



Screening the World

Global Development of
the Multiplex Cinema

Stuart Hanson



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For Vidyasara

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This book examines the development of the multiplex from its beginnings in the USA in the early 1960s to its expansion overseas from the mid-1980s, across Europe and into parts of Asia-Pacific, including Australia. More than a consideration of overseas expansion on the part of US companies, the book considers the hegemony of the multiplex as a cultural and business form. It argues for the significance of the multiplex cinema as a phenomenon that has transcended national boundaries, and which has become the predominant venue for film viewing globally. In many countries, indigenous exhibition companies have adopted the multiplex template and adapted it to their own domestic markets. Finally, this book will be concerned with understanding how the development of the multiplex cinema has been shaped by broad social, economic, cultural, and political contexts, whilst avoiding an over-deterministic focus on simply technology. Implicit in this analysis is a recognition of the domination of US media multinationals and Hollywood cinema, and the development of the multiplex cinema as symbolic of the extension and maintenance of US cultural and economic power. Writing in 1992, Larry Gleason from Paramount Pictures argued that the:

decade of the '90s will see the multiplex cinema strengthen its position as the single most innovative concept in the last 25 years in the world of exhibition. It has caused a rebirth and resurgence of cinema-going throughout the world. Starting in the U.S. in the late '60s, this phenomenon has in the last five years spread throughout the world, from Europe to Australia.¹

Before we go any further though, we need to ask: what *is* a multiplex? In 1973, Sumner Redstone, owner of National Amusements, was mulling over what to call one of his sixplex cinemas that scheduled more films in a week than it had the number of screens, largely as a way of making it harder for distributors to monitor how many films were showing. “The word plex was in the lexicon and I worked with that” he said, and then “it came to me. ‘Multiplex!’ I jotted down the word down and said it out loud. That’s what we had, a multiplex.”² Redstone then sought legal advice as to whether the term could be trademarked and he discovered it could be, so, as he recalled, “National Amusements now owns the trademark to the word “multiplex.” Although it has become common worldwide, when you see the word “multiplex” attached to a theatre in the United States, it belongs to National Amusements.”³

For Redstone, as we have seen, it was, pragmatically, a cinema with six screens or more. In India, such was the complexion of the existing single-screen cinema infrastructure, a multiplex is any modern cinema with more than one screen.⁴ Nonetheless, the term began to be used in the US trade press in the early 1970s, to describe both the subdividing of an existing cinema into multiscreen venues and the construction of dedicated multiscreen cinemas. In January 1974, *Variety* considered the major trends in film in the previous year, pointing to the exhibition sector as experiencing “multiplex fever, on the grounds that two to six screens on one plot have at least the potential for bettering the odds of paying the rent on the single facility.”⁵ The antecedents of the multiplex were in the double- and triple-screen cinemas located within, or located adjacent to, the shopping malls springing up across the US suburbs in the 1960s. Since the shopping malls and the suburb were the site of subsequent developments and the enlargement of the twins and triplexes to quadruplexes, sixplexes, and eightplexes, the multiplex has come to be defined as a purpose-built cinema of eight or more screens, with a shared lobby and shared projection rooms for multiple screens. More often than not, it was also defined by its adjacent parking and ancillary attractions such as restaurants and arcades. MEDIA Salles sought to define the multiplex as distinct from the multiscreen cinema, with the latter suited to “sites where a traditional theatre has been divided up, and to make specific design a criteria for calling a theatre a multiplex.”⁶

Though the criteria for a multiscreen cinema were clear, for the multiplex it was less so, largely as the focus on new, purpose-built multiscreen cinemas could include any number of screens starting from 4–5 and going up to 25 or more. Nonetheless, based upon research of the European

market, and echoing the experience of the USA, MEDIA Salles concluded that the term ‘multiplex’ should apply only to a “purpose-built multi-screen facility of 8 screens or more,” with their rationale being that this:

approach, which aims at evaluating chiefly the efficiency of the multiplex formula (in terms of the degree to which the facilities are utilised), seems preferable to an approach based on the presence of a series of qualitative features (not only the previously mentioned car parks and refreshments, but also screen size, steeply tiered seating, distance between seats, space in the foyers, air conditioning, quality of sound, etc.), which might also be found in theatres which are not multiplexes; moreover these are features that may not be considered equally necessary for the definition of a multiplex as such.⁷

These criteria for the multiplex will largely dictate this study, though it is the case that in many countries official definitions differ. In Japan and South Korea, for instance, the considerable pressures on space and price of real estate, and the necessity of incorporating cinemas into high rise developments, mean that here a multiplex can be smaller. Similarly, in China, the average screens per site are more like five screens. In any event, the key distinction of the multiplex is that, according to Delmestri and Wezel, it represents “a substantive innovation, which aimed at offering a new experience to the visitor.”⁸

STRUCTURE

This book is divided up into four parts: Part I considers the development of the multiplex in the USA, from the 1960s; Part II opens out the discussion of the international rollout starting with the development of the multiplex in Britain from the building of the first purpose-built multiplex cinema in 1985; Parts III and IV consider two large regional case studies, designed to complement the book’s previous focus on the USA and Britain and enable a focus on some key territories. These are Europe and Asia-Pacific. Each regional case study has been selected for its own intrinsic value due to the particular political, economic, and/or social/cultural issues raised in particular territories.

Chapter 2 considers the origins of the multiplex in the USA, from the 1960s, and examines the importance of the shopping mall, and the suburb as the main focus for the development of a new kind of cinema—purpose built and multiscreen. In the wake of the *Paramount Decrees* and the

relinquishing of their first-run cinemas, the major studios ceded their place to a new group of pan-regional exhibition companies like American Multi-Cinema (AMC), General Cinema Corporation, and National Amusements. The 1960s and early 1970s were a significant period in the development of the multiplex cinema, not simply in terms of the imperatives of design, but in the ways in which cinemas were recast with new forms of marketing, consumerism, leisure, and business management.

Chapter 3 charts the emergence of the multiplex in the USA, with 8, 10, and 12 screens or more, and the ways in which these new forms of cinema signalled a radical change in the perception of where cinemas ‘belonged,’ as the mall space gave way to the freestanding complex. The diffusion of the multiplex across the country was the result of companies that had previously been regionally based beginning to look further afield, utilising market research in evolving suburbs and forging alliances with large developers. The result was the creation and growth of several national chains (Showcase, United Artists Theatres, Loews, Cineplex Odeon, AMC, Carmike Cinemas, and General Cinema) by the 1980s.

Chapter 4 examines the development of the megaplex—giant multi-screen cinemas with 16–30 screens—in the context of the hegemony of the multiplex as the *de facto* norm for cinemas in the USA by the 1990s. The megaplex signalled the maturity of the multiscreen cinema and was based upon a new kind of relationship with the major distributors, especially with the development of the film blockbuster.

Chapter 5 considers the decision by a series of US exhibitors to enter the British market, with particular attention to Britain’s first multiplex—The Point opened by AMC in 1985 and the first US multiplex opened in a foreign country. As one of the first countries to import the multiplex from the USA, Britain can be considered a kind of ‘test bed’ for the concept. To this end, some consideration is afforded to the exhibition landscape in the period prior to 1985, especially as 1984 was the nadir of cinema attendance in Britain, when annual admissions were only 54 million.

Chapter 6 considers the complex patterns of ownership and volatile nature of the British market, as the existing exhibition duopoly of Cannon and Odeon was first challenged by US operators such as AMC, Warner Bros., and National Amusements, before this initial wave of US companies either exited the British market or were bought out by domestic and European exhibitors such as UCI, Virgin, and UGC. Chapter 6 also explores the growth of the multiplex and the megaplex cinema in Britain, accounting for a reversal in the downward spiral of cinema attendance as a result of

their introduction. Finally, the discussion of ownership is examined through a discussion of the current domination of the market by three exhibitors: Cineworld, Odeon, and Vue.

Chapter 7 considers the location, design, and operation of the multiplex cinema, situating the analysis in the context of urban planning and in particular the easing of planning restrictions in the 1980s and early 1990s, and the development of large out-of-town shopping centres. The emergence of a new kind of out-of-town leisure and shopping culture in the 1980s and 1990s is considered in the context of both economic and political changes, and indicative of a new set of aesthetics around shopping and consumerism. Chapter 7 also contrasts these earlier developments with changes to planning laws and a greater stress on town and city centre regeneration since the late 1990s, which have seen the relocation of the multiplex from the periphery of Britain's towns and cities back to the centre, as the focus of cultural and economic policy has shifted from out-of-town to the city and town centre.

Chapters 8 and 9 consider the ways in which the concept of the multiplex cinema has been embedded in Europe—through both the expansion of US multiplex operators and its adoption by indigenous cinema exhibitors. It considers a series of case studies of territories in which US companies accessed markets more readily—Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark—and markets where the penetration of US exhibitors was marginal or non-existent—Belgium, France, and the rest of Scandinavia.

Chapters 10 and 11 consider the development of the multiplex in Asia-Pacific, not least because many territories here have witnessed significant growth from a very low base, or are mature markets, in which indigenous operators have dominated both domestically and expanded regionally. Chapter 10 considers Australia, as an example of a mature multiplex market in which domestic exhibitors dominate, having benefitted from greatly increased cinema attendance, and expansion overseas into several global markets. Finally, Chap. 11 examines Japan, South Korea, and China, which are markets that have also expanded rapidly, but which have particular domestic conditions that contrast sharply with each other. South Korea has the world's most enthusiastic cinemagoers per capita, having established the hegemony of the multiplex in 20 years, based entirely on domestic operators. Japan was a multiplex market that was established largely by US and British entrants, though all exited the market subsequently, leaving it to domestic exhibitors. Finally, China is both the fastest growing film market in the world and one of the most complex to do business in and with.

NOTES

1. Larry Gleason, "Multiplex Phenomenon Gains Int'l. Momentum," *The Film Journal* 95, no. 2 (1 July, 1992), 28.
2. Sumner Redstone, *A Passion to Win* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 78.
3. Ibid., 78.
4. Dodona, *Cinema Industry Research India 2018* (Leicester: Dodona Research, 2018).
5. A. D. Murphy, "Big Film Trend Stories of '73," *Variety* 273, no. 9 (9 January, 1974), 64.
6. Elisabetta Brunella, "Multiplexes in Europe 2000," *MEDIA Salles European Cinema Yearbook 2000*. www.mediasalles.it/yearb00/multiplex.pdf (accessed 11 February, 2019).
7. Ibid., 105–6.
8. Giuseppe Delmestri and Filippo Wezel, "Breaking the Wave: The Contested Legitimation of an Alien Organizational Form," *Journal of International Business Studies* 42 (2011): 828–52, 830.

PART I

The Multiplex Cinema in the USA



CHAPTER 2

The Origins of the Multiplex in the USA

The USA emerged from the Second World War as the preeminent economic world power, which Miller et al. identified as a “military and diplomatic hegemony articulated to the expansionary needs of its corporations.”¹ Of particular importance were Hollywood and both its domestic and overseas market, since unlike its European, Asian, and other overseas rivals, the US film industry continued uninterrupted throughout the war and emerged afterwards with a significant backlog of films available for post-war markets. In the USA, dominance by the major studios was based upon vertical integration, in which they controlled production, distribution, and exhibition, and whilst they theoretically claimed that their markets were open to foreign films, in reality the studios produced enough films to fill the nation’s cinemas.²

The cultural importance of the cinema to the US population during the Second World War reflected that of countries like Britain, and which was carried over into the peace. The USA had experienced a “golden age” of cinemagoing during the war and in the immediate post-war period, when in 1948 weekly admissions stood at 90 million, which equated to 4.6 billion annually.³ This was to be a peak as just two years later in 1950, admissions had dropped to 3.01 billion before more than halving to 1.3 billion in 1960 and then dropping to 920 million in 1970.⁴ Obtaining numbers of cinemas in the USA, particularly in the period from the end of the Second World War through to the 1970s, is complicated by the presence of drive-in screens and what were often referred to as “indoor” or

“hardtop” screens (those within cinema buildings). Nevertheless, in 1948 there were 18,631 screens in the USA, of which 17,811 were “indoor,” whereupon the number of screens then declined throughout the 1950s and 1960s, though by 1970 it had risen to 13,750 with 10,000 “indoor.”⁵

As well as being the zenith of cinemagoing, 1948 also saw the break-up of the structure of major Hollywood studios. A key element of this structure was the extent to which the industry had become vertically integrated, so that the organisation established in one part of the production circuit gained control of the other parts of the production process. To this end, many of the studios came to encompass the spheres of production, distribution, and exhibition, with the box-office revenues providing them with on-going finance. Eight major studios—Paramount Pictures Inc., 20th Century Fox Corporation, RKO, Loew’s Incorporated (MGM), Warner Bros. Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Universal Pictures, and United Artists Corporation—all operated first-run cinemas in major cities in order to offer guaranteed outlets for exhibition. In the late 1930s, the federal government began an anti-trust suit against the studios concerned, viewing their dominant control of the exhibition industry as a restraint of trade. In 1948, the US Supreme Court finally outlawed the policy in the case of *U.S. v. Paramount Pictures Inc., et al.* (known as the *Paramount Decrees*) and the studios were forced to divest themselves of their cinemas.⁶ The case was concerned with the vertical integration of the cinema industry and the extent to which this violated the Sherman Act,⁷ with the court finding that the studios had “unreasonably restrained trade and commerce in the distribution and exhibition of motion pictures and attempted to monopolize such trade and commerce.”⁸ However, despite the hope on the part of the US government that the Supreme Court would find vertical integration illegal it did not do so. Rather, it took the view that without what Weisman identified as “conspiratorial design or monopolistic objective,” it was “not *ipso facto* illegal.”⁹ The court ordered the divorcement of distribution and exhibition because it was clear that the studios had monopolised the first-run exhibition of films, denying access to films for independents. In order to prevent future vertical integration, the court would have to prove that a studio was conspiring to restrain trade or seek monopolistic advantage. Ironically, as Holt points out, the decrees explicitly barred only three studios—Warner Bros., 20th Century Fox, and Loew’s Incorporated (MGM)—from owning cinemas without court approval.¹⁰ Like RKO (dissolved in 1959), Paramount, whose name is

associated with the case, renegotiated with the court and thus was not prevented by the decree from owning cinemas.

Over the following decade, the major Hollywood studios realised that distribution was the key to the film industry and whilst dissolving their interests in exhibition they keenly retained their distribution arms.¹¹ In overseas territories, the studios established local subsidiaries of home-based distributors, which allowed for the complete control of marketing and promotion, and the retention of profits. Nonetheless, as they surrendered control of their cinemas and increasingly sold them to the new and emerging cinema circuits, many argued that that the loss of this major source of revenue led to cutbacks in the number of films produced by the major studios.¹²

The period after 1948 in the USA was one of enormous economic, social, and cultural change, in which the cinema would have to find a space, literally and metaphorically. The development of multiplex cinemas in the USA ran in tandem with two phenomena—the post-war development of suburbs and the radical transformation in retailing during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1960s and early 1970s were a significant period in the development of the multiplex cinema, not simply in terms of the imperatives of design, but in the ways in which cinemas were recast with new forms of marketing, consumerism, leisure, and business management.

FROM OUTDOOR TO INDOOR SCREENS—THE NEW CIRCUITS

In many ways, it is perhaps significant that the major studios *did* lose control of their cinemas, since the development of the multiplex owes much to the dynamism of a group of initially regional exhibitors, often led by charismatic and dominant figureheads such as American Multi-Cinema's (AMC) Stanley Durwood, National Amusements' Sumner Redstone, and General Cinema's Richard Smith, all of whom entered the exhibition business through their family companies. As Melnick and Fuchs observed:

[t]heir educational backgrounds and postwar ideals enabled them to match their instincts and wits with a more formal business acumen that all three received from the same university: Harvard. Roughly the same age as one another, the three would help refashion the world of motion picture exhibition during its transitional years by mixing the grit and determination of their fathers' generation with the legal and business skills that their higher

education imbued ... The showmen of the past were gone forever and a new kind of exhibitor had replaced them: an efficient, postwar entrepreneur operating just outside America's dying downtown and deftly conquering the new American business center: suburbia.¹³

AMC had its origins in 1920 when Edward, Maurice, and Barney Dubinsky, who had performed in tent shows across the US Midwest, bought a Kansas City cinema called the Regent Theater.¹⁴ They began expanding into towns and cities in both Missouri and Kansas and by 1932, their company owned more than 40 cinemas in the two states, though this was scaled back during the Depression. Maurice had died in 1929 and in 1936 Barney retired after suffering a major car accident, leaving Edward in sole control. In 1940, Edward changed his surname from Dubinsky to Durwood, having taken the name from a character—Durwood Belmont—in a 1914 silent film titled *Lena Rivers*.¹⁵ Stanley Durwood, Edward's son, joined the company formally in 1945 having returned from the Second World War, where he had been a navigator for the US Army Air Force. By then the newly renamed Durwood Theaters operated eight cinemas in Kansas and Missouri. For the next five years, the company expanded, with Stanley persuading his father to invest in the burgeoning drive-in sector. However, the late 1940s and early 1950s were also one in which Edward Durwood entered into a series of high-profile lawsuits with Barney (who died in 1948) and his other two brothers—Irwin Dubinsky and H. W. Dubinsky—over ownership and operation of their cinema properties, which was only fully resolved in Edward's favour in 1953, when he was declared sole owner of their theatre properties.¹⁶ In 1960 upon the death of his father, Stanley Durwood assumed control of the company.

The beginnings of General Cinema lay with founder Philip Smith, who purchased the run-down National Theater in Boston in 1922. Smith introduced a series of innovations at the National including a varied weekly programme of films and multiple show times, which, with reduced ticket prices, gave the impetus to what became a small local circuit of 12 cinemas by 1925. The Depression meant contraction and it was not until the 1930s that Smith was able to expand again and this time he did so by capitalising on the growth of the motorcar and developing the drive-in cinema. The company he formed, Mid-West Drive-Ins, operated more than 70 per cent of the drive-ins in the USA by 1940, before diversifying into "hardtops" in 1951 with the opening of what is generally acknowledged as the first shopping centre-based cinema at the Shopper's World Mall in Framingham,

Massachusetts.¹⁷ In 1960, the company became the publicly listed General Drive-In Corp one year before founder Philip Smith died leaving his son, Richard, as President and Chairman of the Board. As if to finally signal the transformation in both the company and the cinemagoing landscape, the company changed its name again to General Cinema Corporation (GCC) in 1964 as Richard Smith undertook to dispose of its drive-in cinemas.

Whilst Sumner Redstone's National Amusements, whose cinemas were branded as Showcase, was considerably smaller than AMC and GCC, its influence in terms of cinema developments, particularly multiplexes, was significant. Sumner Redstone was an extremely powerful figure in the film industry more widely. The company began in Massachusetts in 1936 when Sumner's father Michael Redstone opened the Sunrise Drive-in cinema in Long Island, New York. The company expanded with the popularity of the drive-in and controlled more than 60 sites in the Northeast. Sumner joined the business in 1954. Unlike its major rivals, National Amusements was a private company owned by Redstone, who latterly controlled 80 per cent of the stock and his daughter Shari, who had the remaining 20 per cent.

As beneficiaries of the *Paramount Decrees*, companies like AMC, General Cinema, and National Amusements chose to ignore the city centres and adopted a new-build, suburban-orientated policy of cinema construction. Implicit in this was a new marketing approach based around the multiscreen concept and allied with many of the features of other American leisure forms. Many sites formed part of the burgeoning shopping malls, and the motorcar became a prime consideration.

THE SUBURBS, SHOPPING MALLS, AND THE NEW TWIN CINEMAS—‘LESS LIKE THEATRES AND MORE LIKE HOMES’

The concept of the enclosed, climate-controlled shopping centre was introduced in Minneapolis' Southdale Shopping Centre in 1956, which was promoted as “tomorrow's main street today.”¹⁸ Architect Jon Gruen referred to his centre as “introverted,” seeing in this a virtue that was absent in the “extroverted” commercial strips that were a characteristic of suburban America.¹⁹ In what came to be called “the malling of America,”²⁰ it is estimated that some 17,500 were constructed in a 20-year period from 1960 to 1980, whilst by 1990 the total had exceeded 36,000.²¹ The malls were built on the edges of metropolitan centres, and the impact on those areas was dramatic, as the mass free parking drew the car-owning

suburbanites away from the downtown business and shopping area. Moreover, the malls themselves were different in one other way from the downtown areas and that was in the kinds of consumers they attracted. The downtown business areas, Teaforde argued,²² attracted a diverse range of people whereas the malls reflected the white, middle-class composition of many suburbs.

Stanley Durwood, head of AMC, and one of the cinema circuits that became most identified with the shopping centre, made great play of the company's focus on initial research into potential locations for their cinemas, and particularly demographics, including the income, age, education, and occupation of the surrounding population. Durwood said that he preferred middle-class areas with college-educated, young people since they were "the backbone of the existing motion picture audience, and our future."²³ This research also determined the number of cinemas to be built and the size, based on what it was believed the area could support economically. As cities became ever more identified, in the public consciousness, with decline and poverty, the mall offered, Teaforde argued, an "escape from the harsh realities of a heterogeneous metropolis evident in the business district."²⁴

Many of the new shopping malls were built to serve existing suburban populations, which were increasingly characterising post-war USA. As Jackson observed:

[S]uburbia has become the quintessential physical achievement of the United States; it is perhaps more representative of its culture than big cars, tall buildings, or professional football. Suburbia symbolises the fullest, most unadulterated embodiment of contemporary culture; it is a manifestation of such fundamental characteristics of American society as conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division between work and leisure, and a tendency towards racial and economic exclusiveness.²⁵

The major impetus for the development of the suburbs lay in a series of government policies, especially the Federal Housing Administration (a product of the National Housing Act 1934) and Veterans Administration (created in 1930) via the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (popularly known as the "GI Bill") which provided low-interest mortgages, with small down payments for more than 11 million new houses, and were

largely directed towards the construction of new family homes, away from urban areas.²⁶ According to the US Census Bureau, the growth of the metropolitan areas in the twentieth century, which went from the minority of the population prior to the Second World War to four out of five people by 2000, was principally accounted for by growth in the suburbs.²⁷ The movement of people into the suburbs to take up new single-family housing coincided with or was perhaps a product of, a baby boom between 1950 and 1960, in which the population increased by 19 per cent, the highest of any decade except for the 1900–10, a period which was largely characterised by mass immigration.²⁸ The impact of the suburbs on the US economy was also pronounced since, according to Austin, families there earned incomes “70 per cent higher than those of the rest of the nation” and although “they accounted for less than one-fifth of the total population, suburban families possessed nearly one-third of the spendable income.”²⁹

The dispersal of more of the population to the suburbs, allied to higher incomes, meant an increased dependence on the motorcar. In their report for the Federal Highways Administration, Lansing and Hendricks calculated that in the suburbs only 4 per cent of all income groups did *not* own a car as opposed to 54 per cent in older central cities.³⁰ The car ownership rate for all suburbanites was 49 per cent as opposed to 38 per cent in older cities, but households with two or more cars were 47 per cent in the suburbs and only 8 per cent in the older cities.³¹ Significantly, the increasing use of cars by women characterised the suburb and this was also important in the development and popularity of the shopping mall. The expansion of the shopping mall in the 1950s and 1960s was also linked inextricably to the development of the new highways being built across the country as a result of the 1956 Federal-Aid Highways Act (known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act). Many of the new shopping malls were located at the intersections of major highways. The 1956 act provided federal government support for the construction of more than 40,000 miles of interstate highways, and in particular the building of beltways (by-passes) around major cities. The 1956 act expanded the existing system from 1000 to 41,000 miles and authorised \$25 billion to be made available from 1957 to 1969, with the federal government picking up 90 per cent of the cost.³²

Initially, in the suburbs, Austin argued, the increased time away from work led to the growth of new forms of leisure, of which the cinema was but a minor one.³³ This was due in part to the privatisation of leisure and

new home-based entertainment technologies, but also the absence of cinemas in these new areas. However, this would change. The increase in the number of screens throughout the 1960s was largely a result of a sustained boom in the construction of new, initially single-screen but later mainly twin-screen cinemas, in the burgeoning suburbs and in new shopping centres on the periphery of major towns and cities.³⁴ Writing in 1961, designer A.A. Ostrander observed that “[t]heatres in shopping centers are sure to change the entire entertainment industry in years to come ... the people are continuing to move to the suburbs and it’s up to the producers and actors to follow them.”³⁵ An editorial in the *Miami Times* argued that “the motion picture industry has finally awakened and is meeting its competition. If the people won’t travel far to see a movie, then the movie men meet them more than half way and bring the theatre to their doorstep.”³⁶ In 1962, in one of the first of a series of “Modern Theatre Surveys,” *BoxOffice* reflected on the exhibition landscape in 1961 and contended that in terms of “dollars actually spent, there has been nothing like it since 1950.”³⁷ *BoxOffice* noted in 1962 that the major trend emerging was the interest in shopping centres, with 41.2 per cent (70) of new cinemas being located there.³⁸ On it went, according to *BoxOffice*, with openings in 1963 rising to 240 “four-wall” cinemas, in 1964 to 349, and peaking in 1965 with 352.³⁹ Whilst construction continued throughout the second half of the 1960s, there was some volatility, blamed in large part on what one exhibitor called “tight money” and the view amongst some exhibitors that the market was oversaturated.⁴⁰

Though it came to be identified with the suburb and the shopping mall, the twin-screen cinema was pioneered in New York City in 1962, when Rugoff Theatres Inc. opened the Cinema I and Cinema II on Third Avenue. The “piggy-back” design, by architect Abraham Geller, placed a 750-seat cinema on top of a 300-seat one below, positioned at 90 degrees to the upper, with both having separate ticket desks, lounges, and waiting areas. It was claimed that the Cinema I and Cinema II were the first cinemas to be built in New York City in a self-contained building since 1932.⁴¹ Rugoff’s complex generated considerable interest throughout the industry and was quickly imitated, not least in New York City itself with the opening of Walter Reade’s Baronet and Coronet Theatres later in 1962. This was also a “piggy-back” design—what became known as a “cinema-atop-a-cinema”—however unlike Rugoff’s new-build, Reade’s was a reconstruction of an existing 430-seat cinema called the Baronet, with a new 585-seat cinema added on top—the Coronet. The Baronet

had been a notable first-run, arthouse cinema and Reade's proposal was to spend around \$1.5 million on architect John J. McNamara's design, which included a joint façade 70 feet high with two box-offices and an escalator to take patrons up to the Coronet.

At this point, the Downtown areas of cities were still seen as important centres for leisure and business, whilst for the cinema circuits the downtown cinema was often seen as the location for longer-run, 'roadshow' features. Throughout the 1950s, Durwood Theaters, in common with other circuits, expanded, purchasing downtown cinemas in Kansas, including the Liberty Theater and a number that had been owned by some of the major studios including the Empire Theater (RKO), the Paramount Theater (Paramount), and the Midland Theater (Loew's). In addition, it acquired and converted the Ararat Shrine Temple into a cinema in 1959, renaming it the Capri and equipping it to show films first in Todd-AO, and then Cinerama. Within several years, Durwood Theaters owned all of the cinemas in downtown Kansas City, as the company invested heavily in first-run, prestige sites. Stanley Durwood, however, began to sense a change in the economics of exhibition and in particular the development of the suburbs with the concomitant decline in the attraction of the downtown area. In the early 1960s, Ruben Bergendoff of architectural firm Howard Needles Tanmen and Bergendoff took a group of businessmen, with Durwood among them, on a bus tour of the soon-to-open highway system in and around Kansas City. As Mann observed:

Durwood was impressed. But later, in a private conversation Bergendoff pointed out to Durwood that the highway system ran both ways—if the downtown was allowed to deteriorate, people would quit coming, and the heart of the city would die. From that point on, Durwood pushed to try to revitalize the core of Kansas City. His efforts weren't always successful.⁴²

Having assumed control of the company in 1960 on the death of his father, Stanley Durwood undertook a programme of refurbishment of the company's downtown cinemas, including reducing seating numbers and, significantly, the "twinning" of some of these larger cinemas. In 1962, Durwood converted the lounge of the former Loew's Midland Theater, renamed the Saxon, into the 150-seat cinema called the Studio, which had a separate entrance around the corner. Later in the same year, Durwood introduced a 140-seat cinema called the Academy on the mezzanine floor of the Empire Theater, what Sweeney characterised as a

“theatre-within-a-theatre.”⁴³ Like the Studio, the Academy had its own off-street entrance and Durwood envisaged the two theatres-within-a-theatre taking both first-run and also second-run films.

Durwood’s sense that the suburbs were becoming more of a focus for shopping and leisure led him to adopt two broad strategies: the first was to try and attract more cinemagoers into the downtown areas and the second was to recognise that the suburbs were a place that exhibitors needed to move into. With regard to the downtown areas, in 1962 Durwood introduced a scheme to reimburse cinemagoers for car parking after 6pm followed by the introduction of a free bus service for any of Durwood Theaters’ patrons. Durwood was acutely aware that the substantial investment in the downtown cinemas was a risk but according to Baer, Durwood had faith in the “vehicular mobility of Kansas City,” large amounts of parking, and the presence of a major convention centre.⁴⁴ Despite the attractions of the suburbs, Durwood believed that he could “bring these people back downtown and firm up their old patterns of shopping and showgoing.”⁴⁵ What Durwood did not do, however, was to disregard what was happening beyond the downtown area, seeing the suburban development of Kansas City as an additional, rather than alternative, market.

In July 1963, Durwood Theaters opened the Parkway I and II in the high roof of the Promenade at the new Ward Parkway Shopping Center, trumpeted in a publicity flyer as “Kansas City’s only climate controlled shopping streets.” It consisted of two auditoria side by side—The Parkway I and II seating 400 and 300 respectively—that shared a lobby, ticket office, concession stand, and projection booth, with separate projection and sound equipment. The new twin-cinema, costing approximately \$400,000, was of “French Victorian design” with an awning over the entrance that added to the “Parisian atmosphere.”⁴⁶ Durwood later said that the design of the Parkway twin cinema was serendipitous in that he had originally met with the developer of the Ward Parkway Shopping Center, John Kroh, to discuss the placing of the cinema over a grocery store, only to discover that that the spacing of support columns made it impossible to site a standard-width auditorium. So, Durwood told Kroh, “why not give me two theaters, side by side?”⁴⁷

As the first designated two-screen cinema within a shopping complex, it aroused much industry attention, whilst the shared lobby and single projection booth were also novel. On the opening night, Durwood obtained two prints of *The Great Escape* (1963) and showed it on both

screens to an invited audience. At that point, Durwood thought about multiscreen as a way of showing popular films in two spaces, a kind of “overload” system. On that first night, many couples found themselves given tickets for different auditoria because Durwood had not quite considered the seating arrangements.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the concept of showing the same film in different auditoria would, like the design, inform all subsequent multiplex developments. The Ward Parkway development was judged successful enough for Durwood Theaters to embark on a programme of edge-of-downtown and suburban cinema building, which included the Embassy One and Two twin cinemas (300 seats each) in Kansas City’s Country Club Plaza in 1964 and the world’s first four-screen or quadruplex cinema in Kansas City’s Metro Plaza Shopping Center, in 1966. The Embassy twin was located underground in what had been a basement storage area, a site that *BoxOffice* described as a “something out of nothing.”⁴⁹ The Metro Plaza, in contrast, was located within the shopping centre and had a common box-office around a central lobby and a seven-sided concession stand. Two of the auditoria seated approximately 350, with two smaller ones seating approximately 250 people. The single projection booth allowed for programming flexibility, with films able to be shown on multiple screens and retained for a longer period, perhaps on one screen, if demand was there. Durwood argued that the Metro’s four-screen concept had “greater appeal to the entire family, have moderate prices and offer constantly a wide variety of programs.”⁵⁰

The success of the Metro Plaza emboldened Durwood to think about larger complexes and also to expand beyond its regional base in the Midwest. In 1969, AMC opened the 1050-seat Fashion Square 4 in La Habra, California, which it claimed was the “world’s first free-standing multiplex cinema.”⁵¹ There were two auditoriums with 375 seats and two with 200 seats, which shared the same lobby and would, according to the manager, M. Robert Goodfriend, “offer maximum flexibility for booking films which appeal to all ages.”⁵² When the new cinema was launched on 27 August the newspaper advert offered patrons “4-1 fun.”⁵³ In an article in *BoxOffice*, a leaflet setting forth seven advantages for patrons of multi-screen cinemas, and distributed by AMC at La Habra, was reprinted:

[p]atrons can come to the quad complex every week and see a different picture, as at least one or more theatres will have a change of feature weekly. This, as opposed to a single house playing a long run feature which automatically excludes the area patron having seen the current attraction until the change of program allows another visit to the theatre.⁵⁴

The Fashion Square 4 was the first of several quadruplexes planned by AMC—in Aurora, Colorado; Indian Springs, Kansas City; and Oakland, California. All of them were in new shopping centres and all had a common layout of four auditoria with their own entrances off the common lobby with concession stand, display and toilets, and their own individual marquee.⁵⁵ Durwood had also looked to change the name of the company to reflect the reach of their new form of cinema operation, initially settling on American Royal Cinemas (ARC). Though the cinema opened as an ARC, the company's name was soon changed after a successful injunction by the American Royal livestock and horse show in Kansas to cease and desist using the American Royal Cinema name. In 1969, Durwood Theaters became American Multi-Cinema (AMC).

Stanley Durwood had not been the first to recognise the virtues of having more than one auditorium. In Canada in 1948, the eventual co-founder of the giant Cineplex Odeon Corporation, Nathan Taylor, had taken over an unfinished cinema in Elgin, Ottawa, as part of his Twentieth Century Cinemas circuit. The cinema had a 1200-seat auditorium, and on a piece of adjoining land Taylor built an additional 800-seat auditorium, with the intention of showing art films. By the 1950s, Taylor was introducing several innovations at the Elgin, not least of which was the showing of the same film on both screens at times of high demand. Moreover, he also recognised that a film which was initially popular in the larger auditorium could be moved to the smaller one as audiences fell. This ability to retain films for longer was important and heralded what became known as the 'move-over' film or the 'sub-run'.⁵⁶

James Edwards, who ran a large California-based exhibition circuit and who died in 1997, constantly disputed the commonly held view in the industry that Durwood had been responsible for the multiplex. In 1939, Edwards had borrowed \$400 to purchase a cinema called the Alhambra on Atlantic Boulevard in Los Angeles and in 1940 he bought the property next door, which he converted into a second auditorium. Though initially the second screen was referred to as the "Annex," with an entrance off the foyer of the Alhambra, it was renamed the Alhambra Twin in the 1970s.⁵⁷ Edwards would consistently claim to have been the first to open a multiplex: "[e]veryone since who says they invented [the multiplex] is wrong," he once said.⁵⁸

AMC were not the only company focusing on the new burgeoning malls. By 1970, General Cinema Corp. (GCC) had become the largest operator of shopping centre cinemas in the country,⁵⁹ and like its competi-

tors it kept on expanding throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s. For GCC's Richard Smith, the company's move to the suburbs was in large part due to the vision of his father, who had been "wise enough to see the push towards suburbia and the need for shopping center theatres near people's homes."⁶⁰ For exhibitors like GCC the positioning of cinemas in or on the site of the new shopping centres springing up across the USA allowed for the placing of the auditoriums on a single level, with a single projection booth that could serve both auditoriums. Finally, the siting of these new cinemas in or adjacent to shopping centres meant that space was available for large amounts of parking. GCC utilised the same "butterfly" design in developments in Houston's Gulfgate City, Meyerland, and Northline Shopping Centres (all opened in early 1965), and in Philadelphia's North East Shopping Centre (opened in late 1965). Writing in 1965, Richard Smith was of the view that the cinema exhibition industry was living through the "third major change in its basic economic structure in 20 years."⁶¹ The first two changes were television and the rapid growth in drive-in cinemas respectively, whilst the third was the boom in shopping centre cinemas. Barton McLendon, from Republic Theatre Corporation, echoed Smith's optimism when referring to the "Great Return by the theater-going public" spurred on in large part by "the great urban migration" to the "new, spacious and super-convenient shopping centers."⁶² Corbett summed up perfectly the development by observing that "the movie theater as technology achieved the ultimate physical *and* symbolic connection to the most obvious form of conspicuous consumption: shopping."⁶³

The development of the shopping centre, then, heralded the introduction of new cinemas and circuits that took their aesthetic inspiration from the malls themselves and the surrounding suburbs. Indeed, in 1966, a business writer from the *Dallas Times Herald* suggested that "motion picture theatres are looking less like theatres and more like homes."⁶⁴ Drew Eberson (son of noted architect John Eberson), one of the most prolific cinema architects working during this period, outlined his vision of the "theatre of tomorrow" to the 1963 Theatre Owners of America convention, as one "with comfortable seats, plenty of leg room, improved sight lines and a design and interior that will be completely flexible to receive any foreseeable new type of exhibition and projection of pictures and sound."⁶⁵ Many of the cinema circuits strived to make the interiors of the new cinemas luxurious, with: "continental"-style seating in the auditoria that was wider and with more space between; soft lighting; spacious and