University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Department of History

The British Dance Hall (1918-1939) and Its Present-Day Digital Commemoration

by

Benjamin Francis Giordano

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2025

University of Southampton

<u>Abstract</u>

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The traditional narrative surrounding the fate of the twentieth-century British dance hall goes something like this: after a period of heightened popularity in the 1950s the dance hall and dance culture went into a period of decline, and were 'lost forever', as James Nott argues, with Britain's social and cultural life being 'poorer for it'.

This thesis shows that key historical narratives at the heart of the inter-war dance hall experience – a multi-sensual modern experience of phantasmagoria, judgements concerning notions of 'atmosphere' in dance hall design, and dual, contradictory conceptions of the dance hall being at once a location of women's emancipation while signifying male chauvinism and attempts of control – reappear in present-day social media communities, highlighting these communities as what Andrew Hoskins calls 'digital memory ecologies'. Not only do we find these historical narratives reappearing on social media networks, but it is shown how they can be repurposed to suit present-day concerns.

The contribution is thus multi-faceted. An examination of life at the inter-war dance halls yields significant results. I identify the dance hall as an important location of the multi-sensual modern experience of phantasmagoria, expanding the parameters of *where* and *for whom* this experience was available, while arguing it contributed to changing conceptions of romance and intimacy twentieth-century Britain. I argue that the 'atmospheric' design principles which came to define dance hall interiors were far from merely transposed from US cinema designs, as has been suggested, but were brought into these leisure venues in a highly variable form, while challenging established notions of middle-class taste. I argue that reactions to the infamous dance the Lambeth Walk reveal a modern nation coming to terms with its national identity in an increasingly culturally fragmented and diffuse world, and that the dance hall represented not only an unrivalled location of women's emancipation in 1920s and 1930s Britain, but it was also a centre of male chauvinism and the increasing freedom women claimed resulted in a backlash on the part of those anxious at the pace of change.

The subsequent online commemoration of the dance hall in the present represents an important digital 'site of memory' (Pierre Nora) and 'digital memory ecology' (Andrew Hoskins), reproducing and reconfiguring these themes through digital communicative networks. The British dance hall was thus not 'lost forever' after the 1960s, but continues to play a significant role in the historical memory of twentieth-century Britain.

Contents

List of Illustrations

Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Benjamin Giordano

Title of thesis: The British Dance Hall (1918-1939) and Its Present-Day Digital Commemoration

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: .... Date: ....

Acknowledgements

Completing this thesis wouldn't be possible without the supervision of Professor Joachim Schlör and Dr Heidi Armbruster, two academic mentors who have provided me with insightful feedback and academic companionship over the course of completing this PhD. The numerous chapter drafts they read and supervisions undertaken were essential in helping me refine and focus the argumentation. During the darkest, loneliest days of COVID, their video calls spurred me on to keep writing, thinking, and working. In small ways and in large, they have been fundamental in helping me complete this piece of research.

I'd also like to thank my supervisor from the Computer Science Department, Professor David Millard, whose expert knowledge of social media data collection and open mindedness in integrating this into more 'humanistic' subjects gave me the confidence to explore the subject matter further.

My examiners during the Confirmation and upgrade panels – Dr Eve Colpus, Dr George Gilbert, and Professor Tony Kushner – were instrumental in providing much-needed critical feedback that helped inform the research and allowed me to better critique my sources, integrate arguments from different chapters, and think about the work's implications. The depth in which they engaged with my work along with the insights they provided were invaluable in helping to shape this research.

I'd like to thank my examiners at the final viva – Dr Charlotte Lydia Riley and Professor Claire Langhamer – for reading this thesis with care and providing an engaging and illuminating discussion as part of the final examination. The depth and ingenuity with which they engaged with my work made all the effort over the past years worth it.

While, in present times and during the COVID lockdown much of the archival research was conducted using online archives, I'd like to thank the staff members of the archives I was lucky enough to visit in person. The staff at the University of Sussex Special Collections Mass Observation Archive in Brighton helped point me in the right direction and allowed me to access rich and intriguing sources easily and speedily. The entire team at the British Library made locating and studying rare and difficult-to-locate inter-war magazines and

Foreword

This thesis, written under the supervision of Professor Joachim Schlör (History), Dr Heidi Armbruster (Anthropology), and Professor David Millard (Computer Science), was taken at the Web Science Institute, an interdisciplinary research institute at the University of Southampton dedicated to studying how the internet interacts with, and is co-created by, society. While the emphasis of the work below has naturally moved toward the discipline I was trained in as an undergraduate, the knowledge and skills gained from my time as an MSc Web Science student and as a current PhD student at the Web Science Institute Doctoral Training Centre informed the data collection from social media networks, and the integration of this data with traditional 'humanist' analytic approaches.

All secondary data (from social media networks), and primary data (interviews), were obtained following the institutional ethics review process at the University of Southampton, where approval was granted to collect this information from the 26th of June 2019 to 5th September 2019, and from 1st of June 2020 to 29th February 2024 under the University Ethics and Research Governance regulations.

Introduction

The dance hall was one of Britain's most popular leisure venues during the early to mid-twentieth century. Second only to the cinema – and at times even surpassing the cinema's popularity – dance halls existed in every major town and even many villages across Britain, with estimates of weekly attendance being around 4 million by the mid-twentieth century.[1] Going by various names – the Palais de Dance, the Locarno, the Electric Ballroom, the Royal – dance halls served as the premier location where young people spent their free time, came across the latest trends in music, and found love in inter-war era Britain.

Despite this fact, British dance halls and dance culture remain a surprisingly under researched field. Two monographs have been published to date, with a handful of journal publications accompanying these.[2] Work so far has largely served as scholarly introductions to the dance hall and its role within British social and cultural life. James Nott, for instance, places the dance hall at the centre of developments in and contestations over British social and cultural life in the 20th century, delineating how the dance hall was at the centre of debates surrounding gender, morality, class and race relations, national identity and youth culture.[3] Allison Abra focuses more on the style of dance itself, delineating the development of a specifically 'English style' of dance that was propagated by a dance hall industry intent on making a profit.[4]

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[1] *The Economist*, 14 February 1953, p. 401

[2] Abra, Allison. *Dancing in the English Style: Consumption, Americanisation and National Identity in Britain, 1918-50*. Manchester University Press, 2019; Nott, James. *Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960*. Oxford University Press, 2015; "Dancing in the English Style: Professionalisation, Public Preference, and the Evolution of Popular Dance in 1920s Britain." Brett Bebber, ed. *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012. pp. 41-62, Abra, A. "Doing the Lambeth Walk: Novelty dances and the British Nation." *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1 Jan. 2009, pp. 346–369, https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwp035; Nott, James. "Dance halls: Towards an architectural and spatial history, 1918–65." *Architectural History*, vol. 61, 2018, pp. 205–233, https://doi.org/10.1017/arh.2018.8.

[3] Nott, *Going to the Palais,* 2015.

[4] Abra, *Dancing in the English Style*, 2019.

Work undertaken to date has served an important purpose. Serving an illuminating introduction to dance halls and dance culture in twentieth-century Britain, these monographs pave the way for the dance hall as a legitimate and important subject of historical inquiry. Rather than serving as a 'footnote of history' – adjacent to more common topics like the development of music, gender relations or conceptions of class – these scholarly works argue that the dance hall was a fundamental part of British inter-war life, playing an important role in debates surrounding gender, morality, class and race relations, national identity and youth culture.

The traditional argument goes something like this: following a period of popularity from the 1920s to the 1950s, dance halls and dance culture fell into rapid decline with the rise of new music, subcultures and social attitudes in the 1950s and 60s. Following the closure of dance halls throughout the 1960s, the buildings and the culture it gave rise to ceased to exist, being 'no longer in tune with the times', seeming 'anachronistic in a society with apparently rapidly changing values'.[5] After the 1960s, writes James Nott, the dance hall 'was lost forever and Britain's social and cultural life was the poorer for it'.[6]

This thesis sets out to investigate whether this was really the case. Was the dance hall, as James Nott argues, 'lost forever' after the 1960s? Did the closure of these buildings up and down the country result in an erasure of these structures and their meaning from popular memory? And, if not, to what extent, and in what form, does the lived experience of 'going to the palais' appear in present-day recollections and memories?

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[5] Nott, *Going to the Palais,* 2015, p. 98
[6] Ibid.

In order to answer these questions the thesis sets out to do a number of things. Firstly, the literature review will examine not only scholarly work to date on dance halls, but it will investigate the considerable work on memory in the emerging field of 'memory studies', delineating how current work on memory leads to a nascent field of 'digital memory studies'. Secondly, in order to understand if the dance hall was indeed 'lost' after the 1960s, one must firstly understand what the dance hall was. In doing so, this thesis will not only examine experiences, subjectivities and conceptions of the dance hall in its heyday, but it will provide meaningful contributions to the literature in delineating the historical processes which the dance hall both engendered and experienced.

Chapter One will examine everyday life at the dance hall in the interwar period and how this contributed to changing notions of romance in twentieth-century Britain. It will trace the development of a specific, multi-sensual environment that came to define an era of 'late-modernity' in Britain, arguing that the dance hall played a pivotal role bringing this experience of modernity to individuals across Britain for the first time. This unique, 'phantasmagorical' experience of modernity, it will be shown, had a profound impact on individual's experience of leisure, and contributed to changing conceptions of intimacy and romance in mid-twentieth century Britain.

Chapter Two will examine the design of dance halls, tracing the development of 'atmospheric' design principles in dance hall interiors. It will argue that the dance hall represented a democratisation of culture not only in terms of the way it looked – with a 'populist' style containing non-traditional elements – but this sense of democratisation can also be found in the manner in which the interior built environment was designed and constructed. This new populist sense of design, however, was received by a middle class as a threat – undermining

established middle-class notions of taste and thus their ability to justify their social position – and it was consequently attacked and rejected.

Chapter Three will explore the dance hall and modern national identity through a focus on one of the most popular dances of the inter-war era, the Lambeth Walk. The chapter argues that the Lambeth Walk was not only a vehicle through which a variety of views concerning modern British identity were expressed, but it reveals the dance hall as being at the centre of an array of contestations and anxieties in the early-to-mid twentieth century over what it meant to be British in the face increasingly transnational cultural flows. This fragmented reaction to dance culture's relationship to national identity, it is argued, reflects an increasingly modern sense of British national identity with a lack of a singular expression of national character.

Chapter Four will examine the modern female experience at the dance hall. It will show how the dance hall represented an unrivalled location of women's emancipation in 1920s and 1930s Britain, serving as a means through which women could gain physical pleasure through dance, developed a sense of independence through dress, and used the dance hall as a location where they could begin to have more autonomy and agency in navigating the process of courtship. Yet, as will be shown, the fact the dance hall represented a location of women's emancipation resulted in it being seen as a threat by a largely male-dominated class of commentators, who used a variety of rhetorical tools in order to tarnish the reputation of the dance hall and preserve the status quo.

After gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences, subjectivities and conceptions of the dance hall in its heyday, the focus will turn to the dance hall's present-day commemoration. In

what form, if any, is the dance hall remembered in the present day? And how does this fit into current theoretical frameworks in the emerging field of 'memory studies'?

Chapter Five will then focus on how dance halls are remembered in the present day. It will be shown that this largely takes place through social media networks in a process of digital commemoration, investigating whether the experiences and conceptions of the dance hall in its inter-war heyday are reflected in contemporary digital memories, and if so, what form this takes and what this says about the nature of conceptions of 'digital memory'.

Far from being 'lost forever' after the 1960s, this thesis argues that the dance hall is very much alive in the popular imagination of the present day, with the themes outlined above – the specific, multi-sensual environment that came to define an era of 'late-modernity' in Britain, the taste-based value judgements concerning 'atmospheric' design principles, and notions of womanhood and identity – being fundamental to how the dance hall is remembered in present-day social media communities. It will show how the British dance hall as remembered on social media not only reproduces these themes from the inter-war era, but how individuals repurpose themes at the centre of conceptions of the inter-war dance hall to suit contemporary concerns.

It's also important to establish the boundaries of this research. This thesis is an exploration of a specific cultural phenomenon during a specific historical period. While it touches on a variety of other themes central to inter-war British history – such as the history of inter-war Britain leisure, gender-roles and women's emancipation, architecture, the history of emotions and sensuality, race relations and modern national identity – the focus is firmly on how these historical processes interacted with the dance hall and the dance hall's role in developing them.

The temporal span of this thesis might seem quite wide, beginning just after the First World War and spanning to the present-day. There are indeed drawbacks to this approach. A lack of space was dedicated to the role of the dance hall and its place in everyday life during the Blitz and Second World War. The rise of 'Swinging London' in the 1960s and more developments in leisure and dance culture in the 1970s, 80s and 90s were not covered. And a more concrete investigation into the development of trans-national cultural flows, and how these intersected with the dance hall throughout the late-twentieth century, is not investigated. The aim of choosing such wide temporal parameters was two-fold. I sought to understand both how the dance hall functioned during its period of popularity in the inter-war era, and also the historical results of this dance hall experience. More specifically, I sought to understand if, and how, the inter-war dance hall experience made its way into present-day popular memory. This necessitates a wide temporal scope.

Secondly, I wanted to give a more comprehensive history of the dance hall than has hitherto been written. James Nott, for instance, sets the parameters of his 2015 *Going to the Palais* from 1918-1960, arguing that the dance hall ceased to exist as a cultural phenomenon after the 1960s. Allison Abra chooses an even narrower scope in her 2017 *Dancing in the English Style,* setting the dates as 1918-50. In choosing such a wide temporal span, my aim is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of not only the dance hall's specific function in inter-war Britain, but how it sits within a longer history of British leisure culture. I therefore touch on the dance hall's relation to Victorian-era music halls, to present day nightclubs, and how individuals now, in the 2010s and 2020s, remember these buildings.

As opposed to being 'lost forever' after the 1960s, the dance hall is remembered today as a fundamental part of twentieth-century Britain's culture. The core themes that the dance hall engendered in its heyday – ranging from a specific, multi-sensual environment that came to redefine conceptions of romance in modern Britain, to contradictory conceptions of womanhood and women's emancipation – are reproduced and at times repurposed on present-day social media networks, reflecting the dance hall's significance in contemporary conceptions of national identity, gender relations, romance, and design in popular leisure venues.

An Overview of Sources

This thesis draws on a variety of archival material – both digital and from traditional archives – in seeking to understand the processes through which the dance hall was experienced and remembered. Mass Observation (MO), newspaper articles and letters, filmic representations, novels and diary entries form the bulk of traditional archival material consulted in researching the inter-war dance hall. In the present day, social media forms the basis through which the recollections of the dance hall are collected.

The sources used in this thesis present unique opportunities in undertaking what will be, largely, a history of everyday experience, sensation, and subjectivities. Particularly useful in this regard is Mass Observation. Founded in 1937 by three Cambridge graduates who fashioned themselves as intellectual-type figures, the archive includes 'observations' from hundreds of largely middle-class observers recruited via advertising in publications such as the *New Statesman.*[7] While at first glance literature from its founders make numerous references to the

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[7] Hinton, James. *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937-1949*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 62

scientific method and scientific 'objectivity',[8] MO is indeed a rich source for feeling, emotion, subjectivity, and everyday experience, particularly useful, as we will see, in chapters one through four. While its methods were often seen as amateur, chaotic, or unscientific by mainstream academics, Hinton argues they can be seen as pioneering a groundwork for later developments in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies.[9] During a time when sociology, anthropology, and to a large extent the study of history were dominated by statistical sampling and quantitative methods, MO challenged this by focusing on the depth, complexity, and ambiguity of subjective experience.[10] It's eccentric methodology, influenced by David Hume, lends itself to the recording of 'experience', and, as Highmore tells us, MO was not 'simply involved in collecting "opinions"' but observers were 'actively directed to ways of uncovering unconscious desires animating the popular imagination'.[11] This was a 'philosophy that starts from actual sensate, sensorial life', and 'a responsive subjectivity that alters depending on its context is a decisive element in the endeavour to find out what and how people feel and believe'.[12]

The use of MO below follows this framework, offering a means of understanding not only opinion, viewpoint or conscious attitude, but providing a reconstruction of the sensations individuals experienced at the dance hall. This can be seen in the use of MO in chapters one and four, where it proved to be a rich source in providing insights into how bodily movement and rhythmic immersion could evoke emotional and sensory responses.[13]

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[8] Purcell, Jennifer J. *Mass-Observation: Text, Context and Analysis of the Pioneering Pamphlet and Movement.* Bloomsbury, 2023, p. 46

[9] Hinton, James. *The Mass Observers,* p. 291

[10] Ibid, pp. 261-62

[11] Highmore, Ben. '"The Observation by Everyone of Everyone": The Project of Mass-Observation in 1937', in Purcell, Jennifer J. *Mass-Observation: Text, Context and Analysis of the Pioneering Pamphlet and Movement.* Bloomsbury, 2023, p. 14

[12] Ibid, p. 15

[13] See pp. 75-90; 164-67

The use of MO in this manner follows on from Claire Langhamer's arguments concerning the utility of MO for historians of emotion. Langhamer suggests MO constitutes an 'archive of feeling', not only reflecting feeling or opinion in the sense of 'attitude, viewpoint, opinion, or belief, as well as emotion', but arguing it sought to uncover specific emotional states, as an 'active creator and collator of emotional narrative'.[14] MO's directives not only offered structured schooling in the articulation of feeling, but the organization itself constituted an 'emotional community' – with a distinctive emotional texture and one that manifested particular "emotional styles" – connecting the panelists with each other and the research organization itself. Emotion was not only an 'an object of study' for observers, but it was also 'a way of understanding the world'.[15]

MO, as a source that lends itself to the study of experience, sensorial life, and emotion, proves useful in this thesis in shedding new light on sensuality, romance and intimacy in the dance hall (in Chapter One), while providing useful insights into observer feelings over the design of dance halls (Chapter Two) or the different dance styles and forms (Chapter Three). 'Feeling' is thus a useful category of historical analysis in this thesis in both of the ways Langhamer identifies – as a reflection of MO observers' attitude, viewpoint, opinion, or belief – and also their identification with, and observation of, specific emotional states in the formation of an emotional narrative.

Newspapers also form a significant source used in this thesis, and much of the analysis in Chapter Four can be seen in light of existing arguments made by Martin Conboy and Adrian Bingham. For Conboy, the British popular press does not simply *reflect* the interests of ordinary

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[14] Langhamer, Claire, "Mass Observation Feeling" in Curzon, Lucy D., and Benjamin Jones. *Historical Contexts and Contemporary Uses of Mass Observation: 1930s to the Present*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2025 p.51

[15] Ibid, p. 51, 59.

people, but it actively constructed this 'public' through its language, format, and symbolic strategies; and while claiming authenticity, the press consciously crafted a sense of proximity to this imagined 'ordinary public' through strategic, stylized literary constructions (using vernacular language, narratives of common experience, or stereotypical character types, for instance).[16] This enables, for Conboy, 'commercial and political elites' to cultivate consent by partially incorporating the views and language of subordinate groups, giving symbolic voice to ordinary people's concerns, while maintaining hegemonic control, with dissent managed and resistance softened.[17] In this conception, the press becomes a mediator between the interests of media owners and capitalist power structures, and the expectations and emotions of working-class readers.

This is complemented by Adrian Bingham's arguments about the popular press's role in constructing, mediating, and contesting gender relations in inter-war Britain. Bingham's argument is that the popular press was not a passive mirror of society, but was a dynamic, formative cultural agent that played a decisive role in producing, negotiating, and reshaping gender identities.[18] The rise of women's suffrage, increased women's participation in the workforce, and an expansion of consumer culture in the years after the First World War brought anxieties and debates about masculinity and femininity, with the popular press becoming a key site where these debates were played out.[19] Newspapers thus became locations of discursive struggle, presenting images of the 'new women' and 'modern womenhood' – the fashionable, independent flapper or consumer-savvy housewife – alongside anxious critiques of this independent women's behaviour (such as the crime and scandal reports punishing female

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[16] Conboy, Martin. *The Press and Popular Culture*. SAGE, 2002, pp. 5–7, 10-13.
[17] Ibid, 10-15
[18] Bingham, Adrian. *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*. Clarendon Press, 2004. pp. 1–3, 15–18
[19] Ibid, pp. 16–22, 43–47

deviance outlined in Chapter Four).[20] Inter-war gender was thus not monolithic, but refined and contested within the pages of the popular press.

Sex is also a theme that has been written about in literature on the inter-war British press. Bingham has shown how there was a tension between the commercialistic impetus to sell papers and entertain readers through the publication of sexual material, and the need to style the newspaper as a respectable, moral, 'family' product associated with traditional values.[21] The publication of sexual material – while highly prized for selling papers – often took indirect, coded or moralized forms such as scandal reports with moral outrage or crime stories framed as cautionary tales.[22] This thesis touches on these themes in Chapter Four, where we find reports implying the sexual activities women take part in, through the lens of moral outrage or public denunciation.[23]

Newspapers function as sources in this thesis through multiple discursive modes, with publicity, practice, and prescription working together to heighten the popularity of the dance hall and its function as a location of a reconfiguration of gender relations. While we certainly find what might be called publicity in the newspapers, taking the form of the dance hall industry using the press to promote the dance business – with multiple articles in trade publications such as *Dancing Times* or *Modern Dance and Jazz* extolling the virtues of 'graceful, easy' movements of dance, or seeking to publicise the popularity of dance, claiming women 'flock' to the dance hall through a 'compelling impulse' – publicity was always accompanied by the practice of reflecting a genuine excitement and popularity of dance in the inter-war era.

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[20] Bingham, Adrian. *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, pp. 99–102; 149–155
[21] Adrian Bingham. *Family Newspapers?: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978*. Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 6–11, 51–58 125–29
[22] Ibid, pp. 201–203
[23] See pp. 178-82

Newspapers often thus reflect what we find in other sources, such as Mass Observation. When we read of dance's power to allow women to 'move gracefully, easily, and – most importantly of all – confidently' in a 1934 issue of *Modern Dance and Jazz,* for instance, this is echoed in reports by MO where women reported themselves the 'spectacular and graceful' or 'stately and ladylike' movements of dance to observers.[24] Publicity and practice thus went hand-in-hand. While the overzealous reports of dance's popularity and appeal – dance halls '[springing] up like mushrooms',[25] dancing being 'a beautiful thing in a beautiful manner',[26] or women '[flocking] to join the world of rhythm…'[27] – reflected the commercial interests of dance hall proprietors, these can be seen in the vein of Martin Conboy, as only reflecting, but actively constructing, dance hall practices. Women who read about the rise of the flapper, and the dance hall's role as a location of independence, autonomy, and physical and mental pleasure, were thus more likely to not only attend the dance hall and take part in this experience, but reflect these experiences in their responses to MO.[28] Newspapers thus reflected a genuine enthusiasm for dance in the inter-war era, while playing a part in constructing this very popularity, writing it into being and supporting the practice as a widespread social phenomenon.

Not only was the line between practice and publicity at times blurry, but often newspapers also functioned as prescriptive forces in attempting to shape behaviour, encouraging some behaviours while discouraging others. This was commonly seen with the practice of drinking and flirting, behaviour many reports tie to madness and insanity.[29] Yet prescription was often linked with publicity. The press's attempts to regulate women's behaviour at the dance hall – presenting the dance hall as a location which could 'ruin' young women through the

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[24] See pp.164-166
[25] Ibid, p. 164
[26] Ibid, p. 165
[27] Ibid, p. 163
[28] See pp. 165-166 for the similarity of language between newspapers and MO.
[29] See pp. 176-189

temptations of drink and promiscuity, or drive them to insanity and delinquency – often contained elements of publicity which sought to further propel the dance hall's popularity. We in fact see Adrian Bingham's arguments concerning the tension between the press's commercialistic impetus to present sex to readers with the need to present the newspaper as a respectable, moral, 'family' product in full function in Chapter Four. While ostensibly criticizing women's behavior at the dance hall, the press often presented the dance hall as a location of sexual allure. The *Daily Mirror,* for instance, while openly criticising unrestrained interactions between sexes, describes the 'amusement' of flirtation, which 'many girls of today enter into… and appear to enjoy it'.[30] Other publications, furthermore, reported that young couples were 'subjected to drink and moral temptation' at the dance hall,[31] while a 1927 article from the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* portrays a women slouched over a table, legs crossed, gazing passively at a man who extends his hand toward her. The caption offers a critique of the ease and casualness in which the couple are able to initiate intimacy, done without words or any sense of restraint: '"O.K.?" That is how he asks her. "Yep" That is how she accepts….You will notice that there is no form of introduction whatsoever'.[32]

We therefore find what Adrian Bingham locates in his *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918–1978*, an attempt to introduce sex to readers, and entertain the possibility of more accessible or easy sex, through indirect and moralized forms. The apparent criticism of the dance hall as a centre of flirtation, being an 'amusement' for young women which 'many girls of today enter into… and appear to enjoy it', thus serves a dual purpose, condemning the dance hall as a location of immorality and indecency while

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[30] See p. 179
[31] *Daily Herald*, 09 April 1925, p. 5
[32] See p. 179

entertaining the possibility that the reader can engage in these encounters and possibly find casual or quick routes to sexual gratification.

Prescription was thus interlinked with forms of publicity, with attempts of moral regulation and sexualized sensationalism operating hand-in-hand. In dramatizing the dangers of the dance hall, newspapers did not simply discourage attendance, but heightened its allure by framing it as a site of excitement, transgression, and sexual possibility. This paradoxical messaging allowed newspapers to maintain their moral authority while simultaneously capitalizing on readers' curiosity and titillation, revealing, as Bingham has shown, the commercial logic underlying much of the press's prescriptive discourse.

Practice, prescription, and publicity thus worked together to heighten the popularity of the dance hall in the inter-war era, both reflecting the social trend while actively shaping and constructing it. Newspapers did not simply report on dance halls as passive observers; rather, they were active participants in defining their social meaning. Through promoting dance as graceful, liberating, and modern, prescribing acceptable forms of feminine behaviour, and simultaneously sensationalizing the risks of flirtation, drink, and delinquency, the press contributed to the dance hall's status as a contested cultural space in regard to the role of women, much of which is covered in Chapter Four. These discursive modes – practice, prescription, and publicity – were thus mutually reinforcing, forming a feedback loop where the cultural practice of dance was amplified, contributing to its popularity in the inter-war era.

Literature Review

Historiography of Dance Halls

British twentieth-century popular dance is a surprisingly under-researched field, especially considering the popularity of the dance hall and its role in the lives of millions of Britons. While there have been a number of publications published in different research contexts which reference the phenomenon,[33] and a handful of more popular, antiquarian works on the subject,[34] it was not until 2015 that the first full-length academic work appeared with the publication of James Nott's *Going to the Palais: A social and cultural history of dancing and dance halls in Britain, 1918-1960.*

This work can be seen as a much-needed introduction to the field, placing dancing and the dance hall within wider historical processes of the twentieth century and thus justifying them as fruitful subjects of historical inquiry. Dance halls are shown to be at the centre of debates surrounding gender, morality, class and race relations, national identity and youth culture. Being important for the development of women's increasing autonomy, dance halls are argued to be a 'new female public space', 'vital to [women's] social and cultural emancipation in the

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[33] See Langhamer, Claire. *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60.* Manchester University Press, 2009; Brocken, Michael. *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool's Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s.* Routledge, 2016; L. McCormik, 'One Yank and They're Off": Interaction between US Troops and Northern Irish Women, 1942-45' (May 2006) *Journal of the History of Sexuality 228-57,* S.O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and citizenship in Britain 1939-1945*, Oxford UP, 2003.

[34] Jenkins, T. *'Let's Go Dancing': Dance Band memories of 1930s Liverpool* Liverpool Sound Series, 1994, Richardson, P.J.S. *A History of English Ballroom Dancing (1910-45): The story of the development of the modern English style,* London: Herbert Jenkins, 1947; Casciani, E. *Oh! How we Danced! The History of ballroom dancing in Scotland.* Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994; Brown, J. *Glasgow's Dancing Daft* Stenlake Publishing, 1994; and Lawson, A. *It Happened in Manchester: The True Story of Manchester's Music 1958-65.* Multimedia, 1998.

twentieth century'.[35] Middle class anxieties about working class behaviour were expressed through criticism of dance, with dance halls being seen as 'dens of vice' and locations of inappropriate physical contact and movements which did not conform to middle class notions of 'morality'. Dance halls are shown as important sites of early racial mixing and discrimination, which took the form of fighting and brawls, 'colour-bars', and sexual competition and distrust – and dance itself is argued to have also played a significant role in the creation of a language and attitudes of racism (with numerous commentators criticising certain dances for having 'negro' and 'primitive' origins).[36] Young people often had their first taste of independence at dances, locations where they could learn to socialise and court the opposite sex, with dance halls serving as 'distinctive physical spaces' where the young could adopt new fashions, styles and behaviours separate from the adult world. Consequently, dance halls became associated with a growing 'youth problem' in post-war Britain, attacked as sites of immorality and seen as contributing to the rise of juvenile delinquency. Dance also, perhaps most significantly, became an important signifier of national character and identity, and thus was policed and controlled by a dance profession seeking to have dance conform to British notions of 'respectability'. The development of the 'English Style' in the 1920s thus centred on the regulation and restraint of spontaneous physical movement, and such a lack of spontaneity and a controlled, less emotional dancing experience was seen as representative of British national character.[37]

Dance's popularity is also linked to wider social and economic changes, with its 'explosion' in the post WWI years being linked to increasing rest time, set working hours and availability of expendable income of the working class, while its decline in the 1960s being attributed to not

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[35] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, pp. 159, 162, 182
[36] Ibid, pp. 274-278
[37] Ibid, p. 227

only the rising affluence, consumerism and domesticity of workers, but to changing social norms and gender roles, with women no longer expecting to wait to be asked to dance by a man, asserting greater autonomy over how and when they danced.

What Nott achieves, therefore, is to demonstrate the importance of dancing and dance halls as subjects of historical inquiry by placing them at the centre of developments of and contestations over British social and cultural life in the twentieth century. While many authors have written on youth, women's emancipation, sexuality, national identity and race relations in twentieth century Britain, Nott shows how all of these themes intersected through the dance hall, cementing its (hitherto largely unacknowledged) importance in twentieth-century British history.

Two years later, in 2017, Allison Abra published a subsequent book on dancing titled *Dancing in the English Style.* Her work – in a similar vein to Nott – places dancing at the centre of cultural and social changes of twentieth century Britain, but distinguishes itself through emphasising the commercial and nationalistic nature of dance's popularity, showing how these often intersected. While much of Abra's book centres aspects which were covered by Nott – such as the concerted effort to develop an 'English Style' representative of national character and free from foreign forms, dancing's role in the development of discourses surrounding gender, class, and sexuality, and its role in the development of attitudes towards race – she can be seen as complementing Nott's findings through largely focusing on continuities between the English Style in later dance forms. The English style is argued to be the genesis of a form of nationalistic commercialism which accompanied dance until the post-war era, and Abra shows how the public criticisms, processes of commercialisation, and nationalistic appeal of the 'novelty' dances of the 1930s, and the jitterbug of the war era, represent a continuity with the

popular criticisms and nationalistic commercialism of 'English Style' in the 1920s. Furthermore, the process by which these different dance forms came about are argued to represent a continuity in the English Style of the 1920s, as throughout the inter-war period and even up until the end of the war the process by which dance forms developed is argued to be the result of negotiations and renegotiations between the dance hall industry, dance profession and dancing public. In every new dance that came about, the dance profession or dance hall industry attempted to market and commercialise it through nationalistic allure, yet the dancing public often rejected these meanings and appropriated the dance styles to fit their own regional, leisurely or voguish needs.

A slight departure from Nott can also be found in Abra placing the English style in a transnational context, arguing that these dance forms were in fact transnational creations moulded through exchanges with the continent, United States and South America, and it was the British dance profession which sought to standardise and racially purify them of supposed 'negro' and Latin elements, and then export them around the world as something quintessentially 'English'.

Abra's book therefore focuses on the production and reception of dance forms throughout the interwar years between the commercial dance industry and the public, while Nott places dance and the dance hall at the centre of developments in and contestations over British social and cultural life in the twentieth century. In the face of this research, then, we might ask what aspects or angles of inquiry have yet to be covered? Does a focus on the commercialisation, reception, transnational production, and nationalistic propagation of dance, or its place in wider social and cultural issues of twentieth-century British history – such as gender and race relations, youth culture and class dynamics – cover the dance hall's significance in its entirety?

From reading what has been published it may puzzle the reader that an institution such as the dance hall has been largely seen through the interaction of cohesive societal groups – such as the 'dancing public', 'dance hall industry' and 'dance professionals' for Abra – or well-known historical phenomena, such as evolving twentieth-century youth culture, race relations, attitudes toward sexuality and class. Dance, after all, is a lived experience – and for many Britons the dance hall played an incredibly important role in their lives, being a site where countless individuals had their first experience of romance and intimacy, developed a unique personal identity and met their life partners.

James Nott followed his book with a 2018 article in *Architectural History* where we see the beginning of an emphasis on this lived experience. Nott shows us how through their design, dance halls were intentionally moulded as palaces of escapism for their working-class clientele. Dance hall owners thus chose interiors which sought to transport the revellers to different continents, nations and cultures, with Spanish patios or Italian villa gardens, Japanese forests or French 'Boudoirs' being common themes. Not only was this achieved through interior design choices, but Nott also focuses on the individual sensory experience of those visiting the palais, delineating how celestial effects were commonly projected on the ceiling, coloured lights were used to create a constantly changing visual experience, and spotlights traversed the dance floor. Live music – something increasingly rare in later discotheques or nightclubs – emanated from the band, and 'people could literally feel the sound move through their bodies as it reverberated across the dance hall'.[38] These sensual stimuli combined to create a truly holistic experience of romance, intimacy and escape:

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[38] Nott, James. "Dance halls: Towards an architectural and spatial history, 1918–65." *Architectural History*, vol. 61, 2018, p. 229

> The swish of taffeta as couples progressed around the dance floor, the warm melodic sounds of a saxophone, the chatter of friends and partners, the sparkle of mirror balls, spotlights, multi-coloured lightbeams, and the faint whiff of Lily of the Valley or Midnight in Paris. The warmth and thrill of dancing cheek to cheek, waist to waist, as desire and passion ebbed and flowed at three beats to the bar, and bodies clasped together while moving gracefully, ungracefully, freed from their workaday sitting and standing, now gliding, gyrating, swaying, bending and shaking together and apart.[39]

We can, therefore, see Nott's 2018 article as beginning to shift the focus from large-scale social, cultural, and economic processes in which the dance hall was part to its importance in the lived experience of individuals. This shift in focus opens a number of possibilities for re-evaluating key processes in the development of the dance hall, such as its rise, decline, or connection to wider historical processes. Furthermore, this approach can allow for an exploration of hitherto unexplored aspects of the dance hall, such as its role in individual lives, the urban environment, or historical memory of a specific era.

The present thesis seeks to continue where Nott left off, examining the decline and present-day commemoration of the dance hall through an emphasis on how individuals actually experienced 'going to the Palais' in its inter-war heyday. It will do this delineating this human experience through each of the themes explored, placing individual experience at the heart of discussions of sensuality, design principles, national identity, and women's life at the dance hall. The result will be a body of work that challenges conventional narratives around processes the dance hall was both at the heart of and gave rise to, by refocusing attention to the human experiences at the centre of life at the dance hall.

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[39] Nott, James. "Dance halls: Towards an architectural and spatial history, 1918–65.", p. 228

In the field of memory studies, as in almost every field, there are substantially different ways of structuring a literature review. One might take a chronological approach by delineating the different 'eras' or 'waves' in which new concepts developed. One might examine a list of discrete thinkers and delineate how each relates to the research project at hand. Indeed, one might merely select a range of diverse theoretical concepts, articulate these, and demonstrate their relevance. I plan to take a different path. As early as 1998, Jeffrey K. Olick commented on the saturation of the field,[40] and since then things have further accelerated, with a plethora of new theories, applications, revisions, and amalgamations of existing concepts.[41] The question then becomes: how to delineate and summarise this increasingly complex, fragmented, and dynamic field while both rooting the concepts used in their theoretical foundations and demonstrating how my own theoretical framework arises from this diverse conceptual lineage?

My attempt at this is thus: I will chart the development of memory studies theory thematically – posing a series of conceptual oppositions or debates which can be found in the literature over the past century, drawing out certain themes and implications from these oppositions, and finally demonstrating how the implications of these conceptual conflicts have resulted in both contemporary theoretical frameworks on social media, and my own theoretical approach.

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[40] ""Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices", Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 24 (1998), p. 107.
[41] See, for example, Landsberg, Alison. *Prosthetic Memory: The Logics and Politics of Memory in Modern American Culture*. 1996; Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press, 2009; Olick, Jeffrey K., et al. *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Scholars have debated the nature of historical scholarship since the dawn of the profession, whether this was debates between Leopold von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen on the nature of historical objectivity and its relationship to politics in the nineteenth century,[42] or more recent debates between those advocating postmodern approaches and those defending a more 'realist' conception of historical knowledge rooted in empiricist notions of historical truth, largely passed down from Ranke.[43] Therefore when Pierre Nora and Yosef Yerushalmi started to question the relationship of history to memory in the 1980s, they touched off a vigorous debate about the nature of historical scholarship, largely coinciding with the postmodern debate over historical 'truth'. This debate, between those who see history and memory as largely inseparable and those who view them in stark opposition, will be explored below.

While scholars such as Patrick Hutton have shown how inquiries into the relationship between memory and history were conducted by historians of the *Annales* school such as Philippe Ariès,[44] the anglophone world was largely introduced to these discussions through the work of Pierre Nora and Yosef Yerushalmi, with the latter publishing his *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* in 1982 and the former writing his *Les lieux de mémoire* throughout the 1980s, with translations into English appearing in the later part of that decade.[45] Both Nora and Yerushalmi, on first reading, seem to bring memory into the sphere of historiography by strongly delineating the separation of 'history' and 'memory'. Nora, in summarising his conception of *Les lieux de mémoire,* argues his contemporary age was marked by 'intellectual

[42] Kinzel, Katherina. "Method and meaning: Ranke and droysen on the historian's disciplinary ethos." *History and Theory*, vol. 59, no. 1, Mar. 2020, pp. 22–41, https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12144.

[43] Dobson, Miriam, and Benjamin Ziemann. *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*. Routledge, 2020. p. 1

[44] Hutton, Patrick. "Collective Memory and Collective Mentalities: The Halbwachs-Ariés Connection" *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 1988, pp. 311-322

[45] Nora, Pierre. "Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, vol. 26, 1989, pp. 7–24.

and secular' history while the pre-modern *milieux de memoire* were environments of memory where 'real memory – social and unviolated' is said to exist.[46] He presents memory and history, therefore, as standing in fundamental opposition. Memory is said to be 'retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies', 'unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing' and something 'without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition', history is merely a 'reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer'.[47] Thus while memory is a 'perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present', history is an academic practice marked by detachment, intellectualism, and representation as opposed to experience. Thus, 'at the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory'.[48]

Dividing memory and history along lines of spontaneous experience vis-à-vis the detached academic practice is something shared by Nora's contemporary, Yosef Yerushalmi. In *Zakhor,* Yerushalmi makes a distinction between the age-old Jewish tradition of remembrance and what he views as a relatively recent interest in Jewish history since the sixteenth century. However, the rise of Jewish history resulted in a subsequent 'decay in Jewish memory' as a result of their distinctness and incompatibility. Memory is conceived of as 'the function of the shared faith', something transmitted through 'ritual' and constituting the 'cohesiveness and the will of the group itself'.[49] History, by contrast, is conceived of as a detached academic exercise, being marked by 'historical objectivity', 'the value of quantification' and thus represents a 'a decisive break' with the previous paradigm of Jewish memory.[50]

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[46] Nora, "Between memory and history", p. 8
[47] Ibid, p. 8.
[48] Ibid, p. 9.
[49] Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Univ. of Washington Press, 1982, p. 94
[50] Ibid, p. 94

What ties Nora and Yerushalmi together – beyond their emphasis on spontaneous memory in opposition to academic history – is the fundamental nostalgia that drives their work. Indeed, both imagine the passing of a bygone era in which authentic memory predominated, only to be replaced by a more recent emphasis on history: for Nora this is the loss of *milieux de memoire* (environments of memory) in which 'all-powerful, spontaneously actualising' memory predominated, for Yerushalmi this takes the form of Jewish memory, marked by a 'cohesiveness, and the will of the group itself', replaced by 'historical objectivity' in the sixteenth century.[51] However neither describe this process dispassionately, Yerushalmi telling the reader of 'wounds inflicted upon Jewish life by the disintegrative blows of the last two hundred years' in which 'the historian seems at best a pathologist', noting that many Jews 'deplore the widespread decay of Jewish memory', while Nora conceptualises *Lieux de memoire* as the only outlets of 'real' memory in his contemporary society, calling them 'fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it'.[52]

While much of this nostalgia for pre-modern 'eras of memory' was specific to Nora and Yerushalmi, others, such as Allan Megill, continued to argue for the division of history and memory well into the 1990s. For Megill, history – in the same vein as those before him – is seen as fundamentally objective, having 'the obligation to be objective, unified, orderly, justified'.[53] In contrast to this is memory, which defined by its subjectivity, is presented as 'an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present'.[54] Therefore both are seen as fundamentally opposed – standing 'in stark opposition' to one another. However, while being opposed Megill argues both can be improved and made richer through their mutual

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[51] Yerushalmi. *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, p. 87; Nora, "Between memory and history", p. 8
[52] Ibid, p. 12
[53] Megill, Allan. "History, memory, Identity." *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 3, Aug. 1998, p. 56
[54] Megill, "History, memory, Identity", p. 56

entanglement. History's engagement with memory is said to enhance the discipline, enabling it to reach for 'a zone of incomprehensibility' beyond what objective, unified, and orderly methods can achieve, while memory's engagement with history 'reminds memory of the need for evidence coming from the eyewitnesses and from material remains'.[55] Illustrating how the collective memory of subalterns in South Asia was able to enter into the consciousness of India's middle class, Megill draws parallels between this process of cultural homogenisation and a potential homogenisation between history and memory, arguing that 'these cultural experiences have entered, or at least can enter, into historiography'.[56]

Yet while Megill sees benefits of history and memory becoming entangled, the gap between them is still too large to overcome. There 'remains a boundary between history and memory that one can cross from time to time but that one cannot, and should not wish to, eliminate'.[57] Memory has a tendency to be 'irrational, inconsistent, deceptive and self-serving', while history must stay true to its objective roots. Furthermore, there was a troubling trend in historiography, which was to 'eliminate history in favour of memory, or even worse, to identify history with memory'.[58]

However, while Megill was writing a seismic shift had already taken place. Historians were starting to see memory not as an obstacle in their search for historical 'truth', but as a means of understanding in and of itself. In 1997 Peter Burke published a chapter of in his *Varieties of Cultural History* – titled 'History as Social Memory' – which laid out the benefits of investigating memory as a historical phenomenon. While it was agreed that memory is selective and self-serving, this was now seen as a benefit to historians, and by identifying 'the principles

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[55] Megill, "History, memory, Identity", p. 57.
[56] Ibid, p. 55
[57] Ibid, p. 56
[58] Ibid, p. 56

of selection' in what individuals or groups remember and examining 'how [these] vary from place to place or from one group to another and how they change over time', historians would be able to uncover various historical phenomena – and cultural dynamics of a given society – hitherto unreachable through surviving records of the past.[59] Indeed, throughout the late 1980s and 1990s historians published a substantial number of works investigating history *through* memory – touching on topics as diverse as the JFK assassination in American memory (where Barbie Zelizer argues journalists shaped the popular memory of this event as part of a quest for cultural power),[60] oral histories of the Vietnam war (where Patrick Hagopian argues the contestation of Vietnam war memories does not only operate through the suppression of memories by the powerful, but through their mediation and containment),[61] and the Holocaust (where James Young, through examining diaries and memoirs of victims and survivors, seeks to 'understand the manner in which historical actuality and the forms in which it is delivered to us may be intertwined').[62]

This collection of literature, referred to by Astrid Erll as constituting a 'second wave' of memory scholarship,[63] largely explored the possibilities of viewing memory and history as interconnected, with memory in particular seen as a means of historical understanding. The question then becomes – where did these ideas of viewing memory not as the suspect 'Other' of history, but as a means of historical understanding in and of itself, originate? For this, we must turn back to Nora and Yerushalmi.

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[59] Burke, Peter. *Varieties of Cultural History*. Wiley, 1997, p. 46.
[60] Zelizer, Barbie. *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
[61] Hagopian, Patrick. "Oral narratives: Secondary revision and the memory of the Vietnam War." *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1991, pp. 134–150.
[62] Young, James Edward. *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*. Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 5.
[63] Erll, Astrid. "Travelling memory." *Parallax*, vol. 17, no. 4, Nov. 2011, p. 7.

While our first reading of Nora and Yerushalmi presented a picture of history and memory's separation – a closer reading reveals both in fact argued for a fusion of history and memory. For Nora, the contemporary separation of memory and history was something that his conception of *Lieux de Mémoire* sought to address. Through exploring these 'sites' of memory, the historian would be able to rediscover a memorial consciousness which was lost in a contemporary age marked by academic history. These sites were where 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself', and where historians were able to access a lost age of memory – *milieux de memoire* – in a contemporary age of academic history: 'There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory'.[64] By investigating history through these *lieux* – The Museum of French Monuments, the Tour de France, or Ernest Lavisse's *Histoire de France* – historians were able to rediscover a French memorial consciousness 'that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it'.[65] Thus the professional work of history could be enhanced through the mnemonic work of commemoration.

Rather than repeating the age-old empirical practices largely passed down by Ranke – something Nora termed 'nothing more than sifted and sorted historical traces'[66] – the historian was invited to infuse memory back into historical writing. After bringing memory back into historical writing, 'a new type of historian emerges who, unlike his precursors, is ready to confess the intimate relation he maintains to his subject'.[67] In this conception, then, memory is 'not the obstacle but the means of [historians'] understanding'. [68]

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[64] Nora, "Between memory and history", p. 7.
[65] Ibid, p. 12.
[66] Ibid, p. 8.
[67] Ibid, p. 18
[68] Ibid, p. 18

The idea that historical work can be improved through incorporating memory into it can also be found in Yerushalmi's work, albeit more implicitly. While from first reading we find history and memory as separate entities – Yerushalmi writes of a 'decay in Jewish memory' and a consequent rise in 'critical' Jewish histography – upon closer reading we can discern their unity is advocated as a potential new historical methodology. It was only in the modern era, for Yerushalmi, that 'we really find, for the first time, a Jewish historiography divorced from Jewish collective memory'.[69] The 'Jewry today' is seen as simultaneously 'deplor[ing] the widespread decay of Jewish memory' while 'having no real consensus as to its original or ideal content'.[70] This loss of Jewish memory, for Yerushlami, must be rectified, and it is the role of the historian to incorporate memory back into historical work: 'Who, then, can be expected to step into the breach, if not the historian? Is it not both his chosen and appointed task to restore the past to us all?'.[71] While 'modern Jewish historiography can never substitute for Jewish memory', Yerushalmi is 'equally convinced' that 'a historiography that does not aspire to be memorable is in peril of becoming a rampant growth'.[72]

Therefore, while in our initial reading of Nora and Yeruslahmlni we found a conceptualising of history and memory as distinctly separate – upon closer reading we can see how both advocate for a reintroduction of memory to history. While pre-modern societies lived within memory, the contemporary practise of history is woefully divorced from human memory, and it is the historian's role to fuse the two again. In this conception, memory's tendency to be 'irrational, inconsistent, deceptive and self-serving' (in Megill's words), or its propensity to 'reconstruct [the past] in accordance with our present ideas of what is important and what is

[69] Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory,* p. 94
[70] Ibid, p. 93
[71] Ibid, p. 93.
[72] Ibid, p. 101

not' (as Peter Burger tells us),[73] are not faults which diminish its usefulness, but fundamental to both historical insight and to the practise of history itself. Memory and history, far from being distinct entities, can be seen as forming a cohesive whole.

Deception, illusion, and discontinuity – characteristics detractors use to discredit memory and separate it from the 'academic' practice of history – can in fact be useful in understanding phenomena of the past. Miriam Dobson has insightfully shown how in the Soviet Union, prisoners' appeals and statements given at trial provide evidence of their attempt to negotiate the terrain laid out by the legal system, recognizing official discourses that blamed criminality on a bad upbringing and reformulating these in order to gain sympathy from Soviet authorities.[74] Understanding how different discourses can be purposively deployed, reconfigured, and transmitted (with the intention to deceive, discredit, or complicate) allows us to see that examining discursive practices is not only an intellectual activity detached from 'real world' historical events, but can allow us insight into concrete historical phenomena, in this case between prisoners' life and death.

So we have seen that, far from memory's 'illusionary' characterises being an impediment in historical understanding, these can be fundamental in understanding key historical processes resulting in real world effects. Furthermore, the professional practice of history is subject to the same distortions as memory, and creating a division between 'lay' memory practices and 'professional', 'critical', 'rational' histography leads to problematic conclusions – elevating the professionalized institutional discourse at the expense of the vernacular. Memory and

[73] Berger, Peter. 'Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Approach', in Olick, Jeffrey K., et al. *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 217

[74] Dobson, Miriam, and Benjamin Ziemann. *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008, p. 12

history's unity, then, implies a unity between the so-called 'professional' historical practice and the everyday mnemonic practices of countless individuals.

While history and memory can indeed be seen as forming a cohesive whole, as opposed to distinct entities, there is still work to do in locating exactly where 'memory' processes take place. Does memory exist in the individual mind or in society? To what extent is the term 'collective memory' helpful in describing cultural memory phenomena? And how is memory embedded in the various 'discourses' that surround us? These questions will be addressed in the section below.

Individual and Collective Memory

While we have examined the relation of history to memory, we have yet to investigate just where 'memory' fundamentally lies. Much of the debate centres around its location as either in the individual mind or in society. This section will therefore address the following questions: Does memory exist in society, or the individual mind? To what extent is the term 'collective memory' helpful in describing cultural memory phenomena? And how is memory embedded in various 'discourses' that surround us? We will therefore explore the development – and contestation – of the individual/collective memory dichotomy throughout the past century and seek to lay out this study's own theoretical approach. We will see that while scholars from across disciplines have seen memory as either individual or collective – an approach which combines elements of both individuality and collectivity overcomes many obstacles in the debate and forms a useful framework.

One of the first individuals to study memory, not as an individual psychological phenomenon but a collective societal process, was Maurice Halbwachs, often referred to at the 'founding father' of memory studies.[75] While Nora and Yerushalmi are seen to make up the 'second wave' of memory studies research in the 1980s, the so called 'first wave' is often seen as headed by Halbwachs's writings in the 1920s,[76] and Andrew Hoskins even terms Halbwachs the 'Godfather of collective memory'.[77] In his writings in the 1920s, Halbwachs was the first to locate human memory not in the individual mind, as was often the case in previous psychological studies, but in the *cadres sociaux* – the social frameworks – of society. In this conception, individual memories are only possible through these societal frameworks: 'no

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[75] Gensburger, Sarah. "Halbwachs' studies in Collective Memory: A founding text for contemporary 'memory studies'?" *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 16, no. 4, 24 Oct. 2016, p. 397.
[76] Erll, 'Traveling Memory', p. 5.
[77] Hoskins, Andrew. *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*. Routledge, 2018, p. 7.

memory is possible outside the frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections'.[78] In putting forward his argument Halbwachs uses the example of the recollection of dreams, which, he argued, as opposed to our recollections of our waking state, are inherently unstable, inconsistent, contradictory and outlandish. The reason for this inconsistency was the result of them not being constituted by social frameworks: 'The frameworks of the dream are determined by the very images that are prepared within them, outside themselves and considered in themselves',[79] and consequently they 'have no consistency, depth, coherence, or stability'.[80] On the contrary, when the individual is awake, an entire set of social categories – 'time, space, and the order of physical and social events' – are 'established and recognised by the members of our group' and are therefore 'imposed' on the individual.[81] It is, importantly, from these social impositions, only gained through 'members of our group', that 'comes a "feeling of reality" that is opposed to what we still dream'.[82]

For Halbwachs, it was not that the individual did not *remember,* but that their memories were 'dependant on society' and constituted by sustaining social frameworks, of which family, religion and social class were given as examples.[83] Indeed, this was his explanation for different social groups having different memories of the same event – bound to each other through social connections, these distinct social frameworks would result in distinct memories.

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[78] 'The Social Framework of memory' in Halbwachs, Maurice, and Lewis A. Coser. *On Collective Memory*. The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 43
[79] Ibid, p. 172
[80] Ibid, p. 45
[81] Ibid, p. 172
[82] Ibid, p. 172
[83] Ibid, p. 54

Even the inconsistency in memories of members of a single social group are explained by their membership of a number of different groups, so that 'memory of the same fact can be placed within many frameworks, which result from distinct collective memories'.[84] Memories are thus subject to change, 'along with our points of view, our principles, and our judgements, when we pass from one group to another'.[85] The example used is the young child going to school:

> As soon as a child goes to school, his life runs, so to speak, in two currents, and his thoughts are associated according to two directions. If the child sees the members of his family only at rare intervals, the family needs all the energy acquired earlier - and also the energy that comes from the fact that the family exists beyond elementary and high school, that it accompanies and envelopes us until death - in order to preserve its share of influence.[86]

The idea of the individual mind being transformed by social forces was not new in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century continental sociological thought. Whether this was Norbert Elias's 1939 *The Civilising Process,* which argued that chains of social interdependence altered the psychic makeup of the individual mind (differentiating the so-called id, ego, and superego and thus reducing instinctual drives),[87] Georg Simmel's 1900 *Philosophy of Money* which saw money's qualities of precision and quantification resulting in a 'peculiar levelling of emotional life',[88] or Wilhelm Dilthey, who wrote in 1875 that the individual 'is an element of the interactions of society'[89] – ideas of social forces transforming the individual's mind were prevalent in continental sociological *milieux* both before and after Halbwachs was writing, and Halbwachs can indeed be seen as applying these socio-psychogenic conceptions to the problem of memory.

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[84] Halbwachs*, On Collective Memory*, p. 52
[85] Ibid, p. 81
[86] Ibid, p. 81
[87] Elias, Norbert, et al. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Blackwell, 2000, pp. 367-409
[88] Simmel, Georg. *The Philosophy of Money*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p. 468.
[89] Frisby, David. *Simmel and Since: Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory.* London: Routledge, 1992, p. 27

The conception of these 'social frameworks' which construct, sustain, and alter individual memory went relatively unused for decades, until we find Nora and Yerushalmi borrowing Halbwachs's conception in the 1980s to conceptualize the group memory of the French nation (for Nora) or the Jewish people (for Yerushalmi). Later studies, starting to appear in the late 1980s and early 1990s, further used Halbwachs's conception of collective memory to delineate, for example, the Kennedy assassination or Watergate scandal in American national memory.[90]

Yet while all this was taking place, and numerous studies were delineating the collective memories of various (national, ethnic, religious) groups in the 1990s, a backlash was already brewing. Seeking to challenge the idea that memory was a collective phenomenon, scholars drew on psychological and also cultural studies to argue that, far from a solely collective phenomenon, memory was also fundamentally individual. These sentiments, at least in the field of History, were perhaps best summed up by Susan A. Crane in 1997. Crane saw the idea of a Halbwachsian 'collective memory' as valid, but argued that it was an expression of historical consciousness and ultimately is derived from individuals, as opposed to social frameworks. Therefore, as opposed to a 'top down' model in which individual memory is only possible as a result of social frameworks, for Crane collective memory was possible only through individual lived experience. Rather than social frameworks constructing, sustaining, and altering individual memory, it was a multitude of distinct individual memories that formed together to create a larger historical consciousness and collective memories.[91]

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[90] See Zelizer, Barbie. *Covering the body: The Kennedy assassination, the media, and the shaping of collective memory*. University of Chicago Press, 1992 and Schudson, Michael. *Watergate in American memory: How we remember, forget, and reconstruct the past*. Basic Books, 1992.
[91] Crane, Susan. "Writing the individual back into collective memory." *The American Historical Review*, Dec. 1997, p. 1381

For Crane, this argument was relatively straightforward yet nonetheless – up until that point – 'a [proposition] that none of the theorists of collective memory discuss'.[92] Scholars who conceptualized of groups as remembering collectively were missing the relatively straightforward argument that 'groups have no single brain in which to locate the memory function', and it perplexed Crane that 'we persist in talking about memory as "collective", as if this remembering activity could be physically located'.[93]

It follows that, while Nora searched for 'sites' of memory located in a French national memory consciousness, for Crane 'all narratives, all sites, all texts remain objects until they are "read" or referred to by individuals thinking historically'.[94] This leads not only to the democratisation of memory as an individual phenomenon prior to it being 'assimilated, remembered, or archived, to create the multiple pasts Halbwachs described',[95] but also to a conception of memory fundamentally grounded in lived experience: collective memory is 'expressed by historically conscious individuals claiming their historical knowledge as part of personal, lived experience'.[96]

Crane, therefore, not only reconceptualised collective memory as stemming from individuals, but defined the practice of history – following on from Nora and Yerushalmi's call to reintroduce memory into history – as 'the active participation in remembering and forgetting within collective memory by each member'.[97] 'The production of history', therefore, is seen as

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[92] Crane, Susan. "Writing the individual back into collective memory", p. 1381
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid, p. 1383
[96] Ibid, p. 1383, 1384
[97] Ibid, p. 1385

'a personal endeavour of interpretation' which 'refers as much to lived experience as it does to the preserved past'.[98]

While Nora and Yerushalmi called for a reintroduction of memory in history, then, Crane can be seen as setting out a clear conceptualisation of how this can take place. It would not be 'professional' historians who seek to trace large-scale memory frameworks of various groups – such as 'Watergate in American national memory' – but individuals whose everyday lived experiences are negotiated and contested in the formation of a larger historical consciousness, or 'collective memories'. Far from being located in 'social frameworks', collective memory thus stems from multitudes of individuals.

Yet while Crane saw memory as originating firmly in the individual before being 'assimilated, remembered, or archived to create the multiple pasts Halbwachs described', by 2002 theorists were beginning to overcome debates surrounding the individual/collective nature of memory, articulated most clearly by Jens Brockmeier. For Brockmeier, memory is simultaneously individual *and* collective – composed of individuals who are embedded in a corpus of a culture populated by countless symbolic artefacts. 'These cultural artefacts', Brockmeier tells us, 'comprise sign and symbol systems, most notably oral and written language, and other systems of communication and notation' which include 'special memory devices and institutions (from notebooks and encyclopaedias to libraries, archives and computers), memorials and other architectures and geographies in which memory is embodied and objectified'.[99] Therefore the individual mind 'appears only at first sight really "individual"', and upon closer examination it is found to be 'distributed' across an array of cultural artefacts. These cultural artefacts

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[98] Crane, Susan. "Writing the individual back into collective memory", p. 1384

[99] Brockmeier, Jens. "Remembering and forgetting: Narrative as cultural memory." *Culture & Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1 Mar. 2002, p. 25

comprise of 'identification and membership cards, birth certificates and documents from schools […] CVs, copies of job applications […] private letters, tapes, videos and boxes with photographs from all periods of our lives', while also stretching into new digital technologies, 'computers whose hard disks are saturated not only with documents of one's work and thought, as well as those of colleagues, friends and enemies, but also with a few hundred internet bookmarks'.[100] It is these 'memory texts' which comprise a type of 'objectified archive of autobiographical memory', and, most importantly, they 'escape the traditional dichotomy of individual and social memory', demonstrating 'that there is a continuum between selves and communities, individual and social memories'.[101]

Brockmeier thus conceptualises a type of cultural lifeworld, grounded in lived experience, composed of a variety of 'texts' in which the individual mind is embedded, and which together forms the 'connective structure of memory'.[102] Through the connections between various 'texts' or artefacts come narratives that preserve and transmit 'knowledge and formative experiences from times past'.[103] Thus Brockmeier can be seen as building on the arguments of Crane, not only through an emphasis on everyday lived experience, but through challenging traditional conceptions of memory that present it as collective rather than individual. The main difference, or perhaps development, can be seen in Brockmeier's refusal to emphasize either individual or collective memory, locating memory in the individual mind which is itself embedded within a corpus of culture.

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[100] Brockmeier, "Remembering and forgetting: Narrative as cultural memory", p. 26
[101] Ibid, p. 26
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid, p. 18

Thus 'memory', in this context, is conceived as 'a movement within a cultural discourse', continuously combining and fusing different temporalities, corpuses, and loci.[104] Following on from our conception of history and memory as both being subject to the same 'human biases, deceptions, and irregularities', here we find a conception which allows us to question the bleak language of unreliability and conceive of both as positive ways of exploring unknown connections between diverse periods, texts, locations and cultures. As will be shown below, this dynamic conception of memory proliferated in the years after 2000 – and forms what Astrid Erll terms the 'third phase' in the development of the study of memory.[105]

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[104] Brockmeier, "Remembering and forgetting: Narrative as cultural memory", p. 21
[105] Erll, 'Traveling Memory', p. 5.

A Dynamic Conception of Memory

In the years after 2000, we find a dynamic conception of memory appearing – not based on static 'social frameworks' nor addressing questions of individuality and collectivity – but, following on from Brockmeier, viewing memory as a 'a movement within a cultural discourse' distributed across a range of cultural artefacts, with the individual not opposed to social forces but fundamentally embedded within a corpus of culture. The two works which best exemplify this new conception of memory – which largely took off in the years after 2000 – are Alison Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory* and Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*.

For Landsberg, a modern age of mass culture technologies such as the photograph or cinema enabled memories to no longer belong exclusively to cohesive 'groups' – the Holocaust for Jews or slavery for African Americans – but through these modern technologies 'it becomes possible for these memories to be acquired by anyone, regardless of skin colour, ethnic background, or biology'.[106] This form of memory – which Landsburg terms 'prosthetic' – 'emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past', so that people who never lived through an historical event can 'take on memories of events not "naturally" their own'.[107] Just as Brockmeier saw memory as a fluid movement within a culture, Landsburg sees memory as constructed *between* the individual and cultural representations. In this way she further challenges Halbwachs conception of static frameworks shaping individual memory, as prosthetic memories 'are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience', being developed in the process of 'an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past'.[108]

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[106] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 2
[107] Ibid, p. 18
[108] Ibid, p. 19

These individual encounters with cultural representations 'open up a world of images outside a person's lived experience', leading to a conception of memory that is 'portable, fluid, and nonessentialist', with memories flowing between different (national, religious, ethnic) groups.[109]

Seeing memory as marked by its fluidity with an ability to traverse between different discourses is something shared by Michael Rothberg. Rather than viewing memory as a zero-sum game between various competing groups, Rothberg conceives of a multi-directional memory, suggesting different groups' remembrance of the past – African-Americans' remembrance of slavery, Jewish remembrance of the holocaust, or subaltern remembrance of colonialism – is the product of ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing.[110] Rather than each group's 'social framework' being used to construct a memory based on shared experiences, then, memories are the product of diverse interaction between different narratives. In this conception, the public sphere is not a concrete reflection each group's memory, but is a 'malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others'.[111]

Memories are therefore not 'owned' by particular groups, nor are they static constructs, but are the product of ongoing creation through the interaction of different groups' discursive practices, and 'what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant'.[112] Rothburg eventually explores how the articulation of Holocaust memory has not only contributed to the articulation of other histories, (such as slavery, the Algerian War of Independence, or the genocide in

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[109] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 18
[110] Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 3.
[111] Ibid, p. 5.
[112] Ibid, p. 5.

Bosnia during the 1990s),[113] but is itself a product of memories that (at first glance) seem entirely distant, writing that this emerged 'in dialogue with the dynamic transformations and multifaceted struggles that define the era of decolonization'.[114]

Both Landsburg and Rothburg can therefore be seen as building on, or applying, the arguments of Brockmeier to distinct historical contexts – for Landsburg this is the public cultural memory of the United States, while for Rothburg this is the Jewish memory of the Holocaust. Brockmeier's conception of memory as composed of a variety of 'texts' in which the individual mind is embedded and which together form a 'connective structure of memory', through which memory flows, is rearticulated by Landsburg and Rothburg, who emphasize memory's ability to be acquired, used, rearticulated and transposed across a diverse array of individuals and groups. Landsburg's argument that memory is 'transportable' and thus 'challenge[s] more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, "heritage", and ownership' chimes with Rothburg's emphasis on 'the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the acts of remembrance'.[115] Brockmeier's conception of memory as a 'movement within a cultural discourse' and an emphasis on the 'connective structure of memory' thus can be seen as being rearticulated by Landsburg in her conception of memory being 'portable, fluid, and nonessentialist' or by Rothburg, who sees memory as the product of dynamic transfers between diverse times, places and peoples.

By 2010, Astrid Erll – a leading figure in the field – summed up this approach while setting out how it could inform future studies of memory in new contexts. In the light of memory being conceived as transportable, connective, discursive, and dialogical, Erll proposed a new term to

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[113] Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 6
[114] Ibid, p. 7
[115] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 3; Rothberg. *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 11

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encapsulate this 'third wave' of memory studies – 'travelling' memory. In this conception –
following on from Rothburg and Landsburg – memory is seen as a transcultural phenomenon
'continually moving across and beyond…territorial and social boundaries'.[116] Memory itself is
conceived as a 'incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of
memory, their continual "travels" and ongoing transformations through time and space, across
social, linguistic and political borders', and the 'travelling memory' metaphor is 'an
abbreviation for the fact that in the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic
forms, contents, and practices are in constant, unceasing motion'.[117]

In much the same way Brockmeier, Landsburg, and Rothburg conceived of memory as a
movement flowing through different discourses, Erll can be seen as extending this – locating
memory in its emergence across different spatial, social, linguistic and political borders. Here
memory was seen as travelling through 'time and technologies', across different media,
individuals, and practices, all the time transporting 'information from one medium to the
next'.[118] The object of study was therefore not distinct groups' reconstructions of discrete
events, nor the discursive flow and exchange of memories between various groups – but the
movement of memories between media, people, forms, contents, and practices, across time and
space.

The conception of memory as a dynamic movement – originally conceived by Brockmeier and
extended and applied in different contexts by Landsburg, Rothburg and Erll – was taken up by
Andrew Hoskins in applying this notion of memory to digital communicative networks. For
Hoskins, the rise of social media networks since the late 2000s resulted in a fundamental

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[116] Erll, *Travelling Memory,* p. 11
[117] Ibid, p. 11, 12
[118] Ibid, p. 13

reconfiguration of contemporary memory. These social media networks – such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram – resulted in a new 'condition of remembering' characterised by its embeddedness in socio-technical practices.[119] Key to Hoskins theory – in much the same vein as those who preceded him – was that memory was neither individual nor collective, but is 'a kind of circuit that extends from individual cognition out into the world and back again', being 'extended, scattered, and distributed' outside the head and across social, cultural and technological worlds. Memory was thus defined through its mediated *emergence* through a series of interactions between individuals and everyday digital media.[120]

Hoskins termed this an 'ecological' approach, a term which sought to encompass and reveal the distributed nature of memory in the digital age: 'Rather than hiving "memory" off into distinct and separate zones or even "containers" – the body, the brain, the social, the cultural etcetera – an ecological approach is interested in how these work or don't work in producing memory'.[121] Memory is thus located in 'emergent articulations' between these 'containers' which are embedded in communicative digital networks: 'Smart phones and other highly portable digital devices act as prosthetic nodes that extend the self across an array of communication and consumption networks, personal and public'.[122] Ideas of individuals and societies co-evolving with and even co-constituting digital technology were prevalent for some time in the fields of new media and 'Web Science'[123] (taking inspiration from Bruno Latour's Actor–network theory) – yet for cultural theorists of memory they presented a unique opportunity to recast memory in a digital age, and new media scholars such as Richard Grusin

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[119] Van House, Nancy, and Elizabeth F. Churchill. "Technologies of memory: Key issues and critical perspectives." *Memory Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, Sept. 2008, pp. 295–310.
[120] Hoskings, 'Digital Network Memory' in *Digital Memory Studies*, p. 94
[121] Hoskings, Andrew. "Media, memory, metaphor: Remembering and the connective turn." *Transcultural Memory*, 16 Mar. 2016, pp. 32–44; p. 24.
[122] Ibid, p. 26
[123] Web Science Manifesto, https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/271033/1/manifestoACM.pdf

began to observe this, writing that 'even media and cultural theorists have begun to argue that humans have historically co-evolved with technology, distributing their cognitive and other functions across an increasingly complex network of technical artefacts'.[124]

These theories have implications for traditional conceptions of the archive. Hoskins sees the notion of the archive as a static 'repository' and 'permanent place of storage' being challenged by the 'much more fluid temporalities and dynamics of "permanent data transfer"'.[125] Whereas before the digital revolution archives existed in 'the archival space of the vault or library to the material conditions of order, classification and retrieval', they are now increasingly networked, marked by 'hyperconnectivity', having become 'transformed, mediatized, networked'. They are, in the words of Wolfgang Ernst, 'liberated from archival space into archival time'.[126] This results in the archive becoming 'the newly accessible and highly connected scope for articulating memory for the emergence of communities which constitute what Arjun Appadurari calls "a new and heterogeneous sociology"'.[127] Instead of being seen as a repository for default categories of community (the nation, the city, or the religion), the archive thus takes a more active role as 'a deliberate site for the production of anticipated memories' by heterogonous communities.[128]

For Hoskins the archive thus appears to have new potential, liberated from its former 'inherently spatial and to some extent institutional constraints', transformed into a dynamic de-

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[124] Grusin, Richard A. *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 92

[125] Andrew Hoskins, 'The Mediatization of Memory', in Knut Lundby, *Mediatization of Communication*. Walter de Gruyter, p. 672

[126] Ernst, Wolfgang . "The Archive as Metaphor: From Archival Space to Archival Time", Open 7, 2004, p. 52.

[127] Hoskins, Andrew. "Media, memory, metaphor: Remembering and the connective turn." *Parallax*, vol. 17, no. 4, Nov. 2011, p. 25

[128] Ibid.

spatialised body marked by the 'fluidity, reproducibility, and transferability of digital data'.[129]

This also has implications for *who* actually controls the archive. As De Kosnik has argued, there has been a shift in the preservation and reproduction of cultural forms and content within this new media ecology to 'amateurs', so much so that memory has 'gone rogue' – with these 'rogue archives' being freely accessible online archives produced and received by 'subcultural and marginalized groups'. This results in an inversion of 'the sociocultural hierarchy that places them at the bottom of the power structure of media', permitting 'memory-based making in the mode of repertoire—that is, an everyday making, an individualized and personalized style of performance, a holding-in-common of all culture as shared resource and property'.[130]

This transition of the curator of archives from being an institution to potentially marginalised or otherwise silenced individuals – allowing them more control over representations of culture – can be seen as the logical result of the 'new memory ecology' Hoskins delineates. With this new memory ecology figurations of individuals, artefacts, technologies and media all play equal and constituting roles in the development of 'memory' – as opposed to it being located in any one domain. Memory is thus distributed in a fundamentally non-hierarchical sense, with individuals' role being key to the production (and not only reception) of cultural memory.

Taking a step back then, we can discern an intellectual lineage or 'genealogy of memory' originating in Halbwachs and reappearing in scholars such as Nora, Yerushlami, Megill, Brockmeier and their writings on history's relationship to memory, and memory's (collective or individual) nature. These debates have allowed us to delineate an ebb and flow of conceptions of memory over the past century, and as we have seen, complicate the previously

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[129] Hoskins, 'The Mediatization of Memory', p. 671
[130] De Kosnik, Abigail. *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*. MIT Press, 2016, p. 10

accepted dualities of memory and history, and individual and collective memory – replacing them with a more dynamic, emergent, fluid notion of memory, eventually located primarily in social networks producing the 'digital network memory' Hoskins describes. Yet most of this has been theoretical. How have scholars used Hoskins' theory in practice to delineate 'ecologies' of cultural memory in digital environments? Our next section surveys this literature which has been undertaken in the past decade.

Digital Memory Ecologies in Practice

The past decade has seen a plethora of studies which utilise Hoskins' theory of digital memory ecology – applying this to diverse regional, national, cultural and political contexts while focusing on a variety of social media networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube.

These studies often make use of not only Hoskins theory of mnemonic fluidity between diverse actors in a network, but also draw on work done prior to this, such as Rothberg. Ned Richardson-Little, for example, explores a German far-right movement's mnemonic appropriation of the GDR slogan 'we are the People' [*Wir sind das Volk*] in a Facebook campaign to bring down the Berlin government, arguing that the use of *Wir sind das Volk* constitutes a 'multi-directional' memory – being appropriated from the 1989 protests in the GDR to create a 'reputational shield' against accusations of racism. Not only was the phrase appropriated from a different historical context, but it was disseminated through different (digital and non-digital) media, spanning across the far-right movement's Twitter, Facebook and street level networks, with varying degrees of success. Thus for Richardson-Little, this

illustrated how contemporary activism is 'often a hybrid amalgam of social media and street tactics that are digital and non-digital to varying extents'.[131]

Mārtiņš Kaprāns, furthermore, examines responses to the Latvian documentary 'The Soviet Story' (2008) on YouTube and Wikipedia, finding that memory themes in the YouTube comments reappear on Wikipedia and these represent an 'emancipation' from hegemonic Western anti-Soviet representations of Stalin's dictatorship. This 'hegemonic' anti-Soviet narrative is not only found to flow through different media, but it displays multi-directionality in a Rothburgian sense, used by different groups to accomplish divergent aims. Furthermore, these representations are inevitably shaped by the digital media in which they are embedded: while both Wikipedia and YouTube result in an 'emancipation from the hegemonic narrative', they accomplish this in different ways, with YouTube 'resembl[ing] an Irish pub where everyone can quarrel about nearly anything', while the more moderated, edited, and intentionally arranged representation on Wikipedia achieves a break of the hegemonic narrative through the procedural consensus of a variety of moderators, editors, and contributors.[132]

Rik Smit, in investigating 'witness videos' of the Syrian conflict on Youtube, examines 'the interplay between the different media technologies, practices, and actors that are involved in assembling, remixing, and curating (visual) content', while also heeding Hoskins call to examine the 'distributed' socio-technical nature of memory: 'Algorithms and uploaders cooperate in rearranging and reassembling items [on Youtube], thus reactivating mediated

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[131] Richardson-Little, Ned, and Samuel Merrill. "Who is the volk? Pegida and the contested memory of 1989 on social media." *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media*, 2020, p. 62

[132] Kaprāns, Mārtiņš. "Hegemonic representations of the past and digital agency: Giving meaning to 'the Soviet story' on social networking sites." *Memory Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 27 May 2015, p. 169

memory of past events', concluding that 'contemporary citizen witnessing and its associated practices are key components of this "new memory ecology."'[133]

Codruţa Pohrib also makes use of Hoskins' conceptions in examining how the Facebook memory practices of a Romanian post-communist generation – self-dubbed the 'latchkey generation' – produce a genre of life writing, arguing that a 'new genre of generational discourse emerges through the dynamic 'intra-action' of generational frames of remembrance, individuals, and the socio-technical affordances of Facebook pages', with this discourse being 'not so much oppositional to previous or contemporary anti-communist ones' (which are largely propagated by intellectual elites), but rather concerned with 'valuing generational structures of feeling' which are 'predicated upon the interdependence between alternative affective engagements with the past and a new relationship with [present] communist materialities.'[134]

Scholars have also accepted aspects of Hoskins's ecological theory while challenging the implication that these de-territorialized, transnational memory communities may result in a fragmentation of national identity and national allegiances. Paulo Drinot, in examining YouTube comments concerning grievances over the 19th-century War of the Pacific between Chile, Bolivia and Peru, argues that these new technologies 'enable the circulation and reproduction of collective memories in de-territorialized and transnational or global ways', yet paradoxically this 'operation of memory in global 'spaces' such as the Internet does not enable the unmooring of memory from 'national or nationalist sentiments'.[135] Similarly, Seth

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[133] Smit, Rik, et al. "Witnessing in the new memory ecology: Memory construction of the Syrian conflict on YouTube." *New Media & Society*, vol. 19, no. 2, 9 July 2016, p. 294, 303
[134] Pohrib, Codruţa Alina. "The Romanian 'latchkey generation' writes back: Memory genres of post-communism on Facebook." *Memory Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 13 June 2017, , p. 164, 175, 177.
[135] Drinot, Paulo. "Website of memory: The war of the pacific (1879–84) in the global age of YouTube." *Memory Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, Oct. 2011, p. 381

Bernstien has also demonstrated how memory can flow between different temporalities and media, arguing that the digital commemoration of the Second World War on Russian commemorative websites constructs a past which retains elements of the 'unifying Soviet national narrative of the war', albeit transposed in a different era using different mnemonic (digital) media.[136]

These findings can also be complemented by those of Mykola Makhortykh, who finds that 'even in the transnational space of digital media, memory of the [1943] Battle of Kyiv is predominantly represented in terms of national—and often nationalistic—interpretations of the Second World War', with Ukrainophone and Russophone users using YouTube 'not to challenge national narratives of the past but to disseminate and propagate these narratives online'.[137]

Others, perhaps more conventionally, have examined social media as a means of forming distinct counter-memories vis-à-vis 'official', 'institutionalised' or 'elite' commemoration. Birkner and Donk, for instance, demonstrate how during a debate over the renaming of a public square in Munster named after Paul von Hindenburg, Facebook 'played a decisive role as a counter-public sphere against hegemonic mainstream media and politics', and through debate, historical contextualisation, and the affordances of this digital platform they 'fostered a new historical consciousness' which reinterprets Hindenburg's connection to the Nazi regime.[138] Ekaterina Haskins, in her 2007 examination of the online *September 11 Digital Archive*, seemingly pre-empts Hoskins conception of digital memory marked by fluidity and movement

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[136] Bernstein, Seth. "Remembering war, remaining Soviet: Digital Commemoration of World War II in Putin's Russia." *Memory Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, 31 July 2016, pp. 422–436.

[137] Makhortykh, Mykola. "Remediating the past: Youtube and Second World War Memory in Ukraine and Russia." *Memory Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 13 Sept. 2017, pp. 146–161.

[138] Birkner, Thomas, and André Donk. "Collective memory and social media: Fostering a new historical consciousness in the digital age?" *Memory Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, 9 Jan. 2018, pp. 367–383.

while also seeing 'vernacular' digital commemoration as a counterpart of 'official' institutionalised archives, writing that the digital archive constitutes a type of vernacular commemoration which gathers together 'disparate fragments of post-9/11 discourse' such as nostalgia for the World Trade Centre, nationalist calls for revenge, anti-war anger at the Bush administration, and feelings of vulnerability and loss. The memorial therefore 'reflects the unsettled and still evolving' quality of 9/11 memory online, and therefore 'offers a panoramic view of the fractious cacophony of public expression that cannot be accommodated by a permanent, professionally designed memorial'.[139]

Others have examined the ability of digital memory ecologies to conform with or depart from 'official' state memories in other national contexts. Yi Wang, examining the mnemonic practices of Han-centrism on the Chinese internet, argues that this 'mnemonic movement' on the Chinese internet demonstrates the effectiveness of participatory websites for fostering counter-memories vis-à-vis the 'official' memory of the Chinese state,[140] while Shanti Sumartojo, examining the 2015 'live tweeting' by the Australian Broadcasting Company of a first-person narrative of Anzac landing on the Gallipoli peninsula, found that the TV-company's tweeting 'reinforced longstanding, state-sponsored, ways of thinking about Anzac and its relevance for Australians, despite its use of a very recent form of online communication'.[141]

What can we discern from these multiple interpretations and applications of Hoskins' theoretical work? A diverse array of scholars have not only sought to reveal Hoskins'

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[139] Haskins, Ekaterina. "Between archive and participation: Public memory in a Digital age." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 4, Oct. 2007, p. 414.

[140] Wang, Yi. "Contesting the past on the Chinese internet: Han-centrism and mnemonic practices." *Memory Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 19 Sept. 2019, pp. 304–317.

[141] Sumartojo, Shanti. "Tweeting from the past: Commemorating the anzac centenary @abcnews1915." *Memory Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, 28 May 2017, , p. 8.

conception of 'digital memory ecologies' in diverse national, technological, and discursive contexts, but they also focus on the ability of these digital practices to offer alternatives to 'official' hegemonic memories on more conventional media, which are supposedly more 'static', making them less opportune for the development of counter-memories. However, as we have seen, hegemonic memories are not always expressed through conventional (non-digital) sources, and in fact harness the ability to traverse through different temporalities, media, and discursive contexts, much in the way Hoskins, Erll, and Rothberg theorise.

While scholars have sought to reveal the distributed and 'ecological' nature of memories in different temporal, territorial, and discursive contexts, to date no study has examined the nature of present-day memories of dance halls on social media. Do we find a reproduction of hegemonic narratives concerning national identity from print sources in the dance hall's heyday (the interwar period) on present-day social media platforms? Is the unique experience of multi-sensual romance the dance hall gave rise to similarly found to be reconstituted and distributed across time, technology and discursive context? It is only, then, through a thorough investigation of how the dance hall functioned in its heyday, and the unique cultural phenomena that it gave rise to, can we begin to investigate if and how it is remembered on digital communicative networks.

Chapter One: 'I could feel her heart beating, or was it mine?': Sensuality, Romance and Intimacy at the Dance Hall, 1918-1939

Introduction

In the 1980s, long after the dance craze of the early-to-mid twentieth century was over, a writer named Henry Patterson wrote a semi-autobiographical memoir about dance halls under the pen name Jack Higgins. Usually known for his popular espionage novels such as *The Eagle Has Landed* or *The Wrath of God,* Patterson decided to write a different kind of book after a brief hiatus, one based around his memories of going to dance halls in Nottingham in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The resulting book, *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo,* is a whirlwind tale of romance, lust and sexual passion, yet it also contains a unique array of memories about life inside the dance hall, largely based around sensual pleasure. We hear of the protagonist, Oliver Shaw (who is a stand-in for Patterson) describing the visual environment upon entering the dance hall. As Shaw waits in a queue outside, 'the glass doors on the other side of the foyer swung open, giving a tantalizing glimpse of the crowd inside' before we learn of a 'chorus of groans' as the doors are shut again.[142] Shaw's luck is good however, eventually entering and going 'excitedly up the stars to the cloakroom' before taking off his coat, moving onto the balcony that ran around the dance floor, looking down, and experiencing excitement upon seeing, hearing and feeling the life of the dance hall below. Music emanates from the band while dancers and bandmembers are dressed in a variety of different colours. Hundreds of women and men are stepping, turning, swinging and vibrating with the sound of the music. The lighting produces an array of colours and movements which illuminate the entire room: 'waves of scarlet, blue and green rippling across the heads of the dancers'.[143] Upon descending the

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[142] Higgins, Jack. *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo: A Novel*. Pocket Books, 1989, p. 33
[143] Higgins, *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo.* p. 33

stairs, Shaw begins dancing – eventually becoming close with a women whose 'red-gold' coloured hair intrigues him, only to find out, upon getting closer, it 'to be purely an effect of the light'.[144] Such ephemeral encounters continue throughout the novel, and are often not only visual and auditory but somatic in nature. Upon dancing with a partner, Shaw's 'heart started to pound…stomach contracted, the inside of [his] mouth went dry', holding a partner in his arms is described as physically 'exciting', and when a partner moved close to him and 'put an arm around [his] neck' and a face against his shoulder, Shaw experiences intense sensations in his body: 'I could feel her heart beating, or was it mine? It didn't really matter.'[145]

This chapter argues that the dance hall experience Patterson presents to us is not merely a cliché rendering of a young man fascinated with music, women, and dance, but signifies a specifically modern style of sensual romance in which the dance hall played a vital role in developing. Using newspaper articles, novels and Mass Observation, I argue that the dance hall brought the sensual experience found in the nineteenth-century West End to the masses – widening the parameters of *where* and *for whom* this experience was available. Moreover, this modern sensual experience – based around the visual, auditory and somatic impressions dancers felt – resulted in new practices of courting based around romance, emotional intimacy and physical connection. The chapter thus casts the dance hall in a new light as playing a central role in what Claire Langhamer has called an 'emotional revolution' in inter-war Britain.[146]

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[144] Higgins, *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*, p. 34
[145] Ibid, p. 63
[146] Langhamer, Claire. *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 4

The findings below, importantly, fit into the wider literature on conceptions of feeling in twentieth-century Britain. They delineate a location in which we find Ben Highmore's conception of 'feeling' as a materially produced and historically experienced historical phenomenon. Highmore conceptualises 'feeling' following in the footsteps of Raymond Williams and his 'structures of feeling', intentionally articulating feeling as beyond affect or emotion, reaching for an 'entire register of felt phenomena' grounded in materialist analysis, with the 'openness and vagueness' of the term 'feeling' being central to this analysis itself.[147] In this conception 'feeling' denotes an entire lifeworld, encompassing mood, manners, emotions – a 'whole way of life', in the words of Williams.[148]

For Highmore, moods and feelings are embedded in cultural forms and materially produced through forms of labour – a lighting and sound technician at a West End musical, for instance, performs mood work through technological delegates such as dimmer switches, sound mixers, and spotlights.[149] This is what Highmore terms an 'assemblage of human and nonhuman agents working to promote and sustain certain feelings and not others, specific atmospheres and not others'.[150] Moods and feelings are also social, produced through the interactions of humans and experienced collectively, and they're historical, taking place within a certain historical period and connected to wider historical events and trends.

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[147] Highmore, Ben. *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Mediation, and Cultural Politics*. Routledge, 2017, p. 37
[148] Ibid p. 24
[149] Ibid p. 2
[150] Ibid p. 8

Claire Langhamer takes this notion of 'feeling' further, locating it in one of the chief sources this chapter makes use of, Mass Observation (MO). 'Feeling', as Langhamer points out, was 'as important a form of data as experience or opinion' for MO's founders, and MO's turn to feeling was more than 'an accident of style; it was integral to the organization's research design'.[151] For Langhamer, 'MO's Directives offered structured schooling in the articulation of feeling', and this conception of feeling encompassed specific emotional states, opinion or view on a specific event, or even the reflection of feelings per se rather than feelings about other topics.[152] Furthermore, this commitment to the expression of feeling is one of the strands that is argued to tie MO together, with MO as an organization cultivating a sense of community and shared purpose among its panellists in the articulating of feeling, themselves constituting what Barbara Rosenwein terms an 'emotional community'.[153]

The work below, as we will see, heightens both Highmore's and Langhamer's arguments, locating a specific cultural feeling in the dance hall that's materially produced (through an array of technological and tangible elements), a form of labour (intentionally curated by tradespeople with the goal of producing certain atmosphere and feeling), socially experienced (experienced collectively) and historically situated (situated within larger historical trends and phenomena).

This chapter also contributes to the literature on sensuality and tangibility in twentieth-century Britain. Through locating a multi-sensual environment in the dance hall – an environment marked by a variety of sonic, luminescent, somatic and tactile sensations – this chapter follows

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[151] Langhamer, Claire. "Mass Observation Feeling" in Curzon, Lucy D., and Benjamin Jones. *The Historical Contexts and Contemporary Uses of Mass Observation: 1930s to the Present*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. p. 51
[152] Ibid, p. 54-55
[153] Ibid, p. 59; Rosenwein, Barbara H. *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press, 2006.

current work on locating similar environments using Mass Observation in the inter-war public house (with sound),[154] and public transportation (with touch).[155]

Simeon Koole's recent groundbreaking study on touch and tangibility offers a conception of embodied practice this thesis locates in the dance hall. For Koole, touch was contingent on embodied actions and 'how touch is experienced, and how the world is conceptually organized based on that experienced, emerges through ongoing embodied actions in particular spaces and over time'.[156] Originally located in Henry Head and Gordon Holme's "Sensory Disturbances from Cerebral Lesions" (1911), this idea places emphasis on the emergent nature of 'both the sensing subject and the world sensed and their inseparable relation through action'.[157] The body is conceptualised as sustaining the world, bringing it into being 'as an object of perception through unceasing action within it'.[158] This conception breaks down assumed distinctions between mind, body, and world, 'suggesting instead their inseparable entanglement',[159] and as we will see, was later developed by theorists of embodied cognition that this chapter makes use of.[160]

While Koole applied this conception of touch and perception as emerging through embodied actions to phenomena as diverse as the tube,[161] the London fog,[162] and tea shops,[163] this chapter argues the dance hall was a location in which embodied practice resulted in new forms of

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[154] Moss, Stella. '"A Harmonizing Whole"? Music, Mass Observation and the Interwar Public House' in Osgerby, William. *Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

[155] Koole, Simeon. "How We Came to Mind the Gap: Time, Tactility, and the Tube." *Twentieth Century British History*, 26 Aug. 2016.

[156] Ibid, p. 14

[157] Ibid, p. 14

[158] Ibid, p. 15

[159] Ibid, p. 15

[160] p. 96

[161] Koole, Simeon. *Intimate Subjects: Touch and Tangibility in Britain's Cerebral Age*. The University of Chicago Press, 2024, pp. 103-137; "How We Came to Mind the Gap", pp. 524-54

[162] Koole, Simeon. *Intimate Subjects* pp. 181-221

[163] Ibid. pp. 137-81

emotional expression, contributing to a growing literature that seeks to understand how multi-sensual embodied practice contributes to new forms of perception, emotion and feeling in inter-war Britain.

In this way, the chapter aligns with previous work done by Stella Moss on the inter-war public house that locates a nexus between 'mind, body, movement, environment [and] sensation' propelled by the complexity of musical experience.[164] Using MO, Moss shows how many interwar pubs were not only home to a vibrant music experience, but the styles and genres of music shaped emotional engagement and expression – and music resulted in 'dynamic interactions between players, singers and listeners', and these dynamics were 'emotionally enmeshed', 'a resource for producing and recalling emotional states.'[165] Cognition, emotion, and bodily experience both 'shaped and reflected music's potent influence on both performers and audiences' at the inter-war pub.[166]

The dance hall, as we will see, was a location in which embodied practice and sensuality combined to shift individuals' emotional worlds and practice of romance. The profound embodied experience of 'going to the Palais' – where individuals encountered and engaged with visual, auditory and somatic sensations – resulted in new forms of emotional expression, contributing to the 'emotional revolution' Claire Langhamer delineates.

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[164] Moss, Stella. '"A Harmonizing Whole"? Music, Mass Observation and the Interwar Public House', p. 112.
[165] Ibid, p. 112
[166] Ibid, p. 116

Charles Baudelaire first defined 'modernity' as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent'[167] when seeking to articulate what artists must seek to capture about nineteenth-century Paris, and his conception was echoed in the writings of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin as they sought to understand the meaning of metropolitan experience in Paris and Berlin. Simmel, refining Baudelaire, conceived of the visual cacophony of the modern metropolis – the 'rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance'[168] – as having a profound effect on the mental life of individuals. For Simmel, 'the psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli', and a tendency of rationality in the metropolitan character is a direct result of this external visual stimuli: 'Thus the metropolitan type, which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications, creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner'.[169]

Experience in the modern metropolis is therefore conceived of as not only containing a diverse array of visual impressions – rapidly changing images, profound visual differences, 'the unexpectedness of violent stimuli' – but these external sensory impressions result in profound 'modifications' in individuals' internal psyche. Assaulted with a multitude of sensory disturbances, the individual is left with no choice but to create a 'protective organ' against 'domination' by the metropolis – resulting in what Simmel sees as the psychic makeup of

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[167] Baudelaire, Charles, and P. E. Charvet. *The Painter of Modern Life*. Penguin, 2010, p. 17.
[168] Simmel, Georg *The Metropolis of Modern Life* in Bridge, Gary, and Sophie Watson. 'The Blackwell City Reader'. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 103.
[169] Simmel, *The Metropolis of Modern Life*, p. 104

modern mental life: rationality, a 'blasé outlook', and a 'calculating exactness' of time and money. In this way, the modern city – as a result of its very existence– results in modern mentality.

Yet the modern experience was conceived as much more than a set of 'dominating' sense impressions, and later theorists – chiefly Walter Benjamin – commented on the illusory, dream-like quality of experience unique to modern metropoli. In the nineteenth-century, capital cities throughout Europe, and ultimately the world, were dramatically transformed into glittering showcases, defined by dazzling arrangements of light, 'heavenly' panoramas providing sweeping views of the cityscape, and arcades and later department stores which displayed commodities as completely divorced from their use or exchange value, being seen as pure fetish, something to be desired, fascinated by and enthralled with. Here – following on from Simmel – the visual experience of the city was a key component of the modern condition. Benjamin described the spectacle of nineteenth-century Paris as a 'phantasmagoria' – a magic-lantern show of dream-like optical illusions rapidly transforming in size and blending into one another. Often these shows included ghosts of the collective heroes and villains of the revolution, whose effect was heightened through the use of mirrors, music, smoke, projection of voices, and other illusionistic theatrical techniques. These 'phantasmagorias' were so successful that the term immediately passed into figurative use, describing hallucinatory mental processes that were obviously imagined but nonetheless had an indisputable reality of their own.[170]

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[170] Cohen, M. 'Benjamin's phantasmagoria: The Arcades Project'. In D. Ferris (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 207

The fact that 'phantasmagoria' denoted a mystical dreamworld where reality and hallucination were inextricably interwoven can best be seen in the arcades Benjamin describes. The arcades, Benjamin tells us, are fluid places, where a multitude of glistening glass window displays are in a constant state of flux, being rearranged and remodelled in size, contents and meaning, striking the viewer 'like realities in a dream'.[171] The passerby, tempted by the profane pleasure houses of the arcade, is struck by an array of sensual temptations: 'gastronomical perfections, intoxicating drinks, wealth without labour at the roulette table, joy at the vaudeville theatres and the transports of sexual pleasure sold by a heavenly host of fashionably dressed ladies of the night'.[172] Many of these prostitutes could be found behind the frosted-glass panels of the arcades, the passerby struck by the arrays of colours and patterns the light made as it filtered through. In this modern dreamworld of sensual delights Benjamin felt it necessary to comment on the strange delineation between the real and the fantastical: 'where in the new does the boundary run between reality and appearance?'.[173]

The 'fleeting, ephemeral, contingent' modern condition first articulated by Baudelaire was thus refined by Simmel and Benjamin, being largely based around the new visual impressions the modern city offered: dazzling arrangements of light, fetish commodities designed to visually enthral, panoramas, waxworks and optical lantern shows designed to transport the viewer to distant cities, landscapes, classical events and decisive battles. This modernity, however, was not only found in Paris and Berlin – but quickly spread throughout Europe, and nineteenth-century London was a key location where it was experienced.

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[171] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 841

[172] Buck-Morss, Susan, and Walter Benjamin. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*. MIT Press, 1999, p. 83

[173] Leslie, Esther. *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*. Pluto Press, 2000, p. 100

London was home to the first world exhibition in 1851. The famous Crystal Palace, which formed the centrepiece of the exhibition, was constructed out of the same iron and glass that originally had been used in Paris arcades,[174] but now in more grandiose, monumental proportions. Entire trees were encased in its all-glass structure, illuminated by refracted light coming through the building. New industrial inventions were displayed like artworks, competing with ornamental gardens, statues, and fountains for spectators' attention. Contemporaries described the exhibition as 'incomparably fairylike',[175] and even more recent critics have commented on the palace's ability to 'produce intense sensations in its past visitors and contemporary critics, who are still enthralled by its fantastical and ghostly presence'.[176]

Yet it was London's West End where the modern experience most firmly took hold in nineteenth-century Britain. As Rohan McWilliam has argued, many of the phantasmagorical characteristics Benjamin writes about in Paris can be found in London's West End after the 1850s. Not only did the West End's shop window displays, luxurious theatre interiors, hotel lobbies, and romantic melodramas constitute 'the construction of modern ways of living', but this modernity shared the sensual elements which made up the modernity of Benjamin's Paris and Simmel's Berlin: the magic lantern 'made possible colourful forms of enchantment and directed lighting allowed all forms of drama to possess a brilliant allure', panoramas were part of 'a larger world of entertainment that employed optical devices, peep shows, stereoscopes…to produce new ways of seeing', and shops, restaurants, and playhouses were 'made dramatic' through the use of artificial light. The district was thus 'a site of hyper stimulation, based on sites of display and fantasy', and this quality was not developed in isolation but was part of a larger cultural exchange with Paris in the nineteenth century, with

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[174] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing,* p. 85
[175] Ibid p. 85
[176] López, I.B. 'Reading Imperialistic Space: The Crystal Palace'. *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*, Vol. 21, 2014, p. 96

McWilliam describing the West End's arcades as largely replicating Paris's urban cultural forms:

> Arcades should be seen as part of a wider Anglo-French conversation in which new technology and cultural forms criss-crossed the channel in the age of revolution: panoramas, fashionable dress, restaurants, the gothic, melodrama, the serialized novel. The West End arcades were a cosmopolitan space that exemplified sophistication by replicating the best that Paris had to offer.[177]

The modern urban experience Simmel and Benjamin locate in Paris and Berlin – where artificial illumination dazzles the senses creating a sort of dreamworld, where luxury commodities are displayed in ornate shop windows producing a sense of desire in the consumer, where new visual forms of popular entertainment enthral spectators and transport them to distant times and places – can therefore be found in the heart of London in the nineteenth century. In many ways the sense of escapism fostered by modernity was heightened in London. Buildings were not only designed to impress with grandiose facades, but their very names – Hippodrome, Empire, Coliseum, Palladium, Alhambra – reflected 'the language of the monumental and the exotic' which was developed in the West End.[178] Architectural forms did not follow cohesive sets of design principles but often contained contrasting styles – mixing Louis XV and XVI, Empire, and Georgian – with the sole intention of provoking a sense of awe and luxury among visitors, and building's proportions were often widely exaggerated in scale, with grand hotels, theatres and department stores all taking on a monumental presence which sought to impress the passerby. London was thus not only home to an extension of the continental experience of modernity but was also a site of reinvention – where the urban experience identified by Benjamin and Simmel was newly intensified.

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[177] McWilliam, Rohan. *London's West End. Creating the Pleasure District, 1800-1914*. Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 30
[178] Ibid, p. 10

The modern experience first identified by Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin on the continent and later by McWilliam in London's West End was fundamental to the experience at Britain's dance halls. Originally available for upper and middle-class individuals who could afford the delights of the West End, the dance hall brought modern leisure to the masses in ways no other leisure venue could – expanding the bounds of not only *who* this modern metropolitan experience was available for, but *where* the geographical parameters of this experience were located. The dance hall, as this chapter will show, was home to a unique and new experience of sensuality, where an array of sense impressions transformed popular conceptions of romance into something uniquely modern.

Sources and Memory

One of the key sources in this chapter is Henry Patterson's *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo* (written under the pen name Jack Higgins)*.* Written in the late 1980s, the source constitutes a reflection on the dance hall at the height of its popularity in the late 1940s by an individual who not only participated in the dance hall experience, but who remembers the dance hall as being fundamental to his memories of youth and early sexual experiences. *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo* is thus fundamentally a memory text, permeated with nostalgia and a certain romanticism for what Pierre Nora calls an 'environment of memory'.

Patterson's memoir recalls particular sensual details from a period almost 40 years earlier in ways that suggests a nostalgic romanticism for his youthful experiences in the dance hall. Turns of phrase and arguably clichéd renderings of youthful dance hall experiences appear so often they become trite by repetition. 'To this day, whenever I hear that tune, I feel her arm sliding behind my neck, her body pressing against me on the turns' Patterson tells us early in

the book.[179] 'There was music on the night air that first evening', Patterson continues a few pages later, 'it drew me like a magnet when I came out of the public bar'.[180] 'To hold her in my arms', Patterson recalls in another section, 'even lightly, was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me…. When the dance ended, she allowed her hand to stay in mine as if it were the most natural thing in the world'.[181]

While the nostalgic recollections of sexualised experiences of youth contained in Patterson's memoir may seem easy to dismiss as unrepresentative of life at the inter-war dance hall, I treat them here as part of a longer continuum of memory texts – up to and including present-day social media communities[182] – which constitute a recollection of the 'environment of memory' of the inter-war dance hall. *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo* reproduces memory themes from the inter-war era, and, as is shown below, when combined with other texts like MO, gives the reader an unrivalled window into the unique, multi-sensory experience of the inter-war dance hall.

Written in the late 1980s, a time of profound transformation of and challenge to a national memory of the inter-war era – with multicultural voices bringing new experiences that challenged the largely white, working-class memory of the 1930s (often invoking family experiences of empire, colonial oppression, migration and discrimination)[183] – *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo* seeks to reconstruct a typified version of the inter-war dance hall, highlighting its more salient features (multi-sensuality and conventional ballroom dance) while eschewing the phenomena of the period it purportedly represents (rationing, bombsites, and

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[179] Higgins, Jack. *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*. Pocket Books, 1989, p. 30
[180] Ibid p. 32
[181] Ibid p. 59
[182] See Chapter 5
[183] Cowan, David. *The Politics of the Past*. Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 201-37

general postwar hardship). The novel thus forms a memory text, being one of the cultural artifacts that represents the memory of the inter-war dance hall long after its demise. In this sense, the book forms one of the cultural artifacts within which memory is 'distributed', in the words of Susan Crane, 'expressed by historically conscious individuals claiming their historical knowledge',[184] at a time when this historical knowledge was under increasingly pressure and threat. *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*, therefore, functions not only as a nostalgic recollection, but as a cultural lens through which the unique experience of the inter-war dance hall can be examined.

Touch and Physical Feeling at the Dance Hall

The period from the 1910s to the 1930s has been called an era of 'late-modernity' in Britain, defined by increasing international cultural influences and globalisation, more popular forms of entertainment, and an unexpectedly new intensity of stimuli in recreational life.[185] While historians have identified the dance hall as helping to usher in this era of 'late-modernity' in inter-war Britain,[186] there is a dearth of research on exactly how this process played out. How was 'late-modernity' actually experienced and produced by ordinary people at the dance hall? And what did this experience mean for wider conceptions of intimacy and courtship? Filling this void, this chapter re-constructs the experience at the dance hall from the perspective of those who went there, arguing that this modern experience – largely along same the lines of what Simmel and Benjamin describe on the continent and McWilliam finds in the West End – was not only new for the largely working-class clientele who visited, but it ultimately helped

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[184] Crane, "Writing the individual back into collective memory", p. 1385

[185] Baxendale, John. "'… Into Another Kind of Life in Which Anything Might Happen …' Popular Music and Late Modernity, 1910–1930." *Popular Music*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1995, pp. 137–154.

[186] Nott, James. *Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960*. Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 303

foster changing ideas of and expectations from courtship and intimate relations in inter-war Britain.

The first and perhaps most obvious sensual element which made up the environment at the dance hall was touch. Patterson's memoir provides us with a good starting point in demonstrating how touch was not only able to provide physical pleasure, but, for the protagonist Oliver Shaw, it provoked an intense physical reaction across his body:

> When I took her in my arms, my heart started to pound, my stomach contracted, the inside of my mouth went dry……That two members of the opposite sex can strike sparks from each other from the first meeting without even a word being spoken is a common enough phenomenon, and frequently such passion has nothing to do with love in the usual sense of the word. Something inexplicable happens when two people come together inexorably.[187]

While a third-party observer may merely see the image of Shaw dancing with a woman, from Shaw's internal narrative we gain an insight into the raw emotion such a simple gesture can elicit. The seemingly commonplace act of taking the young woman in his arms results in an intense physical reaction – his heart pounds, stomach contracts, 'the inside of [his] mouth went dry'. The writer makes a point of telling us such involuntary reactions happen 'without even a word being spoken', they are solely the result of a simple touch.

Not only is touch presented as harnessing the power to elicit powerful affective reactions inside Shaw's body – stirring a visceral reaction in his heart, mouth and lips – but it eventually is presented as disintegrating the very boundary between his body and that of his dance partner. After we learn that 'to hold her in [his] arms, even lightly, was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to [him]',[188] his partner 'moved very close and put an arm around [his] neck'

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[187] Higgins, *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*, p. 58
[188] Ibid, p. 59

and her 'face against [his] shoulder', Patterson presents us with something of a culmination of the romantic experience: 'I could feel her heart beating, or was it mine? It didn't really matter.'[189]

The dance hall is thus home to a process of a sexualised experience based around touch. Holding her in his arms provokes the beginning of intimate stimulation – heart pounding, stomach contracting, mouth drying – before even a light touch 'was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to [him]'. The process reaches a climax when we are shown how more close, intimate touch leads to the merging of their two bodies: their two hearts, as the cliché is presented, eventually beat as one.

Touch as playing an important role in the sexualised experience of the dance hall can also be found from the perspective of third-party observers rather than internal first-person narratives. One of the most striking displays of public touching at dance halls found in the Mass Observation Archive dates from 1939 at the Paramount in Tottenham Court Road, where we can see just how comfortable people were in expressing physical intimacy:

> Chap aged 35 – fattish girl aged 30, blonde, both looked working class, sitting at table near pen. Chap has his arm round her shoulder. He kisses her neck. She squirms about erotically. Squeezes it through and on to her breasts. She lets him keep it there for a few seconds, staring ahead. Then forces his hand away. He brings it back on to her shoulder. She forces it off again. They sit apart on the settee for 2 minutes. He starts kissing her neck again. She squirms once more. He repeats his movement, putting his hand on her shoulder working it down her arm and under her armpit on to her breast. She moves his hand off and hold it. He keeps his fingers free and tickles her breasts.[190]

The women who is the subject of the man's physical manoeuvres experiences not only the touching of a part of her body, but an entire sexualised experience involving different

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[189] Ibid, p. 63
[190] MOA, 'Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 42.

sensations across different erogenous zones. His hands move across her shoulder, breasts, back to shoulder, breasts and neck. He kisses, holds, tickles – using different movements to create a variety of bodily impressions on the woman, who physically reacts: he 'kisses', she 'squirms'; he 'squeezes', she 'forces'; he 'starts kissing', she 'squirms'; he 'repeats', she holds his hand, and he finally 'tickles'.

South of Tottenham Court Road we find similar accounts of male intrusiveness, pushiness, and physical violations. At a February 1939 dance in the Peckham Pavilion we find an older man sitting next to 'a girl about 20', and after they are said to exchange 'light banter' the man 'tickles her under her arm, smacked her on the bottom and chaffed her. She kept saying she would tell his wife and that she didn't trust him'.[191]

At the Streatham Locarno we find further reports of male control and ill-treatment in how touch was performed and experienced:

> A couple come off the floor after a dance. The girl is plump, working class, and clothed in a light cotton dress of many colours, predominantly blue. The man is tall, well built, and middle-class, also several years older. The girl is perspiring freely and informing her friends who stand around. The man takes the opportunity to place his hand on her back. "So long as it doesn't run ---". He continues to place his hand on different parts of the girl's body, under the cloak of solicitation for her'.[192]

The dance hall was, then, a site of sexual negotiation managed through physical touch – and was home to a type of male intrusiveness, pushiness, and ill-treatment in which touch played a central role. 'Smacking', 'squeezing', 'kissing', 'tickling', or a man 'plac[ing] his hand on different parts of [a] girl's body' – without obvious consent – makes the dance hall into a new venue of male control and objectification, rather than the centre of 'emancipation' historians

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[191] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 409.
[192] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 42.

have hitherto argued it to be.[193] The observer seemingly takes on a voyeuristic role, observing the man's actions in minute detail – recording the duration, location, and position of the man's hands – even waiting while they 'sit apart on the settee for two minutes' before 'he starts kissing her neck again'. The woman is thus subject not only to male groping, but also to a male gaze – and is powerless, if she chose – to do anything about it.

Far from being locations where touch was merely defined by dance, then, dance halls were home to a variety of sexualised experiences transmitted through physical sensations; hands of dance partners caressing erogenous zones, different body parts – lips, hands, arms – employed to evoke sensual reactions through different movements – kissing, caressing, tickling – all this marked dance halls as unique locations of sexualised experience in the mid-twentieth century, a sexualised experience which did not always mark 'emancipation' as various commentators at the time expressed, but allowed pleasure as well as male control and objectification to be reconfigured through physical touch.

Physical Movement at the Dance Hall

Dance itself, of course, also provided distinctive bodily experiences. Comments from members of the public on the Lambeth Walk – a novelty dance from the late 1930s – provide an insight into how individuals experienced the movements dance provided. Respondents, when asked to provide feedback on what they liked about the Lambeth Walk, paid much of their attention

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[193] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 159, 182, 300; Abra, *Dancing in the English Style*, p. 34. Ideas of female 'emancipation' in the dance hall seem to stem from reports at the time largely conducted by men. Thus we find a daily mail article proclaiming 'there is a free-and-easy air about dances, the result no doubt of the emancipation of the young girl which was been brought about by wartime conditions', or an article in 'Popular Music and Dancing Weekly' which argues that 'the lack of conventional restraint [in the dances] points to the fact that the women is taking her right place in the world'. (Abra, 34).

to reflecting on its role in bodily feeling. One respondent noted how 'the dance gives a sense of complete unity to the whole body'[194], while another, in commending the Lambeth walk, described how 'it seems an out-of-doors dance and one full of vitality and movement and careless happiness'. [195] Observers themselves also give a general picture of what individuals enjoyed about dancing, with one writing 'A big proportion of observers mentioned as an outstanding feature of the dance that it includes gesture, speech and action, and is therefore more like acting or impersonation than other dances'.[196]

Significantly, it was not only the novelty dances in the late 1930s that attracted so much praise for their physical movement, but respondents who went dancing in the 1920s – the time of the so-called 'old time dances' – heap praise on these dances being superior to 'modern' dances as a result of the movements they prescribe and the resulting feelings these bodily movements evoke. John Elvery, a 63-year-old Lithographic Plate Preparer, is said to prefer the old-time dances of the 1920s because 'they offer a greater variety of Dances. A diversity of movement. Also they possess a much more easy, gliding and circular movement'.[197] Christina Asher prefers these dances because they are 'graceful' and 'not strenuous',[198] while F. L. Ellinor thinks that they 'more gracefully blend with classical music and create a much more sociable atmosphere….'.[199] Mrs. E. Bonwick's commentary on 'Old Time Dancing' offers similar reasons for its allure: 'I prefer Old Time Dancing because it embraces beauty, art, and grace….the movements and figures are far more varied and interesting'.[200]

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[194] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image: 1242
[195] Ibid, Image 1310
[196] Ibid, Image 1312
[197] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 634.
[198] Ibid, Image 644
[199] Ibid, Image 578
[200] Ibid, Image 612

When commentating on the 'graceful' and 'varied' movement of these dances, individuals often highlight this vis-à-vis the perceived inelegance of 'modern' dances, which were seen as coarse, obtrusive, and un-even. When commenting on how she liked old time dances over modern, Miss A. Miles says 'you feel you are really dancing, not merely shuffling',[201] P. W. Goodwin tells us he likes OTD 'because, in my opinion Modern (so called) dancing is not dancing at all, it's only a shuffle round the room'[202] and Miss H. Stanley comments on how OTD results in 'no colliding with the others on the floor'.[203]

Respondents thus contrast the 'graceful', 'elegant' and 'varied' movements of Old Time Dancing with the un-graceful, gauche and inelegant movements of modern dance. It was not only the mere act of 'moving around' which excited dance patrons, but the pace, deportment, perceived elegance and grace which these movements carried, and the resulting feelings they evoked. Phrases such as 'happy memories'[204], 'young and happy'[205] and 'graceful, delightful'[206] are often used in describing how these movements made them feel, with one respondent linking these movements directly with his mental state, commentating on how 'the movements of the body synchronise with the tempo of the music, forming a beautiful mental rhythm'.[207]

Significantly, as we have seen, individuals who praised the novelty dances of the late 1930s often give similar reasons for their dancing passion, commentating on the physical movements – which are said to give 'complete unity to the whole body', 'vitality' and 'gesture, speech and

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[201] Ibid, Image 621
[202] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 574
[203] Ibid, Image 633
[204] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 560
[205] Ibid, Image 582
[206] Ibid, Image 600
[207] Ibid, Image 644

action' – resulting in positive feelings, such as, one respondent describes, 'careless happiness'.[208]

We can therefore view the act of dance – an action which provided feelings of happiness, gracefulness, and bodily vitality – as part of a wider somaesthetic environment comprising of different modalities of touch – tickling, caressing, squeezing, holding, moving, kissing – and different forms of movement: gliding, walking, gyrating – and even, as we learn from *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*, the different internal bodily sensations these provoked: pounding of heart, contracting of the stomach, or drying of the mouth. The result was an environment which offered unparalleled opportunities for working and lower-middle class men and women to experience somatic sensations in Britain from the 1920s to the 1950s. As we will see below, these sensual experiences stretched far beyond the body, and included visual, sonic and even material elements which combined to produce a modern environment that helped foster new forms of intimacy, love and commitment in twentieth-century Britain.

Illumination at the Dance Hall

Artificial illumination was also a key element in the sensual experience of the dance hall. Resulting in different visual patterns, intensities, colours and shadows, lighting helped foster a visual phantasmagoria which was fundamental in creating a romantic allure unmatched in twentieth-century Britain. Dance hall managers would often intentionally vary the intensity of lighting for different dances. At a 1938 dance in Forester's Hall in Canterbury we are told how

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[208] Ibid, Image 1310

for one dance 'the lights were lowered and a spot-light ranged from the platform over the dancers' only to be followed by a waltz for which 'full lights' were brightened.[209] At the Clapham Baths Hall a year later we find 'lights dimmed for [a] waltz', while for the veleta lights were 'lowered and spot light put on'.[210] Similar variations in light intensity occurring with different dances can be found at the Empress Hall (where, for the manager, 'The Waltz is the romantic [dance], it needs the string instruments, the lights need to be lower'),[211] the Regent Dance Hall in Brighton (where we find an observer commentating on a 'waltz for which the lights were dimmed'),[212] or in general comments from an observer, who, in commentating on changes in dance halls during wartime, remarked how 'when the band played a waltz the lights low, often just to a pale glimmer of blue'.[213]

Variations in the intensity of lighting were intended to affect mood – with slower or more intimate dances requiring lower lighting, something which we can only assume would heighten other sensitivities, such as the bodily sensations outlined above. Yet it was not only differing intensities of light that contributed to the visual illuminations at the dance hall, but different colours, shapes, movements and designs of lighting which played a key role in creating a modern atmosphere of romance.

From Mass Observation we gain insight into how lights were employed to create specific experiences, being illuminated in different colours, and creating unique visual scenes. At St Lawrence Hall in Ipswich we learn how there were 10 pendant lights, 'draped in coloured streamers looped up beneath them' hung from the ceiling.[214] A Brighton's Regent Dance Hall

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[209] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 1213
[210] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 852
[211] Ibid, Image 3883
[212] Ibid, Image 794
[213] Ibid, Image 4211
[214] Ibid, Images 723-26

the central hall is described as having a curved roof 'lit by orange lights in bowls in many storied pendant lights', with the illumination creating an interior of different hues – 'orange, browns, silver, purple and greens'.[215] At one of Britain's most famous dance halls, the Hammersmith Palais, the observer went as far as to comment, critically, on the lack of a diversity in lighting schemes:

> Less use made of coloured lighting here than on Mecca Halls. Only change of lighting was for a waltz, when all the neon stripes with the exception of 4 were extinguished and blue flood lights directed on to the back panels were lit. This gave a bluish appearance to the hall but it was not pronounced.[216]

Not only did visitors have high expectations of dance halls having full spectrums of illumination, but the patterns and shapes that these lights cast were also commented on by visitors. Lindis Percy, the British peace activist, gives an interesting account of her experience as a young girl at the Nottingham Palais in the 1950s:

> We used to go to the Palais de Danse. And Dance. We used to *dance* in those days of course! And there was this *wonderful floor*, and you know those lights in the 50s that used to revolve around and make patterns, *it was that*. And … that *was amazing*. [her emphasis.][217]

Lights revolving around, casting striking patterns across a sea of dancers can also be found in Patterson's semiautobiographical recollections, where different colours create patterns that linger in his mind decades later:

> The lights were low and two great glass balls turned slowly in the ceiling, waves of scarlet, blue and green rippling across the heads of the dancers.[218]

[215] Ibid, Image 783
[216] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Images 809-815
[217] Giordano, Benjamin. "Interview with Lindis Percy." July 2020.
[218] Higgins, *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*, p. 33

His recollections of the different shapes, colours, motions of light projected onto the bodies of dancers is elaborated upon: 'The first girl I asked to dance was an example of this. I was attracted by the red-gold hair, which turned out to be purely an effect of the light…'[219]

Light, therefore, not only served as a means of creating an amicable atmosphere in which people danced, but transformed how people would perceive each other. Creating different patterns, colours, movements and intensities of illumination, light blended with the somatic sensations outlined above – transforming the visual environment into a scene defined by mystery, intrigue, and thrill.

The idea that light itself could evoke emotional and affective reactions in dancers was even actively promoted by a dance hall industry intent on selling the experience to the general public. This was particularly the case during wartime, when we find C. L. Heimann, founder of the Mecca dance chain, promoting dance halls in *Danceland* as locations where light could transform the emotional turmoil people felt at the beginning of the war:

> Never has dancing fulfilled a greater national need than it does now. The war has, as the phrase goes, "taken it out of people"; Dancing has put it back. So many things we took for granted have been taken away, and obvious as it may sound, the worst loss that we have suffered in this respect is that of light. We now realise that light fulfilled an important place in promoting light-heartedness – to-day it has a new importance….. [dance halls offer] a sharp, appealing contrast to the black-out.[220]

Light in the dance hall was thus conceived as not only provoking sensual pleasure – being 'amazing' and 'rippling across the heads of the dancers' – but it contained the ability to transform individuals' affective state; the lack of 'light' during the war, in Heimann's

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[219] Ibid, p. 34
[220] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 4274

conception, denoted not only a scarcity of physical illumination but mental well-being, drawing a parallel between the external visual cacophony individuals experience and their internal psychological state in much the same way Georg Simmel did when discussing the consequences of the modern city.[221] Light was thus perceived in a uniquely 'modern' way – harnessing the ability, in conjunction with movement, to transform individuals' affective state and take them into a dreamworld marked by romance, desire, and escape. The texture, colour and motions of light combined with the 'vitality', 'unity', 'graceful[ness]' of movement to result in positive mental reactions, as we recall how respondents describing movement as resulting in 'careless happiness' or commenting on lights ability to 'amaze'. Summing up the ability of light to provoke a sense of escapism, the brother of the manager of the Hammersmith Palais, while describing his long hours, late nights and 'work[ing] hard', nevertheless praised the dance hall as a location where illumination could allow him to lose track of the outside world: 'it is a nice atmosphere. You walk amongst people. Everything is light. You don't notice the time. I really enjoy it'.[222]

Other Sensations

Light was accompanied by other stimuli, which, while often taking more subtle forms, accompanied and often enhanced the romantic, dreamworld atmosphere present at the dance hall. The most obvious of these would be sound from the live bands. While modern readers may have never danced to the sonic impressions of a live band, for those Britons in the 1920s to the 1960s, it was a regular part of recreational life. Halls were often designed with live bands in mind, containing revolving bandstands allowing two bands to play without interruption, generating a continuous flow of warm sounds emanating across the dance floor. We gain

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[221] See p. 48
[222] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Images 809-815

impressions of what the sound of live, unamplified music must have felt like from the film *Dance Hall*, where two rows of four trumpets project uplifting jazz music around the hall. As the protagonist Eve explores the entirety of the hall, traversing its different floors and meeting her former dancing mates – the sonic throbs of the band linger in the background, providing an uplifting, all-pervasive and continuous presence to her return to the dance hall after being pre-occupied with married life.[223]

Other sources provide further evidence of how it was not only the music played which delighted dance patrons, but its 'live' quality and rich sounds that contributed to a convivial atmosphere. Often the music is presented in conjunction with other sensual elements, such as hot air or multi-coloured visual impressions – demonstrating how these were often perceived as combining in the production of romantic dreamworlds. At a Bolton dance hall in 1938 we are told how, after the visitor passes through the foyer and onto the dance floor, he experiences:

> A waft of hot air, the rhythmic throb of the band, the hiss of feet on the ballroom floor…your first impression is of the red glow of the room — red walls, predominantly red carpets, orange and red lights.[224]

Another rhetorical merging of bands playing with hot air comes from St Patricks Night at the Clapham Winter Gardens in 1938, where we are told how, upon entering a flight of stairs down into the hall, the observer felt 'hot air coming up and sounds of the band playing an Irish tune'.[225]

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[223] *Dance Hall*. Directed by Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1950.
[224] Reproduced in Nott, James. "Dance halls: Towards an architectural and spatial history,*c*. 1918–65." *Architectural History*, vol. 61, 2018, pp. 205–233.
[225] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 5897

The above extracts allow us insight into how the experience of dance halls was often multi-sensory, with light, colour, sound and the temperature and movement of the air not only being presented alongside one another, but integrated together in the production of a specific romantic feeling. Red and orange design choices accompany a red light which creates a reddish 'glow' throughout the room, the soundscape includes not only a warm 'rhythmic throb' of the band but, in contributing to a soft, delicate environment, a 'hiss of feet' can be heard throughout the hall. These impressions – visual and auditory – are presented in the same breath as the somatic sensations of hot air emanating from the band. The result is the production of a romantic aura characterised by a soft, dream-like quality: the band 'throb[s]', people's feet 'hiss', the hot air 'waft[s]', while the entire room 'glow[s]'.

This combination of temperature, sound, colour and bodily feeling appear throughout the evidence. The *Daily Mirror*, in a 1923 report, describes 'a perfect system of heating and ventilating' and 'an atmosphere of gaiety and refinement' being among the features 'that make the Hammersmith Palais de Danse still supreme'.[226] Observers are found describing the 'hum of conversation as the couples went off the floor',[227] referencing the various colours of outfits worn by dancegoers – such as references to a 'blue spotted frock',[228] 'a purple frock reaching just below the knees',[229] or a 'pale green perfectly plain evening frock – low cut at the back'[230] – and even commenting on the temperature of dance halls, with one individual complaining the previous manager 'had not lit the stoves till 7.30 and the room was not warm when the people arrived'.[231] This multi-sensory experience of the dancehall – encompassing touch, light, sound, colour, temperature, movement and smell – is even used by the founder of the Mecca

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[226] *Daily Mirror*, 23 June 1923, pp. 5–11.
[227] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Images 382-88
[228] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 433
[229] Ibid, Image 441
[230] Ibid, Image 416
[231] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 377

dance chain, C. L. Heimann, in attempting to market dancehalls during the early years of the war. In a 1941 edition of *Danceland* Heimann intentionally links dancing's 'pleasures of movement', 'its inspiriting music', 'its social atmosphere' and its 'brilliantly lit' dancehalls. 'Lightness', originally referring to the artificial lighting of dancehalls, is then used in a different sense, with the dance hall bringing a 'light of good-cheer, friendship, and gaiety, expressed in the universal language of Dance'. He continues: 'Here is Dancing, said to be a smile of the limbs'.[232]

The trope of 'lightness' is thus used here in a third sense, not only denoting the 'brilliantly lit' dancehall or the 'light of good cheer', but the light mood that results from dancing is experienced by the body, and we gain an image of a lightness of movement combined with a positive mental state when we hear that dance is literally manifested as a 'smile of the limbs'. The dance hall was thus conceived of as a location where artificial illumination, physical movement and emotional wellbeing were both mutually present and wholly intertwined. In the same vein as Simmel seeing the modern metropolis transforming the emotional life of citizenry through an array of sense impressions, the dance hall harnessed a uniquely modern power to transform the inner psychological state of individuals through an array of sense impressions, and the positive psychological state of dancers was not only presented *as a result* of the movement of dance but an integrated part of it: for Heimann, dancing *was* happiness and happiness *was* dancing.

The dance hall as a location which produced happiness through an array of sense impressions was the subject of series of advertisements in the *Daily Mirror* in the early 1920s promoting the Mecca dance chain. Under the title 'The New Age in Dancing' a paid article presented the

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[232] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 4274

dance hall as a location where 'Colours…recall the Arabian Nights Entertainments to gratify the sight, dainty refreshments…attractions which transport the dancer to realms undreamed of, make the Palais de Danse the dance-goers's paradise'.[233] The exoticist Arabian entertainment which 'gratif[ies] the sight' is presented as part of 'a succession of happy moments which make one feel that the day has been filled with life's brightness'.[234] Further advertisements declare that the environment of the Palais constitutes 'poetry in colour', and through the light-filled surroundings combined with 'music that is magical' and 'dancing which is ideal', the Palais was said to wage a 'Battle of the Blues': 'That feeling of depression, of caredom or boredom, known as "the blues", is dispelled immediately, amid this wealth of all good that's that cheer…'.[235]

Other sources from this series are even more direct in their declaration that the dance hall harnessed the power to transform the emotional states of individuals and 'cure' states of depression. One advertisement declares that 'such wonderful scenes of enthusiasm among the merry throng of dancers [ensures] that every visitor will feel invigorated both physically and mentally after a visit to the Palais de Danse',[236] while another even compares dance halls with hospitals as locations which could treat mental health issues: 'Every afternoon and evening the Palais de Danse cures more fits of depression than the combined hospitals of London. Every mental ailment is forgotten'.[237] At times these advertisements would even take the form of poetry intended to entice the reader to a journey to the Palais:

> If elements are surly, and your mind's hurley-burly, don't give way to melancholy. Let the Palais make you jolly every day at three or eight. You will surely be elate to jazz music fascinating 'neath bright lights a'scintillating, 'midst the general jubilation., gone are care and lamentation; to happiness – then rally.[238]

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[233] *Daily Mirror*, 21 March 1921, p. 6
[234] *Daily Mirror*, 21 March 1921, p. 6
[235] *Daily Mirror*, 30 March 1921, p. 4
[236] *Daily Mirror*, 31 July 1923, p. 12
[237] *Daily Mirror*, 17 June 1921, p. 7
[238] *Daily Mirror*, 12 June 1923, p. 6

The ability of the dance hall environment to transform the affective state of dancegoers – producing the 'careless happiness' dancegoers describe – was thus not only perceptible to the dance hall industry but used as a marketing strategy to entice readers to visit. In presenting the dance hall as a location which could 'cure' an array of mental health conditions, dance hall marketeers tapped into the multi-sensual experience dancegoers experienced – which included dazzling lights, music and physical movement. These advertising strategies often linked mental wellbeing with the unique sensual environment of the dance hall through homographic puns: music in the dance hall was presented as a 'Battle of the Blues' and light filled individuals 'with life's brightness'. The strategy thus further served to reinforce and make explicit – through wordplay – what respondents outlined above and what Heimann asserted in *Danceland*: illumination, physical movement, exoticist interiors and live music all worked in harmony to produce an environment which harnessed the ability to alter the inner psychological worlds of individuals, producing the 'happiness' dancegoers describe. As we will see below, sensuality at the dance hall not only resulted in vague feelings of happiness, but played a central role in changing conceptions of romance and sexuality in mid twentieth-century Britain.

A New Experience?

While the multi-sensory experience outlined above was not entirely new in Britain, for the largely working-class dancegoers the dancehall was a dramatic change from daily life. The modern 'palatial experience' present at the dance hall, however, stemmed from an experience not unknown in nineteenth century Britain. Throughout the nineteenth century we find something of a precursor to the Palais' architectural design, role in social life and function in individual experience in London's West End. Rohan McWilliam has insightfully shown how

the West End contained sensual elements similar to those found at the Palais. Artificial light provided a 'sensuous quality' as it sought to 'reign in the night';[239] the district provided a 'site of hyper-simulation' through optical lantern shows, grandiose buildings, 'exotic' minstrel performances and opera set designs;[240] and rich red colours – scarlet, rose, ruby, and crimson – became 'the stock in trade of the West End', providing visitors with the pretentions of luxury and its accompanying experiences of escape, fantasy, romance, passion and awe.[241]

One of the clearest ways the West End was home to the cultural foundations of twentieth-century dance halls in terms of visual culture was through architecture. In the later nineteenth century the West End's leisure institutions – its hotels, restaurants, theatres and music halls – did not follow a cohesive set of design principles, but often contained an eclectic mix of styles – Louis XV and XVI, Empire and Georgian – side by side in a single building. Rather than being based on traditional principles of design, these buildings' sole purpose was to dazzle the bourgeois consumers who visited them, inspiring a sense of luxury, glamour, awe and excitement. McWilliam terms this unique style 'populist palatial', as it was aimed at the traditionally uncultured bourgeoisie – seeking to provide them with a sense of luxury reminiscent of a palace.[242]

What is particularly interesting is that the dance halls in the twentieth century not only inherited the name 'palais' – but they were the successors to an entire modern 'palatial' visual style and the accompanying experience this provided. While the nineteenth-century leisure institutions of the West End mixed a variety of visual styles in search of inspiring a sense of luxury,

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239 McWilliam, Rohan. *London's West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800-1914*. Oxford UP, 2020, p. 125
240 McWilliam, Rohan. *London's West End*, p. 136
241 Ibid, p. 200-208
242 Ibid, p. 200

glamour and awe in the bourgeois consumer – the dance halls of the inter-war period can be seen as inheriting this visual style of modernity and amplifying it – presenting it to the mass public in its most striking form. The Nottingham Palais – described by James Nott as 'typify[ing] the purpose-built dance hall from the height of the 'dance craze' in the mid-1920s'[243] – had an interior marked by a varied deployment of neoclassical, Art Deco, oriental and even Pre-Raphaelite motifs, while also containing a series of large translucent lamps decorated in a variety of Art Deco and oriental patterns designed to resemble stylised Chinese lanterns.[244] The exterior of the building continued this eclectic trend, containing modern elements such as a large illuminated glass globe but also classical columns and even a series of representations of Terpsichore, the Greek muse of dance, striking poses across a large frieze.[245]

This 'palatial' style inherited from London's nineteenth-century leisure institutions can be seen across the purpose-built dance halls of the mid-twentieth century. The Hammersmith Palais contained a largely classical façade and vestibule while its interior was an orientalist fantasy world of stylised Chinese wood engravings, silk lanterns, glass-work and floral arrangements.[246] Tony's Ballroom in Birmingham was the site of a dance hall decorated to represent a mosque with prayer mats hanging from walls, while the Birmingham Palais was refurbished in 1930 in Japanese style.[247] Even as late at the 1950s and 1960s the 'palatial' style endured – with the renovation of the Ilford Palais in 1959 combining a functional

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[243] Nott, 'Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History, c. 1918–65', p. 217

[244] Picture Nottingham. "Ballroom and Fountain, Palais De Danse, Lower Parliament Street, Nottingham, c 1925." *Picture Nottingham*. 2018, <https://picturenottingham.co.uk/image-library/image-details/poster/ntgm020590/posterid/ntgm020590.html>

[245] "Licensed Image." *Picture Nottingham*, picturenottingham.co.uk/image-library/image-details/poster/ntgm020587/posterid/ntgm020587.html. Accessed 26 May 2023.

[246] Agency, Topical Press. "The Dance Floor at the Palais de Dance, Hammersmith, London." *Getty Images*, www.gettyimages.in/detail/news-photo/the-dance-floor-at-the-palais-de-dance-hammersmith-london-news-photo/3308942?adppopup=true. Accessed 26 May 2024.

[247] *Dancing Times*, October 1931, pp. 79, 85

Contemporary style with an Italianate backdrop to the bandstand (depicting a garden containing numerous fountains, cypress trees and urns), a Tudor Room with mock beams, and a 'Bali Hai' cocktail bar.[248]

Britain's twentieth-century dance halls, then, not only expanded the 'palatial' style geographically – taking it to medium and even small towns throughout Britain – but they took the erratic 'palatial' design principles to their most extreme, with the sole purpose of exciting visitors, providing the working and lower-middle classes with what had previously only been accessible to the bourgeoise: a sense of luxury, glamour, fantasy and escape. The 'palatial' style now went far beyond merely mixing Georgian, Empire, Classical and Louis XV and XVI architectural styles, and incorporated stylised elements purporting to be from far-flung regions of the world, while mixing these with contemporary Art-Deco or modernist styles – seeking to bring a sense of excitement and entertainment to consumers of leisure.

While Walter Benjamin's Paris provided consumers with new pleasures of escape, fantasy, romance, passion and awe through visual culture in the nineteenth-century, and the leisure institutions of the West End brought this experience to Britain, the twentieth-century dance hall extended this not only in design terms but in *who* this experience was accessible to. While the West End's nineteenth-century leisure institutions were predominately urban and accessible to the newly wealthy bourgeoise, dance halls brought this 'palatial' experience to the working class. Beginning in the 1920s, working and lower-middle class Britons experienced a rise in their expendable income, and for the first time were potential consumers of the types of leisure activities previously only accessible to higher echelons of society. As James Nott tells us, 'the dance hall depended on the spending power of the masses', and between 1913 and 1938 average

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[248] *Ilford Pictorial and Guardian*, 10 December 1959, p. 17

weekly wages rose from £112 to £310, working hours fell from 54 to 48 a week, and nearly 42

per cent of workers received paid holidays.[249]

Evidence taken from the Mass Observation archive suggests this increased spending power led

to not only increased working-class attendance at the dance hall, but that this attendance

became habitual. As a dance hall manager in Bolton describes:

> We rely on a class here that comes 4 or 5 nights a week. They have about 5/- spending money a week
> and they don't want to spend it all in one night. So for their 3-4/- they can get 3 or 4 nights a week
> dancing out of it.[250]

While the new experiences at the dance hall coincided with the rise of mass leisure after the

First World War, with cinemas, football stadiums, circuses and seaside resorts all becoming

new locations where working-class Britons could spend additional income and free time,[251]

the dance hall was uniquely conceived of as a contrast with the routinised, laborious and often

patriarchal environment of working-class factory life.

The film *Dance Hall* (1950) provides an interesting representation of the contrast many

working-class dancegoers experienced – between a mechanised working environment marked

by labour, routine, unsanitary conditions and patriarchy, and a dance hall as a palace of

escapism – containing grandiose architectural styles, an array of sense impressions, and

freedom from a male dominated world. As we are shown a scene in a factory filled with female

workers, the camera panning over a setting of large synchronous mechanical belts connected

to metal cutting machines producing iron filings covered in dark oil – the women hum a soft

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[249] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 15

[250] MOA: Worktown collection. 48/D. Manager. Aspin Hall. Bolton', 8 January 1940, 14.

[251] 'Going to the cinema: mass commercial leisure and working-class cultures in 1930s Britain' In Bebber, Brett. *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Manchester University Press, 2016, p. 63

tune and are seen completing repetitive physical tasks such as turning large industrial wheels or cogs. The room is filled with smoke, either from cigarettes or the soot produced in such an environment, and the soundscape is marked by the soft repetitive whirr of the industrial machines. The facial expressions of the women are marked by resignation and a degree of boredom – often rolling their eyes, or staring disinterestedly across the room. At one point, a woman – seemingly fed up with operating her machine – exclaims 'This thing's driving me mad! Mad!'.[252] Her outburst is short-lived, as the audience see her male supervisor, hands in his pockets, frown at her from behind – before gazing up and down her body in a sexually interested way. 'Shop-soiled, that's what I am!' the women says to herself, before her co-worker provides her with information intended to liven her spirits: 'Cheer up', the co-worker tells her, 'It's the Palais tonight!'[253]

The Chiswick Palais, where the women go after work, is represented as the very opposite of the routinised, banal and even oppressive environment of the factory. Women are presented as moving freely to the syncopated and improvisational quality of Jazz, dressing up in fine, clean clothes, smiling and socialising, and approaching men on their own terms and with their own sense of purpose, with Eve, the protagonist, demanding a dance from a man: 'Peter, have we just got time? I haven't danced for ages!'[254] This contrast between a centre of play, escape and female emancipation and a location of tiresome labour is further underlined through sound – with the soft Jazz music of the dancehall on multiple occasions being suddenly interrupted by the aggressive blare of the factory whistle.[255]

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[252] *Dance Hall*. Directed by Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1950, 28min
[253] *Dance Hall*, 29min
[254] *Dance Hall*, 33min
[255] Ibid, 24min

The film thus has the effect of achieving a contrast between a dancehall marked by the sensual pleasures of movement, sound and touch, and a working-class factory life defined by routinisation, manual labour, dirtiness and monotony – while presenting the dance hall as a location where women are free from the patriarchal structures of the outside world, in an environment where, at times, they could take the initiative and demand experiences inaccessible in other areas of their life.

Such representations clash with the reports from Mass Observation outlined above, where we hear of various forms of groping – 'smacking', 'squeezing', 'kissing', 'tickling' – with a woman powerless to halt either the man's physical manoeuvres or the voyeuristic gaze which looks upon them. Therefore, while the experience was new for working-class dancegoers, the exercise of male power over sexuality was not extinguished with the rise of the dance hall, and forms of control were often embedded in the pleasurable sensations which made the dance hall so unique for its working-class patrons.

Dance Hall was, after all, created and produced in a different Britain to the country it represents. Presented to audiences in immediate post-war era, the film only hints at the profound disruption the war had on individuals' sense of daily life and leisure in the late 1940s and early 50s, taking the form of an almost archetypal rendering of an inter-war dance hall experience. The dance hall as a location of independence and female empowerment – especially concerning dress and the ability of women to choose their own dance partners or escape a daily routinised life – speaks to a fundamental process the dance hall gave rise to in the 1920s and 30s, being a location in which women felt increasingly comfortable challenging existing gender norms.[256]

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[256] See pp. 171-78

The film is in many ways not an accurate depiction of 1940s and early 1950s Britain – with only fleeting hints to the profound changes to daily life in the war's aftermath (with one passing reference to rationing and no depictions of bombsites and urban destruction) – but functions as a commemoration of the dance halls' inter-war cultural dynamics. Particularly pertinent in this regard is the relationship between the dance hall's function as a women's refuge from a patriarchal society, and a male backlash during the interwar era. As we will see in Chapter Four, the inter-war era dance hall was a site in which women claimed a newfound sense of independence and autonomy, and this resulted in an anxiety on the part of male commentators who saw the dance hall as a threat to their social position.[257] Anxious male commentators commented on 'Dance Hall Dangers', derided the dance hall as 'poisonous and dangerous', and even claimed it resulted in mental insanity and delinquency in an attempt to counter the increasing autonomy women claimed at the dance hall.[258] While from the early 1940s the war brought a transformation in how the dancing was perceived – being celebrated representing national solidity, collectivity, spirit and wartime passion[259] – by 1950 *Dance Hall* functions as a memory text, taking the audience back to the earlier inter-war dance hall experience and its accompanying gender dynamics. Eve's husband, in the film, reflects this inter-war male anxiety on the role of the dance hall in women's lives, pressuring her to 'give up the Palais', professing he is 'fed up' with her trips there, and complaining she neglects housework and domestic chores as a result of her passion for dance.[260]

Produced in a period of post-war anguish, the film provided audiences with a window into not only the sensual pleasures of the inter-war dance hall, but the accompanying gender dynamics

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[257] See pp. 178-90
[258] Ibid.
[259] See p. 195
[260] *Dance Hall,* 11min, 39min.

that the inter-war dance hall gave rise to. In this way, the film transmits, in the words of Jens Brockmeier, 'knowledge and formative experiences from times past', across different media and temporal boundaries,[261] and the depiction of the inter-war dance hall in the film forms what Brockmeier, Landsburg, Rothburg and Erll conceptualise as a discursive flow and exchange of memories, as a movement across media, people, forms, contents, and practices.[262]

The Dance Hall Experience and Conceptions of Love

If the modern sensuous experience of the dance hall was new for working class dancegoers – our focus might turn to what this new experience meant for them. Did the experience of holding their partner in their arms while they danced, hearing the musical soundscape, seeing an array of visual stimuli, feeling thermal changes in the air, and experiencing the bodily sensations these provoked, result in wider changes in individuals thought patterns and social practices? The discussion below may help us find an answer.

As we have seen, the vast majority of stimuli at the dance hall were intentionally curated with the aim of providing a romantic atmosphere. Warm red hues – typical of the 'populist palatial' style – were present in a variety of dance halls. The varying shades, levels of illumination, and patterns of artificial light were specifically designed to affect mood and create a romantic atmosphere – slow dances, as noted above, were usually accompanied by lower lighting, patterns of light were projected around ballrooms, contributing to atmosphere marked by mystery, intrigue and romantic possibility, and sounds, from the deep rhythmic pulsations of Jazz and ragtime to more subtle hums of conversation, contributed to the romantic aura

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[261] Brockmeier, Jens. "Remembering and forgetting: Narrative as cultural memory.", p. 18-26
[262] See p. 46

dancegoers experienced. Not only this, but we have seen how these sensual elements in the dance hall played off each other and were experienced in conjunction with one another – heightening the experience of romance and contributing to the profound somatic sensations outlined above.

So far, however, many of these experiences have been individual. The historian is left to wonder – did the sense impressions countless individuals experienced at the dance hall, and their evocations of intimacy, passion, seduction and public sexual proclivity, have a lasting effect on wider conceptions of intimacy, romance and love in twentieth-century Britain? Claire Langhamer has argued that long before the sexual revolution of the 1960s an 'emotional revolution' took place, where conceptions of love changed concurrently with the rise of the modern experience in the years after the First World War.[263] The process of this 'emotional revolution' begins in the 1920s and ends in the 1950s – during which 'new understandings of love and partnership' developed.[264] While previously material circumstance – but also a strong emphasis on gendered roles, domesticity, reliability – 'both shaped and constrained, but always framed, the ways in which people crafted their emotional worlds', by the late 1930s and into the 1950s there was an increasing emphasis on romance, physical attraction, personality traits, kindness – characteristics that would presumably lead to emotional intimacy.[265] Above all, 'as emotional intimacy became increasingly valorised as the key to happiness, romantic love was endowed with extraordinary powers beyond material advancement and mutual care'.[266]

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[263] Langhamer, Claire. *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 4
[264] Ibid, p. 207
[265] Ibid, pp. 19-25
[266] Ibid, p. 38

The reasons for this shift in mentality are doubtlessly complex, but even commentators at the time linked it to changes in leisure practices, with American sociologist Willard Waller observing that:

> Whether we approve or not, courtship practices today allow for a great deal of pure thrill-seeking. Dancing, petting, necking, the automobile, the amusement park, and a whole range of institutions and practices permit or facilitate thrill-seeking behaviour. These practices, which are connected with a great range of the institutions of commercialised nations, make courtship an amusement and a release of organic tensions.[267]

If dancing and dance halls were seen as part of the new forms of courting based around amusement, can we discern the dance hall specifically as playing a role in the shifting conceptions of love identified by Langhamer?

At first it may seem the dance hall was not unique in this regard. A variety of new leisure activities became accessible to the majority of Britons in the years after the First World War – with cinemas, amusement parks, seaside resorts, circuses, joyrides all offering opportunities for courting couples to experience new leisure practices linked to thrill, personal connection, and romance. Cinemas in particular played a pivotal role in the new, modern, practice of courting and sexual experimentation.[268] Not only did couples attend the cinema with the intention of viewing films, but as journalist Ian Jack reflected on his time courting as a young man in Scotland, going to a film with a partner would often entail much more than merely viewing what was on screen:

> If you were interested enough, and you both wanted to continue this relationship into something more physical and sexual as well as more permanent… then the cinema was the place to go….. the cinema was *dark*, you see.[269]

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[267] Waller, Willard. "The Rating and Dating Complex." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1937, pp. 727–734, p. 98

[268] Beaven, Brad. "Going to the cinema: mass commercial leisure and working-class cultures in 1930s Britain." *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain*, edited by Brad Beaven, Manchester UP, 2016, p. 77

[269] Giordano, Benjamin. "Interview with Ian Jack." Aug. 2020.

If couples could attend a variety of locations of leisure which facilitated new forms of romance, what, then, was special about the dance hall's role?

Recently, researchers in the psychological and neurosciences have examined what causes emotion, and how – from a neuro-biological standpoint – emotions are brought into being. Emotional *feeling* – or what neuroscientist Antonio Damasio calls 'a patterned collection of chemical and neural responses' in the brain – are said to arise in 'the presence of an emotionally competent stimulus'.[270] Visual stimulation, sense of smell, and even facial expressions and the deportment of other humans in close proximity have been shown to chemically change the composition of people's brains, changing their emotional state.[271] 'Affective practice', writes Margaret Wetherell, 'rests on a large unarticulated hinterland of possible semiotic connections and meaning trajectories (built around the discursive, the visual, the tactile etc)'.[272]

The dance hall, therefore, can be seen as a centre for the type of stimuli which would provoke emotions of romance and intimacy – red hues, slow music, awe-inspiring 'luxurious' palatial design – but perhaps the most intriguing way in which this could be achieved, if we borrow from recent psychological and neuroscientific literature, was through embodied practice.

Antonio Damasio, in his *Looking for Spinoza*, shows how twenty-first century neuropsychology supports the Spinozaist concept that 'events in the body are represented as ideas in the mind'.[273] For Damasio, the process of emoting therefore takes place through what

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[270] Damasio, Antonio R. 'Emotions and Feelings', In Manstead, A. S. R., et al. *Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium*. Cambridge University Press, 2004. , p. 49

[271] Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Cornell University Press, 2014. p. 68; Wetherell, Margaret. *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*. Sage, 2014; Stern, Daniel N. *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*. W.W. Norton, 2004. p. 76.

[272] Wetherell, Margaret. *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*. Sage, 2014, p. 129.

[273] Damasio, Antonio R. *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*. Vintage, 2004, p. 197

he calls a 'body loop', where emotions travel through the brain and body. In this conception, 'the registering of this physical flow and the loop back as these changes are recorded and picked up by the brain, becomes the affective experience'.[274] For Damasio, then, the body plays a role as important as the mind in the creation of emotion – and the experiences of anger, sadness, love, lust – all exist as embodied experienced through a feedback loop *between* the body and mind. What is felt physically, *becomes* what is felt emotionally.

The notion that emotions in the mind stem from individuals embodied experience in the world can further be seen in Christopher Eccleston's work on the psychology of physical sensation:

> Rather than viewing the body as simply a receptacle for the mind, as a means of moving a thinking machine around, the mind is a product of physical being in interaction with the world.[275]

Likewise, Teresa Brennan has argued that it is not only visual stimulation which leads to emotive experiences such as love – but emotions like these can become distributed through a variety of senses, in particular the sense of smell. The pheromone, she argues, is 'chemically emitted by one body that causes the release of hormones in the blood of another body, leading to a change in the body state and to feelings and action', and emotions can also be stimulated through visual, sonic, and tactile means – indeed, 'the deployment of all the senses' are fundamental in the creation and transference of emotion.[276]

What does all of this mean for the dance hall? Perhaps no other leisure institution in the years after the First World War to the 1950s was a site of sensuality so evocative of romance as the dance hall. As we have seen, sound, light, colour, smell, touch, movement and design all

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[274] Wetherell, *Affect and emotion*, p. 34
[275] Eccleston, Christopher. *Embodied: The Psychology of Physical Sensation*. Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 35
[276] Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, p. 52

combined and played off each other to produce an environment conducive to romance – and from what few records exist that record these feelings, they support the notion that this was successfully achieved. Physical movement, let us recall, gave dancegoers a feeling of 'complete unity to the whole body', 'vitality' and 'gesture, speech and action' resulting in 'careless happiness'. Visual sensations of light, intended by dancehall owners to help dancegoers 'seek the light of good-cheer, friendship, and gaiety, expressed in the universal language of the Dance' resulted in feelings of 'amazement' (for Lindis Percy) or 'light-heartedness' (for C. L. Heimann). And physical touch, as Henry Patterson tells us, left him feeling lost for words – 'something inexplicable', he writes, 'happens when two people come together inexorably'.

Therefore, not only were physical sensations present at the dance hall new – with the dance hall bringing to working classes the type of 'luxurious' dreamworld based around sense impressions previously only accessible to the bourgeoise – but this new experience had consequences for how emotions were experienced and expressed. The variety of new sense impressions dancegoers experienced – something which contrasted with their routinized life at work – facilitated emotional expression previously unknown to the multitudes of working and lower-middle classes. It was not only the array of differing shades and auras of light, interior designs which evoked feelings of 'palatial' luxury and its consequent evocations of escape, amazement and romance, or the sound of soft music, which, we have seen, combined with other elements in the production of these romantic dreamworlds – but bodily movement, touch and presence played a role in heightening the romantic atmosphere at the dance hall. If light, colour, design and sound provoked a romantic feeling in the audience, the embodied experience of dancing, touching, kissing, stroking, and smelling heighted this feeling – embedding it into the deepest regions of dancegoers minds and bodies.

It is no wonder, then, that we find Oliver Shaw's profoundly embodied emotional experience at the dance hall, an experience that includes wistfully recollecting a romantic kiss – describing it as 'like a flower, a kiss like no other I had ever had before' – or deeply felt somatic sensations when dancing with a partner – heart pounding, stomach contracting, mouth drying.[277] It was not only that the dance hall provoked such embodied emotional feelings, but Patterson – who visited dance halls in the post-war era – now sees these sensations as fundamental to the experience of romance and courting. The dance hall, then, was a key site which contributed to the remaking of notions of courtship, with sense impressions and embodied experience contributing to changing conceptions of courtship based on personal feeling, emotional connection and intimacy, and a quest of personal fulfilment – all aspects Langhamer identifies as key outcomes of the 'emotional revolution' which marked a shift to more 'modern' conceptions of romance.[278]

These findings, furthermore, contribute to current research on intimacy, sexuality and marriage in inter-war Britain that seek to go beyond notions of 'companionate marriage'. The orthodox interpretation of intimacy in inter-war Britain focuses on the rise of companionate marriage that began to replace Victorian notions of 'separate spheres' after the First World War and the publication of Marie Stopes' inter-war best-seller, *Married Love*, in 1918.[279] Rather than an emphasis on 'separate spheres', companionate marriage supposedly saw a rise in partnerships based on affection, intimacy, and sexual gratification as opposed to the more gendered separate roles of the Victorian era.[280] Recent work by Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter, has, however, challenged the notion that inter-war Britain came to be defined by a strictly conventional idea

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[277] Higgins, *Memoirs of a Dance Hall Romeo*, p. 63
[278] Langhamer, *The English in Love,* pp. 28, 38, 207.
[279] Szreter, Simon, and Kate Fisher. *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011, p. 34
[280] Ibid

of companionate marriage, delineating variation between working and middle-class individuals and arguing for a more complex interplay between romantic ideals and realism: while couples began to see 'space for acknowledging the importance of love and intimacy', this was often in a 'practical context of the kind of hard-working partnership that would be necessary for a successful marriage'.[281]

While much historiographical and sociological literature has emphasized the rise in a new set of ideas about love, sex and intimacy in the first half of the twentieth century in many generalized and cross-regional studies,[282] with new forms of consumer culture presented as creating a new emphasis on 'expressivity, romantic attachment and erotic adventure',[283] with sexual love, in advertising and film, 'emerging as a utopia, wherein marriage could also be exciting, romantic, fun,'[284] and 'the emotional attachment between sexual partners, formed through "falling in love" [became] understood as the basis of a relationship'[285] – Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter show how approaches to love were often tied together with, not in opposition to, 'practical considerations, social pressures or external influence'. [286] While many individuals 'rejected dangerous or unstable forms of romantic attachment', they accepted 'affectionate, yet prudent' relationships, 'in which lasting love was developed through devotion and duty'.[287] As Claire Langhamer tells us, despite prevailing narratives of partner selection and ideas about the place of love and romance in marriage that emphasized pragmatism and

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[281] Szreter, Simon, and Kate Fisher. *Sex before the Sexual Revolution*. p. 194,
[282] Gillis, John R. *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values*. Harvard University Press, 1997; Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. Viking Adult, 2005; Hirsch, Jennifer, and Holly Wardlow. *Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage*. The University of Michigan Press, 2009.
[283] Szreter, Simon, and Kate Fisher. *Sex before the Sexual Revolution*. p. 162; Shumway, David. *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis*. New York University Press, 2003.
[284] Scott, Jacquelyn Thayer, et al. *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*. Blackwell Pub, 2007. p. 297.
[285] Langford, Wendy. *Revolutions of the Heart: Gender, Power and the Delusions of Love*. Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 3
[286] Szreter, Simon, and Kate Fisher. *Sex before the Sexual Revolution*, p. 168
[287] Ibid

expressed scepticism toward forms of romantic attachment, this 'was not necessarily a counterpoint to romantic love...rather pragmatism could itself inform narratives of "falling in love"'.[288]

While the dance hall brought a new, multi-sensual experience to dance patrons that resulted in a profound transformation in the way courtship was experienced and intimacy expressed, the 'emotional revolution' in which the dance hall played a key role in bringing about need not be seen as a counterpoint to forms of practicality that continued to inform notions of love and romance well into the inter-war era. However, the rise of notions of romance (whether these contained elements of pragmatism or not) that began to place an emphasis on physical attraction, personal feeling, personality traits, and kindness – all characteristics that were seen as leading to emotional intimacy – were informed by the dance hall's role in not only being a location in which couples courted, but being home to a profound multi-sensual, embodied experience that facilitated new forms of romantic attraction and emotional connection.

Conclusion

'Late-modernity' at the dance hall could not only be seen in the multi-sensual environment the dance hall fostered but also in the new forms of courtship and intimacy which this environment helped promote. The phantasmagoria Benjamin originally located in Paris – where reality and myth were inextricably interwoven in the visual production of romantic dreamworlds – came to Britain through the West End in the nineteenth-century and was newly accessible to the working class during the inter-war years largely as a result of the dance hall. The intensity, movement and colour of light combined with sound, physical touch, movement and even

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[288] Langhamer, Claire. "Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth-Century England." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 1, 13 Feb. 2007, p. 190.

temperature, to foster an environment which had the capacity to alter individuals' emotional state, in a similar way to Simmel's conception of the modern city altering the mental life of individuals.

This process was part of a larger story of 'late-modernity' which reshaped British society from the 1910s to the 1930s. New industries of mass culture were developed – such as the national popular daily press (1896), cinema (late 1890s) and radio (early 1920s) – which transformed where and how consumers could access information and entertainment.[289] Popular culture was also becoming increasingly globalised with new forms of entertainment being subject to transatlantic influences (with ragtime and Hollywood movies being now distributed and consumed on a truly global scale). Gender roles and expectations were being renegotiated and restructured with women seemingly gaining increased autonomy over their lives outside the home,[290] and national identity was under renewed pressure from this globalisation of culture, with the state playing a role as a 'protector of national culture' (setting up the BBC in 1922 and restricting the distribution of Hollywood films by setting up quotas in 1927).[291]

The modern sensual experience outlined above was thus part of a wider process of an 'acceleration' of culture, and through commodifying and concentrating the sensual experience of urbanity into a single building, dance halls played a key role in bringing what was previously only accessible in the West End to working-class Britons and those living in provincial towns.

[289] Baxendale, John. "Popular Music and Late Modernity, 1910–1930.", p. 137.
[290] Abra, *Dancing in the English Style*, p. 34
[291] Tiratsoo, Nick, et al. "Pushing Back Hollywood: the Impact of Protection on the British Film Industry during the 1930s." *Americanisation in 20th Century Europe: Business, Culture, Politics.* vol. 2, Publications De l'Institut De Recherches Historiques Du Septentrion, Lille, 2002, pp. 161–176.

This experience, furthermore, also had repercussions for how emotions were constructed and experienced, playing a central role in changing conceptions of and expectations from romantic relationships and courtship in the inter-war years. While couples were able to participate in 'thrill-seeking' courtship at a whole range of leisure institutions, the profound sensory environment at the dance hall was unmatched in inter-war Britain for its unique combination of visual, sonic, somatic and kinetic stimuli – and it was this unique combination that helped facilitate new forms of emotional expression during the same period. While previously courtship was marked by a strong emphasis on gendered roles, domesticity and reliability – the production of romantic dreamworlds and the sensory experience that accompanied this helped promote new conceptions of courtship and expectations of the opposite sex based around romance, physical attraction, personality traits and emotional feeling. In this way the dance hall was not only home to a 'modern' sensual environment in which dancegoers could enjoy themselves, but also played a role in fostering more modern forms of courtship and personal relations based around notions of romance. As we will see in the next chapter – the dance hall not only played a pivotal role in bringing modern sensuality and romance to Britain, but was also home to a distinct architectural style which further promoted this experience.

Chapter Two: Atmospheric Design Principles and Populist Palatial: The Design of Dance Halls, 1918-1939

Introduction

The previous chapter allowed us to understand how the environment of the dance hall was experienced by dancegoers in the early to mid-twentieth century. Bringing the urban experience of 'phantasmagoria' to the masses, the dance hall played a central role in how late-modernity was experienced for Britons up and down the country – and this uniquely modern sensual experience played a central role in changing conceptions of and expectations from romantic relationships and courtship in the inter-war years. Yet the dance hall was a location of late-modernity through more than the sensual experience it provided. As this chapter will argue, the design and production of dance hall interiors was at the heart of a process that defined the late-modern era in Britain – a series of middle-class anxieties over a loss of control of maintaining established social and cultural norms. The dance hall was a location in which 'atmospheric' design principles – taken from US cinema designs – allowed for the development of a sense of escapism provided by the West End's 'populist palatial' style. As will be shown, however, these atmospheric design principles were far from imported in an unaltered state – 'mechanically reproduced' throughout the country – but were the subject of a series of individual negotiations by an array of countless local businessmen, dance hall managers, craftsmen and handymen using the resources and know-how they possessed. In this way, the dance hall represented democratisation in terms of design principles – with a 'populist' style containing an eclectic mix of architectural traditions whose sole purpose was to spark excitement and a sense of entertainment in the dancegoers – and this sense of democratisation can be found in the multitude of decisions, negotiations and implementations of the most

minute design choices. This new populist sense of design, however, was received by the middle class as a threat to their position as the purveyors of what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'legitimate culture' (culture sanctified by a hierarchy of institutions – such as architectural institutes, universities or elite media – that imbue unequal value into cultural goods and thus legitimate them) and was thus wholeheartedly rejected as unacceptable in terms of taste. The production and reception of the design of dance halls, then, follows a similar pattern to other transformations in British society during a period of late-modernity – where the emancipation of women, rise in Hollywood films or increased international influences on music and dance were interpreted as a threat by a middle-class intent on preserving the existing cultural order.

As we will see below, the production of dance hall design reflects what Ben Highmore has called 'mood work', the intentional labour that goes into 'promot[ing] and sustain[ing] certain feelings and not others, specific atmospheres and not others'.[292] As an array of local businessmen, dance hall managers, craftsmen and handymen worked to build dance hall interiors, they were performing this 'mood work', selecting certain materials, arranging specific constellations of lighting, or making choices relating to the colour of paint, for instance, with the goal of producing a certain atmosphere and feeling for dance patrons. This chapter thus locates the process of 'mood work' in the dance hall, supporting the notion that the dance hall played a significant role in producing Highmore's 'cultural feelings' in twentieth-century Britain.

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[292] Highmore, Ben. *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Mediation, and Cultural Politics*. Routledge, 2017, p. 8

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s numerous purpose-built dance halls were built up and down the country, bringing a new architectural style to Britain. Designed around the principle of 'atmospherics', these dance halls aimed to 'bring the outside world in', and contained an eclectic mix of architectural forms whose purpose was to produce a sense of escapism, luxury and romance that, as we have seen, made dance halls unique centres for the experience of modernity in Britain. The Hammersmith Palais, for instance, imitated the architecture of a Chinese pagoda, containing lacquered columns, ornamental fretwork, coloured silk lanterns and even a model Chinese village and fountain in the centre of the dance floor. Tony's Ballroom in Birmingham took inspiration from the Arab world, containing a hall decorated to represent a mosque, with prayer matts hanging from the walls and a star-painted ceiling, while the Derby Palais de Danse contained generic seventeenth-century European 'aristocratic' mural paintings in the vestibule. As this chapter argues, however, the implementation of these 'atmospheric' principles was by no means uniformly applied throughout Britain, and design decisions were often taken at the local level by local tradespeople, who, far from being intent on implementing certain trends in design, were motivated by intuitive notions of what their fellow citizens would find pleasurable and enjoy. In this way, the dance hall represented both a 'democratisation of pleasure'[293] – a key signifier of the modern experience in Britain – and a democratisation of design choices.

What little that has been written on the design of dance halls focuses on the implementation of 'atmospheric' design principles and the role of this design in creating a sense of escapism among dancegoers. Not only did these 'atmospheric' design principles 'bring the outside world

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[293] Nott, *Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History*, p. 213

in', but often this outside world was not the natural physical environment beyond the walls of the dance hall, but images from far-away regions and cultures. Tony's Ballroom in Birmingham was designed to contain a hall decorated to represent a mosque, complete with prayer matts hanging from the walls and a star-painted ceiling. [294] The Hammersmith Palais used wood engravings, lanterns, glass-work and floral arrangements in the creation of a 'Chinese' theme, while the Ilford Palais's renovation in the late 1950s contained a large painting of an Italianate garden, complete with fountains, cypress trees, urns, and three metal arches placed in front of it. Other dance halls made use of pseudo-impressionist paintings intended to evoke a night's stroll through Paris,[295] or palm trees intended to transport visitors to the tropical regions of the Caribbean. Thus when James Nott argues that the design of dance halls 'helped manufacture…dreams' by employing the style of 'atmospherics',[296] these dreams were largely based around exoticist fantasy worlds intended to transport dancers to remote regions and cultures.

This fascination with the exotic and the desire to transport visitors to non-Western cultures came as an inheritance from the nineteenth-century. Throughout the nineteenth century bourgeois interiors would become known for containing an array of domestic items – such as coin jars, tea sets, vases, dishes and figurines – which took inspiration from 'oriental' forms of design such as Islamic ceramics, Indian textiles, or Japanese prints.[297] This fascination for exotic styles came in the context of Orientalist subjects in nineteenth-century painting, and, from 1851 onwards, world exhibitions. These exhibitions not only contained non-Western

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[294] Nott, *Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History*, p. 213
[295] Hicks, Danielle. "Birmingham's Golden Age of Dance Halls." *Birmingham Live*, 3 Apr. 2019, www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gallery/birminghams-golden-age-dance-halls-10953587.
[296] Nott, 'Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History', p. 226
[297] Oshinsky, Sara J. "Exoticism in the Decorative Arts: Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." *The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, 1AD, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/exot/hd_exot.htm.

archaeological finds and collections intended to excite the spectators and demonstrate the superiority of European technology, but as the century wore on the exhibitions became a human showcase, with colonial subjects brought to live in mock communities – often performing 'authentic' acts such as farming – for the gratification of observers.[298] Atmospheric design principles were thus deployed in dance halls in order to continue a nineteenth-century phenomenon of transporting pleasure-seekers to distant regions and culture for their enjoyment. Yet while the exoticist fantasy worlds of the nineteenth-century may have been limited to bourgeois interiors or world exhibitions – the dance hall brought this experience to provincial towns and the working class throughout Britain, expanding, democratising and mass producing the sense of exoticism which had previously been available to a smaller segment of society.[299]

The 'atmospheric' design principle was common among other late-modern leisure venues, and was taken from US Cinema designs in the 1910s and 1920s.[300] John Eberson, the American architect known for the design and promotion of US 'movie palaces' in the atmospheric theatre style, provides us with a sort of template which we can see British dance halls as following. Eberson's theatres aimed to create the 'illusion of outdoor space' through graphically depicting outdoor gardens, European 'villas' and star-filled twilight skies.[301] Colour selection was seen as vital in creating this escapist atmosphere in the movie palaces, and Eberson even foreshadowed the centrality of colour in creating a romantic atmosphere in dance halls:

> The very nature of the pastel colouring executed in hundreds of desired shades and colours, lends itself so well to the imagination of the average person, and as we linger and look about, our fancy is free to conjure endless tales of romance.[302]

[298] Rabinovitz, Lauren. *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. Rutgers University Press, 1998, p. 60
[299] At the world exhibition of 1851 'a shilling had been fixed upon as a sum which would allow the respectable artisan in and keep the rabble out'. Short, Audrey. 'Workers under Glass in 1851', *Victorian Studies*, Dec., 1966, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Dec., 1966) p. 199
[300] Nott, 'Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History', p. 226
[301] Hoffman, Scott L. *A Theatre History of Marion, Ohio: John Eberson's Palace & Beyond*. The History Press, 2015, p. 57
[302] Quoted in Ibid, p. 59

The design language, which was inherited from US cinema palaces, was intended to foster the atmosphere of romance described in Chapter One. Murals depicting outdoor scenes from distant cultures or ceilings containing soft shades of blue among painted stars were curated with the intention of fostering a dream-like atmosphere. Importantly, these elements were not 'romantic' in themselves – but contained the ability to allow visitors to dream, allowing their 'fancy' to be 'free to conjure endless tales of romance'.[303] In this way, the 'palatial' design language was a direct descendant from the 'populist palatial' architectural style of the nineteenth-century West End, or Benjamin's conception of Paris – both by providing consumers with pleasures of escape, fantasy, romance, passion and awe through visual culture, and facilitating this through allowing the individual the space to dream and 'conjure' different worlds and experiences.[304] The modern experience of escapism, originally seen in the 'phantasmagorical' quality of Benjamin's Paris where the luminous quality of the city created a dreamworld in which reality and hallucination were interwoven, was thus embedded in design of the US cinemas from which dance halls later drew their inspiration.

Eberson's cinemas contained a variety of other design elements intended to heighten the sense of escapism and adhere to the design principles of 'atmospherics', often through the use of engravings, sculptures and bas-relief carvings. The Grand Riviera Theatre in Detroit contained a classical simulated courtyard complete with busts, Corinthian columns and French Empire style gazebo, [305] while the Palace Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky was home to a stylised Spanish baroque courtyard containing Churrigueresque reredos,[306] Renaissance sculptures, and

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[303] Hoffman, Scott L. *A Theatre History of Marion, Ohio*, p. 59
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid, p. 62
[306] Refers to a lavishly ornamented late Spanish baroque style.

busts of famous men such as Dante, Shakespeare, and Beethoven. [307] We can thus see how the amalgamation of a variety of disparate design elements was similar to the 'populist palatial' style found in London's West end in which architectural forms contained contrasting styles with the sole intention of provoking a sense of awe among visitors. Indeed, while beyond the scope of this study, the similarity between the 'atmospheric' design principles which were developed in Eberson's US cinemas and the inter-war British dance halls highlights the likely transnational nature of the development of this style in leisure institutions.[308]

Not only can we look to US cinema designs for the inspiration and principles behind the 'atmospheric' design of dance halls, but by examining architectural theory we can understand how dance halls incorporated these principles in their entirety. Peter Zumthor, a contemporary theorist who writes about these principles, argues that, as opposed to being concerned with only the 'look' of a building, atmospherics is concerned with how buildings create an entire experience of those who interact with them – and these experiences are largely based around the type of sense impressions – sound, light, touch and movement – discussed above. For Zumthor emphasis is placed on 'the sound of a space' and this goes far beyond the production of music, but encompasses the shape and even texture of interiors:

> Interiors are like large instruments, collecting sound, amplifying it, transmitting it elsewhere. That has to do with the shape peculiar to each room and with the surfaces of the materials they contain, and the way those materials have been applied.[309]

[307] "Louisville Palace." *Society of Architectural Historians*, 24 Sept. 2019, sah-archipedia.org/buildings/KY-01-111-0051.
[308] Serial entrepreneurs Howard Booker and Frank Mitchell – who opened the first British dance hall with the Chinese-themed Hammersmith Palais in 1919 – were American citizens and attempted to introduce various other American leisure pursuits to England, such as baseball. It is likely, then, that they took with them 'atmospheric' design elements common in US leisure institutions of the time. (Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 18)
[309] Zumthor, Peter. *Peter Zumthor: Atmospheres: Environnements Architecturaux, Ce Qui m'entoure*. Birkhauser, 2008, p. 29.

The objects *in* a space – so-called 'surrounding objects' – are also important in the creation of atmosphere, as we can see in how Eberson's US cinemas make use of a variety of busts to make visitors feel transported to different locations and cultures. The experience of visitors in the space stretches far beyond visuality, and includes what they feel and touch, with the temperature of a space being important in the sensual experience of buildings: '[temperature is] in what I see, what I feel, what I touch, even with my feet'.[310] How individuals move in a building is a crucial aspect of its design – and this is not merely about 'directing people', but 'there is also the gentler art of seduction, of getting people to let go, to saunter'.[311] Buildings are said to have a 'tension between interior and exterior' which helps create atmosphere through fostering 'an incredible sense of place, an unbelievable feeling of concentration when we suddenly become aware of being enclosed, of something enveloping us', while lighting is seen as integral to the design of a building – where one must take into account the position and temperature of light, and the materials off which it will reflect.

We can see, therefore, how dance halls incorporated these 'atmospheric' principles. The Hammersmith Palais' exterior was fashioned in a largely classical style, yet its interior – as we have seen – was an intoxicating mix of stylised Chinese wood engravings, lanterns, glass-work and floral arrangements – creating a tension between interior and exterior which would have heightened the sense of awe, escapism and wonder upon entering the hall. Lighting also played a fundamental role in the creation of a romantic atmosphere, with specifically chosen colours, patterns and intensities creating a vibrant aura of romance and intimacy. The Locarno in Bradford, for instance, featured 35,000 Italian-made light bulbs which were used on its blue

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[310] Zumthor, Peter. *Peter Zumthor: Atmospheres*, p. 35
[311] Ibid, p. 43

painted ceiling, giving the impression of a starlit night sky.[312] Objects in a space, so-called 'surrounding objects', played a key role in transporting visitors to distant regions, with the Ilford Palais containing full size palm trees, many of the 'Mecca' halls featuring Bali Hai cocktail bars in a pacific-island theme. Indeed, even the temperature of dance halls was the subject of attention by dance hall managers, with one manager at the Peckham Pavilion complaining how the previous manager had 'let things slide' when patrons would enter the hall and 'he had not lit the stoves till 7.30 so the room was not warm when the people arrived'.[313]

Many more dance halls made use of atmospheric principles, albeit in more general ways. The upper portion of the walls at Royal Dance Hall in Tottenham featured green moulding embossed with a 'garlanded' design in gilt.[314] At the Streatham Locarno the bandstand was decorated in a 'futuristic design', 'a-symmetrically in light colours – gold, greens, grey', while a natural gardenate painting framed the stage: 'On one side a tree formed the centrepiece [of the painting], on the other large flowers resembling sunflowers'.[315] A corner piece was 'in the form of a mural of a hall of a very large residence, with marble pillars, [a] wide staircase, statue and red curtains' while the other corner of this mural contained 'a piece of crimson silk in the form of a curtain' which resulted in a 'heightening [of the] the realistic affect'.[316]

The sensations individuals encountered at the dance hall – touch, light, sound, colour, temperature, movement – leading to experiences of romance and escapism – were thus intentionally evoked through the extensive use of atmospheric principles. Through incorporating this design language – which included eye-catching busts of historical figures,

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[312] Nott, 'Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History', p. 228
[313] MOA, Topic Collection 38-380-486 Peckham Pavillion, p. 24.
[314] MOA, MDJ-1-C The Royal Dance Hall, Tottenham (III) – p. 2
[315] MOA, MDJ-38-3-F Mecca Managers (XX), p. 2
[316] Ibid.

outdoor scenery from distant cultures and locations, 'exotic' stylised Chinese, Italian, Arabic, and South Pacific engravings and objects and dazzling arrangements of lights and colours – dance halls condensed the sense of escapism which defined the modern city into a single building which could be readily replicated far from the traditional metropolitan centres of urban experience. Where previously individuals would need to enter the metropoles of Paris or London to find the dazzling arrangements of light, fetish commodities, panoramas, waxworks and optical lantern shows designed to transport them to distant cities, landscapes, classical events – by the twentieth century this experience of fantasy was reproduced and condensed into countless dance halls up and down the country. Originally 'organically' produced in European nineteenth-century metropoles, by the twentieth century this experience was intentionally curated in the dance hall through the use of atmospheric design principles.

Was this use of atmospheric design principles systematically applied throughout dance halls in Britain? From the above evidence it might seem so. We can see how Peter Zumthor's criteria for atmospherics – which included 'surrounding objects', choice of colour, light, sound, a tension between interior and exterior and even temperature – were made use of in the design of dance halls, and the influence of John Eberson's atmospheric US cinema palaces is notable. Indeed, even dance halls located in different regions of Britain were often owned by the same commercial chain or made use of the same interior decorators – often resulting in almost identical interiors. The Mayfair dance hall in Newcastle and Locarno Ballroom in Birmingham, for instance, both featured a 'Ladies' Boudoir' which were exact replicas of one another – complete with matching ovel shaped mirrors, striped wallpaper and similar floor and ceiling decoration.

Figure 1 - Comparison of two 'Ladies Boudoirs' in Newcastle (Right) and Birmingham (Left) – late 1950s/early1960. [317]

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[317] Left taken from Nott, *Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History*, p. 228; Right taken from Hicks, Danielle. "Birmingham's Golden Age of Dance Halls." *Birmingham Live*, 3 Apr. 2019, www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gallery/birminghams-golden-age-dance-halls-10953587.

The Construction and Design 'Atmosphere' in Dance Halls

Yet while atmospheric design principles were certainly made use of in inter-war dance halls, these were by no means applied uniformly throughout Britain's dance halls, and, as the text below will show, were the impetus of a variety of local builders, tradespeople, managers and craftsmen employing intuitive notions of proportion, design, balance and contrast using the resources they possessed. In this way, the dance hall not only incorporated and refined a 'populist' palatial cultural style inherited from the nineteenth-century West End, but the very construction and design of these buildings contained 'populist' aspects as well.

At the Paramount on London's Tottenham Court Road we find a good example of how this process often played out. A mass observer runs into an electrician, referred to as Mr. Barnett, who describes himself as a 'jack-of-all-trades', explaining in unusual detail how he 'makes the dance hall look nice' through decoration.

> Barnett has cut out some three-ply letters for this poster and arranges them on the poster preparatory to sticking them on. Decides that cardboard would look ugly on the poster. Waits for it to dry. When it is dry he paints over it with white paint and this dries a clean white…. Paint now dry and Barnett starts sticking on the letters. These painted in red. Has first painted a black border round the white centrepiece to make the letters stand out better. Now sticks the letters on starting from the last and going nearly to the middle of the name and then going on to the first and making the whole meet in the centre.[318]

The observer continues to question Barnett, asking about the number of light bulbs he has to replace each week:

> ….[he] replies that usually 2 dozen off weekly varying of course. Says that with the concealed lights for the hall he usually lets these go till the hall begins to look a bit dim and then he may replace as many as 200 at one go. There are some 2,000 bulbs in the building.[319]

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[318] MOA 30-0-262, p. 13
[319] Ibid.

The process of construction is thus not one of mechanical reproduction, or steadfast adherence to any cohesive principle of design, but an ongoing process of individual negotiation involving subjective decision making. The electrician in question is not trained professionally in design – being called a 'jack-of-all-trades' – but makes design decisions using his own intuitive sense of proportion, beauty, and cohesion: considering what 'would look ugly', what 'would make the letters stand out better', or what level of illumination would be acceptable before 'the hall begins to look a bit dim' and lights need replacing. Rather than following instructions from a superior, the tradesman relies on his own sense of design, deciding for himself when to replace the lights based on its own feeling of what level of illumination is would be acceptable to the dancegoers, or arranging lettering according to his own taste. While he is not someone formally trained in design or the creation of atmosphere – the tradesman is observed manually cutting out letters from cardboard, arranging them on the signage, deciding whether the background colour looks undesirable and thus painting it a clean white before using a contrasting red for the letters and a black border to frame the entire sign. This is followed by gluing the letters on by hand, 'starting from the last and going nearly to the middle of the name', then beginning with the first and 'making the whole meet in the centre'. The skill involved is not the process of years of studying architectural symmetry, hierarchy, ordering, rhythm, repetition and so on – but an individual sense harmony and proportion. This recalls E. H. Gombrich's classic passage on art and artists:

> What an artist worries about when he paints his pictures, makes his sketches, or wonders whether he has completed his canvas, is something much smaller than outsiders would, I think, suspect. What an artist worries about when he has completed his canvas, is something much more difficult to put into words. Perhaps he would say he worries about whether he has got it 'right'….. I am anxious to prove that there is hardly any person who has not got at least an inkling of this type of problem, be it in ever so modest a way. Anybody who has ever tried to arrange a bunch of flowers, to scuffle and shift the colours, to add a little here and take away there, has experienced this strange sensation of balancing forms and colours without being able to tell exactly what kind of harmony it is he is trying to achieve. We just feel a patch of red here may make all the difference, or this blue is all right by itself but it does not 'go' with others,

and suddenly a little stem of green leaves may seem to make it come 'right'. 'Don't touch it any more', we exclaim, 'now it is perfect'.[320]

Gombrich's notion of art being an intuitive process of 'balancing forms and colours…. without being able to tell exactly what kind of harmony [one is] trying to achieve' reflects Highmore's conception of the 'mood work' went in to producing dance hall interiors. When tradesmen or dance hall managers made intentional choices about what 'would look ugly', how certain changes could make the letters on a sign 'stand out better', or what level of illumination would be acceptable before 'the hall begins to look a bit dim', they were producing mood materially (through tangible and technological elements like electric lighting or the choice of materials) while performing labour (intentionally curating the interior with the goal of producing a certain feeling). The resulting mood was socially experienced by the countless dance patrons who attended dances, and, as we will see, historically situated, being a key process in the transformation and democratisation of culture in a period of late modernity.

This process of individual negotiation – taken at the most minute level – over what objects would foster the unique environment of the dance hall, can also be found in decisions of other individuals who were integral to the creation of this environment. When a band is preparing to perform at the Paramount, with its members tuning their instruments, setting up their sheets of music – the trumpeter takes a role both in the preparation of the band for their performance, and also has suggestions on which hue of lighting to use. As the bandstand lights are turned on, the trumpeter sternly tells the dance hall manager, 'Don't put the blue lights on. It is terrible

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[320] Gombrich, E. H. *The Story of Art*. Phaidon Press Limited, 2023, p. 33

to read by them'.[321] Such decisions were often based on not only factors of what was convenient for performers, but could also involve financial considerations. One such occasion where financial considerations led a manager to improvise was a during the selection of chairs at a Mecca dance hall. A manager attempted to get hold of Louis Quatorze chairs – the 5GBP cost of which was prohibitive, so had to improvise with more plain, unrefined chairs, with the observer noting how

> they had dug out some chairs that they had stored away – plain wooden framed arm chairs with plush seats and had painted them in gilt and used these instead. But they were trying to get hold of a period table and were also going to have a professional booking box which would tone in better than the present modern design.[322]

The often impromptu nature of design choices – combining concerns about cost, glamour and the balancing of colours and forms – is further seen in reports from the Streatham Locarno, where an observer noticed a change in lighting and complains that the lights were no longer lowered for certain dances:

> No longer is room darkened and lit only with blue lights for Blues and Waltzes. Lights kept same for all dances. Tonight they had a change for a Waltz when they flooded the floor in red lights. This definitely unusual.[323]

The inconsistency with which design elements were implemented – some elements being haphazardly substituted due to cost or missing altogether – reflects the localised nature in the implementation of atmospheric principles. The curation and implementation of objects at the dance hall – all with the result of creating the type of romantic dreamworld described above – was, as we have seen, not the result of a process of centralised organization, meretriciously following the atmospheric principles of John Eberson or Peter Zumthor – but was the result of

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[321] MOA, 30-0-262, p. 8.
[322] MOA, MDJ-38-3-F Mecca Managers (XX), p. 2
[323] MOA, Topic Collection: 38, MDJ, Image 114.

a multitude of ad-hoc decisions made by countless local managers and their subordinates. In this way, the dance hall represented a 'populist' democratization of culture not only in the architectural style but in the process of construction, design and curation.

So far this chapter has argued that dance halls did not merely appropriate atmospheric principles from US cinema designs in a centralised, systematic way, but rather it was often left to local managers, tradesmen, handymen or other members of the dance hall environment to implement these principles with the resources and know-how they possessed, thus giving new meaning to the dance hall as a venue of 'populist' design. Yet, as will be argued below, with increasing popularisation of style came hardened criticism from those who saw themselves in positions of cultural authority. While the dance hall represented a new, populist venue at the centre of increasing democratisation of culture in the 1920s and 1930s, this democratisation of culture was met with anxiety from the middle classes intent on maintaining their position as arbiters of acceptable taste.

Atmospheric Design and Judgements of Taste

The first two chapters of this thesis have made use of the Mass Observation archive by using it as a window into life inside the dance hall, offering us a rare glimpse into how an array of sense impressions were experienced by ordinary people and how and by whom dance halls were designed and curated. Along with using sources to gather direct evidence concerning how an environment was experienced or constructed, however, we must be conscious of what sources reveal about the attitudes and predispositions of the author. Was the Mass Observation archive truly a 'scientific' study collating objective data on ordinary life in Britain in the 1930s, as its founders initially claimed? By reading these sources 'against the grain' we can delve not

only into rare reports concerning how life inside the dance hall was experienced but also into the subjectivities, perceptions and presumptions of the those who constructed these texts.

While founded with the intention of creating a new form of 'social research', and even seen by the early twentieth century anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski as signifying a 'vital new departure in scientific research',[324] much of the richness of Mass Observation comes from the subjectivities of the observers themselves. Largely white, male, middle-class and educated, the observers have been routinely criticised for not participating in serious academic study but 'class inspired voyeurism',[325] and Jessica Evans even sees the project as being 'informed by a 'colonial-bourgeois gaze on to the anthropological other', the working class.[326] More recent reflections on Mass Observation, however, emphasise the potential historical value in these biases, which can reveal insights into attitudes toward race and British identity in the mid-twentieth century.[327] The passages below can thus be seen in this light, as valuable historical sources precisely as a result of what they reveal about attitudes of the authors toward class in mid-twentieth century Britain.

Our first example comes from Streatham, where we find an observer writing an entry under the heading 'Impressions gained by a first visit to the Locarno'. His comments, as we will see, reflect not only a willingness to pass judgement on aspects of the design and atmosphere, which did not meet his expectations, but also contain a certain condescension toward the dance hall in question:

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[324] Summerfield, Penny. "Mass-observation: Social Research or social movement?" *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 20, no. 3, July 1985, pp. 439–452, p. 439
[325] Kushner, Tony. *We Europeans?: Mass-Observation, "race" and British Identity in the Twentieth Century*. Routledge, 2004, p. 209.
[326] Evans, Jessica. *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography*. Rivers Oram Press ; Published in the USA by New York University Press, 1997, p. 145.
[327] Kushner, *We Europeans?*

> Undoubtedly the first point that strikes home is the congruity of the hall. The architecture of the hall is possibly even above average and very well suited to serve its purpose yet it has to be ruined by hanging lanterns and vulgar red lamps. The backcloth to the band was very passable but another with no virtues at all was superimposed. The carpet, if gaudy, at any rate gave the impression of richness and opulence; yet the lino that surrounded it looked cheap and nasty. The tables downstairs were decently covered and the chairs comfortable and pleasant; yet upstairs the place for more resembled Lyons. At least one of the waiters resembled the obsequious head waiter at a London club; yet most of the waitresses were familiar. Some of the dancers at any rate looked 'young and innocent'; yet others looked coarse, and one or two even debauched.[328]

The observer thus takes it upon himself to make judgements concerning the interior of the dance hall, often in explicitly snobbish terms. While the 'architecture of the hall is possibly even above average and very well suited to serve its purpose' it is 'ruined by hanging lanterns and vulgar red lamps'. The backcloth of the band is deemed to be 'passable', yet another is said to have 'no virtues at all'. While the carpet, 'if gaudy', is said to give the impression of richness and opulence, 'the lino that surrounded it looked cheap and nasty'. There is thus a tension present between what seems to be all the elements of a 'congruent' dance hall – 'above average' architecture 'very well suited to serve its purpose', a carpet giving the impression of 'richness and opulence', or 'decently covered' tables and 'comfortable and pleasant' chairs – and the criticisms of an observer which are couched in the language of class condescension: the dancers look 'coarse', the carpet seems 'gaudy', the red lamps are deemed 'vulgar', the lino looks 'cheap and nasty', and while the one of the waiters 'resembled the obsequious head waiter at a London club', most of them are deemed 'familiar'.

Another observer, upon entering a dance hall in Tottenham, continues this theme of condescension. Creating an entry titled 'the difference between the managerial outlook here and at the other two Mecca dance halls – the Locarno and Paramount', the observer is quick to pass judgement: 'Here there is little attempt to give "tone" to the place', he writes, 'the carpet

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[328] MOA, 30-0-262, p. 99

is always covered in bits of paper dropped by the patrons'.[329] The general feeling of the hall is 'very free and easy', and the manager 'does not try to maintain any dignity' in the hall. This 'lack of dignity' is partly attributed to a ladder being present in the foyer with an assistant helping to put up a poster.[330]

The pedantry of observers in their judgements of the dance halls can similarly be seen in comparisons between the adornment of dance halls and cinemas. 'After an examination of these dance hall fronts', one observer writes that he is 'tempted to ask' why the halls made no use of an array of devices which cinemas employed. There were no 'animated signs to attract the eye' or 'show windows' as 'these form an attractive way of displaying posters'. At one point, the observer's tone seems to change, abruptly asking 'Why is not more attention paid to the lighting of the entrance'.[331]

The passages above allow us insight into how the designs of dance halls were received by often middle-class observers who saw themselves as the arbiters of respectable taste. While the largely working-class patrons fully participated in an environment marked by the eclectic mix of architectural forms, exoticist decoration and 'atmospheric' design elements, middle-class observers reject this environment, not in terms of its objective physical state, but as a result of their judgements of taste. While the architecture of the Streatham Locarno is 'well suited to serve its purpose', its chairs 'comfortable and pleasant', its tables 'decently covered' and a carpet even conveying 'richness and opulence', the lamps are said to be 'vulgar', a backcloth is characterised as having 'no virtues', and a lino deemed to be 'cheap and nasty'. These condemnations, curiously enough, even extend to the inhabitants of the dance hall. Not only

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[329] MOA, MDJ,1-C The Royal Dance Hall, Tottenham (III), p. 2
[330] Ibid.
[331] MOA, 38-1-K Dance Halls locations, exteriors, posters, newspaper cuttings (XI), p. 12

are 'most of the waitresses…familiar', but dancegoers are described as 'coarse' and a select few are described as 'debauched'.

Why might we find these observers venturing away from the original mission of Mass Observation – that of 'social research' – and offering judgements of taste couched in the language of condescension, even at times descending wholeheartedly into outright class hostility? As we recall from Pierre Bourdieu, cultural capital not only takes the form of *institutionalised* academic qualifications or *objectified* cultural goods (such as paintings, books, instruments), but can be acquired over time, accumulated, through socialisation and tradition.[332] This *embodied* form of cultural capital takes the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, and manifests itself as familiarity with the high-status cultural codes that exist in a society. Other sociologists, such as Michele Lamont and Annette Lareau, further elaborate on what constitutes cultural capital, defining it as

> widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goals, and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion.[333]

 In its embodied form, this can take the form of mastery of language, taste distinctions, or knowledge of high culture – attributes which serve to distinguish one group of society from another.[334]

This distinction between segments of society based on culture is further displayed through what Bourdieu terms 'legitimate culture' – culture that is sanctified by institutions (such as

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[332] Bourdieu, Pierre. 'The Forms of Capital' in Biggart, Nicole Woolsey. *Readings in Economic Sociology*. Blackwell, 2002, p. 243
[333] Lamont, Michele, and Annette Lareau. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1988, p. 156.
[334] Jæger, Mads Meier, and Karlson, Kristian Bernt. *Cultural Capital and Educational Inequality: A Counterfactual Analysis*. 2018, p. 778

architectural institutes, universities or elite media) that imbue unequal value into cultural goods, and thus legitimise some and delegitimise others. [335] This cultural hierarchy allows us to understand differences in taste, and understand how judgements of taste have consequences for the reproduction of social inequalities and class systems. Aesthetic judgment is thus fundamental to the accumulation of cultural capital, and with it the differentiation between classes.

Returning to the context of dance halls, the cultural sensibilities of middle-class mass observers – being a product of their accumulated cultural knowledge – would thus be at odds with a dance hall environment containing an unfamiliar, eccentric amalgamation of contrasting forms in the 'populist palatial' style. These buildings, as we have seen, contained an eccentric mix of exoticist stylised Chinese, Italian, or Arabic designs side by side with classical facades, artificial starlit skies or pseudo-impressionist paintings. Partly inheriting the design language from the 'populist palatial' cultural style of the nineteenth century West End, these buildings took this style to its most extreme, with an array of contrasting architectural forms and cultural tastes eschewing traditional principles of design in favour of fostering an environment whose sole purpose was to create a sense of thrill and fantasy. Furthermore, these environments were curated – as we have seen – by countless arrays of local handymen, tradesmen, managers and businessmen relying on their own intuitive notions of design. In this way, as we can see that the dance hall represented a democratization and popularization of culture, not only through its 'populist' design but also through the process of construction and curation. This democratization was thus a clear challenge to established notions of 'legitimate culture' and

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[335] Warde, Alan. "Dimensions of a social theory of taste." *Journal of Cultural Economy*, vol. 1, no. 3, Nov. 2008, pp. 321–336.

thus resulted in the backlash from middle class observers intent on preserving an existing cultural hierarchy.

Yet cultural capital, for Bourdieu, is a means of signifying social status and superiority. '[It is] used', write Lamont and Lareau, 'as a basis for exclusion from jobs, resources, and high status groups',[336] and the best expression of this cultural capital would have been in the accumulated cultural traditions – established principles of design, art, music – sanctified by institutions which those in positions of authority create and defend. The proliferation of a democratic design language and architectural forms – eschewing principles of design favoured by any established architectural tradition – would present a clear challenge, not only to middle class taste, but to their monopoly over 'legitimate culture' and thus their means of signifying their social superiority. Indeed, the observers continually use the language not only of aesthetic judgement, but of outright class condescension – deriding the interior of dance halls as 'vulgar' or 'cheap and nasty' – and even extending their criticism to the appearance of dancegoers themselves, terming them 'coarse' and 'debauched'. Some halls are judged to contain 'lack of dignity', while others provoke condemnation of observers who snap 'Why is not more attention paid to the lighting of the entrance?'

Dance halls, let us recall, were proliferating in the years after 1920, and while official statistics do not exist as to their numbers, by the mid 1930s they were as popular as the cinema as a form of leisure in Britain.[337] This new democratic design language would thus be seen as a growing phenomenon throughout the country during this time. Furthermore, the design language challenged 'legitimate culture' in a unique way. With its classical facades, 'impressionist'

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[336] Lamont, Michele, and Annette Lareau. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1988, p. 156
[337] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, pp. 1-3

paintings, busts of established cultural figures such as Shakespeare and Dante – this style can be seen as an almost farcical parody of 'legitimate culture'. The use of these features in combination can thus be seen as a sort of appropriation – using features from 'legitimate culture' with the sole purpose of providing a sense of entertainment to working and lower middle class dancegoers. In this way, the style can be seen as a direct challenge to established notions of culture, and consequently provokes condemnation from middle class observers intent on maintaining their social position. 'Cheap and nasty', 'lack of dignity', 'coarse' or 'debauched' were thus defensive strategies used by observers in the face of changing forms of public culture that threatened to undermine the existing cultural hierarchy.

The challenge to middle class sensibilities posed by the 'populist' dance hall took place in a context of multiple pressures on established notions of cultural practices in the two decades after 1920. As we recall, this era of late modernity saw a profound transformation of daily life. Popular culture became increasingly globalised, with American ragtime and Hollywood movies replacing previously 'national' forms of public entertainment such as the music hall. Gender roles were being renegotiated with women gaining increased autonomy over their lives outside the home, and national identity was under renewed pressure from this globalisation of culture, with numerous societies being created to 'protect' and 'promote' purported British dance moves throughout 1920s, and the state restricting the distribution of Hollywood films through the use of quotas. [338]

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[338] Abra, *Dancing in the English Style*

Conclusion

The dance hall was thus one of the key sites in which the transformation and democratisation of culture took place in a period of late modernity. As this chapter has shown, 'atmospheric' design principles were far from merely transposed from US cinema designs into Britain's dance halls, but were brought into these leisure venues in a highly variable form, being the subject of individual negotiation, decision making, and an intuitive sense of what felt 'right' – within the confines of what resources were available at the time. In this way, the dance hall was populist not only in its design – incorporating an eclectic mix of architectural styles intended solely to inspire a sense of luxury, glamour, awe and excitement reminiscent of a palace – but also in the process of making design decisions and in construction of the interior built environment. Countless handymen, electricians, local managers, and caretakers played roles in designing and constructing the interiors of purpose-built dance halls, which often involved painstaking effort and precision, reflecting what Ben Highmore call 'mood work'. Yet with this increased democratisation of cultural production and design came a backlash from an anxious middle class looking to preserve the status quo. Mass observer reactions to the interior of dance halls reveal an anxiety in the face of increasing working-class control over public cultural production, with continual repudiation of the populist style in terms of taste. The dance hall thus challenged established notions of middle class taste, and in doing so implicitly challenged the ability of the middle classes to justify their social superiority. This middle class anxiety over an increased democratisation of culture and its consequences for their social position took place in the context of many late-modern stressors on British identity, resulting in a backlash from the middle classes. While part of this backlash was in response to the increased internationalisation of culture from Hollywood films and changing gender roles, with women gaining increased autonomy outside the traditional confines of the home, the dance hall, as will be explored below, was also at the centre of anxieties concerning new dance forms and styles

of music which threatened to undermine established notions of national identity that the middle

classes were intent on defending.

Chapter Three – 'The dancers appear to have torn away the last veils of decorum': The Dance Hall and Modern National Identity, 1918-1939

Introduction

During a rise in a dance craze marked by a variety of 'novelty dances' in the late 1930s, a retired army Major interviewed for Mass Observation expressed a peculiar view on the latest popular dance, the Lambeth Walk. Asked his view on the latest dance craze, instead of joining in on the fun, the Major's reaction was one of whole-hearted disgust: 'I was astounded that decently brought up young people could give themselves up publicly to what had all the appearance of the preliminaries of a sexual orgy'.[339] While the Lambeth Walk contained individuals exaggeratedly swaggering and strutting throughout the dance floor in a manner purported to represent a 'typical cockney walk', the Major not only links the dance to supposedly disreputable sexual actions, but even links the movements to a purported 'festival' from Central Africa 'where anything from about 40 upwards of naked young men and women get into a circle and jump up and down, giving ecstatic groans, sweating and stinking, to the beat of a darabuka, in the flickering light of a fire'.[340]

This chapter explores why the interviewee might have given this sexually and racially charged response to a seemingly innocuous question concerning whether he liked the latest fashionable dance. While the Lambeth Walk's physical movement was seemingly ordinary or even senseless and crude (with dancers exaggeratedly swaggering and strutting about the floor in a manner purported to represent a 'typical cockney walk'), this chapter argues it was a vehicle

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[339] MOA, Topic Collection 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk, p. 4.
[340] Ibid.

in which a variety of views concerning modern British identity were expressed. Being seen alternately as a signifier of moral decline, an expression of a primordial cockney working-class ethic, a 'primitive' tribal dance, or even a manifestation of a growing revolutionary consciousness – the Lambeth Walk reveals the dance hall as being at the centre of an array of contestations and anxieties in the early-to-mid twentieth century over what it meant to be British in the face of an increasingly transnational popular culture during a period of late-modernity. While the dance hall was a key site in which modern notions of romance were developed in twentieth-century Britain, it was also the place where competing notions of 'Englishness' were articulated, performed, and contested in the twentieth century – revealing the class, racial and national anxieties of a country struggling to come to grips with its modern identity.

The Lambeth Walk

By the late 1930s, in contrast to the more formal 'English style' dances of the 1920s, British dance halls began to promote so-called 'novelty dances' aimed at attracting a new generation to take up dancing. While there was a seemingly endless array of dances promoted by the dance-hall industry during this time – the 'Trek', the 'Cherry Hop', the 'Palais Stroll' and the 'Park Parade' being among them – it was the Lambeth Walk which captured the mind of dancegoers in the late 1930s in a way no other dance did. The dance began life as a theatrical number for the comedy-musical *Me and My Girl,* which focused on the character of Bill Snibson, a cockney from Lambeth who inherits an earldom and finds it difficult to adapt to life among the elite. The dance is performed during a grand dinner party, where individuals are seen exaggeratedly swaggering and strutting about the stage, rolling their shoulders and

swinging their arms in what was purported to represent a 'typical cockney walk'.[341] The dance was later, as Allison Abra shows, consciously promoted as a quintessentially *national* dance by the dance hall industry, where dance promoters turned to ballroom dance professionals to transform this into an accessible sequence dance. The result was a group dance in which dancers circled the floor in pairs, singing the 'Lambeth Walk' while sauntering with supposed cockney swagger. When there was an interval in the song they would slap their knees and raise their thumbs in the air, yelling 'Oi!' – vocalising the most stereotypical word 'cockneys' supposedly uttered.

The dance was thus an exercise in mimicking the purported mannerisms and behaviour of cockneys, and perhaps this self-conscious enactment of class stereotypes is the reason many individuals at the time had strong reactions to the dance, often decrying it as a patronising upper-class 'impersonation' of working class culture.[342] One interviewee takes the view that the dance is 'a piece of middle-class romanticism about working-class conditions', while another characterises the dance as 'a vague kind of patronising attitude *on behalf* of "our betters" towards the ordinary working-class cockney' and terms the dance 'the inevitable product of complete class-ignorance'.[343] Using hyperbolic and perhaps liberal use of political terminology, one interviewee even claimed 'as danced by the rich and upper classes it seems to be a sign of Fascism'.[344]

However, many at the time often celebrated the dance as a proud expression of a working-class spirit, a continuation of a coster song tradition dating back to time immemorial, an expression of a distinctly English culture in the face of its increasing Americanisation. Much of this took

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[341] Abra, *English Style*, p. 178
[342] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 28
[343] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 28
[344] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV) p. 28

the form of dancers pridefully taking on the physical and verbal habits of the archetypal 'cockney', with one interviewee, when asked for their views on the dance, focusing on these physical and vocal peculiarities of the dance:

> One thing that struck me was the way the dancers seemed to throw themselves into the part, as though they were play-acting, especially the men, who seemed to fancy they were coasters, imitating their mannerisms. The outstanding features, I would say, are the action, friendliness with other couples, humour, opportunity to act in unison, chance to express themselves vocally.[345]

The dance was thus seen as embodying the defining characterises of cockney culture – a certain vivaciousness, humour and playfulness which marked a specific social class unique to a specific region of England. The observation of the dancers as seeming 'to fancy [themselves as] coasters' is followed by the listing of how this cultural ideal of a costermonger is translated into dance – 'action, friendliness with other couples, humour, opportunity to act in unison, chance to express themselves vocally'.

The identification of the Lambeth Walk with (southeast) English working-class culture can similarly be seen in legends about its creation. Mass Observers, when inquiring about the origins of the dance, were often told of it originating from the musical *Me and My Girl,* with the comedian Lupino Lane performing the dance during a dinner party. Mass Observers were thus tasked with finding and interviewing Lane, with one stationed outside a theatre lucky enough to interview him on how he came to create the dance:

> An observer waiting at the stage door of the Victoria Palace for Lupino Lane saw him drive up in a huge Rolls Royce. The little man got out on the pavement, did a huge stretch and yawn and started to talk to some stage hands hanging round the door. He is an alert little cockney, on his toes the whole time like a boxer, and with the same suggestion of popular prestige and sportiness. While he was changing and making up his dressing-room, the observer asked him how he came by the idea of the Lambeth Walk. "Well, I just did some Mass-Observation, if you like", he said, and went on: "I got the idea of my personal experience and from having worked among cockneys, I'm a cockney born and bred myself. The Lambeth

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[345] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 4.

Walk is just an exaggerated idea of how the cockney struts. The cockney is well known for his wit, grit, guts and humour, and these are expressed in his walk. If you'll go deeper in the matter, the walk will tell you the nature of any man or women. If it hadn't been for me, there would have been a dance and no walk. The walk came entirely from myself…. No, there's no cockney dancing" Obs: 'Lane was out to show that he was responsible for the Lambeth Walk idea. And he certainly deserves the credit of having put it over. […] He explained also: 'The cockney has no social distinctions. He'll go in and say how d'ye do to the King. He calls em – "good old Teddy, good old George".[346]

While Lupo Lane's story about his central role in the origin the Lambeth Walk is certainty open to question, his description of the dance helps us understand how it was conceptualised, by some, as an expression of a working-class cockney culture. Indeed, from Lane's description, the dance is presented as a physical manifestation of cockney culture, with the cockneys' characteristics – his 'wit, grit, guts and humour' – 'expressed in his walk'. Moreover the dance is not only intended to be a humorous take working-class cockney culture, but is, in Lane's own words, intended to be an expression of the very 'nature' of this culture: 'the walk will tell you the nature of any man or women'. The dance was thus conceived of as more than an imitation of cockney physicality, but a reflection of the flamboyant, self-assured stereotypical personality of a cockney. Lane thus ties the physical manoeuvres of the dance – the flamboyant and confident walk – to the cultural attributes of a specific English working-class culture, demonstrating how the Lambeth Walk was seen as embodying these characteristics like no other dance at the time.

The connection between the Lambeth Walk and cockney culture is also found in various newspapers from the period, the most striking of which feature the Lambeth Walk as an expression of English working-class spirit during the Blitz. The *Aberdeen Evening Express,* for instance*,* featured a report during the early months of the German bombing campaign on London depicting the 'Cockney spirit during the air raids'. Included is a photograph of various

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[346] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 6.

individuals dancing the Lambeth Walk on a street in Lambeth (from which the dance gains its name). The article not only refers to the 'the wanton destruction' of the photographs background but makes reference to 'typical cockney spirit of the foreground' in which the individuals perform the Lambeth Walk.[347]

Figure 2: Aberdeen Evening Express, 28 September 1940

The exuberant display of cockney sensibility during a period of war reflects not only a sense of defiance, but for Halbwachs, would be evidence for the 'social frameworks' of memory in action. These were the memories of a pre-war era of celebration, cockney exuberance, and play embedded in a group of people, tied together by class, community, and possibly family.

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[347] *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 28 September 1940, p. 4

The image above thus reflects not only the connection of the Lambeth Walk with cockney culture, but the beginnings of its entrenchment in social frameworks of memory, ready to be recalled and expressed by subsequent generations.

The Lambeth Walk and English Nationalism

The Lambeth Walk, however, was often interpreted as much more than embodying cockney culture; it was at times framed in the language of English nationalism and even primordialism. While Lupo Lane attempts to portray the dance as originating from English cockney culture, from interviews with the general public the picture gained is of the Lambeth Walk being the most recent manifestation of a time-old primordial tradition, and an expression of a uniquely English national identity dating long before nineteenth century cockney culture. The observers, upon speaking to dancegoers, heard how 'a spontaneous talent for dance and song is a Lambeth tradition', which had a connection 'with music hall tradition, but also having a life of its own'.[348] This 'spontaneous' talent, called a 'Lambeth tradition', is then linked with the spontaneity and impulsiveness of a supposed primeval custom: '[the dance] has many features in common with primitive dancing. Men dress up as women or pretend to be animals…'[349]

These outlandish acts of cross dressing were on occasion recorded by other mass observers, who likewise viewed them as expressions of primitiveness:

> Two of the toughest men came in, some time after midnight, made up with red eyebrows and white cheeks, each wearing a women's hat and dress, and also (under the dress) pyjama trousers. One had false breasts, the other a pregnant belly. A women came up and kicked the belly, and the man with the false breasts made his wife hold them. One of the men said to the other "I'll sleep with you tonight and give

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[348] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 6.
[349] Ibid, p. 4

you a baby", and there was some pantomiming of the kind that is usually classed as "obscene" and which is familiar to anthropologists in many kinds of primitive dance.[350]

Such incidents of spontaneous outburst during the performance of the Lambeth Walk were not only linked to primitivism but were also explicitly tied to English national identity. An observation from New Years Eve 1938 notes how:

> The appearance of Coventry-street is vastly different from that of two months ago. A solid mass of people now blocks the entire street; through traffic is impossible. Above the shriek of the tin whistles and rattles rises a sound like distant cheering, which is the noise of thousands of people talking not in undertones, as the English usually do, but loudly and cheerfully. It is one of the few occasions when the shut-in, reserved nature of the modern English is swept away and reveals the hearty, humorous tolerance that was once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe.... We joined a group of people who have formed a circle in the roadway and are singing the "Lambeth Walk"..... It seems to have taken its place in the folk music of England – I can't imagine even the latest Hollywood hit being sung in the streets of London on New Year's Eve.[351]

For the observer in question, the Lambeth Walk brings back a national past seen as boisterous, hearty, cheerful – in stark contrast to the quiet, 'shut-in, reserved nature' seen as emblematic of contemporary national characteristics. This idealised era – which was marked by 'hearty, humorous tolerance' – is explicitly linked to national territory, being 'once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe', and seemingly takes the form of the English *people* reclaiming their heritage in the face of a modern city, which as a result of their joviality is blocked from functioning as it was intended, with 'through traffic' being 'impossible'. This jovial behaviour, importantly, is 'reveal[ed]' in the English people. Rather than presenting the English people as adopting a behaviour of 'hearty, humorous tolerance', the passage conceives of it as existing deep within the national character, only arising during rare moments of spontaneous jubilation, which the Lambeth Walk provokes. The Lambeth Walk, for the observer, signifies the latest

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[350] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 4
[351] 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 10

manifestation of an English folk tradition, innately connected to not only the territory of England but emblematic of the English people as a national group. The 'obscene', 'primitive' behaviour which accompanied it – such as acts of crossing dressing and hyper-sexualised movements and gestures – were thus seen as expressions of English national character, 'hearty, humorous' behaviour which 'was once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe'.

The Lambeth Walk was thus not only viewed as embodying cockney culture but was seen as an expression of a type of English primordialism – as an outlet for the type of innate, primitive, hearty, vigorous English characteristics which had been buried in a modern age characterised by civility and reserve. While Lupino Lane presents the Lambeth Walk as an expression of the 'wit, grit, and guts' of cockney culture, observations of and interviews with a wider variety of dancers suggest it was seen as an expression of a national character – with its bawdiness, humour, primitiveness and exuberance being presented as an assertion of an enduring English national ethos constrained in a modern age marked by reserve.

In this sense, the Lambeth Walk itself becomes a 'site of memory', expressing the environment of a prior era, a lost 'environment of memory', through a memorial tradition. Originating from a specific social group at a specific geographical location, the national past would, for Maurice Halbwachs, be largely dependent on sustaining social frameworks such as family, religion and social class.[352] Interpretations of the Lambeth Walk below, however, give us pause when seeking to view the dance as a site of national memory sustained by social frameworks. As we will see, interpretations of the dance varied considerably, and were often diverse, inconsistent, and even contradictory in nature.

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[352] See p. 40-41

The Diversity of Interpretations of the Lambeth Walk

While the Lambeth Walk was seen by some as an expression of Englishness – others often derided it as a transgressive, hyper-sexualised dance originating from barbarous roots, and a threat to the very English national identity people saw it as expressing. We thus recall the retired Major mentioned above expressing contempt at the Lambeth Walk for being what he sees as an expression of primitive sexuality. It is worth quoting him in full:

> When I first saw it at the smallish dance of about 150 people, I was astounded that decently brought up young people could give themselves up publicly to what had all the appearance of the preliminaries of a sexual orgy. The rapt look on the faces of both the boys and the girls could have been interpreted by the blind. It is possible, probable even, that the youngsters did not realise what it was all about. The second time I saw it was in a public dance hall, where probably about 1,200 people were all doing it to a band that knew its business. There was no tune but merely rhythmic percussion, and the effect was the same as that produced in a 'deluka' (native festival) in the Southern Sudan, where anything from about 40 upwards of naked young men and women get into a circle and jump up and down, giving ecstatic groans, sweating and stinking, to the beat of a darabuka, in the flickering light of a fire. They finish up quite frankly in the way one might expect – what our young compatriots did after the dance was over is not on record. Its outstanding feature is its eroticism, but whether the dancers admit this to themselves I do not know. In my view, eroticism is the main attraction of all dancing, but in the Lambeth Walk the dancers appear to have torn away the last veils of decorum.[353]

Rather than seeing the dance's sexual expression as indicative of its Englishness, as we found in previous reactions to the Lambeth Walk, the Major links its forms of movement to purported African native festivals. Couched in the language of xenophobia, the Major compares their sexual expression not to a type of primordialist English spirit, but instead to the supposed 'deluka' in the Southern Sudan. The dance is thus linked explicitly to primitivism, as it was above, but this is a depiction which stresses its otherness: not only is the dance said to have originated in Africa but its accompanying description includes a list of racialist stereotypes emphasising its foreign nature, such as that of an African tribe 'giving ecstatic groans, sweating and stinking.' While 'eroticism' is said to be 'the main attraction of all dancing', what

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[353] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 4 (Image 117)

exasperates the Major is the fact that this eroticism has 'gone too far' – 'torn away the last veils

of decorum', and is reminiscent of what he views as uncivilised African tribal group sex. The

dance is thus presented as the very opposite of an expression of English national identity –

being a threat to expected standards of public sexual expression and a reflection of exoticized

and racialised cultural practices.

The Lambeth Walk, furthermore, was often at the centre of even more explicate anxieties over

its purported racial origins – being seen as not only reminiscent of African dance but actually

originating from this part of the world. Many accounts individuals tell observers about the

dance's origins reflect the notion the dance originated in African culture, and was often seen

as a hybrid form of dance between an African-American importation and 'native cockney

dancing'. One respondent presents the Lambeth Walk as originating from the Cake Walk and

the United States, explaining how 'the Cake Walk came to England in 1898. It was a "coon"

dance, and its tradition blended with the cockney and coaster tradition of the Music Halls'.[354]

Other observers similarly note how the Lambeth Walk was the result of an African-American

importation fused with a cockney dance tradition:

> It is said to have originated among the French negroes of Florida, who in turn copied it from the
> ceremonial dances of the Seminole Indians. It caught on in England anyhow and the first (1903) version
> of the Lambeth Walk was clearly a popular link between the American importation and the native
> cockney dancing.[355]

While for the observer above, the Lambeth Walk was not seen as English in origin or spirit,

but rather a hybrid dance between African and Native American and cockney dance, other

observers often focus on the dance purported precursor – the Cake Walk – and frame this in

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[354] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), Image 163.
[355] Ibid.

highly charged racialised language. One observer even cut out a clipping from a 1912 book on music halls in his survey of the Lambeth Walk's origins:

> With the passing of the old, healthy sensual (but not sensuous) English dances came the rushing in of alien elements; chieftest and most deadly, the cake-walk, a marvellous, fascinating measure of tremendous significance. The cake-walk tells us why the negro and the white can never lie down together. It is a grotesque savage and lustful heathen dance, quite proper in Ashanti but shocking on the boards of a London Hall.[356]

As opposed to embodying English characteristics or being presented as manifestation of cockney culture, for some the dance signified the very opposite – 'quite proper in Ashanti [modern day Ghana] but shocking on the boards of a London Hall'. Rather than being an example of a primordial English nation, the Lambeth Walk's origins represent the 'rushing in of alien elements', originating from a 'deadly' cake-walk. This cake-walk is presented as the very opposite of English dance; rather than reflecting Englishness the dance is derided as a 'grotesque savage and lustful heathen dance' which demonstrates, for the author, the innate separation of white and black; 'why the negro and the white can never lie down together'.

There is thus a delineation to be drawn between reactions to the Lambeth Walk which revered it as an embodiment of 'English' characterises and cockney culture – and an expression of a type of English primordialism signifying a national culture – and those who saw the dance as indicative of the very opposite – tribal orgies, an Africanisation of English dance, resulting in the 'death' of the very culture others celebrated the Lambeth Walk as embodying. The Walk was seen as signifying moral decay – being compared to 'the preliminaries of a sexual orgy' – whilst simultaneously being venerated as an expression of the 'wit, grit, and guts' of cockney

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[356] Titterton, W. R. From Theatre to Music Hall. S. Swift, 1912. pp. 208-209

culture and the 'humorous tolerance that was once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe'.

Yet the Lambeth Walk was not only seen as being an embodiment or threat to English national identity, but as we will see below, interpretations of the Lambeth Walk extend to its being the result of a growing working-class revolutionary consciousness. The *Daily Worker,* commenting on the Lambeth Walk in 1938, wrote about the 'effectiveness of bright, topical songs' which Britain had been 'rather slow to realise'. 'Once the idea really catches on, the possibilities should be obvious. It is hoped this new 'Song-Consciousness' will generally improve the Labour movement's singing style'.[357] This echoes comments we find in Mass Observation, where a section under 'General Observer Comments' views the Lambeth Walk as fostering a sense of social consciousness among its dancers:

> That this mass-dancing accepts and glorifies the Lambeth Walk is significant of the nature of its social appeal, and makes it much more than a piece of middle-class romanticism about working-class conditions. It proves that if you give the masses something which connects on their own lives and streets, at the same time breaking down the conventions of shyness and stranger-feeling, they will take to it with far more spontaneous feeling than they have shown for the paradise-drug of the American heaven-in-arms dance-tune. The whole emphasis of previous jazz has been on yourself, and maybe your girlfriend. Never on others, community, social forces.[358]

While some saw the Lambeth Walk as stimulating 'the masses', revitalizing social ties and fostering a 'Song-Consciousness' – others saw the dance as a means of social control, a mechanism by which the upper-class placate the workers through improving their social conditions. One interviewee expressed their opinion that the Lambeth Walk was 'part of the modern movement to boost the proletariat to keep them quiet rather than with a view to

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[357] *Daily Worker,* 20 August 1938
[358] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 41

ameliorating their conditions of living'. This dance had been 'designed to please the cockney – a mean, mannerless and socially unfit specimen of English society'.[359] In this view, the fact that the Lambeth Walk was performed in the West End – often to middle-class audiences – was a reflection of a patronising attitude toward working-class culture: 'a vague kind of patronising attitude on behalf of our betters towards the ordinary working-class cockney'.[360]

The Lambeth Walk, then, was simultaneously seen as a reflection of a growing proletarian consciousness, a means of social control and class division, an embodiment of English national characteristics, and representative of 'alien' culture, moral decay and primitivity. While some saw the 'obscene' and 'primitive' nature of the Walk as a venerable expression of a primordial English spirit, others derided them as indicative of the very opposite – representing a threat to the very values others saw the Lambeth Walk as embodying, being 'alien', 'African' or 'debauched'.

Dance in an Age of Globalised Mass Culture

The diversity, inconsistency, and contradictory nature of interpretations regarding the Lambeth Walk took place during a period of late-modern cultural stressors on British identity. New technologies such as the cinema, wireless and pre-recorded music made foreign cultural influences vastly more accessible to the general public and resulted in a truly globalised mass culture. In 1923 only 10 percent of films shown in the United Kingdom were British-made, and two years later this number stood at roughly 5 percent.[361] Most British production companies were out of business by the middle of the decade. Forms of popular music also began to change,

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[359] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 41
[360] MOA, 38-2-C The Lambeth Walk (XIV), p. 28
[361] Kaufman, Will, and Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson. *Britain and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*. ABC-CLIO, 2005, p. 222

absorbing African American and Latin American influences. As the generation of freed black American slaves moved into cities during the post-Civil War era, they brought with them a musical culture which was eventually picked up by white audiences, mediated by Tin Pan Alley composers of New York such as Irving Berlin, and which resulted in an international dance-craze. Originating in the United States around 1910, this eventually found its way to Britain by the 1920s. Initially termed Ragtime, this genre of music paved the way for a variety of African-American and Latin American elements to become part of music commonly listened to through the 1920s under the generalised label 'jazz'. Forms of popular dance, as we have seen, also signified increased globalisation. The Charleston, jitterbug and foxtrot – as danced in England – were amalgamations of African, African-American and European-American traditions, and dances of Latin origin such as the tango or rumba were hybrid creations of stemming from the multi-ethnic societies of South America and the Caribbean. As Ross McKibbin notes, this transatlantic influence was so strong it signified one of the key moments 'as to change the way the English thought of music and dance'.[362]

While such a rise in a globalised mass culture was readily accepted by a majority of the public during the 1920s and 1930s, it also resulted in an accompanying backlash among commentators who perceived it as a threat to British identity. A 1929 article in *The Sphere* lamented that 'millions of millions of men and women were going once, twice, or thrice a week to cinemas where they beheld the world through American spectacles', and derided the fact that 'often enough they [are] seeing England and Englishmen as the American producers conceive them to be or decided they should appear'.[363] An early 1920s editorial in the *Sunday Chronicle* complained of 'younger cinemagoers' being 'Americanised',[364] and a *Daily Express* columnist

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[362] McKibbin, Ross. *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951: A Study of a Democratic Society*. Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 390
[363] *The Sphere*, 16 March 1929, p. 29
[364] Kaufman*, Britain and the Americas,* p. 222

claimed in 1927 that 'we have several million people, mostly women, who, to all intent and purpose, are temporary American citizens'.[365] As Mark Glancy notes, the columnists' focus on women is revealing, as these anxieties concerning American influence often focused on female, young and working class cinemagoers whose 'patriotism and mental fortitude were not so easily assumed'.[366]

Reactions to this globalisation of music and dance culture were often more explicitly racist. As early as 1919 the *Observer* described jazz as a 'number of niggers surrounded by noise'.[367] Just a year later Cecil Sharp, director of the English Folk Dance Society, condemned the new dances that accompanied jazz as 'the expression of the nigger' and contrasted them with English folk dance, arguing that 'we are a higher race, and our expression ought to be different'.[368] These characterisations of jazz music and the dances that accompanied it often focused on the origins of specific dance moves, emphasising their 'un-English' and foreign nature. The *Daily Mail* thus reported in 1926 that 'The Charleston's peculiar foot twist originated in the foot twist the Negro slaves gave when they came out of the cotton fields and cleaned their feet of mud',[369] or that that Black Bottom dance originated from 'the silted mud on the tidal bed of the Mississippi River' which was 'firm enough near the banks for a Negro to dance upon'.[370] The *Daily Mirror*, in 1927, even featured a cartoon characterising 'Present Day Dancing and Its Origins' which depicted the foxtrot as originating from a slave plantation (figure 1), with a heading underneath reading, 'Are not some of the dances of to-day singularly unsuited to our rather undemonstrative British character?'.[371]

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[365] Glancy, H. Mark. *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain: From the 1920s to the Present*. I.B. Tauris, 2019, p. 14

[366] Glancy, H. Mark. *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain*, p. 21

[367] *The Observer*, 16 March 1919, p. 14

[368] *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Jan 1920, p. 10

[369] *Daily Mail*, 13 November 1926, p. 8

[370] Ibid

[371] *Daily Mirror*, 13 January 1927, p. 7

Figure 3: Daily Mirror, 13 January 1927

The backlash against this globalisation of culture and accompanying anxiety about its effects on 'British' identity extended far beyond racist cartoons or anti-American newspaper columns, and led to more official, institutional reactions. The Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 established quotas for British-made films with the intention of stemming the tide of an increasing Americanization of film. Dance 'professionals' established organisations seeking to limit the foreign influence in British dances – such as the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing or the Official Board of Ballroom Dancing – which sought to standardise dances, purge them of supposed foreign movements and imbue them with what were thought to be

more 'English' characteristics of reserve, civility, moderation and refinement.[372] The result was an 'English style' of dance, which while continually propagated by dance schools and dance societies, was never fully embraced by a dancing public largely receptive to these transnational influences.[373]

The Lambeth Walk, then, was created and received in a context of a specifically late-modern anxiety concerning English identity in an increasingly culturally transnational world. New American Hollywood films brought to British cinemas depictions of criminality, American accents, and the depiction of a lifestyle ostensibly free from class boundaries and economic deprivations which inflamed those who feared the 'Americanization' of the British public.[374] New dance forms – as we have seen – came from across the Atlantic and sparked fears of an Africanisation of British culture, with entirely new popular musical forms developing from the 1920s. These included new African-American or Latin American music, with its emphasis on rhythm, syncopation and repetition ('riffs'), replacing traditional 'singalong' live performance at the music hall. In addition, a multinational entertainment industry made use of new technologies of mass production – the gramophone and the wireless – that relocated music into dance halls, people's homes, or the innumerable public locations where loudspeakers were to be found.[375] At the end of this period of profound fragmentation and globalisation of popular culture, then, even dances which were extravagant expressions of Englishness – containing dancers pridefully taking on the physical and verbal habits of the archetypal 'cockney' – were treated with suspicion.

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[372] Abra, *Dancing in the English Style*, pp. 41-50

[373] Giordano, Benjamin. "Allison Abra, Dancing in the English style: Consumption, Americanisation and national identity in Britain, 1918–50." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 56, no. 2, 28 Mar. 2021, pp. 443–445.

[374] Glancy, *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain: From the 1920s to the Present*, p. 50.

[375] Baxendale, John. "'… into another kind of life in which anything might happen …' popular music and late modernity, 1910–1930." *Popular Music*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 1995, p. 139

The diversity of reactions to the Lambeth Walk also point to an instability of meaning concerning English identity during the late-modern period. While some derided the Lambeth Walk as an example of the Africanisation of English culture, originating with the Cake Walk and resulting in young people expressing primitivism, others saw the dance as not only an expression of cockney culture, but a continuation of a supposed primordial English spirit. With the fragmentation of culture in an era of late-modernity, then, there was no longer a consensus over what constituted authentic expressions of national identity.

Contemporary reactions to the dance hall's predecessor, the Victorian-era music hall, reveal views of this leisure venue which contrast markedly with the variety of interpretations we find in response to the Lambeth Walk. While the Lambeth Walk was alternately seen as an expression or threat to notions of Englishness, the music hall represented a consensus around its purported authenticity. The formal aspects of what the music hall offered – such as the celebrated call and response between singers and audience, the collapse of the fourth wall in comic sketches and songs, or the melodic vocal articulations which seemed to channel an authentic coster spirit – served to convince the halls' enthusiasts that 'the very essence of the English people was reflected in its variety entertainment.'[376] We thus find Elizabeth R. Pennell, who wrote a 1893 article titled 'The Pedigree of the Music Hall', explicitly linking the variety entertainment of the music hall to a collective English past:

> Acrobats and jugglers, bears and dogs, by the same feats and the same tricks—you can see them in illuminated MSS. And old woodcuts held Saxon and Norman spell-bound, as they hold the Cockney today. Not one number of the programme could be cited which has not its medieval counterpart. More of the past lives in the music hall than in any other institution.[377]

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[376] Faulk, Barry J. *Music Hall and Modernity: Late Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture*. Ohio University Press, 2014, p. 28

[377] Pennell, Elizabeth R. "The Pedigree of the Music Hall." *The Contemporary Review* , vol. 63, Apr. 1893, p. 576

Pennell views the popular entertainments found in the music hall – which in isolation seem to be generic popular entertainments quite common in nineteenth-century leisure activities – as indicative of a national past which binds the Victorian-era Cockney to their medieval ancestors. The acrobats, jugglers, bears, dogs and woodcuts found in the music hall are linked to vague symbols of collective English past, such as illuminated manuscripts or Saxons and Normans. The variety entertainments the music hall, then, are the latest manifestation of a national character and an expression of an all-encompassing ideal of Englishness.

Other contemporary critical observers of the music hall, such as Max Beerbohm, similarly present it as a location where the popular essence of Englishness is expressed. Not only does Beerbohm write that 'there is not one peculiarity of our race, good or bad, that is not well illustrated in the Music Halls', but he argues that the entertainments found at the music hall have 'grown' from 'the publics taste'.[378] 'They are things', he writes, 'which the public itself has created from its own pleasure; they know no laws of being but those which the public gives them'.[379] This theory behind the music hall's evolution stresses its role in reflecting a supposed popular essence of culture and suggests its development follows a logic which outstrips its role as a commercial enterprise. The music hall, for Beerbohm, is a location where folk culture was coproduced between the performers and spectators, and the culture which emerges is representative of a supposed singular essence of national character.

These representations follow an English tradition of thought, as Barry Faulk tells us, which tends to 'naturalize culture'.[380] Seen in Edmund Burke and Samuel Coleridge, extending

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[378] Beerbohm, Max. *More Theatres, 1898-1903*. Taplinger Publishing Company, 1969, pp. 223-227
[379] Ibid.
[380] Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity,* p. 30

through Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle, and reaching forward to modernists like T. S. Eliot – this tradition eschews rupture and discontinuity in the historical process, and seeks to construct, as Terry Eagleton observes, a 'seamless evolutionary continuum'.[381] The folk entertainment found in the music hall thus becomes a representative national form, and an expression of national character emanating from time immemorial.

We can see this tradition of thought in reactions to the Lambeth Walk, where the dances bawdiness, humour, and exuberance – and the 'obscene' and 'primitive' behaviour which accompanied it – being viewed as expressions of English national character originating in an idealised distant era.[382] The loud cheering on the streets of London, or acts of cross-dressing and hyper-sexualised movements and gestures, where seen as expressions of a 'hearty, humorous' English national character which was 'once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe'.[383]

Yet while the Victorian-era music hall represented 'Britain's first indigenous and fully capitalized mass culture form' and served as 'a reliable index of national vitality and values, and the most authentic expressive form of native Englishness',[384] interpretations of the Lambeth Walk constituted anything but a consensus surrounding its authenticity as dance signifying Englishness. While the Victorian-era entertainments at the music hall featured a variety of pantomimes, singalongs, and comic sketches and songs were which seen as a singular expression of national character and representative of an unadulterated notion of Englishness – only some reactions to the Lambeth walk saw it in this manner. The notion of seeing English

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[381] Eagleton, Terry. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Studies*. Verso, 2006. p. 4
[382] See p. 118
[383] See p. 121
[384] Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity*, p.1, p.23.

history as a 'seamless evolutionary continuum' and eschewing rupture in the historical process can be seen in those reactions to the Lambeth Walk which emphasise its supposed origins in an idealised distant era – with the dance bringing with it a 'humorous tolerance' that was 'once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe' and being characterised as 'spontaneous' and 'revealing' behaviour which exists deep within the national character.[385] Yet while some interpretations of the Lambeth Walk emphasised historical continuity and an expression of English national identity, others, as we have seen, viewed the dance as representative of the erosion of this very identity, being an immoral, sexualised dance originating from Africa and signifying the 'rushing in of alien elements'.

Not only did interpretations vary between viewing the Lambeth Walk as an expression of English national identity or a high sexualised 'primitive' African dance, but others completely disregarded the national characteristics of the dance, seeing the dance through the lens of class conflict. Some, therefore, saw the dance as a booster to a newly revitalised labour movement, and expressing the hope that it would 'generally improve the Labour movement's singing style', while others attacked the dance as a means to pacify the working class through entertainment, with the dance being designed to 'please the cockney' in order to 'keep them quiet rather than with a view to ameliorating their conditions of living'.[386] A third group even saw the dance as an example of a middle class 'patronising attitude…towards the ordinary working-class cockney'.[387]

What can be seen as a type of inheritor to the variety entertainment of the music hall – with the Lambeth Walk containing similar exuberant displays of Cockneyism and stereotypical displays

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[385] See p. 141
[386] See p. 147
[387] Ibid.

of 'native Englishness' – was thus received, by the late 1930s, in a fundamentally fragmented manner. The celebrated call and response between singers and audience at the music hall manifested itself as dancers responding 'oi' when prompted to during renditions of the Lambeth Walk, and the melodic vocal articulations which seemed to channel an authentic coster spirit – or even physical expressions of the cockneyism seen in their deportment – were inherited as the infamous cockney swagger or singalong qualities to the Lambeth Walk which contained similar elements of bawdiness, humour, and exuberance.

Despite being the inheritor to the entertainments and environment of the music hall, the Lambeth Walk, by the late 1930s, was no longer seen as a singular expression of native Englishness. With a shift in not only the technologies of cultural reproduction but the globalised nature of mass cultural flows – the previous 'reliable index' of national values and authenticity was replaced by a multitude of competing cultural interests from around the world, and the former consensus regarding authentic expressions of native Englishness was replaced by a discord over what constituted authenticity in this an increasingly culturally diffused world. American Hollywood films inflamed those who feared the 'Americanization' of the British public, new dance forms sparked fears of an Africanisation of British culture, and a new popular music system not only resulted in African or Latin American music replacing the traditional 'singalong' live performance at the music hall, but gave rise to a multinational entertainment industry which made use of new technologies of mass production in order to relocate these new forms of music into dance halls, people's homes and an array of other public locations where loudspeakers could be found.[388]

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[388] Baxendale, '... into Another Kind of Life', p. 139

The three decades after 1900 thus saw a profound fragmentation of popular culture, and this fragmentation resulted new ways of seeing expressions of Englishness. The Lambeth Walk was now subject of an array of interpretations surrounding its origins and meanings. The typical cockney strutter of the Lambeth Walk, seen by some as a manifestation of the wit, grit and guts of the archetypical cockney, was thought by others to originate in the 'deadly' cake-walk, which itself is termed a 'grotesque savage and lustful heathen dance'. The 'obscene', 'primitive', and often bawdy behaviour of the participants – such as acts of cross-dressing and hyper-sexualised movements and gestures – were seen as expressions of English national character, yet were simultaneously derided as originating in a purported South Sudanese tribal festival and signifying moral decline and 'the last veils of decorum' being 'torn away'. The dancegoers participation in the music – best exemplified by the shouting of 'Oi!' at the end of the dance – was interpreted by some as 'revealing' the type of behaviour which was 'was once upon a time typical for this corner of the globe', yet others completely ignore the national component and emphasise a 'Song-Consciousness' which was seen as a boost to the labour movement.

This fragmentation of experience was indicative of an era of modernity in which notions of solidity and certitude had come to be dissolved into 'into complex, contradictory and disorienting parts'.[389] Gogol's *Nevsky Prospect,* though written in 1835, has been seen by Marshall Berman as an archetypical twentieth century modern text, presenting St Petersburg as a montage of disparate images – 'marvellous moustaches', 'a thousand varieties of ladies' hats', or 'whole sea of butterflies' – which contribute to an energy and momentum that has 'become so intense that the planes of vision are shattered and the unity of human form is broken

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[389] Sack, Robert D. "The consumer's World: Place as context." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 78, no. 4, Dec. 1988, p. 642

into surreal fragments'.[390] Almost a century later we find similar themes in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Doblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* which undermine traditional notions of certitude through impressionistic interior dialogue or montage – creating an image of reality segmented into a multitude of disorienting parts.[391] Walter Benjamin, as we saw above, similarly saw the arcades of the modern city as fluid places where a multitude of sense impressions are in a constant state of flux, being rearranged and remodelled in size, contents and meaning, striking the viewer 'like realities in a dream' and producing the fragmentary 'kaleidoscopic' effect of phantasmagoria.[392] Modernity, then, was conceived in large part as a fragmentation of traditional certitudes of perception, so that, as Marshall Berman quotes Marx, 'all that is solid melts into air'.[393]

The analysis above thus contributes to a growing literature on the problematization of these traditional certitudes of perception in inter-war Britain, a time when the rise of a mass consumer society led to a reconfiguration of the meaning of class-distinctions and established convictions of national identity and character, and even individual selfhood. These themes are tied together in Matt Houlbrook's *Prince of Tricksters,* where Houlbrook uses the figure of Netley Lucas, a confidence trickster who infiltrated elite social circles by exploiting their deference to aristocratic titles, to reveal deeper anxieties about authenticity in a modernizing Britain. Detectives, journalists, and criminologists all identified the trickster as a pressing modern problem in inter-war Britain, concerned the country was suffering from an 'epidemic of bogus honourables', and that the growing ease with which impostors could infiltrate elite circles

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[390] Baxendale, '... into Another Kind of Life', p. 197
[391] Ibid
[392] See p. 69
[393] Baxendale, '... into Another Kind of Life', p. 197

exposed the fragility of social hierarchies, the superficiality of status markers, and the vulnerability of institutions that relied on deference rather than verification.[394]

The identification of anxiety among middle-class observers reacting to a democratisation of culture that the dance hall represented,[395] or the Lambeth Walk highlighting anxieties concerning the meaning and authenticity of national character in an age of globalisation, tie into Houlbrook's delineation of Lucas's story, where Lucas challenged and undermined established notions of class distinction and social relations through deception and trickery. As Houlbrook shows, Lucas was not an outlier, but was emblematic of a broader cultural anxiety about performance, imposture, and the erosion of authentic markers of status in inter-war Britain.[396]

Houlbrook also ties Lucas's rise to the rise of a consumer culture and the modern, mass market. The rise of the modern mass media, advertising, tailored clothing, make-up, grooming products, and self-help literature made it increasingly possible for individuals to remake themselves through appearance, and Lucas's success as a confidence trickster depended on the use of consumer goods to, essentially, fabricate aristocratic status. These cultural technologies of modern consumer capitalism that become increasingly accessible in the inter-war era allowed, it seemed, for individuals to completely re-make themselves. The dance hall, with its emphasis on the manipulation of surface appearances, with artificial multi-sensual displays of light, sound, and mass-produced decoration allowing for many working and lower middle class individuals to experience the luxuriousness of a 'palais' for the first time, [397] and engage in the

[394] Houlbrook, Matt. *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook.*
University of Chicago Press, 2021, pp. 31-42
[395] See p. 124-31
[396] Houlbrook, Matt. *Prince of Tricksters*. p. 10-13
[397] See pp. 90-93

type of activity previously reserved for different social classes. The dance hall was a pivotal zone in which identity could be performed, and established notions of authenticity, class distinctions, and, as we have seen, national identity, could increasingly be unsettled, revealing the anxieties of a modern society resistant to change and the apprehensions of those who stood to lose from the blurring of these social boundaries.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the dance hall was a key site in which a singular expression of national character became fragmented during the period of late-modernity. While reactions to the Victorian-era music hall represented a consensus surrounding authentic expressions of Englishness, by the late 1930s – with the coming of the late-modern era and its accompanying fragmentation of popular culture – even the exuberant displays of Englishness found in the Lambeth Walk were treated with suspicion. A globalisation and internationalisation of popular culture – with African American and Latin American elements becoming part of music commonly listened to through the 1920s, Hollywood films bringing the American way of life to audiences around the country, and new dance forms coming from across the Atlantic – exposed fears of an erosion of national identity and anxiety concerning what constituted authentic displays of Englishness. Reactions to Lambeth Walk reveal that by the late 1930s the previous consensus surrounding authentic expressions of national identity through song and dance were replaced by discord over what constituted genuine expressions of Englishness. We thus find reactions to the Lambeth Walk varying between being seen as an embodiment of English national character and as a threat to these very characteristics, originating from an 'alien' culture, and signifying moral decay and primitivity. Some even ignored the national element of the dance altogether, and interpreted it variously as the result of a growing working-class revolutionary consciousness or the 'patronising' attitude of the middle class.

Chapter Four: 'Deranged through dancing': emancipation, morality, and the modern female experience at the dance hall, 1918-1939

Introduction

In the film *Dance Hall* – which was released in 1950 and reflects daily life at the dance hall during the inter-war years – the protagonist, Eve, is faced with a dilemma. Her husband is working late as an aeroplane mechanic – long past the usual time he would be home – and Eve begins to feel restless. Submersed in a domestic world, wearing an apron and with laundry drying behind her, Eve stares deep into the face of a pendulum clock in their suburban London home, a look of despair appears across her face. As Eve is in a state of dejection, the audience begins to hear a jazz tune in the background, and we start to see a smile come across Eve's face. As the music intensifies, Eve undoes her apron, throws it down, and sets off for the Palais. At the Palais Eve is reacquainted with her former friends, dancing partners and acquaintances. When one band member asks where she has been as he 'hasn't seen [her] for months', she replies, while slightly rolling her eyes, 'married'. Eve proceeds to run up a flight of stairs, greet her friends, gaze over the dance floor, and demand a dance from her male friend – 'Peter', Eve demands in a cheerful voice, 'have we just got time? I haven't danced for ages!'.[398]

This chapter argues that Eve's journey in the scene, from a restless, bored housewife to an independent woman fully in control of her pursuit of pleasure, speaks to a key role the dance hall played in women's lives during the inter-war period. Being an institution which provided women with a newfound sense of freedom and independence – of dress, courtship, promiscuity, and pleasure – the dance hall represented an unrivalled location of women's emancipation in

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[398] Crichton, Charles, director. *Dance Hall*. Ealing Studios, 1950, 33 min

1920s and 1930s Britain. It served as a means through which women could gain physical pleasure and satisfaction through dance and dress, a location where women could experience a newfound sense of freedom and control over their lives in the face of the domesticity and obligations of the home, and, conversely, it represented a threat to a largely male-dominated class of commentators – who used every rhetorical tool available to them – labelling the dance hall as 'dangerous' and female dancegoers as 'mad' – in order to tarnish the reputation of the dance hall and preserve the status quo. In this way, the inter-war dance hall was at the centre of contestations over what the modern women meant and how she should behave. Yet in the face of this bombardment by male commentators anxious at the change the dance hall and women dancegoers represented, dance culture endured – so much so that by the end of the 1930s dancing was no longer seen as a threat to established gender norms, but extolled as a virtuous performance of collective solidarity in the face of war.

Women, Pleasure, and Dancing

As a *Dancing Times* reporter put it in 1927, 'The longing for self-expression which is the characteristic of the age is driving the girls of to-day to seek satisfaction in dancing. In response to this compelling impulse they flock to join the world of rhythm…'[399] Dancing was far more popular with women than with men, and current literature on the subject deems the dance hall a 'female public space' in which women could explore their newfound identifies in the era of the 'flapper'.[400] Newspaper commentary from the period also reflects the popularity of the dance hall among women; a piece in the *Daily Express* complain how 'the girl of today lives only to dance. She is not happy unless the subject of conversation relates to the ballroom',[401]

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[399] *Dancing Times*, November 1927, pp. 162–3.
[400] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 159.
[401] *Daily Express*, 16 February 1920, p. 6.

the *Sunday Sun* reported that 'all over the country….. dancing halls have sprung up like mushrooms, and are thronged by girls of every class',[402] while Carl Heimann, one of the founders of the Mecca Dance chain, wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* how special measures had to be taken in some places to attract enough men to attend: 'If we dance hall proprietors can once get the males dance minded and enthused, it will be an enormous fillip to the dancing business… surely this business of ours should attract both sexes'.[403]

It was not only dance hall proprietors which commented on the abundance of women at the dance hall, but people wrote into papers pointing out the striking gender imbalance. One individual, who signed themself off as 'Curious', was especially candid about the ratio of women to men:

> I wonder if many of your readers have been struck by the number of women who "simply rave" about dancing. From personal experience I maintain that for every man who is really keen about dancing there are ten women. This is also borne out by the number of surplus women one sees at most public dance halls where frequently women are to be seen dancing with one another while many of the men appear to have been dragged there against their will.[404]

One of the most prominent reasons women went dancing was the physical pleasure it provided. In a rare *Daily Mail* column written by a woman, Millicent Lester Jones explained how 'Most women go to dances because they like dancing and for no other reason….Let it be clearly understood that we are out for dancing – for the exercise and the pleasure of the rhythmic motion to good music, and the pride all human beings take in doing a thing well'.[405] Indeed some of the best evidence we have on what drew women to dance halls is from Mass Observation. When Mass Observation conducted a survey asking women why they went dancing, respondents point to the physical pleasure it provided. For example, a 23 year old

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[402] *Sunday Sun* (Newcastle Upon Tyne), 21 September 1919, p. 5.
[403] *Dancing Times*, November 1937, p. 195
[404] *Daily Mirror*, 05 December 1923, p. 5
[405] *Daily Mail*, 22 September, 1922, p. 5

single clerk, when describing her favourite dance, focuses on its physicality: 'They are so spectacular and graceful…. There are so many different steps… one moment it is slow and dreamy, and the next, one is flying around, and yet the dance is still graceful'.[406] A 24 year old housewife tells us how 'You can just throw yourself into it with real interest and learn something new every week',[407] while a married women from Lee in South London responded that she prefers old time dancing 'because I have found it to be a great deal more graceful in deportment and movement'.[408] A 36 year old housewife likewise focuses on the physical postures and deportment dance provides, tells the observer that she prefers old time dances 'because they are more stately and ladylike'.[409]

Often, as we have seen in Chapter One, these experiences of physical pleasure in dance are experienced in conjunction with other sensual elements at the dance hall – and women emphasise the link between physical movement and notions of musicality and abstract beauty. One women thus responds that she enjoys a certain dance 'because the movements of the body synchronise with the tempo of the music, forming a beautiful mental rhythm', while for another prefers old time dancing 'because it embraces Beauty, Art and Grace to a degree not attainable in modern dancing. The Movements and Figures are far more varied and interesting'.[410]

The pleasure women gained from dancing not only provided them with an opportunity to experience new and varied movements – and to link these movements with more abstract notions of culture – but it also led to general feelings of mental wellbeing and happiness. A young women from Birmingham told an observer that dancing made her 'feel light hearted and

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[406] MOA, 38-1-G The Peckham Pavilion questionnaire on Old Time Dancing (VII), p. 34
[407] Ibid, p. 39
[408] Ibid, p. 7
[409] Ibid, p. 36
[410] Ibid, p. 9

it is something either to look back on or to look forward to with great pleasure'.[411] Another women from Peckham responded that she went dancing 'because it puts new life in me – makes one feel life is worth living',[412] while a third told an observer that the one day of the week she could go dancing was 'the one evening I long for and am most unhappy when unable to get there'.[413] As one young female dancer from Edinburgh told an observer in 1939, 'When I feel blue I get dressed up and go along, even the thought of going makes me happy'.[414] Dancing, for these women, was an activity which allowed for a certain mental delight and refreshment – in the words of one women, dancing 'rejuvenates the spirits, keeps you going. Tuesday and Saturday is something to look forward to'.[415] As an article in the *Daily Mail* wrote in 1921, 'Dancing….is the performance of a beautiful thing in a beautiful manner. It is the natural, age long expression of delight, and when we are happy we are always beautiful….The feeling of exhilaration which the body swinging in perfect rhythmic union gives, sends a becoming flush to the cheeks and a sparkle to the eyes'.[416]

The language used not only centres around themes of exhilaration and thrill – with women claiming dancing 'puts new life in me', 'rejuvenates the spirits, keeps you going', or fostered a 'spectacular and graceful' feeling – but the elation which dancing elicited is said to lead to feelings of beauty. While many women enjoyed dancing for the 'spectacular and graceful' movements which dance provided, this is presented as resulting in mental wellbeing, which in turn is said to result in physical beauty.

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[411] MOA, 38-1-G The Peckham Pavilion questionnaire on Old Time Dancing (VII), p. 9
[412] MOA, 38-1-G The Peckham Pavilion questionnaire on Old Time Dancing (VII), p. 40
[413] Ibid, p. 37
[414] MOA, 38-6-F Danceland; replies to questionnaire in Danceland magazine, p. 17
[415] MOA, 38-1-G The Peckham Pavilion questionnaire on Old Time Dancing (VII), p. 14
[416] *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1921, p. 9

This sense of empowerment and freedom women gained from the dance hall also stemmed from the opportunities to dress in the way they wished. In a 1934 issue of the magazine *Modern Dance and Jazz,* a fashion designer named 'Matita' penned an article arguing that 'Fashion says "freedom" for women'. 'This is just what the dancing women seeks', the article continues, 'she wants to look her best and wear beautiful clothes, but she wants, too, to have that freedom which enables her to move gracefully, easily, and – most importantly of all – confidently'.[417] The sense of newfound freedom with which women dressed in dance halls is further seen in surveys from Mass Observation, which took an inventory of the various clothes women wore in dance halls. Women's dress clearly dazzled the observers, and they became interested in what colours and types of outfits women wore. An overview of these surveys reveals the multitude of colours women dressed in – maroon, red, pink, petunia, cream, blue, green, pink, brown, black, purple, mustard, peach, white and yellow – and observers even went so far as to note the various colour schemes women employed, matching their frock with the collar, coat, skirt, and jumper.[418] Women also experimented with different patterns and materials, with check, striped and flowered dresses, skirts, coats commonly recorded.[419]

Perhaps one of the most fitting examples of the importance of dress for women at the dance hall comes from the film *Dance Hall*. Here we find Eve's friend attempting to gain access to the local dance championship, and as a sign of support, her parents – with what little expendable income they have – buy her a dress to wear to the dance competition. Upon arriving to the competition the dance hall manager presents her with a dress of far greater quality – with glimmering pearls and a complex lace design – and the women is torn between loyalty to her family and the chance to wear a beautiful new dress.

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[417] *Modern Dance and Jazz*, November 1934, p. 17.
[418] MOA, 38-1-A The Streatham Locarno, London (I), Images 94-98
[419] Ibid

The dance hall thus provided women with an array of experiences which resulted in physical and mental pleasure. Dancing itself provided women with a means to exercise, and the sense of exhilaration and thrill found at the dance hall was continually referenced by women as a chief reason for attendance. This sense of excitement that dancing provided was experienced in conjunction with a variety of other sensual elements – and seen by women as signifying not only a sense of exhilaration but was linked to notions of refinement, musicality and general notions of grace and beauty. Physical movement, the ambient surroundings, and an opportunity to dress as they pleased all combined to foster an environment where women could feel beautiful, free, and independent – producing a public space representative of the values and aspirations of the modern women.

The physical and mental pleasure the dance hall represented for women came at a time of profound change in the female experience. The 1920s saw the beginning of what might be called modern, mass-produced femininity. Magazines and paid print media extolled the virtues of make-up, and lipstick and other forms of female cosmetics finally entered the fashion mainstream during the 1920s, and became even more affordable to the working-classes by the 1930s.[420] A new industry developed producing cheap frocks and skirts in the industrial north and outer London areas such as Tottenham and Edmonton, which allowed working-class women access to a sense of glamour and luxury hitherto reserved for the wealthy, and while cinema projected images of the 'new women' on screen for young girls to idolise, the dance hall allowed these dreams to become reality – with young women dressing up in bright colours, dancing, and immersing themselves in a multi-sensual environment marked by an array of sonic, luminescent and somatic sensations. In this way the dance hall was a critical social and

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[420] *Daily Mirror*, 26 October 1928, p. 26; Alexander, Sally. *Becoming A Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*. New York University Press, 1995, p. 223.

cultural element of the times which gave rise to what commentators termed the 'new women',

a young female character who, as Sally Alexander writes, could be seen 'lipsticked,

silkstockinged, and dressed…. "like an actress"'.[421]

This was, as Carol Dyhouse reminds us, a period in which the modern idea of 'glamour' came

to fruition. Originally used in the nineteenth century to mean something akin to sorcery or

magical charm, 'glamour' took on new meanings in the first third of the twentieth century, new

conveying a sense of 'sophistication, artifice and sexual allure'.[422] This was seen in the variety

of new consumerist leisure practices women enjoyed, in 'the opulence and display of the theatre

and demimonde, in Orientalism and the exotic, and in a conscious espousal of modernity and

show of sexual sophistication'.[423] The glamourous women was 'modern, metropolitan, and in

their element; defying convention and revelling in a new freedom', and contained a reworking

of traditional ideas of femininity, embodying 'a kind of androgyny: her boyish look went along

with boyish habits, she was not afraid to drink or smoke or drive a car'.[424] We can see this

reworking of traditional ideas of femininity in figure 5, where a dance hall 'manageress'

(depicted in the 1930s production of *The Gusher*) takes on these androgynous characteristics,

sitting on a bar stool drinking and smoking in a leather jacket, surrounded by half empty bottles,

looking suggestively at the viewer.

The dance hall was a key site in which 'glamour' was experienced in inter-war Britain. Ideas

of exoticism, as we saw above, were seen in dance hall interiors that sought to transport dancers

to various exclusive and out-of-reach locations, such as an aristocratic French residence or a

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[421] Alexander, Sally. *Becoming A Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*. New York University Press, 1995*,* p. 203
[422] Dyhouse, Carol. *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2010, p. 10
[423] Ibid
[424] Ibid, p. 14

South Pacific island.[425] The dance hall was a location where women had the opportunity to wear cosmetics, particularly lipstick, in the pursuit of feeling glamorous.[426] And the dance hall environment continually emphasised opulence and reached for notions of sophistication, with crimson silk curtains, murals of large aristocratic residences with marble pillars, and gilded furniture being commonplace.[427] Women also, as we have seen above, contributed to this sense of glamour through dress, experimenting with different colours, materials, and patterns in seeking to convey a sense of individuality.

The dance hall thus provided women with ample opportunities to take part in the modern experience of 'glamour' identified by Carol Dyhouse, which was seen in their defiance of conventional ideas of femininity and propriety through dress and cosmetics, while pursuing physical and mental wellbeing and pleasure in an environment containing extravagant displays of opulence and exoticism that came to define inter-war glamour. Women's physical and mental wellbeing at the dance hall, then, was inextricably tied to notions of glamour, and the dance hall was a key site in which this glamour was experienced by women in inter-war Britain.

As Sally Alexander reminds us, embedded in notions of inter-war glamour was a sense of rebellion and freedom from gender and class constraints. Glamour offered working-class women a chance to escape houses 'overcrowded with dirt and noise', and freedom from the gendered expectations their families placed upon them.[428] Romance, make-up, dressing up, and dancing all offered women a means to forge their own identities and reject, at least for a time, the confinement of domesticity and the limited futures prescribed by class and gender. Image,

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[425] See pp. 112-13
[426] Ibid.
[427] See pp. 109-13
[428] Alexander, Sally. *Becoming A Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History.* New York University Press, 1995, p. 219-222

and notions of 'glamour', were thus social instruments for women to assert independence of thought, and reclaiming pleasure – going to the dance hall, styling their appearance, or meeting the opposite sex – became political acts for women in inter-war Britain. We see, significantly, a memory of this function of inter-war glamour for women reappearing in later representations of the dance hall in the post-war era,[429] where memories women asserting their independence in the inter-war era serve as a nostalgic device.[430]

As we will see below, the dance hall played a key role in this newfound sense of independence women claimed in the inter-war era. Allowing women a space of their own – outside the confines of the domestic sphere – in which to renegotiate their gender roles and relationships with the opposite sex, the dance hall was fundamental in the larger reconfiguration of gender roles during the 1920s.

Dancing and Women's Independence

One of the most prominent ways in which this sense of independence manifested itself was the ability of women to choose their own dancing partners. While a host of different men might approach a women in order to ask for a dance, it was the women who could refuse as many times as she wished. Furthermore, if a women – through peer pressure and a fear of being called 'frigid' – was driven to dance with a partner not of her own choice, she was completely free to end the pairing immediately after the dance had come to an end.[431]

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[429] *Dance Hall*. Directed by Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1950.
[430] See pp. 97-99
[431] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 178

This sense of empowerment and freedom from male-dominated social conventions can further be seen in the film *Dance Hall*. When Eve (the protagonist) attends a dance, she takes it upon herself to approach a man for a dance – demanding from her friend Peter to join her on the dance floor, asking 'Have we just got time? I haven't danced for ages!'.[432] This convention of women choosing their own dancing partners was formalised in the practise of 'ladies choice' nights, where as opposed to women saying yes or no to men approaching them for a dance, they approached men on their own initiative.

While this practise was common during the 1930s, even by the end of the decade it was not in place everywhere. The archaic practice of a man asking a woman for a dance came under fire. Under the headline 'We demand equal rights for women – Pick Your Own Partners in the Dance Hall' the magazine *Dance News* implored readers to abandon the practice of men approaching women in and asking them to dance: 'It is absurd that in 1941', the outlet argued, 'the rigid role that ladies must be asked to dance by a gentleman should continue. *Dance News* demands that this antiquated custom should be abolished and that women should have equal rights, and be able to ask the men to dance….'[433] The article went on to press for 'equality' in the dance hall through linking the role in women in the war effort to dance practices: 'In this war the women are playing their full part alongside the men. They are serving in the ATS, WAAF, WRNS, and other services. They are doing men's jobs in the factories… We urge girls not to wait until they are asked to dance. Go up to the men and say 'May I' or make your request more emphatic if you like'.[434]

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[432] *Dance Hall* (1950), 37min
[433] *Dance News*, 13 December 1941, p. 1
[434] Ibid.

The dance hall was a location in which women felt increasingly comfortable challenging existing gender norms; as a physical space it was largely constructed for the enjoyment of women. We have seen, in Chapter Two, how atmospheric design principles were employed to create a sense of commercialised escapism largely representative of modernity. Yet many of these design elements of the dance hall were specifically constructed for the female experience. The 'Ladies Boudoirs' – which were found at a variety of dance halls including Newcastle and Birmingham – were constructed with the sole purpose of gratifying the female visitor, with the colour pink employed extensively, floral patterns on carpets and upholstery, and mirrors intended for women to fix their make-up.[435] The music played was often romantic in tone, which, as we have seen, interacted with the soft multi-coloured lighting to produce a romantic atmosphere. The feminised physical environment was perhaps one reason boys often remained far shyer than girls when it came to dancing. In one Southport dance hall teenage girls asked the management to introduce more 'ladies invitation' dances because many of the boys were too scared to ask them to dance. Diana Miller, aged 18, complained that 'Occasionally a boy will scuttle across like a scared rabbit and, blushing all over, mumble something under his breath about dancing. But most of them huddle in a corner and just stare all the evening.'[436] Summing up the notion that women themselves conceived of the dance hall as a space of their own, we find a women overheard by a mass observer commenting on the décor of Streatham Locarno: 'Why do you think they have these lights?', she asks her friend, 'they aren't flattering to women… and we are the ones that count.'[437]

The dance hall as a predominately female public space can further be seen in the film *Dance Hall.* The film indeed chimes with our other sources in presenting the dance hall as a location

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[435] Nott*, Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History*, p. 228
[436] DM, 21 September 1950, p. 7
[437] MOA, 38-1-A The Streatham Locarno, London (I), Image 220.

of women's autonomy and independence. Not only does the film's protagonist, Eve, take it upon herself to approach a man for a dance, but for Eve the Palais represents a location in which she can choose between different men to find a suitable husband. The film depicts different men almost 'on offer' for women at the palais. There is Mike, a tall, large men who always appears ungroomed, and who Eve's friend, when discussing his attractiveness, terms him 'not a man but a mountain'. There is Alec, a wealthy American womaniser whose dance skills impress Eve; and there is Phil, presented as a handsome, humble Englishmen whom the audience warms to. The selection of potential suitors at the Palais – and the female power to choose between these – is illustrated in a conversation between Eve and her group of friends in which Eve attempts to persuade her friend that Mike, who continually shows interest, is worth accepting as a partner. 'It's no good', her friend responds, 'after the way Fred treated me, I'm finished with men!'[438] The film thus presents the Palais as a location in which women could select a partner from an array of potential suitors and do so independently on their own initiative.

The dance hall as representing a location of female freedom and empowerment in choosing potential partners is further illustrated later in the film. When Eve eventually decides to marry Phil, and they settle down in a large suburban house, Phil's insecurity at Eve's continued attendance at the dance hall is evident. While Phil is traveling for work and returns home late one evening, Eve attends the Palais and enjoys the pleasures of dancing, speaking with different acquaintances and meeting her friends. Upon her return home, Phil is incensed – raising his voice and pressuring her to give up the Palais. The reason for Phil's insecurity towards Eve's attendance at the Palais is evident for the audience: it represents a location in which she is free to interact with other men and develop a life outside the traditional confines of married life.

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[438] *Dance Hall* (1950), 23min

A major theme in *Dance Hall* is the indeed the continual juxtaposition of the domesticity and obligations of the home with the excitement and freedom represented by the Palais. These themes appear so often in the film they almost become trite by repetition: when Eve's mother asks if she can see her younger brother to bed, Eve replies that she is going to the Palais instead; when Eve's friend is leaving her mother's house and the mother demands that she finish the household dishes before she leaves, the friends responds 'I'll wash up when I come back mother'.[439] This incompatibility of the obligations of the home with the allure of the dance hall is made further obvious when, while Eve takes a phone call from her friends inviting her to the Palais, she trips over the ironing board as she is running to the phone, the duties of the domestic sphere physical manifesting themselves as barriers to Eve's life at the dance hall. These themes continue when Eve returns from the Palais, with her mother commenting on Eve's supposed lateness; 'Late, aren't you?', her mother snaps, to which Eve responds 'It's only 11', asserting her desire for independence from expected familial obligations and modes of behaviour.

In *Dance Hall,* the local Palais functions, for Eve, as a sort of refuge from the difficulties of everyday life. When she is having relationship problems, with her lover failing to follow through on his romantic promises – Eve runs to the Palais and immerses herself in music and dance as a means of forgetting her troubled relationship. Later in the film when Eve is married, Eve's husband, Phil, continually rejects and disapproves of Eve frequenting the Palais. Immersed in a world marked by cleaning, ironing and a variety of other forms of housework, the Palais functions as a location of freedom for Eve, a space she can visit to escape the drudgery, and loneliness, of domestic work. Indeed, part of Eve's husbands anger and disapproval of Eve frequenting the Palais is that it prevents her from fulfilling her traditional

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[439] *Dance Hall* (1950), 3min

domestic role. When her husband Phil is working late in the evening as an aeroplane mechanic, and Eve goes to the Palais in order to dance with her friends, she comes home to find leftovers of tinned beef which Phil has eaten, and upon finding out the ration was intended to feed 12 people – perhaps their food for a week – Eve begins to get angry. In response to Eve's anger, Phil responds, tellingly, 'You could make a meal yourself if you would stay away from the Palais for once in your life!'.[440] The presentation of the dance hall as irreconcilable with domesticity and a women's obligations to the home is seen throughout the film. In a scene towards the end of the film, after Eve and Phil have reconciled, Eve persuades her husband to go dancing, and they take a trip to the Palais. Yet when Phil performs badly at dancing, he jokes, prophetically, 'if we're going to live together, we just have to give up the Palais!'[441]

The dance hall is thus presented as not only incompatible with the traditional obligations women have in the domestic sphere, but as a perennial threat to the established role of married women. What the Palais offers Eve is an opportunity to develop a sense of identity outside the traditional confines of marriage and housework – and it is for this very reason that it draws her husband's wrath. This sense of identity the Palais serves to develop is still unashamedly feminine – with women dressing up in elegant frocks, dancing gracefully to romantic music, wearing makeup and styling their hair – yet this is a femineity with newfound autonomy and independence. Eve's trips to the Palais represent her rejecting the expected gender roles of the day – eschewing the ironing, laundry and dishes found in her marital home for the opportunity to choose her own dance partners, gossip with her friends and explore different ways of dressing at the Palais. The dance hall thus served both to challenge and indeed undermine established paradigms of female behaviour in the inter-war era. With women no longer content

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[440] *Dance Hall* (1950), 35min
[441] *Dance Hall* (1950), 57 min

living a life centred on the traditional obligations of the home, the dance hall served as a means of developing a newfound sense of independence and autonomy centred on the desires of young women in the inter-war period.

Dance Hall, as outlined above, can be seen as a memory text, transmitting knowledge and forms of experience of the inter-war era to a post-war audience likely receptive to these depictions of a pre-war Britain.[442] This even, as we see above, extends to the portrayal of women's sense of autonomy and independence. In the immediate post-war era and into the 1950s, inter-war Britain was comparatively an era in which many women had a sense of financial independence, with ample opportunities for leisure structured around an industrialized working day.[443] Indeed, as Selina Todd has pointed out, women's increased earnings in the 1930s, especially in comparison to men, led to leisure becoming a key component of their weekly life, and this resulted in a significant degree of independence and autonomy, with women having a greater say in relationships and courtship practices.[444] With the post-war 'return to domesticity', many women found themselves in increasingly domestic roles, redirected toward home-focused and care-related occupations.[445] *Dance Hall*'s almost romantic depiction of the dance hall's central role in Eve's rejection of traditional gender roles and pursuit of freedom and autonomy would thus have spoken to a post-war audience nostalgic for the inter-war era's more visible avenues of female self-expression and independence. The sense of identity Eve is depicted as developing outside the traditional confines of marriage and housework – wearing fashionable dresses, dancing, and cultivating her appearance through cosmetics – is thus part of a memory text aimed at a post-war audience, and serves as an early

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[442] See pp. 96-98
[443] Selina Todd's *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918–1950,* pp. 196-199
[444] Ibid.
[445] Summerfield, Penny. *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict.* Routledge, 1984.

resource which helped embed the memory of the inter-war dance hall into the minds of subsequent generations.

The dance hall thus played multiple roles in women's lives during the inter-war period. Women were drawn by the opportunity of physical exercise and resulting physical pleasure dancing achieved. This sense of physical movement, combined with the unique dreamworld atmosphere of the dance hall, resulted in mental wellbeing for numerous women; and, perhaps most significant was the role the dance hall played in fostering a sense of independence and autonomy for women outside the confines of the domestic sphere and obligations of the home. However, as will be explored below, this very sense of freedom and autonomy which the dance hall represented for women was interpreted as a threat by a largely male class of commentators at the time. Being a flash point for images of this 'new women' who increasingly abandoned her expected gender roles, the dance hall and the women who frequented it were subjected to an onslaught of criticism and judgement with the goal of preserving the status quo. Cast as a location of frivolity, a centre of immorality, and a place which could drive women 'mad', the dance hall was presented as a perennial threat to what was deemed acceptable female behaviour.

Throughout this criticism, however, the dance hall and the culture which it contained persevered, and by the end of the 1930s dancing was no longer seen as a threat to established gender norms, but extolled as a virtuous performance of collective solidarity in the face of war.

Criticisms of Women at the Dance Hall

One of the most prominent ways in which commentators criticised women going to dance halls was to call them frivolous, and the outlet for this type of criticism was often letters sent to the

editors of daily newspapers. We thus find a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* from a war veteran who expressed disillusionment with what he perceived to be the type of women he encountered upon returning home from the front. While servicing in Egypt, he wrote, he had dreamed of 'the dear girls of home and the purity, brightness, and sweetness of the beautiful English home life', yet upon returning home he was struck by the difference between the women of his imagination and what reality had to offer: 'Instead of the girls of our fond imaginings we find them a madly given-over-to-dancing, theatregoing type. Not content with these as a mere diversion they have become in the present day an intoxicating passion.'[446] Criticisms of the modern dancing women appear in a host of letters to newspaper editors during this period. In February 1920 a man wrote to the *Daily Mail* expressing dismay at 'The frivolous, scantily clad, jazzing flappers, irresponsible and undisciplined' and determined that women behaving in this manner 'are themselves a reason why so many men shrink from matrimony'.[447] 'The majority of men', another man wrote, 'much prefer a girl of modest disposition – that is, one who does not smoke, flirt, or jazz',[448] while another declared that 'no serious thinking man would ever … look for his "dream girl" in a jazz-hall or night club'.[449]

Much of this criticism of the 'dancing women' centred on her supposed immorality. From this point of view young women may have ostensibly gone dancing for physical pleasure, yet their real motivation was far more dishonourable. As one *Daily Mirror* reader wrote in 1922, women who went dancing engaged in a 'poisonous and dangerous' activity he took particular dislike to:

> I have found that fully fifty per cent of the girls who attend dance halls have only the faintest idea of dancing, and I know many bright young fellows whose chances in life have been spoilt through falling victims to girls who go to dances with the sole object of flirting. Flirting is one of the most poisonous

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[446] *Daily Express*, 19 February 1920, p. 4.
[447] *Daily Mail*, 6 February 1920, p. 6.
[448] *Daily Express*, 23 February 1920, p. 6.
[449] *Daily Express*, 26 February 1920, p. 6

and dangerous "amusements" that one can indulge in, and it is surprising and deplorable to see how many girls of today enter into this so called form of "sport", and appear to enjoy it.[450]

The idea that dance halls could be a centre for flirtation, lust, and interactions between men and women which went outside the bounds of acceptable forms of courting, can similarly be seen in a 1927 article from the *Birmingham Daily Gazette.* The accompanying sketch [figure 4] depicts a women slouched over a table, legs crossed, glass of wine in hand, staring passively up at a man with his outstretched hand. The caption criticises the supposed casual nature of the encounter; '"O.K.?" That is how he asks her. "Yep" That is how she accepts….You will notice that there is no form of introduction whatsoever'.[451]

Figure 4

The dance hall was thus presented as a location in which the entire convention of traditional courtship was undermined – and partners became increasingly casual about whom they interacted with. In this view, women had lost all principles upon which to choose a partner, with the woman depicted in the *Daily Gazette* in a causal posture, slouched over her table, legs stretched out, and merely uttering an uninhibited 'Yep' when being asked to dance. While the *Daily Gazette* criticises such behaviour only implicitly – suggesting that the reader 'will notice that there is no form of introduction whatsoever' – the letter in the *Daily Mirror* openly

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[450] *Daily Mirror*, 27 September 1922, p. 5
[451] *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 28 November 1927, p. 5

criticises such unrestrained interactions between sexes, describing the 'amusement' of flirtation – which 'many girls of today enter into' – as 'poisonous and dangerous'. The dance hall was thus seen as a location of immorality, in which female dancers disregarded any notion of reserve, restraint, formality or repression. What women themselves may have seen as an atmosphere marked by increasing freedom and autonomy – to dress, behave, dance and interact with men in the manner they wanted – was interpreted by a class of male commentators as 'poisonous and dangerous' to a status quo under threat. Being located outside the confines of the familial or marital home, or the workplace, the dance hall occupied a space in which men lacked clear means of control, and while women happily went to dance halls and claimed the location as their own, some men turned to a traditional outlet of power to voice their distress— the daily or broadsheet newspaper. While commentary could characterise women as overly flirtatious or casual with whom they interacted, often newspapers focused on alcohol – a persistent symbol of the 'new women' or flapper of the 1920s – in order to present the dance hall as a location of female immorality.

Much of the information concerning women and alcohol at the dance hall comes from reports of female drunkenness in which magistrates ban women from dance halls. While we know members of both sexes would often drink while dancing, and male brawls were common – reports continually link the 'dancing women' with drunkenness. The *Daily Herald* reported in 1925 – under the headline 'Dancing Hall Morals' – that a magistrate in Glasgow had banned women under 18 from working as professional dance partners after claiming the practice was 'morally bad', adding that 'Complaints have been made that young dancing partners are subjected to drink and moral temptation'.[452] The *Market Harborough Advertiser* published an article in 1934 entitled 'Dance Hall Dangers', with a subheading which read 'Girl Helplessly

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[452] *Daily Herald*, 09 April 1925, p. 5

Drunk at Northampton'.[453] 'All is not well in Northampton' the paper reported the local the Chief Constable as saying, noting that at the Juvenile Court the Constable gave a 'grave note of warning to girls and young women' who attended dance halls. The fear of female drunkenness can be similarly seen in an interview conducted by the *Daily Mirror,* where the interviewee, Mr T. R. Daly, complained that he 'saw a women in a drunken stupor with her head on a man's shoulder' at a dance hall – proceeding to assert that 'girls are ruined in the dance hall' and that the 'morals there rival those of Sodom and Gomorrah'.[454]

The theme of immorality thus runs through condemnations of dance halls. Women, attracted to dance halls for the pleasure and sense of freedom the environment provided, were vulnerable to be 'ruined' at these institutions through alcohol and the accompanying fears of 'moral temptation'. The sense that women were unable to contend with the 'dangers' present at the dance hall is reflected in the language used – with young women being presented as 'helplessly drunk', as receiving a 'grave note of warning' or being subject to 'temptation' from which they were unable to resist. Male commentators thus attempted to remove the newfound sense of agency and independence the dance hall offered women; while women themselves declared the dance hall provided them with physical and mental pleasure and a sense of greater autonomy and independence – these commentators, in voicing their distress – formed a counter narrative centred on conventional images of women as innocent, naïve, and vulnerable to the immoral 'temptations' the dancehall offered.

Images of the 'immoral', modern dancing women were not confined to the pages of newspapers. An on-stage manifestation of the type of moral dangers women were supposedly

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[453] *Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail*, 28 December 1934, p. 2
[454] *Daily Mirror*, Saturday 30 April 1938, p. 1

exposed to at the dance hall can be found the 1930s production of *The Gusher*, in which the 'club manageress', Corel Brown, is depicted as the quintessential modern 'flapper'. Casually sitting on a bar stool hunched over the bar counter, the character of Brown clings to a drink, smokes a cigarette, and looks over flirtatiously at the camera in a 1937 edition of *The Sketch.* The counter Brown rests on is supporting half full bottles of various spirits, her leg dangles out suggestively, and her skirt is presented as above the knees (figure 5). The immoral temptations commentators presented the dance hall as eliciting in women are thus manifested on stage, with Brown being portrayed as the exhibiting the types of behaviour – female drunkenness, promiscuity and immorality – which commentators claim women fall victim to at the dance hall.

Figure 5: The Sketch, 08 September 1937, p. 19

While the dance hall was presented as harnessing the potential to 'ruin' supposedly innocent women with the 'temptations' of drink, dance, and promiscuity – some reports went further, declaring the dance hall had to potential to drive women to insanity. Focusing on acts of alleged theft or supposedly crazed behaviour, these reports continue the narrative centred on images of women as uncorrupted and vulnerable to the immorality and deviance represented by the dance hall. Even has early as 1919 we find reports which link the rise of dancing to an unwelcome change in female behaviour. The *Sunday Sun*, while reporting that dance halls 'have sprung up like mushrooms' around the country, quickly focuses on the results this supposedly had for the mentality of modern women: 'Two out of three girls one meets will talk of nothing but the jazz, the Turkey-Trot, and the rest of the passionate gymnastics we have borrowed from the negros of America. Dancing…. Has become an obsession. It is ousting everything else in the mind of the   modern   girl'.[455]

The 'obsession' commentators saw young women as having for dance was often presented as leading them to acts of 'madness', criminality, and delinquency. Young women's love of dancing was thus presented as far from an innocent compulsion among young, carefree women – or even an amoral temptation stemming from a desire for drink and promiscuity – but it was seen harnessing the power to transform young women into delinquents whose troublemaking stemmed from the supposed 'madness' the dance hall elicited. We find a 1928 report from the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* outlining how Eva Ball, aged 18, stole items 'amounting to 120 pounds to gratify her love of finery, chocolates and dancing', adding that in addition to going to dance halls, 'she paid a professional dancer thirty shillings a lesson for instruction'.[456] In the same year the *Morecambe Guardian* published an article under the headline 'Dance-Mad Girls'

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[455] *Sunday Sun* (Newcastle Upon Tyne), 21 September, 1919, p. 5.
[456] *Aberdeen Press and Journal,* 26 July 1928, p. 7

which began with the rhetorical question 'What will girls not do to gratify their craving for dancing?'.[457] The article went on to present an array of illegal acts supposedly committed by young women in order to sustain their love of dancing, such as stealing from an employer in order to buy dance frocks or 'fees for a course of instruction that would qualify [them] for a position in a high-class hotel or well-known public dance hall', adding that such women were 'deranged through dancing'.[458] The *West Sussex County Times* penned a similar article under the headline 'Girls "Madness" For Dancing', going on to describe how she supposedly stole a handbag from a church hall in order to fuel her dancing life.[459] The girl's father later was later quoted as saying his daughter had a 'madness for dancing and going out at night-time' and a local court banned her from attending dance halls.[460] In a similar vein, the *Westminster Gazette* published an article in 1926 that centred on a petty theft from a dance hall in which Gladys Heron, aged 19, was charged with stealing a women's handbag. While the petty theft from a crowded public place may have not usually resulted in a newspaper report, the paper presented the affair as being the result of dancing, with the headline reading 'Girl's Dancing Mania: Court Imposes A 3-Month Ban' and the probation officer in the case blaming Heron's actions on a supposed insanity which came with dancing, declaring to the court, 'This girl seems to have a mania for dancing'.[461]

The theme of dancing women being driven to 'madness' appears throughout the evidence, and indeed involves all regions of the British Isles. *The Scotsman* reported in 1927 that a Glasgow women aged 20 was banned from dance halls, admitting in court 'to stealing sausage skins to the value of 27 pounds and squandering the money in dancing halls and picture houses',[462] just

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[457] *Morecambe Guardian*, 13 October 1928, p. 10
[458] *Morecambe Guardian*, 13 October 1928, p. 10
[459] *West Sussex County Times*, 29 October 1943, p. 8
[460] *West Sussex County Times*, Friday 29 October 1933, p. 8
[461] *Westminster Gazette*, 30 October 1926, p. 3
[462] *The Scotsman*, 14 November 1927, p. 11

a year earlier the paper published another report on a young, 'dancing mad' women who 'steals finery to be able to visit dance halls'.[463] The *Larne Times* reported on a similar situation in London where girl aged 16 was described by a probation officer as 'Dance hall mad' after she lost her job 'because she would stay out until two a.m'.[464] The *Catholic Standard* reported from Ireland that, while 'No one wants to prohibit dancing in Ireland; no one ever dreamt of doing so…' the 'mad dance craze' was getting out from control: 'all who are familiar with the mad craze for dancing and who are acquainted with its attendant evils (they are visible in almost every village and town) are awakening to a scene of duty towards their fellow man', adding that 'the public opinion of the country demands certain restrictions be laid on dance halls and their proprietors'.[465]

Women's love of dancing was thus branded as not only frivolous (with dancing being seen as an 'intoxicating passion'), or immoral (with commentators asserting that acts of drinking, smoking and flirting would 'ruin' young women), but dancing was presented as harnessing the ability to drive women to insanity and delinquency. While women themselves indicate their fondness for dancing was the result of the newfound sense of independence and autonomy it provided – being able to craft an activity and consequent identity for themselves outside the traditional confines of the domestic sphere – an array of largely male commentators interpreted this as an unwelcome change to established roles of men and women, and thus condemned the female dancer in exceedingly strong terms. Often these attacks appear contradictory – such as dismissing dancing as frivolous yet maintaining it harnessed the potential to drive women to acts of criminal insanity – or are couched in the language of gender hierarchy, with women being presented as 'helplessly drunk' or in need of a 'grave note of warning'.

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[463] *The Scotsman*, 13 November 1926, p. 13
[464] *Larne Times*, 18 February 1939, p. 9
[465] *Catholic Standard*, 13 September 1935, p. 8

In attempting to challenge the increasing autonomy of women fuelled by the dance hall, these male commentators drew on a nineteenth-century trope of women as prone to madness and insanity as a result of their supposed biological inferiority. As Elaine Showalter has shown, ideas of insanity and mental illness underwent a distinct 'feminization' in nineteenth-century Britain. As opposed to the vague and uncertain concepts related to general insanity which Victorian psychiatry produced, female insanity was specifically linked with the biological processes inherent in the life-cycle of women, such as puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause – presenting women as a victim of these biological processes. [466] Childbirth, for instance, was deemed to render a women's mind abnormally weak, her constitution depleted and her control over her behaviour greatly diminished.[467] As middle-class Victorian women sought increasing control over and personal and professional lives – pursuing higher education or ambitious careers – medical practitioners maintained that the pursuit of such activities would lead to sickness, sterility, and a variety of nervous system disorders.[468] Female advancement and autonomy were thus deemed incompatible with womanhood.

Later, in the inter-war period, we find commentators using the same rhetorical methods to stem the tide of female advancement and empowerment. As the dance hall became a centre of female independence and autonomy in the 1920s, commentators used the well-known rhetorical tools they had available to attack women. Women were thus declared 'deranged through dancing', with the dance hall bringing out a 'mania', leading to 'crazed' behaviour and 'madness'. Through branding women who enjoyed dancing as insane, male commentators of the inter-war period thus drew on an established discourse which not only used the trope of lunacy to attack

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[466] Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and Culture in England, 1830-1980*. Pantheon Books, 1986, p. 56
[467] Ibid, p. 58
[468] Ibid, pp. 124-5

women's increased freedom, but represented women as biologically vulnerable to insanity and requiring male protection and control.

Depictions of women as weak and prone to be led astray by the dance hall are also found in their continual representation as metaphorically airborne. Many of these representations take the form of women as birds or butterflies who 'flock' to the dance hall. The *Dundee Courier,* for instance, published an article in 1920 which asked the question 'Should Girls Go To Dances?', and in arguing that young women should attend dances as it is a 'Natural Expression of Joy in Youth', the article compared women's attendance at the dance hall to the natural song of birds: 'It is as natural for a girl to dance as it is for the birds to sing or the flowers to open'.[469] Other sources continue the avian metaphor, with *Dancing Times* reporting that women 'flock' to the dance hall as a result of a 'compelling impulse'.[470] A host of letters sent in to the *Daily Express* around 1920 in similarly refer to the feminine figure in the dance hall as a 'butterfly', easy to influence and susceptible to be drawn in to the vices of the dance hall: provocative dress, flirtation, smoking and drinking, and an unhealthy obsession with dancing.[471]

The metaphor of dancing women as being airborne – with its associations of instability, susceptibility, and weakness – reflected an attempt by commentators to counteract the increasing agency women claimed at the dance hall. With dance halls up and down the country providing a location where women could dress in new and inventive ways, renegotiate their relationship with the opposite sex, and claim newfound autonomy of which public smoking and drinking were the most prominent outward manifestations – commentators attempted to stem the tide of this increased independence by attacking the process at the centre of women's

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[469] *Dundee Courier*, 17 February 1920, p. 4
[470] *Dancing Times*, November 1927, pp. 162-3
[471] *Daily Express*, 16 February 1920, p. 6

increased freedom at the dance hall: their ability to act an independent agents vis-à-vis the opposite sex. Women were thus branded as airborne – birds or butterflies 'flock[ing]' to the dance hall as a result of a 'compelling impulse' – in order to eliminate the increasing agency they claimed at the dance hall. The branding of women who danced as insane, 'dancing mad', or 'deranged' similarly reflects male commentators' desire to take away the potential for women to make their own decisions – presenting women as mentally unstable, unable to make their own decisions, and thus needing male guidance and protection.

Male commentators thus used a variety of rhetorical techniques in order to promote negative associations between women and dancing. Women were not only presented as airborne creatures susceptible to making poor decisions, or prone to insanity and derangement through an unhealthy love of dancing – but were ridiculed for their supposed immoral and frivolous behaviour at the dance hall. Anxious at the pace of change and the newfound freedoms women claimed at the dance hall, these commentators used a variety of rhetorical techniques in order to counteract this change and preserve the status quo. They appealed to society's sense of morality through depicting women as undermining traditional notions of courtship through drinking, smoking and flirting at the dance hall. They evoked nineteenth-century tropes of women as prone to madness and insanity, with dancing bringing about instability, derangement and mania in vulnerable women. They sought to circumscribe women's agency through the metaphor of dancing women as airborne, further cementing the image of them as unstable, susceptible, and weak; and they branded 'dancing women' as frivolous, 'irresponsible and undisciplined', and unworthy of marriage.

The dance hall thus encompassed wider themes in inter-war women's leisure history, being a location in which women could celebrate autonomy and independence while simultaneously

serving as a means of deriding and attacking this newfound freedom. These findings fit into previous work on women's inter-war leisure, which delineate a tension between newfound freedom and autonomy with continued limits to this independence imposed by the structures of family, marriage, domesticity and authority figures' expected modes of public behaviour.[472] Indeed, we have seen how the dance hall was home to what Claire Langhamer refers to as an 'underlying fear of the economically independent working-class women' that was 'articulated with reference to her leisure behavior'.[473]

As will be shown below, however, the rhetorical backlash on the part of authority figures ultimately failed to stem the tide of change, and by the late 1930s and the outbreak of war, dancing was no longer seen as a threat to established gender norms or a corrupting influence on women, but extolled as a virtuous performance of collective solidarity in the face of war.

Women and the Dance Hall During Wartime

As opposed to reports in the 1920s and early-to-mid 1930s which vilify women in dance halls as immoral, frivolous or gripped by insanity, during the Second World War reports largely eschew the gendered language, presenting many of the same incidents we find above – such as petty theft or fighting – in strikingly non-gendered language. Our first example comes from a report a 1941 report in the Somerset *Wells Journal*, which gives an account of two women fighting at the local dance hall:

> A scene at a village dance hall, where two women slapped each other's faces and pulled each other's hair, had a sequel at Shepton Mallet Police Court on Friday when Evelyn Fear, a married woman of Sleight Hill, East Cranmore, was summoned for assaulting Dorothy Greenaway, married woman, of

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[472] Fowler, David. *The First Teenagers: Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Interwar Britain*. Routledge , 2013, p. 220-237; Bingham, Adrian. "'An Era of Domesticity'? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain." *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 1, no. 2, May 2004, pp. 225–233. Langhamer, Claire. *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960*. Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 103-130

[473] Langhamer, Claire. *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960*. Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 53

Council Houses, West Cranmore. She pleaded not guilty. [….] Miss Margaret Greenaway, the 13-year old daughter of the complainant said she was at the dance and as she came from the cloak room she heard her mother screaming. She saw Mrs. Fear thumping her mother, but did not see any blows struck. Mrs. Fear, giving evidence, said she was passing Mrs. Greenaway on her way to the cloakroom and remarked to her that she had not yet finished with her daughter. She alleged that Mrs. Greenaway struck her across the face with her handbag. She admitted slapping Mrs. Greenaway's face in return and said Mrs. Greenaway then pulled her hair, so she pulled hers.[474]

In light of the reports outlined above which depict acts of minor criminality as resulting from women's madness, the lack of gendered language is striking. While the text refers to these acts of violence as being committed by 'two women', nothing concerning the women's gender is elaborated upon. As opposed to highly charged opinions about the acts signifying an issue with women's place in dance halls and attacking women as mentally unstable, the language above is notable for its planeness, merely recounting the facts in the case. Furthermore, rather than the reader hearing the condemnation of a magistrate admonishing the women in question and banning them from dance halls – the text gives the women who were involved a voice to express their account of what happened, and we even hear from one of the women's 13-year old daughter who 'heard her mother screaming'.

Other reports which concern women's behaviour in dance halls similarly focus on the supposed acts committed and eschew any moral condescension, negative characterisations or supposed link between the behaviour and dance halls. In 1941 the *Liverpool Echo* reported, under the title 'Stole at Dance Hall', that two women were charged with theft at a dance hall:

That they were frightened the police into admitting their guilt was alleged by two young women at Warrington, to-day. They were Gertrude Harrison, aged 20, of 27 Norris Street, Warrington, and Dorothy Smith, aged 20, of 21 Norris Street, Warrington, charged with stealing two ladies' handbags from the Casino Ballroom on Boxing Night. One handbag contained 10s, and the other 4s 1d, a cigarette lighter and a lady's compact, total value of £1 ls the handbags were left by young ladies on a table while they danced. Later the handbags were found behind a door, Smith had said. I did take the money, out of one

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[474] *Wells Journal*, 20 October 1944, p. 4

of the handbags, Harrison said, received a share from one handbag. Both accused said they had been drinking port wine, but they denied taking 10s.[475]

The extract from Liverpool, in the same vein as the previous extract from Somerset, places an emphasis on the facts of the case without linking the behaviour with dance halls. In place of strong moral condemnations by a magistrate or attacks on women themselves, the text lists the items allegedly stolen and their value without qualitative judgements concerning the thefts and women's supposed 'mania' or 'crazed' behaviour. While the behaviour described is largely consistent with what we find in reports from the 1920s and early 1930s – with women drinking and engaging in minor criminal acts – the manner in which these are interpreted differs markedly. While previously such acts were seen as indicative of the ability of dance halls to corrupt women, transforming supposedly susceptible women into frivolous, immoral, and potentially insane delinquents through drink, dance, and flirtation – by the outbreak of war reporters, commentators and magistrates fail to criticise women for these acts. The *Dundee Evening Telegraph,* for instance, devote a mere 5 lines to a story about a women stealing a handbag from a dance hall in 1941, listing the contents that were stolen – 'money, identity card, cigarettes, powder puffs, and correspondence' – without publishing any criticism of the women in question.[476] The same paper published a report concerning a theft by a women at a dance hall six months later, similarly devoid of any criticism or implications of moral outrage.[477]

Rather than viewing dancing and dance halls as a symptom of social decay and indicative of a host of issues with modern womanhood, commentators impressed new meaning onto dance during the Second World War through presenting it as a means of unifying the country, with dancing signifying a form of collective solidarity independent of considerations of gender.

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[475] *Liverpool Echo*, 14 January 1941, p. 5
[476] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 23 July 1941, p. 3
[477] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 23 December 1941, p. 5

Much of the evidence left behind comes in the form of promotional material from the dance hall industry, even this seems to have reflected the general feeling toward dance during the war. In a 1941 edition of *Danceland,* C. L. Heimann, a major dance hall proprietor and owner of the Mecca chain, maintained that 'Never has dancing fulfilled a greater National need than it does now', adding that 'promoting the happiness of others places us in an essential war industry. We are doing "our bit"'.[478] A Mass Observation interview with an employee of a song publisher, the Peter Maurice Music Publishing Company, informs us of the link between dance music and national pride during wartime: 'Business has been good…During the war people will want the English type of song – they won't stand for jazz. A simple melody and a simple lyric will affect them. Nothing in the jazz line is selling at all'.[479] An interview with the manager of the publishing firm similarly indicates the passion individuals had for dancing during wartime: 'Everyone thought the business was finished…They thought we were mad, raving mad. Look at these figures for one store – a shop in Newcastle. They are sales for !Au Revoir! [proceeds to show the observer] …. And that's without plugs!'.[480]

The popularity of dancing during wartime can further be seen in the creation of a specific dance – named 'The Tuscana' – which was intentionally linked to the war effort. The backstory of the creation of The Tuscana was presented as inextricably linked with a boost of morale and success on the battlefield; under the headline 'They're All Doing Their Bit', a special 1941 edition of *Danceland* presents a narrative of how the dance was purportedly made when Eric Maschwitz, a former variety director of the BBC, wrote the lyrics for the dance and teamed up with a general in the Auxiliary Fire Services and C.L. Heimann, who, while a still a civilian, 'has been busy pioneering many efforts for War-Time Funds, including the remarkable

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[478] MOA, 38-6-F Danceland; replies to questionnaire in Danceland magazine, p. 4 (Image 211)
[479] MOA, 38-5-C Peter Maurice Music Publishing Company (XXXII), p. 2
[480] MOA, 38-6-F Danceland; replies to questionnaire in Danceland magazine, p. 3 (Image 210)

achievement of opening no less than 12,000 New War Savings Accounts'.[481] The publication

went on to describe how the edition was a 'special issue' which they termed a '1941 Souvenir',

'because its contents have such a war-time flavour – thirty-six pages of war-time humour

collected from our Halls'.[482] The special issue of *Danceland* not only evokes 'war-time

humour' in seeking to present dance as a means of relief from the trepidation of war, but

references the collective spirit of wartime Britain and links this to dancing, with the creation

of the new dance involving a degree of unity found only in war, with everyone 'doing their

bit'. Dancing was thus not only exceedingly popular during the second world war, but

consciously promoted as a means of boosting spirits, humour, and collectivity.

This sense of national wartime spirit expressed through dancing can similarly be found in daily

papers, which continually publish articles linking dancing with a wartime spirit and public

morale. A 1943 article in the *Northern Whig,* for instance, maintains that 'Dancing away the

black-out blues is a past-time probably more popular this year than it has been since the

beginning of the war',[483] while an advertisement taken out in the *Aberdeen Evening Express*

implored people to 'Keep your Spirits Up! Go Dancing!'.[484] Dancing as a means of maintaining

a positive wartime spirit was not only speculated to be popular, but numerous reports reflect

the widespread practise of wartime dancing. The *Daily Record* reported that war workers were

looking forward 'to a night at the dancing after a week of twelve-hour daily shifts',[485] while

the *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* reported that dances were even being held in public parks

due to lack of space in dance halls.[486] The *Staffordshire Sentinel* even quoted a Major in the

Army as asking the Prime Minister to 'not interfere' with the public 'enjoyment' of dance halls,

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[481] MOA, 38-6-F Danceland; replies to questionnaire in Danceland magazine, p. 3 (Image 210)
[482] *Danceland*, February 1941, p. 1
[483] *Northern Whig*, 02 January 1943, p. 3
[484] *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 13 May 1940, p.3
[485] *Daily Record*, 12 May 1941, p. 4
[486] *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 03 February 1940, p. 2

as, according to him, there was a 'loss of public morale resulting from the shutting down of dancing in France from the outbreak of war'.[487]

Photographic evidence of this dancing wartime spirit is difficult to come by, but a photograph from *Aberdeen Evening Express*, previously discussed in Chapter Three, gives us an indication of the type of mentality dancing came to be seen as part of.

Figure 6: Aberdeen Evening Express - Saturday 28 September 1940, p. 4

A group of men and women can be seen, arms interlinked, dancing the 'Lambeth Walk' on the street in Lambeth from which the dance derives its name. While the buildings in the background

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[487] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 07 August 1940, p. 3

have been devastated by the Blitz, transformed into piles of rubble from the bombing, the group of dancers are presented as defiant. Smiling and dancing in the jovial manner, the dancers' message is clear – despite the air raids and destruction of their city, their spirit endures.

Rather than focusing on dance as a symptom of social decay and indicative of a host of issues with modern womanhood, by the Second World War dancing was thus presented as a means of unifying the country, transformed into a de-sexualised act of national wartime spirit. The Tuscana was thus marketed in the language of wartime cooperation, with the different creators of the dance 'All Doing Their Bit', while the image in *Aberdeen Evening Express* captures how this unity first manifested itself first-hand with men and women embracing each other dancing the Lambeth Walk. References to the behaviour and etiquette of women – and the potential of dancing to act as a corrupting force – are now replaced with more positive depictions of dancing as a means of expressing a wartime spirit. Daily papers thus instructed people to 'Keep your Spirits Up! Go Dancing!', reported on the phenomenon of 'Dancing away the black-out blues', or announced that war workers were looking forward 'to a night at the dancing after a week of twelve-hour daily shifts'. While in the 1920s and early 1930s dancing was branded as harnessing the ability to drive women to insanity, to 'ruin' supposedly innocent women through drink, dance, and promiscuity, and to undermine traditional notions of courtship and family – by the outbreak of war the discourse of dance as a threat to established notions of femininity is replaced by an emphasis on dance as a signifier of a healthy, vigorous nation in the face of war.

While the dance hall represented an unrivalled location of modern women's emancipation in 1920s and 1930s Britain, and this increasing freedom and autonomy women claimed resulted in a backlash from commentators anxious at the pace of change – by the 1940s dance was no longer seen as a threat to established gender roles and was unquestionably accepted as representative of the wartime collectivity and national character. The modern 'dancing women' of the 1920s – represented as flirting, drinking, smoking and as having a mania for dancing – faded in commentators' imagination by the late 1930s, and dance was now extolled as signifying unity in the face of a common enemy. Images of dancing as leading to mental instability and a loss of morals were thus replaced by images of dancing as representing national solidity, collectivity, spirit and wartime passion. What previously would have scandalised commentators and led to accusations of female madness and insanity – such as the image of an all-women group passionately dancing the Lambeth Walk in front of a series of buildings reduced to rubble – was now seen as a boost to public morale and representative of national wartime spirit. New meanings were thus projected into dance during a period of wartime, and viewing dance as an activity which corrupted women – rendering them immoral, frivolous or insane – was replaced by a narrative free from considerations of gender.

Why did this transformation occur? While early in the inter-war period the dance hall, as we have seen, was a location where individuals could experience the era of change representative of late-modernity first hand – through the new and varied phantasmagorical sense impressions, through a 'populist' democratic design language, the fragmentation of notions of national character, and through the rise of the modern dancing woman – by the 1940s the dance hall was no longer representative of change but of continuity, and as the dance hall culture of the 1920s became unexceptional and routine, the ability of the 'dancing women' to scandalise

observers was increasingly limited. In response to a changing international situation, notions of national unity and togetherness took on a greater importance, and dance now served a different role. Rather than being a means to attack changing conventions of womanhood and gender roles, dance was now used to rally support for the war effort and maintain a sense of national unity in the face of adversity. As the shock of the new, modern 'dancing women' faded, dance was thus re-purposed from a symptom of social vice to as an expression of collectivity and solidarity.

Conclusion

The dance hall was therefore not only the site in which courtship was reconfigured around the modern experience of sensuality, phantasmagoria and notions of romantic love, where a transformation of public culture took place which included the increased democratisation of design choice, and where a fragmentation of traditional certitudes of national identity played a role in the disintegration of experience indicative of an era of modernity, but it was also the site in which the modern women claimed a newfound sense of freedom and independence – of dress, courtship, promiscuity, and pleasure – and thus represented an unrivalled location of women's emancipation in 1920s and 1930s Britain. Yet as with so many other areas of inter-war change in Britain, these transformations of women's behaviour resulted in a backlash on the part of those anxious at the pace of change. Just as we saw a middle-class backlash over an increased democratisation of dance hall design, or an anxiety concerning the globalisation of popular culture and concern about its consequences for notions of 'British' identity, the increasing freedoms women claimed in the dance hall resulted in condemnations on the part of those wishing to preserve the status quo. In this way the experience of women at the dance hall follows similar contours to other processes of change in the inter-war period. Yet as we have

seen, the ability of the dancing women to scandalise observers was confined to a specific moment defined by the rise of the modern 'dancing women'. Once the modern, independent dancing women became a routine figure at dance halls, dance was no longer criticised as immoral and corrupting, but repackaged as a positive force uniting people during wartime. The modern figure of 'dancing women' and the outrage she evoked was thus short lived, and the transformation of dance from a corrupting influence on women to a positive force representing national wartime spirit and collectivity speaks to the ability of it to be repurposed in different eras in order to serve different purposes.

Chapter Five: Dance Halls and Their Present-Day Digital Commemoration

Introduction

In the spring of 2007, the *Ilford Palais de Danse* – a local London dancehall first opened in 1925 – was torn down to make way for a block of luxury apartments. The reaction from the local community was immediate. 'History started to unravel this week' the *Ilford Recorder* tells us, presenting the reader with a photograph of the demolition site, under the headline 'Bitter end for Palais'.[488] A week later, readers wrote in with their own memories of the Palais and its significance in their lives. David Gribson wrote a letter about how the Palais was the site of an important life event: 'It was actually in the car park opposite the Palais that I first met my wife Lisa', adding that 'Both of us are upset at the news the Palais has been demolished'.[489] James Arden wrote about how he 'visited the club as a teenager, three decades after [his] parents met there in the 1960s',[490] and remarked of his 'family history there…It seems a bit strange to think of Ilford without it'.[491] Pauline Engleworth of Chadwell Heath tells us how she had 'great memories' of going to the Palais in her youth, and added that decades later her two daughters would attend events there. 'They all felt it was part of their heritage', she writes, because their parents used to go when they were the same age.[492] It is therefore no wonder why when a local councilmen heard the news, he termed the destruction of the Palais an 'end of an era',[493] or in even more stark terms, a local historian wrote 'A very significant part of Ilford's and local people's history has now gone'.[494]

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[488] *The Ilford Recorder*, 1 Mar. 2007
[489] Ibid.
[490] *The East London & West Essex Guardian*, 1 Nov. 2007
[491] Ibid.
[492] *The Ilford Recorder*, 1 Mar. 2007
[493] *The Ilford Recorder*, 28 Feb. 2002
[494] Dowling, Ian. Introduction to 'Come Dancing, Palais Saturday', 2007

The distress was not confined to the pages of newspapers. In the years that followed the Palais'

2007 destruction, an online community was formed on Facebook with the goal of

commemorating life 'growing up in the Ilford area', and the regret felt over the demise of the

Palais features heavily. 'Sad demise' writes Elissa Schornstein, commenting on a post that

gives a narrative of 'The rise & fall of Ilford Palais: From the electric premier theatre, the Palais

de dance, the palais, ilford palais, tiffanys, 5th avenue, jumpin jacks, and finaly [sic] a block

of apartments'.[495] Other comments similarly focus on feelings of regret and loss: 'Very sad!!!'

writes Vivienne Sarousi, 'Tragic' comments Muriel Cornwell, 'Ilford Palais Now 😢😢' Julie-

Anne Ward posts with an attachment of an image of a grey, concrete tower block of flats.[496]

The outpouring of emotion in online communities stretches far beyond commemoration of the

Ilford Palais, and encompasses dance halls up and down the country. On Facebook's

'Wimbledon group reborn' we find comments such as 'Loved the palais my time was very

early 50s', 'danced myself dizzy there....good days.....', 'Many good night' and 'Would never

change those days for anything' – while others comment with similar regret at the Palais'

destruction we find in Ilford: 'They definitely should not have demolished it. It should be a

listed building!', 'They should never of demolished it but that's Merton council for you', 'It is

now a kitchen showroom'.[497] On the 'Lost Glasgow' Facebook page we find further fond

memories: 'We lived for the dancing couldn't wait for the weekend', 'fab evening it was the

late 60's [at the Glasgow Locarno], I loved it', '[I went dancing] every Saturday afternoon

1960, [I] loved it', while a page commemorating London's district of Hammersmith contains

a series of posts and comments centred on positive memories of the Hammersmith Palais: 'So

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[495] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10161019769336122/. Accessed 30 May 2024.

[496] Ibid.

[497] "Wimbledon Group Reborn: Wimbledon Palais, or More Accurately Furnitureland, Merton High Street, C1979." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/344555315673862/posts/957961634333224/. Accessed 30 May 2024.

many great nights and memories', 'holds a lot of fond memories that's where i [sic] met my wife of 50 years', 'The Palais will always be in my heart'.[498] The sense of fond recollection, joyous memory, and even hint of nostalgia for these demolished structures can be seen in a comment from Theresa Deemer left in the 'Wimbledon group reborn,' where she remarks, 'loved it all! bring it back...........oh for a night of dancing!'.[499]

This chapter argues that the contemporary online commemoration of dance halls is a symptom of the experiences outlined in section one – of visual, auditory, somatic and olfactory stimulation, of anxiety over the meaning of modern womanhood, of a fragmentation of popular conceptions of national identity and Englishness – becoming so fixed in national memory that they are expressed in a variety of social media pages decades later. In this way the online commemoration of the dance hall meets not only Pierre Nora's definition of a *Lieu de Mémoire* – a 'site of memory' fixed in a collective consciousness – but it also can be conceived of as an example of Andrew's Hosking's concept of a 'digital memory ecology', with the memory themes outlined above being distributed across time, media, people and digital communicative networks.

Pierre Nora's Les Lieux de Mémoire

As discussed in the literature review, Pierre Nora conceptualises *Lieux de memoire* as outlets of 'real' memory in contemporary society, calling them 'fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls

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[498] "Hammersmith Palais - Old Skool." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/2399454237/. Accessed 3 June 2024.
[499] "Wimbledon group reborn." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/344555315673862/. Accessed 3 June 2024.

out for memory because it has abandoned it'.[500] In a contemporary age marked by the distance, mediation and academic practice of history, *Lieux de memoire* constitute outlets for the type of 'spontaneous, all actualizing' memory of *Milieux de memeoire,* 'environments of memory'.

While the original, seven-volume project located *Lieux de memoire* in structures such as the Palace of Versailles, the Museum of French Monuments, or Ernest Lavisse's *Histoire de France*, historians and scholars of memory have since applied the concept to phenomena as diverse as The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Bulgaria,[501] the Terracotta Warrior Museum in China,[502] or even Hurricane Katrina in the USA.[503] Recent research has even applied the concept to online communities and social media, with Madalena Cunha Matos locating *Lieux de memoire* in Facebook communities remembering building in Portuguese ex-colonies, Johan Lagae declaring the online commemoration of a Jewish cemetery in Lubumbashi, Congo a 'genuine digital *lieu de mémoire*', or Rachel Lee reading a Facebook group dedicated to memories of early 20th-century Bangalore as a digital *lieu de mémoire.*[504]

Memories of Dance Halls on Social Media

Do the Facebook communities where we find recollections of Britain's twentieth-century dance halls constitute a deterritorialized, digital *lieu de mémoire*, where experiences of a former era

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[500] See pp. 33-36.

[501] Todorova, Maria. "The mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as lieu de mémoire." *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 78, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 377–411, https://doi.org/10.1086/505801.

[502] Matten, Marc André. *Places of Memory in Modern China: History, Politics, and Identity*. Brill, 2014, pp. 17-51

[503] Giancarlo, Alexandra. "'I am coming home!': Lieux de mémoire and Social Memory in the Post-Katrina Ninth Ward." *Material Culture*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2020, p 60-79.

[504] Cunha Matos, Madalena, et al. "Digital Lieux de Mémoire. connecting history and remembrance through the internet." *ABE Journal*, no. 3, 2 Feb. 2013, https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.568.

are secreted, expressed and reawakened? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to investigate the manner in which dance halls are remembered.

The first indication of how dance halls are remembered on social media is from Facebook's *Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's Public Group.* Here we find Peter Murch giving members of his community a complete history of the Ilford Palais from its origin as a cinema in the 1920s to its dereliction in the 1990s and eventual destruction. Accompanied by fourteen photos, the post appears under the title 'The rise & fall of Ilford Palais', and gives a summary of the different iterations of the Palais's existence: 'From the electric premier theatre, to Palais de dance, the palais, ilford palais, tiffanys, 5th avenue, jumpin (sic) jacks, and finaly (sic) a block of apartments'.[505] The picture series begins with grainy back and white photos from sometime between 1911 to the early 1920s (when the Ilford Palais replaced the premier electric theatre), before we find an image of the Palais from the early post-war era, surrounded by local shops and distinctive designs of cars from the 1950s. By the 1960s and 70s we find an image of mods driving past the building on their distinctive Vespa scooters, before pictures of the Palais rebranded as 'Tiffany's' and '5th Avenue' in the 1980s. The last few photos in the series come from the 2000s, where we see an abandoned Palais, boarded up with plywood, before images of a tall contemporary block of flats appear, the structure made of prefab concrete, faux brick facades and concrete columns interlaced with glass panels on the ground floor.

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[505] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook* https://www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10161019769336122/ Accessed 3 June 2024

Figure 7: Photo of the Ilford Palais from the 1980s, posted on Growing up in the Ilford Area
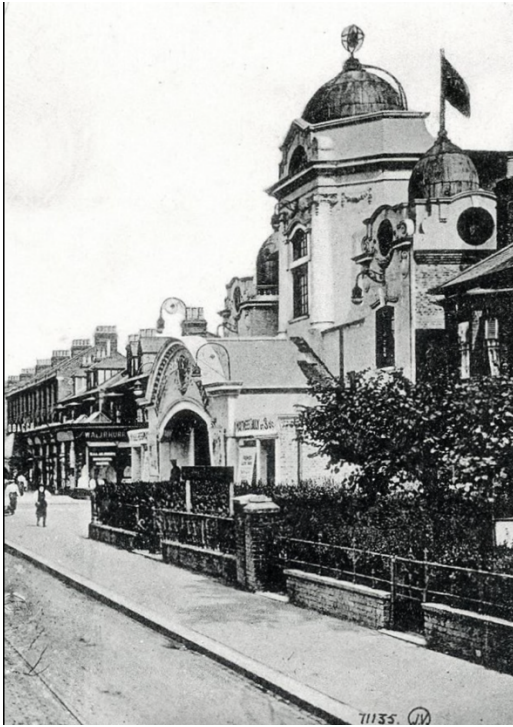
Figure 8: Photo of Ilford Palais from sometime between 1911 to the early 1920s, posted on Growing up in the Ilford Area.

Figure 9: Block of flats adjacent to where the Ilford Palais once stood

Figure 10: The tall contemporary block of flats that replaced the Ilford Palais in the 2000s

Source for Figures 7, 8, 9, 10: "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." Facebook Accessed 3 June 2023

The picture series is striking in its presentation of the Palais as a fixed 'site' for around a century, with different iterations from different eras. But while photos of the Palais in the 1910s, 1950s and 1960s/70s depict the Palais as embedded within a community – surrounded by local shops and pedestrians in the 1910s, a bustling high road in the 1950s, and large crowds

and zestful mods on scooters in the 1960s – the contemporary images convey the opposite of community life. A tall, anonymous office block emerges from a large duel-carriageway, and the high street previously marked by pedestrians lays empty, the former shops seemingly flattened to make way for a highway and overpass.[506]

The photo series thus presents the Palais as being at the centre of an entire neighbourhood's history stretching back to the beginning of the twentieth century, before presenting a rupture in this narrative. The sense of community life, excitement and revelry is gone, replaced by empty concrete spaces and an anonymous-looking block of flats.

Comments on Peter Murch's Facebook post reflect the importance the Palais held in the local community and the feeling of sadness and regret at its destruction and replacement. 'Sad demise' writes Elissa Schornstein, 'Very sad!!!' says Vivienne Sarousi, 'Tragic' comments Muriel Cornwell. Individuals ever go so far as to express their hope that the Palais can be rebuilt – with Cathy Wood writing 'If I won loads of money 💰 I would rebuild it' – or criticising the 'greed' of the developers who built the block of flats: 'greed spelled the end, property developers making money'.[507]

Feelings of loss, frustration and regret over a destruction of a dance hall can similarly be found in the Facebook community *Wimbledon group reborn,* where members commemorate the destruction of the Wimbledon Palais De Danse. 'It is now a kitchen showroom' comments Joan Fossey. Patricia Lovelock joins in the feeling of frustration: 'They definitely should not have demolished it. It should be a listed building?'. Christine Askew agrees: 'They should never of

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[506] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*. Accessed 3 June 2024.
[507] Ibid.

[sic] demolished it but that's Merton council for you, still doing it now', while Jenny Jenner agrees: 'Another good idea from Merton council, destroying another iconic piece of Merton!!'.[508]

Notions of frustration, regret and sorrow at the loss of dance halls appear in online communities up and down the country. The Facebook page *Lost Edinburgh* posts a picture of a dance hall in Edinburgh hosting a jiving competition in 1962 with the caption 'Pictures like this remind me why the Palais in Fountainbridge should be saved. Truth is it's got no chance. Set to become yet another part of lost Edinburgh'.[509] In the *Lost Glasgow* Facebook page a post commemorates the Glasgow People's Palace Museum and Winter Garden, a venue which often hosted dances, in much the same way the Ilford Palais is remembered. Two images are presented side by side, one of a palace full of well-dressed people enjoying a musical performance, the other of a derelict building, dirt and decaying foliage strewn across the floor. The accompanying text gives an indication of the importance this venue held for the local community, as well as the regret over its dereliction: 'Today, the building lies silent, with its glorious, glazed Winter Garden facing an uncertain future…The people want their Palace back.'[510]

Remorse over the national destruction of dance halls also made its way into popular culture, and these fragments of culture make their way into social media communities when dance halls are remembered. Lyrics from the 1982 song *Come Dancing* by the Kinks are continually posted

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[508] "Wimbledon Group Reborn." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/344555315673862/permalink/957961634333224/. Accessed 28 July 2019.

[509] "Lost Edinburgh." *Facebook*, 20 Mar. 2015, www.facebook.com/lostedinburgh/photos/a.271043749619982/888225457901805/?type=3. Accessed 4 June 2024

[510] "Lost Glasgow ." *Facebook*, 5 Nov. 2021, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid02mH7eDYmasaFjGUHoJL5zQ7hoD8sQ58vwRSpucArgF CsBS3yFht3iKBMKBRd8KVCNl. Accessed 4 June 2024

on the Facebook communities in question, and encapsulate not only the deep sense of sadness at the demolition of dance halls, but the importance people placed in these buildings as centres of local community over many decades:

They put a parking lot on a piece of land
When the supermarket used to stand
Before that they put up a bowling alley
On the site that used to be the local pally

The day they knocked down the pally
My sister stood and cried
The day they knocked down the pally
Part of my childhood died, just died

- *Come Dancing* (1982) by the Kinks

In reverse chronological order, the song delineates a decline that chimes with notions of anonymity and loss of community outlined above. The decline of the Palais is depicted in distinct stages, each less personal than the last. The dance hall is transformed into a bowling ally before it becomes a supermarket, with the building finally being flattened to make way for a car park, a process not dissimilar to the fate of the Ilford Palais. Community life, excitement and revelry are replaced by an anonymous space, devoid of any social references or meaning for a wider community. Indeed, the sequential transition from dance hall to car park contains gradations of loss of social meaning: a location home to the type of sensual and romantic experiences outlined in Chapter One is replaced by an institution home to the more individualistic action of rolling a polyurethane ball down a track of wooden boards.   A supermarket – a location with even less social interaction and marked by even less social meaning and significance for a community – is ultimately replaced by a universal symbol of bleakness and anonymity in the form of a parking lot.

The notion of a physical location, a specific 'site' in which the dance hall existed as having an importance that transcends time and appearance is evident in *Come Dancing's* lyrics. After the destruction of the Palais, the lyrics refer to the 'piece of land' on which it once stood and present the subsequent buildings as being constructed 'on the site' where the dance hall once existed. In this way the significance of the dance hall is presented as entrenched within a certain social community and neighbourhood, with memories of its existence persisting long after the destruction of the physical building.

Remembering the dance hall as inextricably tied to a certain location or 'site' can also be found across other contemporary online communities. In *Growing up in the Ilford Area* Debbie Brian recalls how she used go to the dance hall for 'a drink and dance' because of the proximity to her home: 'I lived literally round the corner in Pyrmont road'. Similarly, Kate O'Donovan comments with enthusiasm that the Palais was 'Just round the corner to where I live!', while Jayne England remembers how she and her friends 'used to go to Lyons Cafe first to do our makeup and hitch our skirts up'. The remembrance of the Palais as being surrounded by, and an integral part of, the local neighbourhood is further evidenced by the memories of Ian O'Conner, who uses the Palais as a sort of place-marker in his recollection of the wider neighbourhood, asking 'How far down the road [from the Palais] was the swimming bath?'. Here individuals' aid their recollection of the Palais by visually placing it in a certain locus. For Ian O'Conner, the Palais is inseparable from what surrounded it, being part of a wider physical world. Similarly, for Kate O'Donovan and Debbie Brian, the Palais sparks the recollection of what was near it, a former home in Pyrmont Road or a café where one would meet friends.

The dance hall, then, was not only seen as a centre of community over generations, a fundamental part of the social fabric whose meaning was tied to a particular physical location, but it was a building whose physical surroundings, the space in which it was situated, informed its status as a 'site' of memory.

Mnemonic Online Communities as a 'Site of Memory'

The notion that an object's physical surroundings making it a 'memory place' – a significant location where a culture's collective memory is located and expressed – is a central concept in Pierre Nora's *Les Lieu de memoire*. For Nora these 'sites' of memory are indicative of a modern age of 'reconstructed history', where the 'intellectual and secular production' marked by 'distance' and 'mediation' have suppressed instinctual memory, draining it of its 'true', 'primitive', and 'ancestral' qualities and resulting in age where academic detachment, and 'analysis and criticism' reigns supreme.

For Nora, these modern 'sites' of memory are an expression of pre-modern *Milieux de memoire,* 'environments of memory', characterized as 'remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition…in the repetition of the ancestral', and the location of 'real memory' is said to originate.

Central to the idea of *Lieux de memoire* is that memories are connected to and expressed from certain physical locations. Nora himself reveals, in the preface to the English language edition of *Lieux de memoire* from 1996, that he actually took the phrase 'sites of memory' from Frances Yates's influential 1966 book *The Art of Memory,* which delineates how the classical 'art' of remembering information (mnemonic techniques) was based around *loci memoraie* or

'memory places'.[511] Yates demonstrates how the art of memory, in its classical form which was then passed down to medieval and resistance thinkers, involved using these *loci memoraie* where individuals 'place' a memory within an imaginative image.

The way the dance hall was remembered – with an emphasis on location and individuals visually placing it in a certain locus – gives credence to the idea these mnemonic online communities represent a 'site of memory'. Not only do individuals specifically link the dance hall to a certain physical location or 'site' – visually placing it in a certain *locus* or using it as a place-marker in their recollection of the wider neighbourhood – but even memories of the interior of the dance halls make use of space in the memory process. When John Boulder posts photographs of the interior of the Ilford Palais in *Growing up in the Ilford Area,* he finds it helpful to remind viewers *where* these photos were taken from, telling them these were shot from 'the coffee bar upstairs' or 'the upstairs balcony'.[512] Tina Cindy's memories of the interior of the Palais, similarly, are centred on *loci* throughout the Palais: 'I used to walk all over the place, from downstairs to the upper part, hoping to meet people' and also commenting that she 'liked to sit upstairs and look down into the dance floor'.[513] These *loci* are not only used to remember general memories of walking around the Palais, but for Steve Wells, they help spark significant personal reflections concerning personal growth: he writes, capitalising 'Balcony', 'I did a lot of learning and growing up as a 16 year old on that Balcony'.[514]

Individuals therefore not only use the Palais's physical location to remember the wider locality – and conceive of it as inextricably tied to certain location or 'site' from which memories stem

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[511] Nora, 'Preface to the English-Language Edition', p. xv.
[512] *Ibid*, "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, 28 Oct. 2018, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/permalink/10157025878746122/. Accessed 28 July 2019.
[513] *Ibid*, "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, 4 Mar. 2019, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/permalink/10157367991186122/. Accessed 28 July 2019.
[514] *Ibid*.

– but in recalling the interior of the building, people make use of various *loci* to recall specific memories. For John Boulder, Tina Cindy, and Steve Wells, memories of the interior of the Palais also make use of certain *loci* which spark memories of a balcony, coffee bar, or dancefloor – or indeed more personal memories of what these sites meant for them: growing up as a teenager and learning about the world. It is not the tangible object itself – the balcony, coffee car or dancefloor – which results in its significance, but the object gains its meaning through it being situated in a specific location – surrounded by other markers of the former community.

The online commemoration of dance halls, then, can be considered a *lieu de memoire* through both an emphasis on location and individuals visually placing the building in a certain *locus* in their recollections, as well as how specific objects within the dance hall's interior are remembered within their spatial context. But if the online commemoration of the dance hall can be considered a *lieu de memoire* – a site where 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself' from a former age of lived experience and 'environments of memory' – what memories do people recall beyond generalized notions of nostalgia? The experiences of modernity outlined in section one – multi-sensual visual, auditory, somatic and olfactory stimulation leading to an experience of phantasmagoria, of modern 'atmospheric' notions of architectural criticism and design, and anxiety over the meaning of modern womanhood – all make their way onto contemporary social media networks, with the communities forming a *lieu de memoire* in which these recollections can be expressed and given meaning.

If the commemoration of the dance hall on social media can be considered a *lieu de memoire,* we might ask about the specific form this 'site of memory' takes. Do the dance hall memories found on social media – reproduced through a site of memory – form a dynamic conception of

memory, memory ecology or 'travelling' memory in the vein of Astrid Erll? And if they do, how does this dynamic conception of memory align with or deviate from the lived experience of dance halls in the inter-war era?

The Reproduction of Dance Hall Lived Experience on Social Media

To help us answer these questions, it is useful to return to Astrid Erll and Andrew Hosking's conception of memory. Astrid Erll, as we recall, conceived of memory as 'travelling', viewing it as transportable, connective, discursive, and dialogical, in a constant state of flux between different eras and technologies. Harnessing the ability to travel between 'time and technologies', across different media, individuals, and practices, and transporting 'information from one medium to the next',[515] memory was thus conceived as connecting individuals in different eras and technological worlds.

This dynamic conception of memory, we recall, was picked up by Andrew Hoskins in applying it to digital communicative networks, seeking an 'ecological' approach that would encompass the distributed nature of memory in the digital age. For Hoskins, memory was thus seen as emerging through a series of interactions between individuals and everyday digital media, and digital communicative networks contained the ability to give the archive new potential, liberating it from its former 'inherently spatial and to some extent institutional constraints', transforming it into a dynamic de-spatialised body marked by the 'fluidity, reproducibility, and transferability of digital data'.[516]

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[515] Nora, Pierre. 'Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Memoire', p. 13.
[516] Hoskins, Andrew. 'The Mediatization of Memory', in *Mediatization of Communication*. De Gruyter, 2014, p. 671

The lived experience of modernity in dance hall memories – encompassing the multi-sensual, phantasmagorical experience that fostered changing conceptions of romance, conceptions of atmospheric architectural design and value-judgements in terms of taste, ideas of women's emancipation – along with criticism of her rationality and immorality – can indeed be found to be reproduced on contemporary social media networks.

The Multi-Sensual Dance Hall Experience

One of the areas where it is most apparent how memories of the inter-war dance hall reappear on social media is the multi-sensual, phantasmagorical experience that, I argued, played a central role in reshaping conceptions of and expectations from romantic relationships and courtship during the inter-war years.

Just as we find inter-war accounts from Mass Observation presenting the dance hall as defined by the integrated experience of an array of sense impressions – movement, sound, illumination and bodily sensations – narratives of this experience reappear on present-day social media communities. In the Facebook group *EAST END of LONDON and EAST LONDON - History & Memories,* Barry O'Connell responds to a post about the Ilford Palais by recalling the sense of movement, illumination and bodily sensations that came to define the inter-war dance hall:

> The last dance was dead slow, silver ball twirling the same record played every time at the end, smoke gets in your eyes by the awesome Platters.
>
> God the magic of this place, your mates egging you on when you saw a girl you liked. Then that dreaded moment going to her table full of her mates all giggling nudging each as you asked do you fancy a dance, boy the laughter got huge when you come back, shot down again. Most fellers disappear into the gents than hear Mickey taking. What was worst was she then saying ok all right what ever, then as you turn round she never followed you, again laughter rung out.[517]

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[517] "EAST END of LONDON and EAST LONDON - History & Memories." *Facebook*, 25 Apr. 2018, www.facebook.com/groups/551874308225394/posts/1719612284784918/. Accessed 28 July 2019.

The rhetorical merging of an array of sense impressions – a 'dead slow' dance, a 'twirling' silver ball, smoke stinging the eyes, laughter 'ringing', bodies pressed against one another, nudging, giggling, laughing and dancing – recalls the profound multi-sensory environment of the inter-war dance hall where the 'throbbing' music of a band, 'waft[ing]' feeling of hot air, or the 'glow[ing]', luminous quality of the dance hall interior merge to produce a unique environment defined by romance, mystery, intrigue and thrill. Indeed, while the inter-war dance hall was defined by a phantasmagorical multi-sensory experience that fostered an escapist, romantic environment, we see this sense of 'dreamworld' atmosphere recalled in Barry O'Connell post, exclaiming 'God the magic of this place'.

The sense of the dance hall defined by a magical, multisensory dreamworld can further be seen in social media recollections of illumination at the dance hall. The unnamed administrator of the *Lost Glasgow* Facebook page provides us with an extended account of how light was conceived in remembering the dance hall:

> There's always something entrancing about the falling of the light in Glasgow, that magic hour when the sun disappears and the street and shoplights come on, casting pools of light across the cracked and pockmarked pavements. […] This picture, taken on Saturday October 17 1953, captures that magic hour perfectly; the time when, with the day's shopping done, thoughts turn to a teatime pint with pals, a fish tea, the tram home, or a night at the pictures, or up the dancin'. […] Closer, and on the left hand side of Hope Street, we can just glimpse the neon lights of the New Savoy Cinema (the former Savoy Theatre), which, in 1958, would become the Majestic Ballroom; known to generations of Glasgow groovers as 'the Magic Stick'. […] If all that musing has given you a dose of 'Saturday Night Fever', get off your bahookie, get your gladrags on, and get up the town.[518]

Just as light was conceived as at the centre of a phantasmagorical dancing environment in the inter-war era – 'rippling across the heads of the dancers', varying in intensity and levels of illumination, and evoking emotional and affective reactions in dancers by taking them into a

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[518] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, 13 Jan. 2018, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid032HHtpuZqT4ADBf37RerKHNEvHy57ojhknsDJanbkMyr HyxhKZfu6zLw1gge5Gyaxl. Accessed 28 July 2019.

world marked by romance, desire, and escape [519] – the administrator of the *Lost Glasgow* group imbues light with qualities of 'magic[al]' movement and performance: presenting it as 'falling', 'disappearing' and 'casting', with the transition from natural to artificial light being repeatedly termed a 'magic hour'. It is in this context that the narrator is drawn to the dance hall, glimpsing its neon lights, recalling how it was known as 'the Magic Stick', and imploring the reader to join them in a dance.

Memories of illumination at the dance hall can be found throughout the Facebook communities, often centred around recollections of a prominent, spherical silver glitter-ball which hung over the dancefloor. When members of the *Growing up in the Ilford Area* ask individuals to comment with their favourite memory of the Ilford Palais, Dave Smith responds 'mines the glitter ball above the dance floor'.[520] In *Lost Glasgow Group,* Cathy Reynolds asked 'Did the palais have huge Glitterball like I remember?'.[521] *Hammersmith Palais - Old Skool* even features a post by Rita Fleming with a full size image of a glitterball under the headline 'I think everyone will remember the glitterball... all that romance!'.[522]

Memories of the unique, 'roman[tic]' atmosphere created by glitterballs are complemented recollections of other types of illumination, often on the exterior of dance halls. We are told of the 'fizzing Neon' from the Glasgow's Albert Ballroom in 1960 or the 'high maintenance'

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[519] See Chapter One

[520] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/. Accessed 3 June 2024.

[521] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, 20 Mar. 2015, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid02otGA23KfjhfEvhuSqoNwpVkN1V5apygYLXWpALdM2RumKZj5R9MbwotwBbcBiVTfl. Accessed 28 July 2019.

[522] "Hammersmith Palais - Old Skool." *Facebook*, 19 Feb. 2021, www.facebook.com/groups/hammersmithpalaisoldskool/permalink/10159233084619238/. Accessed 24 February 2021.

neon signage outside the same building.[523] In *Lost Glasgow,* the administrator posts an image of the exterior of the Glasgow Locarno, purportedly from 1938, under the headline 'Bright lights, big city..': 'It's 1938, and the neon-lit canopy of Sauchiehall Street's Locarno Ballroom has attracted Glasgow's dance-mad youngsters like moths to a flame'.[524]

It is not only, then, the refraction and movement of light from glitter balls that is remembered on social media as producing an atmosphere conducive to romance, or the 'fizzing Neon' that is conceived as producing a sense of excitement and thrill central to the dance hall experience, but the dance hall itself is remembered as at the centre of an environment defined by enchantment, magnetism and fantasy propelled by illumination. This sense of magnetism and fantasy is not only seen in the terms used in remembering dance hall experiences – with individuals exclaiming 'God the magic of this place' or recalling how a certain dance hall was known as 'the Magic Stick', but it is the quality of light itself that's remembered as central in producing this dreamworld atmosphere, creating a 'magic hour' for the dance hall, or being imbued with qualities of movement and independent action beyond mere illumination, 'falling', 'disappearing' 'casting', or 'fizzing'.

Other, more tactile sensations are also remembered on social media as being key to the dance hall experience. When individuals are presented with numerous photographs of their local dance halls on Facebook, a recurring theme that arises is the unique sensation provided by sprung wooden dance floors. 'That sprung, Canadian maple floor was one of the best in

[523] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*,
www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid033usquv6e6LDxvcet9UD6n2rEWGw74fgqUTtvCA13JisiP
PxCLsRAcXhhgQfjHWtXl. Accessed 3 June 2024.
[524] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, 1 Oct. 2017,
www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/photos/a.265323076912889/1288151027963417?type=3. Accessed 28
July 2019.

Glasgow, adding more torque to your twist, more bounce to your boogie, and more magic to your moves', writes the administrator of *Lost Glasgow*.[525] John Barringer from *Wimbledon Group Reborn* recalls 'the Bob Barter Big Band, the sprung floor'[526], while others react to images of dance halls with short one-liners summarising their experience of moving on a flexible floor, commenting, 'Sprung floor' or 'Sprang dance floor'. The connection of sprung dance floors to movement and physical sensations can further be seen Celia Prescott's response to Tracy Kew's comment in *Wimbledon Group Reborn,* writing 'Your Dad was right about the sprung floor Tracey, it was really terrific for moving',[527] while Eddie Westfield's recollection of the dance floor connects it to such experience of movement that he even recalls a supposed game that was played consisting of moving in motion with the dance floor: 'Remember the Madison Barbara when it seemed that the game was to see how much the line could make the sprung floor move up and down?'

Notions of movement, physicality and bodily expression are also connected to the dreamworld atmosphere we find above. When Margaret Letham responds to a post about dancing in *Lost Glasgow,* she not only comments on the pleasures of the dance floor and the process of dancing itself, but recalls a sense of fantasy, imagination and illusion that came to define dance halls: 'it was a fantasic [sic] dance floor and if you got a good dancer you were in seventh heaven'.[528] Likewise, when Moya Sube responds to an image of a dance hall, she recalls not only the excitement of seeing her parents 'swirl[ing]' around the living room to 'big band music', but recalls the profound somatic sensations this 'dreamworld' quality of dancing provoked: 'To

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[525] "Lost Glasgow ." *Facebook*, 7 June 2018, www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1189679401143914&set=a.265323076912889. Accessed 28 July 2019.

[526] "Lost Glasgow ." Facebook, www.facebook.com/groups/344555315673862/posts/1450625548400161. Accessed 4 June 2024.

[527] "Wimbledon Group Reborn: Wimbledon Palais, or More Accurately Furnitureland, Merton High Street, C1979." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/344555315673862/posts/957961634333224/. Accessed 28 July 2019.

[528] "Lost Glasgow ." *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064367814846/

this day my heart skips beats and my inner self swirls up in a dream world of big band music and sings from the 40's'.[529]

Sensations of light and physical movement are remembered in conjunction with other sensations at the dance hall, such as smell. Susan Edwards, when describing her memories of the Ilford Palais in *Growing up in the Ilford Area,* focuses on the sense of smell the environment gave rise to, '[I] used to love the smell of Brut as you walked in'.[530] When discussing The Albert Ballroom, a prominent dance hall of 1960s Glasgow, the administrator of *Lost Glasgow* attempts to engage the audience by appealing to their memories of the dance hall smell: 'Anyone else catch the whiff of Bel-Air hairspray, Old Spice, Lifebuoy soap, and disappointment?'[531] – or when discussing their time as a child, the administrator recalls the smell of their parents before they went to the dance hall: 'They'd both vanish into their bedroom and the bathroom, before emerging, resplendent in their good duds, smelling wonderful, and give us a twirl before vanishing into the night'.[532]

Smell and aroma are even combined with other sensual elements in the environment, such as temperature. When the administrator of *Lost Glasgow* recollects the Glasgow People's Palace, a location continuously used for dances throughout its century of existence, they mention

[529] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*,
www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid0Pavey6J38wBdSrrugohGG5shewuJPzu9vCzMhjNGriUwe
Hx2bAcaYRpRF39Qq6nel. Accessed 8 June 2023.
[530] Growing up in the Ilford area (Redbridge, Gants Hill etc) in the 60/70's "*Facebook*
https://www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10157258933881122/ Accessed 28 July 2019
[531] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, 9 Jan. 2021,
www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid0ytH8S6u5RPHJ2di1ZEjxdgZmywMbkkogUYsZyBgyP594
H6tTS7o8kA9nmGrJXK8Jl. Accessed 6 June 2022.
[532] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, 23 Sept. 2017,
www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid02SveNtceVjZMGmjbDE8Bd9VZbJGkTkLv7ff4LHNQgo
HNN9BSPxX9UDUFviNYPVTQil. Accessed 28 July 2019

temperature, smell and humidity in a single sentence, describing 'the gloriously warm and humid Winter Garden, with that wonderful loamy aroma of warm earth, and tropical plants'.[533]

Smell, then, is not remembered as a discrete sensual element, but just as it was experienced in the inter-war years – being part of an environment defined by an amalgamation of visual, auditory, sonic and somatic sensations – it is conceived of as part of a wider sensual environment, with the smell of the building being presented in the same breadth as its temperature or humidity.

The multi-sensory nature of the dance hall is thus a key theme that is reproduced on social media networks, and not only are the unique experiences of light, movement, smell and temperature recalled on digital communicative networks, but the inter-war experience of fully integrated and combined sensations remerges. Indeed, even the sense of phantasmagoria – with sensations combing to produce romantic dreamworlds defined by mystery, thrill, excitement and magic – are reproduced in social media recollections, with the illumination outside the Glasgow dance hall creating a 'magic hour', the elasticity and subtleness of floors producing a 'seventh heaven', and the sound of music and sounds emanating from a dance band producing a 'dream world'.

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[533] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, 22 Jan. 2023, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid02iZJnwATT4LzNjQh2pfXYEVx74PCwB2nHX4Kmr7n94 s8HxPY5LYgD8HCcN4Wwp5ssl. Accessed 8 June 2023.

Dance Hall Design

Not only do we find the multi-sensory environment of the inter-war dance recalled on social media networks, but the commentary on the design of dance halls is also reproduced. As we recall from Chapter Two, the 'populist palatial' design of interwar dance halls – incorporating new atmospheric principles curated by an array of local businessmen, dance hall managers, craftsmen and handymen – was received critically by an army of Mass Observers interpreting it as a threat to their position as the purveyors of good taste. In receiving this 'populist' architectural style, the observers thus used every rhetorical tool available to them to discredit the design choices made in these dance halls, often focusing on the 'mood' these design choices created. The atmosphere at the Streatham Locarno is deemed 'ruined by hanging lanterns and vulgar red lamps' while the lino surrounding a carpet is said to be 'cheap and nasty'. When discussing a dance hall in Tottenham, another observer argues there is 'little attempt to give "tone" to the place', while a third questions the lack of 'animated signs to attract the eye' to improve the atmosphere generated by a dance hall exterior.

When recollecting memories of dance halls on social media, individuals use the same taste-based value judgements centred around notions of atmosphere that we find in Mass Observers. One of the most prolific commentators in *Growing up in the Ilford Area,* Tim Carpenter, reacts to an image of the high-rise building where the Ilford Palais once stood with subjective comments relating to the feeling the transformed site gives off: 'The whole "design" was a failure even before they started. Anti-human, bleak, brutal'. Other comments focus on the 'horrible', 'awful', 'grim', 'terrible', or 'ugly' look of the current building, while yet more comment on the atmosphere the current building produces, writing that the building 'looks out of place' or is a 'monstrosity'.

Taste-based judgements of the current state of dance halls appear throughout the evidence. In *Lost Glasgow* Catherine Black, upon seeing an image of the 'People's Palace' in a derelict condition, expresses her view that 'it is time to stand up and complain about the ruin and destruction of an absolute beauty', while Jenny Jenner expresses regret in *Wimbledon group reborn* that 'an iconic piece of Merton' has been destroyed. Fin Swanston, in *Lost Glasow*, even goes so far as to declare the current state of the People's Palace as 'cultural vandalism': 'There should be criminal charges for this act of cultural vandalism'. Others in the Facebook community agree, with George Chalmers writing that it is 'a disgrace this treasure has been left in this state', and Anna M Cairns commenting 'This is horrendous such a beautiful place too'.

Not only is the language reproduced – with criticism of design in terms of atmosphere and mood – but by placing these comments in the context of the architectural design decisions of dance halls in their heyday, we can gain insight into the connection between the experience of the inter-war dance hall and its remembrance on social media. As we recall from Chapter Two, the atmospheric design principles found in the inter-war dance hall were the product of a multitude of decisions, negotiations and implementations made by an array of local managers, tradespeople, and their subordinates. In this way, the dance hall represented a 'populist' democratization of culture not only in architectural style but in the process of construction, design and curation. When members of the online groups – individuals from the same communities that dance halls were an integral part of and whose relatives likely went to the dancehall in its heyday – encounter images of dance halls destroyed, abandoned and transformed into high-rise apartment buildings, the condemnation is thus couched in the language of aesthetics, mood and ambiance: 'Anti-human, bleak, brutal', 'act of cultural vandalism' or 'monstrosity', 'eyesore' and 'out of place'. While architecture of the inter-war dance hall was a location defined by 'atmospherics' – containing an eclectic mix of

architectural forms whose purpose was to produce a unique ambience defined by escapism, luxury and romance – the reaction of individuals in online communities similarly focus on the atmosphere these contemporary sites produce, expressing opinions about the 'bleak', 'anti-human', 'ugly' and 'sad' environment they create.

The 'Dancing Women'

This reproduction of language between the inter-war dance hall and commemoration of dance halls on social media is further seen in narratives about the 'dancing women'. During the 1920s and 1930s, as we recall from Chapter Four, women at dance halls were routinely criticized by the popular press as being superficial, immoral, and even driven to insanity by dancing. Comments derided 'frivolous, scantily clad, jazzing flappers, irresponsible and undisciplined', called dancing a 'poisonous and dangerous', presented women at the dance hall as sexually loose and undermining traditional notions of courtship, and even castigated the dance hall as driving women to insanity and delinquency. The dance hall was not only presented as harnessing the potential to 'ruin' supposedly innocent women through the immoral 'temptations' of drink, dance, and sexual promiscuity, but it was presented as being home to the 'dancing mad' women, a figure who would steal, lie, cheat and lose their job in pursuit of a love of dancing. Women being 'dancing mad', 'dance hall mad', or having a 'Madness For Dancing' was thus a common portrayal, and the resulting reprimands women received were couched in the language of gender hierarchy, with women being presented as 'helplessly drunk' or in need of a 'grave note of warning'.

This language used by the popular press to criticize women as immoral or insane we find reappearing in social media communities. Angela Gallon, sharing her memories in *Growing up in the Ilford area*, posts: 'My dad would not let me go to the Ilford Palais, he said good girls

did not go to places like that. So I never went. Any others banned by their parents from going there?'[534] Hilary Green responds: 'Ditto....our business was across the street and I was told that I was NOT allowed to go...confession, I sneaked in there once and was terrified that I would see someone who would tell my parents!'[535] Sue Taylor shares the memories of attending the dance hall despite a parental ban: 'I have to admit it, I was also banned from going to the Palais, but I still went regularly', while Elaine Gershon comments 'I was banned too!'.

We can see, therefore, both themes – a mixture of female emancipation and male control – reappearing in women's recollections in social media networks. The inter-war dance hall was home to a contradictory mix of emancipation and male control – being a centre of female empowerment through movement, a location where women could explore their newfound identities in the era of the 'flapper', and a location of women's empowerment and freedom in challenging existing gender norms, taking the initiative in approaching men – while containing elements of male sexualized hostility, castigated as undermining traditional notions of courtship and genders roles, being seen as a location of immorality, 'ruining' young women and leading them to acts of 'madness', criminality, and delinquency. [536]

The notion that young women of upstanding morals – so-called 'good girls' – could be 'ruined' at the dance hall is thus integrated with ideas of male authority and control, with women banned by their fathers from going to the dance hall and having to circumvent this authority to attend dances. While the inter-war papers presented the dance hall as harnessing the power to 'ruin' women of good morals, the language reappears in women's recollections on social media, repeating phrases that were seemingly used by their families when discussing dance halls. Yet

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[534] "Growing Up in the Ilford Area" *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10151388892786122/. Accessed 5 February 2023.
[535] Ibid.
[536] See Chapter Four.

as we see with women in the inter-war era, attempts of male control were often fruitless at limiting women's ability to enjoy the dance hall. While women were banned by male authorly figures from attending dances, these attempts – just as we find in the inter-war era – were fruitless. While women were 'banned from going to the Palais', they often defied attempts of male control, sneaking into dance halls and experiencing the enjoyment of dancing despite attempts of male dominance.

Notions of dance halls driving women to 'madness' also reappear on social media networks. Just as the inter-war popular press castigated dance halls as driving women 'dancing mad', being overexcited and uncontrollable, individuals on social media use the same language when describing their families' or friends' love of dancing. When Julie Brittian recalls her mother's keenness for the local dance hall in *Lost Glasgow*, she describes how her mother 'always talked about The Locarno. She was dancing mad'.[537] Indeed, when the administrator of the group describes the scene of countless young people surrounding the exterior of a dance hall, they present the magnetism and luminosity of the dance hall as attracting 'dance-mad youngsters like moths to a flame'.[538]

While the direct connotations of the term 'dance-mad' or 'dancing mad' may vary between the inter-war era and the present day, and its associations with mental illness, delinquency and insanity might not be present, we find a term that is still used to convey a sense of spontaneous energy, uncontrollability, and excitability that verges on the edge of what might be the social norm. The anthropomorphic image of 'dance-mad youngsters' being compared to moths around a flame heightens the sense of irrationality, spontaneity and intractability – beyond

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[537] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid033jiqcmpuGoC29ACTDkKmDKn34v8c6umtPk8DRfDNC DJDjMwHEGAio6mLfl1RxB59l. Accessed 28 July 2019
[538] Ibid.

influence or control. Indeed, it is telling that the reproduction of the term 'dance-mad' is found in the same berth as images of airborne life, recalling the commentary we find in newspapers during the inter-war era that presented women as uncontrollable airborne creatures prone to be led astray by the dance hall. Indeed, the phrase used on present day social media – with a mother 'always talk[ing] about The Locarno. She was dancing mad' – suggests a sense of irrational excitement and uncontrollability in speaking about the dance hall far beyond what might be the social norm.

Not only, then, is the narrative of the dance hall being at the centre of a sensuous dreamworld of movement, physicality and bodily expression reproduced from contemporary accounts from Mass Observation, but we find the same architectural taste-based value judgements and notions of female immorality and irrationality reappearing, originating in so-called the conventional sources of Mass Observation and the popular press, before being reproduced on contemporary social media networks.

Dance Hall Memories and 'Digital Memory Ecologies'

What does the reproduction of these narratives say about notions of memory outlined by Astrid Erll and Andrew Hoskings? Erll and Hoskings see memory as traveling between different media and temporalities – much in the same way Pierre Nora conceived of *lieux de memoire* expressing historical lived experience in contemporary 'sites of memory'– and for the numerous researchers who later applied this conception of memory to contemporary political and cultural contexts, they were seen as useful concepts for understanding how digital memory ecologies on social media could reproduce or challenge official, state, or institutionally sanctioned narratives. Yi Wang's study of Han-centric mnemonic practices on the Chinese internet, for example, suggests that a 'mnemonic movement' online highlights how

participatory websites can effectively cultivate counter-memories that challenge the Chinese state's 'official' narrative.[539] Birkner and Donk argued that the Facebook debate over renaming a Münster square named after Paul von Hindenburg functioned as a counter-public, playing 'a decisive role as counter-public sphere against hegemonic mainstream media and politics', reframing Hindenburg's connection to the Nazi regime.[540] Shanti Sumartojo examined the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's 2015 live-tweeting of a first-person account of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli, arguing that despite adopting a modern digital platform, the initiative ultimately upheld traditional, state-endorsed narratives about Anzac and its significance for Australian identity.[541]

While Mass Observation and the national popular press do not constitute state or 'official' sources, they reflect the motivations, attitudes and perspectives of those in positions of social and cultural power. Mass Observation, as we have seen, was composed of a largely white, male, middle-class and educated social stratum in the inter-war era,[542] while the popular press in Britain – famously owned by 'press barons' such as Lord Beaverbrook (*Daily Express*), Lord Rothermere (*Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*), and Lord Camrose (*Daily Telegraph*) – was a mouthpiece for the reactionary, socially conservative, middle-class opinions of what later came to be known colloquially as 'the Establishment'.[543] The reproduction of themes from the interwar era can therefore be seen not only as a process of 'travelling' memory between the conventional, institutionally sanctioned and establishment sources of the inter-war and digital memory ecologies – with notions of sensuality, architectural taste judgments and conceptions

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[539] Wang, Yi. "Contesting the past on the Chinese internet: Han-centrism and mnemonic practices." *Memory Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 19 Sept. 2019, pp. 304–317.

[540] Birkner, Thomas, and André Donk. "Collective memory and social media: Fostering a new historical consciousness in the digital age?" *Memory Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, 9 Jan. 2018, pp. 367–383.

[541] Sumartojo, Shanti. "Tweeting from the past: Commemorating the anzac centenary @abcnews1915." *Memory Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, 28 May 2017, p. 8.

[542] Page 101 above.

[543] Middleton, Stuart. "The concept of 'The establishment' and the transformation of political argument in Britain since 1945." *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 60, no. 2, Apr. 2021, p. 262

of female impropriety reappearing – but we can see how these narratives 'travel' between different classes, originating in the printed texts of Mass Observers or newspapers in the inter-war era and becoming common parlance in the digital recollections of dance halls.

The Repurposing of Themes in Dance Hall Digital Memory Ecologies

Not only, however, do digital memory ecologies *reproduce* narratives from the interwar era, but in remembering the dance hall on social media, they *repurpose* themes in response to contemporary social pressures. While we find interwar themes of sensuality, architectural conceptions and ideas of womanhood reproduced on social media, identity – a prominent theme in the inter-war reception of dance culture – similarly reappears in social media dance hall recollections, albeit transformed in response to contemporaneous social and economic changes.

Identity, as outlined in Chapter Three, played a significant role in conceptions of dancing and the dance hall experience in the interwar era. While the Lambeth Walk was alternately interpreted as a 'primitive' tribal dance, a signifier of moral decline, or even a manifestation of a growing revolutionary consciousness, English identity was a central element to how the dance was interpreted.[544] This sense of English nationalism was not only centred around the dance being seen as an authentic expression of a cockney working-class ethic, embodying the defining characterises of cockney culture, but it was also seen in conceptions of the dance that presented it as a time-old primordial tradition, and an expression of a uniquely English national identity dating from a bygone era.[545]

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[544] See pp. 148-56
[545] Ibid

While notions of identity are similarly found in contemporary social media networks, the focus is markedly shifted from national to local. When Laraine Hollingtonn posts an image of the Ilford Palais in *Growing up in the Ilford Area,* her accompanying text focuses on the entire chronological progression of the Ilford Palais through different eras, while also linking the building to a sense of family:

> The Palais has changed names and owners a few times - from the Palais to Tiffany's , back to the Palais in 1978 after the £250,000 face lift , then Fifth Avenue (1991) , to Venue in the late 1990s and finally Jumping Jacks in 2002 before being demolished in 2007, making way for residential tower blocks . A very significant part of Ilford's local history may be gone, but many local people may be thankful that their parents and grandparents met on that dance floor.[546]

A similar emphasis on location or the 'site' on which a dance hall was located can be found in *wimbledon group reborn,* where Teresa Anne posts a photo of 'Furnitureland' in the 1980s with the caption:

> The old home of the 'Wimbledon Palais' on the corner of Abbey Road and Merton High street. Believed to have been a barrage balloon factory during WW1 and a roller skating rink. It was a very popular dance venue for many years eventually becoming a Bingo hall and finally a branch of Furnitureland. Now demolished.[547]

The Palais is thus conceived as an institution that transcends its outward physical manifestations, as having a meaning beyond its various physical iterations in different eras. When we find Teresa Anne posting an image of a 1980s branch of a popular home furnishing store, the meaning of the location is revealed when she refers to the location as 'The old home of the "Wimbledon Palais"' before giving a complete overview of the site that spans different iterations and eras: a barrage balloon factory, roller skating rink, bingo hall and furniture store. Laraine Hollingtonn, meanwhile, lists the different names the building acquired, from 'the

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[546] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10155107475361122/. Accessed 28 July 2019.
[547] "Wimbledon Group Reborn: The Old Home of the 'Wimbledon Palais' on the Corner of Abbey Road and Merton High Street." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/344555315673862/posts/2113225522140157/. Accessed 28 July 2019

Palais' to 'Tiffany's' to 'Fifth Avenue', 'Venue' and 'Jumping Jacks', while linking the specific site to notions of family: 'many local people may be thankful that their parents and grandparents met on that dance floor'.

While the inter-war dance hall was presented as home to unique sense of English identity expressed in an era of mass culture and globalisation, the dance hall as remembered on social media is conceived to have meaning in terms of local identity. Not only is the building described as being in a specific location in the community – 'the corner of Abbey Road and Merton High street' – but it is presented in terms those from the local area would understand, with individuals reminiscing about the specific names a dance hall took – 'the Palais', 'Tiffany's', 'Fifth Avenue', 'Venue' or 'Jumping Jacks' – to describing the different incarnations a dance hall would take, linking the current state of the building to its previous roles in the locality: employing people in a barrage balloon factory, providing leisure as a roller skating rink or bingo hall, or being a location in which to purchase furniture. The emphasis on community and localism is so strong that the dance hall is presented as playing a fundamental role in local people's family history, with 'their parents and grandparents' meeting 'on that dance floor'.

Other social media comments from *Growing up in the Ilford Area* similarly reflect the sense of local identity the Palais represented. 'Here are two memories together', Denise Grey posts, 'The Ilford Pictorial which my Dad always bought. Also the opening of our great Palais in 1959'.[548] 'Nostalgia', writes Rita Ward, 'The Ilford Palais has many fond memories for alot of us',[549] while Katrina O'Neill comments 'Just found this membership card for The Ilford

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[548] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10159369740671122. Accessed 15 February 2021.
[549] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10159867452716122. Accessed 5 August 2021.

Palais in a box of old photos…. This means my mum (Cathy O'Neill) used to go out dancing after I was tucked up in bed! I thought she never went out!!!'.[550]

Not only is the dance hall was remembered as a site embedded within the local community – with references to 'our great Palais', 'fond memories for alot of us', or chronologies of the different manifestations the local site of the dance hall took – but we find it entrenched within individuals' personal sense of familial identity, with references to 'many local people….thankful that their parents and grandparents met on that dance floor' or recollections of how 'my mum….used to go out dancing after I was tucked up in bed!'. While the inter-war dance hall was a centre of English collective identity – home to the infamous Lambeth Walk that embodied supposed cockney characteristics – on social networks the memory theme of identity still appears, but the focus has now contracted, from an emphasis on nation to one of community, neighbourhood and individual sense of family.

Why might this shift have occurred? As we recall from Chapter Three, the 1920s and 1930s saw the development of a globalised mass culture concurrent with the rise of the cinema, wireless radio and pre-recorded record, and this globalization of culture resulted in not only anxiety that dances such as the Lambeth Walk were 'obscene', 'primitive', and wholeheartedly foreign – but a belief that they could also represent a supposed English national character. In the face of this onslaught from a globalised mass culture, dance was seen as a unique way of channelling supposed English national characteristics, and the lens through which dancing and dance halls were received was thus decidedly national in character. The 2010s, by contrast, were a decade in which the average Briton experienced an assault on the common institutions

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[550] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/groups/58264696121/posts/10159867452716122. Accessed 5 August 2021.

of local community that had existed for over a century, with high street shops,[551] pubs,[552] and youth centres[553] closing at an astoundingly high rate. Various newspaper headlines have referred to this as the 'Death of the Great British High Street',[554] bemoaned the 'Disappearance of community spirit' or even labelled the 2010s as 'the decade that broke Britain'.[555] By 2019 a local paper in Cambridgeshire reflected that 'few areas of the country…changed more than the Great British high street', with the paper claiming 'once the heartbeat of towns and local communities, the high street has changed radically in the past 10 years and much that is different has become worse'.[556] Recollections of dance halls on social media in the last decade thus reflect these new stressors on local identity, with memories focusing not on how a certain dance was a threat or boon to notions of Englishness, but how the dance hall represented feelings of collectively, communality and nostalgia based around a certain locality.

The dance hall was, therefore, a vehicle for notions of identity that served different purposes in different eras. While in the inter-war era dancing was alternately seen as an expression of or threat to notions of English national identity, by the 2010s the dance hall is remembered not in national terms, but as embedded in local communities and providing a connection between

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[551] "Britain's High Streets under Strain as 15 Shops Close Every Day." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 24 Oct. 2016, www.theguardian.com/business/2016/oct/25/britains-high-streets-under-strain-as-15-shops-close-every-day; Simpson, Emma. "Almost 50 Shops a Day Disappear from High Streets." *BBC News*, BBC, 4 Sept. 2021, www.bbc.com/news/business-58433461.

[552] Foley, Niamh. "Pub Statistics." *Parliament.Uk*, 2021, researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8591/CBP-8591.pdf. ; "Pub Closures Rise Sharply amid Warning over Planned Business Rate Change." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 18 Sept. 2023, www.theguardian.com/business/2023/sep/18/pub-closures-rise-sharply-amid-warning-over-planned-business-rate-change.

[553] "Farewell Youth Clubs, Hello Street Life – and Gang Warfare." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 29 July 2011, www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/jul/29/young-people-gangs-youth-clubs-close.

[554] Mailonline, Tom Pyman For. "Death of the Great British High Street: How Empty Stores, Violence on the Streets and Soaring Parking Costs Have Turned Once Thriving Town Shopping Areas into a Shadow of Their Former Selves." *Daily Mail Online*, Associated Newspapers, 5 July 2022, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10979633/Empty-stores-violence-soaring-parking-costs-spark-death-British-High-Street.html.

[555] "The Decade That Broke Britain: The Disastrous Decisions That Left Millions in a Cost of Living Crisis." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 1 June 2022, www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jun/01/the-decade-that-broke-britain-the-disastrous-decisions-that-left-millions-in-a-cost-of-living-crisis.

[556] Harker, Joe. "How Bad Have the 2010s Been for the Great British High Street?" *Wales Online*, 30 Dec. 2019, www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/how-bad-2010s-been-great-17490636.

familial generations. The dance hall and dance culture were seen as harnessing the power to protect collective identity at two separate historical points, with this ability to supposedly preserve collective identity being called upon in response to differing perceived threats at different times.

The palais as remembered on social media thus both solidifies and deviates from narratives of the inter-war era. While the narratives surrounding the multi-sensory dreamworld atmosphere, taste-based value judgments on dance hall design, and the behaviour and morals of the 'dancing women' are reproduced on social media – with the inter-war *milieux de memoire* reappearing in the *lieu de memoire* of social media communities – we find notions of identity reconfigured in response to different external pressures at different points in time. In response to what was perceived as a threat to ideas of Englishness in the inter-war era, dancing was seen as a unique way to channel English national identity, with the Lambeth Walk seen as embodying notions of a primordial English national spirit. As dance halls were remembered on social media in the 2010s, however, identity remained central to how they were perceived, albeit with the emphasis reconfigured from national to local. While notions of the Lambeth Walk representing a certain cockney swagger and vivaciousness, English national spirit and even primordialism were seen as useful in pushing back against a wave of globalization and mass culture in the inter-war era, by the 2010s emphasizing the dance hall's rootedness in a locality, connection to individual family history, or importance in the wider community had become essential in preserving a sense of local identity in the face of the social and economic transformations of that decade. The 'digital memory ecologies' outlined thus contain the ability to reproduce memory themes that have become central to how the dance hall is perceived, while also being able to update, transform and repurpose existing narratives in response to changing societal circumstances.

Family Memories from the Inter-War Era

The idea of the inter-war era remembered by ordinary people through inter-generational family memories is a central argument of David Cowan's recent book, *The Politics of the Past*. For Cowan, popular notions of what it had meant to live before the Second World War – in the so-called 'hungry thirties' – were 'defined as much by social interactions – individual people speaking to their children and grandchildren – as by political interventions addressing national audiences over the airwaves'.[557] The result that was what is left of Britain's commitment to social democracy and a welfare state – seen in the country's contemporary attachment to the National Health Service (NHS) – 'depended upon embedded impressions of the world before the post-war welfare state, inherited from people who had experienced them, and a desire to honour their experiences'.[558] There was thus a centrality of familial memories of the inter-war era – and the individual decisions around what to say and not say in retelling these stories and passing them on the future generations – to politics and popular conceptions around the role of the state generations later, up to and including the present-day.

In Cowan's conception, politics and the forces that shape contemporary political opinion are never 'just about the power of "language and symbols"', but histories of affective life indicate that emotions are 'fundamental, constitutive forces mobilising decisions in popular politics, just as important as "ideology"'.[559] These 'feelings embodied in people's everyday relationships with one another' – 'optimistic hopes for a fairer future; gloomy stories about the likely challenges facing the next generation on the way; pride at witnessing economic security;

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[557] Cowan, David. *The Politics of the Past*. Cambridge University Press, 2024, p. 7
[558] Ibid, p. 9
[559] Ibid, p. 246

jealousies at the new opportunities inaccessible to older generations; resentments at younger people failing to heed the lessons of the past' – mattered greatly to politics, forming the foundation of living memory of the inter-war era in the twenty-first century and people's conception of the role of the state in their lives.

Yet with time, conceptions of the inter-war era changed. The narrative that solidified in the 1950s and 1960s as a response to familial stories from those born in the pre-war generation – that the deprivation and social failure of the 1930s and the shared hardship that a generation collectively went through justified an expansive state typified in the NHS and welfare reforms – changed over time. By the 1980s Thatcherite rhetoric recast the 1930s as an era of self-reliance, and younger people increasingly questioned their parents' stories about the hardship of the 1930s.[560] By the 1980s and 1990s, multicultural voices brought new experiences based on familial memory that challenged the largely white, working-class memory of the 1930s, often invoking family experiences focused less on the Depression or unemployment and more on empire and colonial oppression, migration and discrimination, and global fascism and genocide.[561] While the 1930s continued to be used in the post-2000 era to invoke a generalised image of mass unemployment, hunger, and inequality – this was stylised and often oversimplified, used in political rhetoric to warn against austerity, deregulation, or neoliberalism.[562] Inter-war memory was therefore never just about the past, but it was used as a cultural and political resource that was constantly reshaped to serve the needs, anxieties, and identities of subsequent generations, in much the same way inter-war dance hall memories were repurposed to suit the needs of local communities in the 2010s.

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[560] Cowan, David. *The Politics of the Past*, pp. 166-201
[561] Ibid, Chapter 6, pp. 201-37
[562] Ibid, Epilogue, pp. 237-53

When we observe the intergenerational memory of the dance hall on contemporary social media – of individuals recalling memories of discovering their mother's membership card for a dance hall in a box of old photos, or being 'thankful…. that their parents and grandparents met on that dance floor' – we might ask: what *was* the dance hall for these individuals, and why was it something remembered in the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s? For those who attended dances in the 1920s and 30s, the definition of a dance hall might be relatively simple, being an enclosed space intentionally established for dance and where dance could be practiced. The same can be said for the numerous curators, dance hall managers and entrepreneurs who brought dance halls into being: the dance hall was much more than a traditional 'hall' type building – such as the Hammersmith or Ilford Palais – but it was any space intentionally curated for the purpose of dance, and often, as we have seen, came about in town halls, Winter Gardens, or other various enclosed venues. But just as David Cowan's individuals in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s had never lived through the 'hungry thirties' while this memory played a significant role in their political views, many members of contemporary social media communities had never stepped foot in a dance hall despite its significant role in their memory of family, locality, and community identity.

The dance hall, for these individuals, was a place of groundedness, community, interaction, connection to family, and closeness lost in an age of anonymity and destruction of local community. Having never lived through the inter-war experience of the dance hall, and often never through the subsequent iterations in the post-war era, the dance hall was not so much a physical structure for these individuals, but a resource in which to recall inter-generational experiences that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, challenged the circumstances they found themselves in. Often, as we have seen, this had to do with a multi-sensual 'luxurious' experience – recalling light 'falling', 'disappearing' and 'casting', a 'dream world' of 'big band

music', or the smell of various fragrances – but often, it was about other aspects of dance hall memories. The design of successor buildings to dance halls were critiqued as 'horrible', 'awful', 'grim', 'terrible', or 'ugly', being said to 'look out of place' or a 'monstrosity', while women often recalled memories of a time of innocence and mischief, sneaking to attend dances despite parental banns. The dance hall was also a resource to recall connection to and closeness with family, rooted not only in shared stories, but in tangible memories passed down through photographs, objects, and affectionate recollections of parents and grandparents who once danced there. Most of all, however, we find the dance hall as representing connection to local community in an age when local communities were being transformed. This sense of groundedness and community can be seen in the continual references individuals make to 'our' palais or dance hall – suggesting its embeddedness within a community but also a sense of ownership and pride with which communities held these structures – or in the placement of dance halls within a specific location or 'site' in a community throughout time, representing a sense of stability despite changes in high street composition throughout the ages.

The dance hall mattered as something to be remembered because it could be a repository of shared local identity, generational continuity, and family reminiscence — things under threat as Britain faced a destruction of the common markers of local community in the early twenty-first century. Recalling these inter-generational experiences which the dance hall acted as a repository – or in Nora's words a *lieu de mémoire* – for, was thus an exercise in nostalgia, but it was also a way of critiquing the circumstances individuals found themselves in with the acquired cultural knowledge and symbols they possessed. In this sense, remembering the dance hall became a means not only of personal reflection, but a way of articulating resistance in a world where the fabric of local belonging was rapidly unravelling.

In this way, the memory of the inter-war era follows on from previous work done by Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson which highlights the strategic mobilization of Second World War memories in British public discourse. The 'reactivation' of wartime mythology in political rhetoric serves multiple purposes, particularly during moments of national crisis or transformation. During the 2010s, as Rebecca Bramall demonstrates, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government adopted wartime rhetoric – particularly the slogan "we're all in this together" – in framing public sector cuts as collective national sacrifices, echoing WWII-era solidarity.[563] Just as governments in the 2010s invoke the spirit of wartime resilience to legitimize austerity policies, we have seen above how individuals on social platforms recall personal and familial experiences of dance halls to respond to anxieties around the erosion of local identity and community spaces. Memory then, becomes a tool to offer continuity in the face of loss, being repurposed and reframed in reasserting shared values in a rapidly shifting social landscape.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has done three things. It has demonstrated how the online commemoration of the dance hall can be considered a *lieu de memoire* through individuals emphasizing a specific 'site' in which the dance hall's existence transcends time and outward appearance, before showing how this virtual (online) *lieu de memoire* reproduces themes that were central to how the dance hall was experienced in its heyday, such as a multi-sensual, phantasmagorical experience of the inter-war dance hall, conceptions of atmospheric architectural design and value-judgements in terms of taste, and narratives about the modern

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[563] Noakes, Lucy, and Juliette Pattinson. *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, p. 201-7

'dancing women'. Finally, the chapter has delineated how online social media communities do not only *reproduce* themes from the inter-war era, but *adapt* them in response to contemporary social pressures. This process of adaptation meant recalling a shared local identity and generational continuity that the dance hall represented.

These arguments have consequences for both Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and Astrid Erll and Andrew Hoskins's conceptions of a dynamic, 'traveling' memory expressed in digital memory ecologies. First, they contribute to a growing literature that locates *lieux de mémoire* on digital communicative networks. While Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* were originally conceived as physical 'sites' that expressed the memory of a pre-modern, 'primitive', and 'ancestral' society, numerous studies have located them commemorating relatively modern events, such as the Holodomor in modern Ukraine,[564] socialist urban spaces in Central Europe,[565] or even Hurricane Katrina in the USA,[566] and also in the realm of digital online spaces, such as Facebook groups, websites, online forums, blogs, and Instagram.[567] The arguments here contribute to that literature.

Second, while most prior work that investigated digital memory ecologies sought to demonstrate how memory themes either conform to or deviate from hegemonic narratives – with Paulo Drinot arguing that YouTube comments concerning the 19th-century War of the Pacific 'enable the circulation and reproduction of collective memories',[568] Seth Bernstein

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[564] Wylegała, Anna, and Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper. *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine*. Indiana University Press, 2020, pp. 49- 73

[565] Pożarlik, Grzegorz. "Lieux de Mémoire and post-communist nostalgia in the Central European symbolic landscape of urban spaces." *European Cities in the Process of Constructing and Transmitting European Cultural Heritage*, 2022, pp. 121–136, https://doi.org/10.12797/9788381386708.06.

[566] Giancarlo, Alexandra. "Lieux de mémoire and Social Memory in the Post-Katrina Ninth Ward." *Material Culture*, vol. 52, no. 2, Sept. 2020, pp. 60-79.

[567] Huber, Rachel, "Digital Lieux de Mémoire and Milieux de Mémoire" in Decker, Juilee. *Fallen Monuments and Contested Memorials*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024.

[568] Drinot, Paulo. "Website of memory: The war of the pacific (1879–84) in the global age of YouTube." *Memory Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, Oct. 2011, p. 381.

arguing that the digital commemoration of the Second World War on Russian commemorative websites retains elements of the 'unifying Soviet national narrative of the war',[569] or Yi Wang arguing that the mnemonic practices of Han-centrism on the Chinese internet, foster a counter-memories vis-à-vis the 'official' memory of the Chinese state[570] – this chapter has shown how online commemorative communities can both *reproduce* memory themes while *updating* existing narratives in response to changing social and economic circumstances. Digital memory ecologies, rather than reinforcing or providing a counter-memory to hegemonic narratives, harness the ability to selectively reproduce and repurpose themes in remembering the past.

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[569] Bernstein, Seth. "Remembering war, remaining Soviet: Digital Commemoration of World War II in Putin's Russia." *Memory Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, 31 July 2016, pp. 422–436, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015605573.
[570] Wang, Yi. "Contesting the past on the Chinese internet: Han-centrism and mnemonic practices." *Memory Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 19 Sept. 2019, pp. 304–317, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698019875996.

Conclusion

On the 9th of January 2021, the anonymous administrator of the *Lost Glasgow* Facebook page made a post. While much of the information the page shared during this time concerned text commemorating specific cultural events – 'On this day, in 1964, Glasgow was in the grip of Beatlemania' reads one,[571] or local parks 'Passing the lovely wee Holmlea Park, I was much taken to see an original, cast iron swing frame' – the post on this occasion was quite unique. 'I walk through Glasgow in the company of ghosts', the anonymous administrator writes, 'dear, happy ghosts, who tell me their/our stories, and invite me to join their dance to the music of time'.[572] The administer posts a picture of a dance hall from the post-war era, The Albert Ballroom, accompanied by the text 'all rain-slicked pavements, and fizzing Neon. Anyone else catch the whiff of Bel-Air hairspray, Old Spice, Lifebuoy soap, and disappointment? I really miss the dancin'....'.[573]

The remembrance of this particular dance hall with such specificity and elaboration – going into detail concerning the auditory, somatosensory, olfactory and visual stimuli – reflects a similar post was made several years earlier in 2017. 'Sauchiehall Street's Locarno Ballroom was the place to be seen in 1938', writes the administrator.

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[571] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid0EwHSHhAaG4ECqjyhYe4XpNiSTWABet2hE4P5ZPBjZZ G1nPomKCNhAtMXb7DsnDHAl. Accessed 5 August 2021.

[572] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid033gyFHwyW5uvxhh1wiTfEvQyEczWz5AMnkhzrWcTQE ud49JdWdSaEutNkRGHce4oZl. Accessed 5 August 2021.

[573] "Lost Glasgow." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/lostglasgowofficial/posts/pfbid033gyFHwyW5uvxhh1wiTfEvQyEczWz5AMnkhzrWcTQE ud49JdWdSaEutNkRGHce4oZl. Accessed 5 August 2021.

> With its sprung Canadian maple dancefloor, balcony cafe, revolving stage, showgirls and live bands, the venue was a mecca for Glasgow's dancing-mad citizens. In fact, the place was so popular, it even used to run lunchtime dancing sessions….The dancing continued throughout the 1950s, although the moves were more jive and jitterbug than sedate waltzes and foxtrots. By 1972, the venue was showing its age and was revamped, at a cost of £150,00, and renamed Tiffanys. Under that guise it continued to attract big-name pop acts.
>
> Sadly, after a few years as the Zanzi-Bar discotheque in the mid 1980s, the dancing stopped for good when the venue was converted into a casino.[574]

The posts above reflect what has been the central contention of this thesis. While historians have promoted the notion that the dance hall was 'lost forever' after the decline of partner dancing through the 1960s, we see a venue very much alive in the minds of those who commemorate it. The dance hall experiences which were a hallmark of 'going to the palais' in its heyday reappear in present day social media, underlining both the specificity and the passion with which the dance hall, and the modern experiences it engendered, are remembered.

While James Nott argues that during the 1960s an 'important chapter in Britain's social and cultural history had come to an end', with social dancing 'outliving the venue that had given birth to it' and the palais being 'lost forever and Britain's social and cultural life was the poorer for it',[575] the evidence presented in this thesis might give us pause. Rather than the palais being 'lost forever', this thesis has demonstrated how these structures lived on well past the 1960s in the popular imagination. Rather than the dance hall being 'lost forever', the experiences of the dance hall at its height during the inter-war era played a fundamental role in how conceptions of modern multi-sensual romance, popular taste-based value judgements, and notions of womanhood and identity are remembered in the present day. The modernity that was brought

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[574] "Growing up in the Ilford Area (Redbridge, Gants Hill Etc) in the 60/70's." *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1122112534567268&set=a.265323076912889. Accessed 28 July 2019.
[575] Nott, *Going to the Palais,* 2015, p. 98

to the masses in the inter-war danced hall – a modernity defined by a multi-sensual experience of phantasmagoria leading to new conceptions of romance and intimacy, a new conception of taste-based value judgements centred around notions of atmosphere, a contradictory conception of modern womanhood as being at once emancipated and controlled, and the dance hall's central role in notions of identity – reappear decades later on contemporary social media networks. In this way, the memory of the fundamental processes at the core of the modern dance hall experience harness the ability to 'travel' between time, media, and as we have seen, even between social classes – demonstrating not only how Astrid Erll's conception of 'travelling' memory can be found in recollections of the dance hall, but how the digital memory ecology of dance hall recollections on social media can reproduce narratives found in disparate eras, media and class structures.

This first chapter of this thesis examined how the modern experience of phantasmagoria that Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin first located in Paris and Berlin in the 19th century – where artificial illumination dazzles the senses creating a dreamworld atmosphere, where luxury commodities produce a sense of desire, and where new visual forms of popular entertainment enthral spectators and transport them to distant times and places – were also found in the heart of London in the nineteenth century. We then saw how this unique modern experience was fundamental to the experience of Britain's dance halls, with the dance hall bringing this modern, multi-sensual experience leisure to the masses in ways no other leisure venue could, expanding the boundaries of *where* and *for whom* this experience was available. The chapter then went on to argue that this modern experience of sensuality – encompassing sound, light, colour, smell, touch, movement and design – newly available for ordinary men and women up and down the country – played an important role in changing conceptions of and expectations from intimacy and romance in twentieth century Britain, contributing to the 'emotional

revolution' Claire Langhamer delineates. The dance hall, then, played a fundamental role in the development of 'modern' conceptions of romance, with a transition away from material circumstance, gendered roles, domesticity, reliability – to attributes like physical attraction, personality traits and emotional intimacy.

The second chapter focused on the design and production of dance hall interiors. As we saw, the inter-war dance hall was a location of late-modernity not only through the sensual experience it provided, but the design and production of dance hall interiors was at the heart of a process that defined the late-modern era in Britain – a series of middle-class anxieties over a loss of control over maintaining established social and cultural norms. The dance hall was a location where 'atmospheric' design principles, taken from US cinema designs, were imported to Britain, and the sense of democratisation this represented – being an eclectic mix of architectural traditions whose sole purpose was to spark excitement and a sense of entertainment in the dance goers – was seen not only in populist design elements but also in the process of design decisions and construction, with everyday handymen, technicians and dance hall managers implementing these principles with the resources and know-how they possessed – often using an intuitive sense of what felt 'right' – rather than importing atmospheric design principles to Britain in wholesale form.

As we saw, however, this new populist sense of design was received by the middle class as a threat to their position as the purveyors of respectable taste. Castigated as 'cheap', 'coarse', 'gaudy', and 'vulgar', dance hall interiors were subject to a hostile reception by a middle class anxious about a newfound threat to themselves as the arbiters of respectable taste. The result was a dance hall that challenged established notions of middle-class taste and in doing so, implicitly challenged their ability to justify their social superiority.

Chapter Three focused on notions of identity in the dance hall experience. Specifically focusing on the Lambeth Walk, the chapter argued that the contradictory interpretations of the dance – with it being seen variously as a signifier of moral decline, an expression of a primordial cockney working-class ethic, a 'primitive' tribal dance, or even a manifestation of a growing revolutionary consciousness – points to a modern fragmentation of the idea of a singular expression of British national character. While the Victorian-era music hall represented a consensus surrounding authentic expressions of Englishness – being 'Britain's first indigenous and fully capitalized mass culture form' and served as 'a reliable index of national vitality and values and the most authentic expressive form of native Englishness' – the Lambeth Walk was received, by the late 1930s, in a fundamentally fragmented manner. With a shift in not only the technologies of cultural reproduction but the globalised nature of mass cultural flows – the previous 'reliable index' of national values and authenticity was replaced by a multitude of competing cultural interests from different global sources, and the former consensus regarding authentic expressions of native Englishness was replaced by discord over what constituted authenticity in this increasingly culturally diffuse world. The reception of the Lambeth Walk, then, demonstrates that it was not only heralded as an embodiment of English national identity, but reflected the conflicts and contradictions that came to define the age of modernity in the inter-war era.

Chapter Four delineated the modern female experience at the inter-war dance hall. The dance hall, as we have seen, represented a location of women's emancipation in 1920s and 1930s Britain. It was a location where women had to opportunity to dress as they pleased, while providing a sense of physical pleasure from dancing leading to general feelings of mental wellbeing and happiness. The dance hall also, importantly, allowed women a space of their

own – outside the confines of the domestic sphere – in which to renegotiate their gender roles and relationship to the opposite sex, having the opportunity to take the lead in interactions with men for the first time. Indeed, this sense of freedom and female empowerment is best seen in the film *Dance Hall,* where the viewer is presented with a continual juxtaposition of the domesticity and obligations of the home with the excitement and freedom represented by the Palais.

Yet the figure of the emancipated 'dancing woman' became a flashpoint in a hostile reaction to these changing gender roles, with the dance hall and the women who frequented it being subjected to an onslaught of criticism and judgement with the intention of preserving the status quo. Women at the dance hall were thus derided as frivolous, immoral and indeed 'mad', with the dance hall being presented as driving women to insanity, criminality, and delinquency. 'Dance hall mad' or 'dancing mad' became a popular refrain, with male commentators drawing on a nineteenth-century trope of women as prone to madness and insanity as a result of their supposed biological inferiority. Yet as the 1930s wore on and with the coming of the war, commentators impressed new meaning onto dance responding to a need for national collectivity and unity. Rather than being presented as a corrupting influence on young women, dance culture was now presented as a means of unifying the country, with dancing signifying a form of national collective solidarity far removed from considerations of gender.

Chapter Five delt with the subsequent commemoration of dance halls. We saw social media as the main outlet for this commemoration, and how this online commemoration can be considered a *lieu de memoire* – where memories of the unique dance hall experience are expressed. The dance hall, as we saw, was not only a centre of community over generations, a fundamental part of the social fabric whose meaning was tied to a particular physical location,

but it was a building whose physical surroundings, the space in which it was situated, informed its status as a 'site' of memory.

This 'site' of memory served a clear purpose. The lived experience of modernity in the dance hall outlined above – of modern notions of sensuality and romance, conceptions of 'atmospheric' architectural design, national identity and womanhood – was reproduced on present day social media networks. Just as the inter-war 'environment of memory'[576] of the dance hall was defined by a multi-sensual 'dreamworld' atmosphere where reality and myth were interwoven – notions of illumination, physical movement, temperature, humidity and even smell are similarly remembered in social media recollections of dance halls, with this unique multi-sensual experience of modernity expressed through the *lieu de memoire* of contemporary social media networks. Similarly, we saw how the taste-based value judgements of inter-war commentators reacting to the atmospheric design principles of dance hall interiors are reproduced on social media networks, with the reappearance of language criticising the design in terms of aesthetics, mood and ambiance. Narratives concerning the 'dancing woman' are reproduced, with language vilifying women at dance halls in terms of their morality and mental state finding its way to contemporary social media networks. And a contradictory mixture of women's emancipation combined with continued male control are reproduced, with notions of women's sense of autonomy, physical pleasure and self-determination reappearing and being combined with recollections of attempts of male control.

While the themes of a multi-sensual modern experience of phantasmagoria, taste-based value judgements concerning notions of 'atmosphere' in dance hall design, and the dual, contradictory conceptions of the dance hall as being a location of female emancipation while

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[576] See p. 32-33

subject to male control, are reproduced on social media, we also find notions of identity reappearing in present-day social media communities, repurposed to suit present day concerns. While the inter-war dance hall was a site of dispute over what constituted English identity in an age of globalization and mass media, with the Lambeth Walk being venerated as an authentic expression of Englishness – by time of the dance halls' commemoration on social media networks in the present day, the building was conceived in terms of local identity, ingrained within localities, communities, and familial structures. In response to a perceived loss of notions of local identity in the 2010s, memories of the dance hall were repurposed, no longer connected to expressions of Englishness or nation, but firmly centred around local community.

This identification of present-day repurposing of dance hall themes from the inter-war era fits into a growing literature that delineates how digital memory ecologies can alter past memories in light of both the socio-technical affordances of social media, and present-day relationships with the past. Just as Codruța Pohrib argues that a Romanian post-communist generation produce a genre of life writing on Facebook that comes in response to a new, present day relationship with communist materialities,[577] or Ned Richardson-Little's contention that a German far-right movement appropriated the GDR slogan 'we are the People' [*Wir sind das Volk*] in an effort to bring down the Berlin government 1989 – this thesis as shown how notions of identity were both interwoven with people's relationship to the dance hall, and were reconfigured in different eras to suit the concerns of the day.

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[577] Pohrib, Codruța Alina. "The Romanian 'latchkey generation' writes back: Memory genres of post-communism on Facebook." *Memory Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 13 June 2017, p. 164, 175, 177.

What does this reproduction and reconfiguration of themes from the modernity of the inter-war era to present day social media communities tell us about the history of dance halls, and of conceptions of memory? Firstly, we can see how dance halls, and the specific modern cultural phenomenon they gave rise to, did not cease to exist after the 1960s as historians have hitherto argued. Rather than being 'lost forever', dance halls and the culture they contained lived on in the popular imagination far into the third decade of the new millennium.

Secondly, we were able locate a digital memory ecology in a new context while demonstrating how memories and experiences from the inter-war era – the 'environment of memory[578] – are not only reproduced on contemporary social media networks, but these experiences, subjectivities, and conceptions travel through time, media and even social classes, repurposed in a contemporary age to suit contemporary concerns.

This thesis has therefore broken new ground in the scholarship of dance halls and the dance culture they gave rise to while also contributing to a growing scholarship on digital memory ecologies. We have located the unique, modern experience of phantasmagoria in the British inter-war dance hall before delineating how the dance hall played a fundamental role in expanding the parameters of *where* and *for whom* this experience was available. We then saw how this multi-sensual experience contributed to Clare Langhamer's conception of an 'emotional revolution' in Britain, playing a significant role in the development of 'modern' conceptions of romance. We have traced how 'atmospherics' were not only imported to Britain through the dance hall, but this cultural style – seen as the successor to the West End's 'populist Palatial' designs – was also seen in the 'populist' process of danced hall design decisions and construction, and was the subject to a hostile reception by a middle class anxious about a

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[578] See p. 32-33

newfound threat to themselves as the arbiters of respectable taste. We have seen how the dance hall was at the centre of a modern fragmentation of a singular expression of British national character, and how it was home to contradictory conceptions of womanhood reflecting an era of cultural change. Finally, we have seen how the dance hall's commemoration on present-day social media networks constitutes a *lieu de memoire* (Pierre Nora) and digital memory ecology (Andrew Hoskings) – not only reproducing the experiences, subjectivities, and cultural processes of the dance hall in its heyday, but repurposing them to suit present-day social and economic conditions.

While the task of researching and writing this thesis has been long and at times arduous, considerable scope for future research remains. One of the most interesting paths for future research is to trace the global cultural flows that arose at the time dancing became a truly mass leisure phenomenon. During the inter-war era, dance halls not only became exceedingly popular in Britain, but locations as diverse as Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Manchester, Johannesburg, Chelyabinsk, Russia, and Auckland were home to the type of inter-war dance phenomenon we find in Britain, with dances such as the Charleston and the Foxtrot found throughout the world. Hitherto there has been one study focusing on this global dance phenomenon, largely focusing on one aspect of the global dance phenomena in different countries.[579] The outcome, however, is fragmented, with an investigation into the nature of dancing in inter-war New Zealand, for instance, having little crossover to phenomena in Shanghai or the USA. A more integrated history examining dance halls and dance culture, and the global cultural flows they gave rise

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[579] Nathaus, Klaus, and James J. Nott. *Worlds of Social Dancing: Dance Floor Encounters and the Global Rise of Couple Dancing, c. 1910-40*. Manchester University Press, 2022.

to, would offer new insights into the rise of mass culture in the age of globalisation at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Another exciting theme, unable to make its way into this thesis, is the interaction between modern medicine and dance culture. In propelling the public to take up dancing in the 1920s, dance magazines such as *Dancing Times* borrowed the lexicon of science and medicine to not only hail the health benefits of dancing, but to legitimize it as something undoubtedly modern. Doctors wrote in suggesting specific exercises and movements – 'supination' or 'pronation' – while naming specific bones – the *ulna* or *radus*[580] – in attempting to give the reader a picture of dancing as inextricably linked to new advancements in technology and science. Diagrams appeared representing the anatomical structures of dancers, with x-ray views of the human body labelling different muscles and their specific function and relation to dance. And those claiming to be experts linked specific illnesses and aliments to muscles and bones that dancing could help realign and regenerate. Examining the interplay between how dancing was presented to the public and the role of medicine in fostering a sense of modernity could, therefore, allow for a better understanding the complex relationship between conceptions of the modern body, medicine and dancing. An examination of this, however, must be left to another occasion.

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[580] *Dancing Times*, March 1933, p. 587.

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