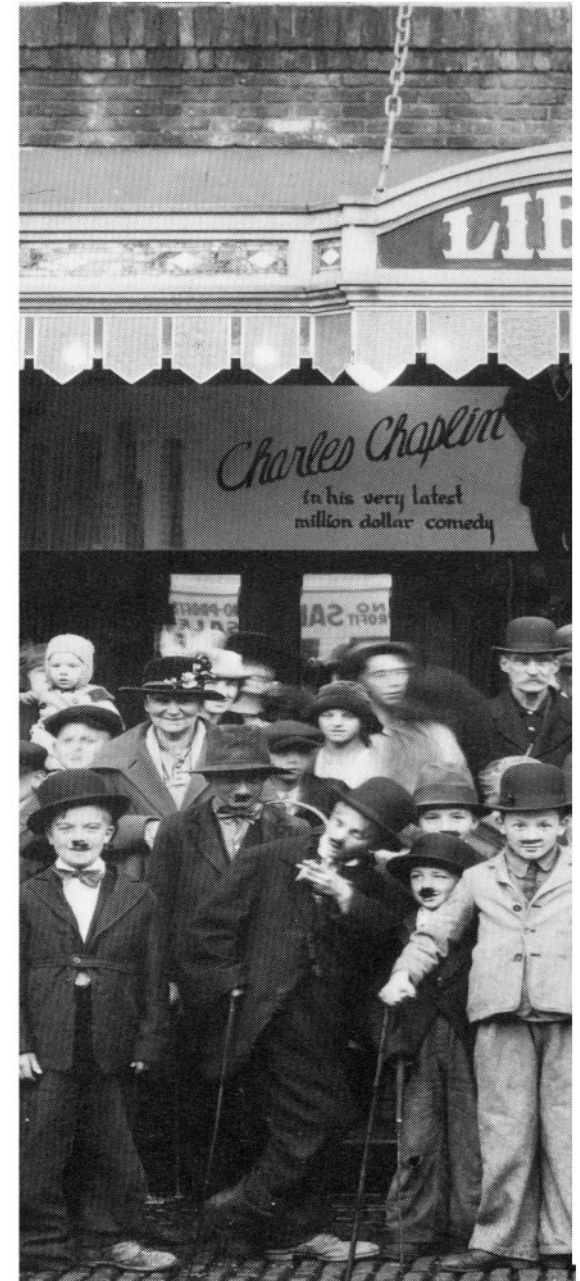


“Why are there so few decent cinemas? If you walked down the street and every restaurant was a McDonald’s you’d be frustrated. When you go out you want to decide if you want to eat Italian or Chinese or Indian. Sometimes you want to grab a sandwich, or a burger; sometimes you want to spend the whole evening over a meal. It would be bizarre if every evening you went out you had to go to the same identikit burger bar serving bland mass produced food where you sit on bright coloured plastic chairs under neon lights with muzak playing in the background. Yet nine times out of ten people go to the cinematic equivalent”(Baker *et al* 2002: 3)



Michael Winterbottom, film director, stated (in Baker *et al* 2002: 4) that as a cinema-goer he wants to have the widest choice of films to view: whether they are from America, Europe, Hong Kong, India, China or even Britain so long as he can see them in a cinema which is designed for them. According to Winterbottom, this is a cinema that is sophisticated and friendly, a cinema with good quality projection and sound, which has enough screens to give him a choice of films and which is near the bars or restaurants he might want to visit to afterwards. (Baker *et al* 2002: 4)

According to Baker (2002:6), the quality of a particular cinema makes a dramatic difference to the number of people who attend. Old, uncomfortable and unsophisticated cinemas cannot compete with the standards set by modern leisure facilities, and potential audiences respond accordingly. It has been proved through research, and the evidence of the cinema industry in general, that cinema-goers want new release films, value for money and choice.

“The standard of cinema buildings, the comfort levels and the quality of technical presentation are all rising rapidly. Unobstructed viewing, large screens, multi-channel sound systems, and comfortable seats with generous legroom are considered to be basic requirements by many modern cinema-goers.” (Baker *et al* 2002: 6)

Differentiation and choice are the keys to attract audiences to the cinema and this is the primary idea behind this dissertation. The objective is to enhance the experience of the viewers whether they attend the cinema centre as a group or as an individual by giving them the leisure of choice. Choice includes which movie to see and choice

in the sound and visual quality. The viewer should at all times feel comfortable in the surrounding environment. By giving the viewer attractive choices these comfortable environments can be achieved. Emphasis is placed on incorporation of the old idea of cinema as a black box with new innovative ideas of cinema viewing.

## 1.2 THE HISTORY OF THE CINEMA THEATRE

“The origins of the movies lie within the collective genius of inventors working during the late nineteenth century.”(David Naylor 1981:13) Films were by no means the first answer to the desire to see the moving image. It was preceded in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by an overabundance of techniques and machines capable of reproducing and projecting images to an excited audience.

From 1830 to 1900 cinema evolved from a Zoetrope - a drum with images of the various stages of an object that once spun, which enabled you to see the images in motion - to the series photography of Eadweard Muybridge (1830 – 1904). Next was the Chronophotographic gun of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830 – 1904) – a single camera capable of taking consecutive pictures of live action. Marey also designed a paper film roll. Tomas Alva Edison (1847 – 1931) was next with his company’s Kinetograph, a camera that was able to capture movement by allowing for more extensive sequences. (Fig 3) During the same time, Oskar Messter (1866 – 1943) designed a movie projector, providing a steady motion of the film roll. In France, the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière (1862 – 1954, 1864 – 1948) invented the Cinematographe, a device that combined the functions of a movie camera, film printer and film projector. (Jarek Kupsc 1998: 1-3)

“On December 28, 1895, the Lumières opened the first movie theatre in history, showing several short films to a paying audience.” (Jarek Kupsc 1998:3)

According to Heathcote (2000:9), cinemas, every bit as much as films, are the physical embodiment of their eras. “The movie palaces of the United States in the 1900’s and the 1910s were the offsprings of a long and distinguished collection of buildings, dating back as far as the ancient Greek amphitheatres and through the formal stages of the seventeenth century. Baroque palaces, Mediterranean palazzos, Gothic Cathedrals and temples of the Far East served to inspire the designers of the grandest movie theatres. The buildings with the most direct bearings on shaping the movie palaces were the opera houses and music halls of the late nineteenth century.” (Naylor, 1981: 17) At the same time, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 halted the development of the European cinema.

“The palaces’ nearest relative in time were the nickelodeons and the vaudeville

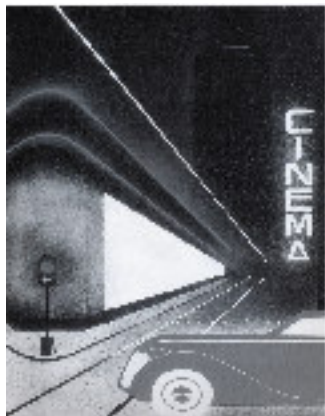


Fig 1 Belgain poster (c. 1930)

Fig 2. Poster for 'The man with a movie camera'

houses built just after the turn of the century. (Fig 4) Art Nouveau was then in vogue in America as evidenced by much of the theatre design of that period. Art Nouveau flourishes were visible in the façades of many nickelodeons that were small family-operated businesses, located in simple storefronts.” (Naylor 1981: 24)

The 1920’s gave way for a new idea of exoticism – auditoria of gold and velvet in the outrageously elaborate cinemas – palaces that made the audience feel that they too could temporarily immerse themselves in the dream of luxury. “This kind of extravagant, exotic auditorium became one of the fastest growing genres and was the first move away from European historicist styles.” (Heathcote 2000: 15) The interior of the cinema was seen as a place of escape and fantasy. (Fig 5) It created a world in which one could forget one’s reality and create a new reality. The architecture of these cinemas manifested the same idea of providing a fantasy world. “These dreamlike temple interiors were both absurd and striking, precursors to the childish awe, which theme parks attempt to instil by taking visitors around the world in a brief, self-contained visit.” (Heathcote 2000:17)

Whether simply for economic reasons, for practical and acoustic reasons or for reasons of fashion, the 1930’s saw the last gasp of the exotic theatres as Art Deco and Moderne gradually became indispensable. “It was in these years that the Art Deco, Modernism, Expressionism and all kinds of theatrical historicist applied styles coexisted for a brief period.” (Heathcote 2000: 19) The greatest boom in cinema building more or less coincided with the lifespan of Art Deco – it became the first and only universally recognised building style for cinemas. One of the main reasons that proved so popular with cinema architects was its simplicity. Art Deco

is merely a decorative style. “Cinema architects began to shift slightly from the conventional theatrical model of auditorium and the 1930’s saw plans of cinemas developing into a shape derived from projection and sightlines of screens rather than stage.”(Heathcote 2000:24)

During the 1930’s Modernism began to take a firmer grip on the architectural avant-garde but, by and large, cinema owners and builders remained wary of the functionalist roots of Modernism. (Heathcote 2000:29) (Fig 6)

In the late 1940’s and 50’s after the Second World War, economic and cultural austerity deepened and cinema attendance began to fall away dramatically, with inevitable consequences for the building stock. During these modernistic times, few new cinemas were built. It was the start of the anti-building cinema – the drive-in. The drive-in was the perfect manifestation of a non-architecture of the mid twentieth century cinema design. During the 50’s and 60’s, the television gradually replaced cinema as the most popular form of mass entertainment. Other factors that also contributed to the decrease in cinemas, was the growth of alternative leisure pursuits, low standards of comfort and services in existing cinemas. (Heathcote 2000: 43)

The multiplexes and megaplexes that emerged in the 1970’s and which dominated the new cinema building boom in the 1980’s reduced the architectural element to the design of a garish, stick-on façade and lobby. The multiplexes have tended to be the most basic sheds, built by developers with minimum input from architects and then fitted out by the film chain. In this way the architecture was limited to the

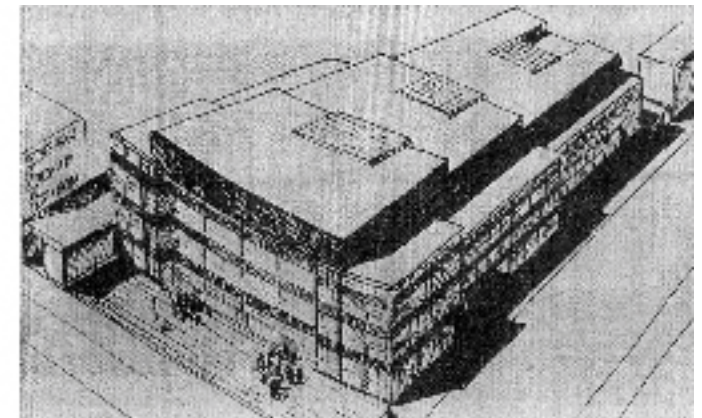
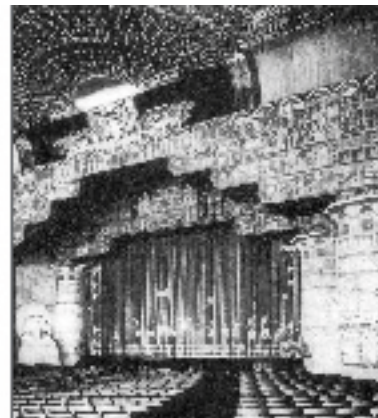
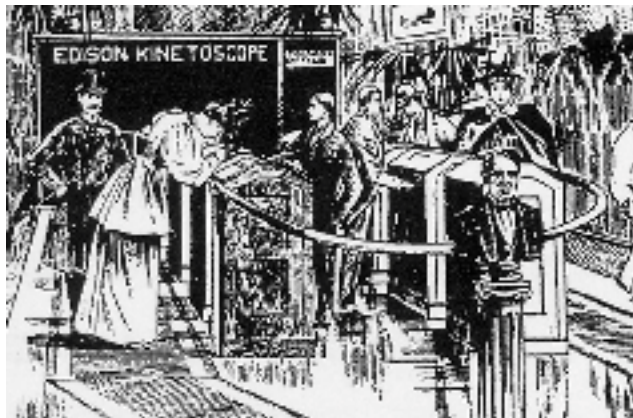


Fig 3 - 6. 3. Edison's Kinetoscope, 1891. 4. Nickelodeon - Dreamland Theatre (1907) Portland, Maine. 5. Grauman's Egyptian Theatre (1922) Los Angeles. 6. Design for Kino Palast (1926) Max Taun

interior design and, at best, some kind of canopy. (Heathcote 2000: 43)

With economic growth and profitability being important issues of the 1990's, most of the big cinemas of the 1970's and 1980's were spilt up to form three or four smaller volumes. With this change of scale there was an inevitable loss of comfort and sense of occasion. This was largely due to the increased number of film releases and to give the public a wider choice.

"Recently, however, the revival of city-centre cinemas and a few, lavish and enjoyably kitsch out-of-town monsterplexes has led to a revival of interest in the architecture of cinemas." (Heathcote 2000:10)

Although sources with information on the history of South African movie theatres could not be found, one can assume that the history of the movie theatre design in this country correlates with that of Britain and the United States but that the time line is a decade or two behind.

## 1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

### 1.3.1 Real world trends

Where are cinemas going? Are they an evening out, a festive occasion, something of a 'luxury' when compared to the parallel availability of television? Are we looking at fewer cinemas, with more advanced technical standards, itself again a reflection of urban reorganization? Are cinemas changing to a means of education like the



Fig 7. Regent Theatre (1913) New York

IMAX that shows a variety of documentary films? Or are cinemas going to fade out to make place for the comfort and ease of the cinema in your own living room?

According to Francesco Casetti: "...is the cinema not a neutral space, a mere container; if it may be said that it has served as the venue for contact between film and the audience, then the cinema is a point of transition between a possible world created for the screen and the real world in which the audience lives. Moreover, it guarantees mediation between the entertainment related by the film and that provided by the living environment, especially the city. A border zone, therefore, a margin; but also a threshold which in juxtaposing two worlds reveals their common traits and means of passing between them." (Casetti s.a: 1)

Cinema theatres have been undergoing numerous trends over the last several years. The increased construction of multiplexes is the main cause for the increase in screens. At the same time, smaller single screen theatres are being retired. One just needs to look around at the suburban mall to see the number and size of new theatre complexes. At the same time, older urban theatres are converted into retail space, concert halls, or demolished.

This increase in screens and decrease in cinema theatre complexes is largely due to the efforts on the part of theatre owners to reduce costs. Infrastructure such as parking, concession stands, and restrooms can be shared by a larger number of screens. (Husak 2004: 924) This creates more variety in the product, which serves the needs of the broader and more varied market.

The long-term trend is to concentrate on more screens at fewer sites, resulting in substantial cost savings and more choices of screenings.

In South Africa there has also been an increase in the competition among the leading cinema theatre companies. On Friday 18 March 2005, Nu Metro Theatres slashed their movie ticket prices to R12 for all shows in all their cinemas. This was in response to Ster-Kinekor's strategy to ensure future sustainability and profit, announced on 16 March 2005, reducing their ticket prices to R14 at 70% of their cinemas. As result, CEO of Ster-Kinekor, Ferdi Gazendam, expects cinema attendance to increase from 16.5 million to a staggering 26 million over the next financial year as a result (2005/2006, ending-June). (Marsland 2005 www.biz-communiy.com)

This indicates that movie ticket prices in South Africa are expensive in comparison to the renting of videos or DVD's, that the market is very competitive and that cinema owners have to make bold decisions to ensure growth in attendance. This

fact needs to be kept in mind in this project. According to Sanjay Seeth, Operations Director of Numetro, the price of movie tickets is a complex issue, and like the price of all products and services, they need to be appropriate, for both the consumer and for suppliers to maintain a viable business model. (Marsland 2005)

South Africa is also making its mark in the world of film. “The film industry has seen a considerable growth in the Western Cape over the past six years with Cape Town as a top international venue for film production. This is largely due to the favourable exchange rate and the region’s diverse and magnificent scenery and locational settings, superb quality of light and availability of world-class technical support.” (Masters 2004, <http://www.dreamworld.com>)

Due to this growth in the industry the development of the Dreamworld Film City Project emerged. This project situated in Cape Town provides a one-stop working film-studio complex. This complex will be able to accommodate foreign filmmakers and will have the capacity to expand when required to do so by the market. This project is a great boost for South Africa’s economy and will have a positive impact on tourism in the country.

The aim of this development is to support the growth of the local film industry and to empower, train, sustain and develop local talent. (Masters 2004)

### 1.3.2 Design problem

The aim of the project is to design a **cinema centre** that is **original** and offers the user a **new and exciting experience**. Emphasis will be placed on new **technologies**, like **digital cinema** and innovative screens, bringing a new dimension to cinema viewing. Digital cinema will replace the **film-based cinema**, which will provide an enhanced viewing experience for audiences, content flexibility for theatre owners, and distribution cost savings for distributors. Digital cinema will make the showing of sport events, concerts as well as events of significant importance possible and this can take place in real time. These showings are called **alternative content**.

A **diverse range of approaches** to the cinema design will be incorporated. One will be the traditional **black box cinema** and how it can be improved. One should keep in mind the significance of the cinema auditorium that has stayed a black box for the last decade. It plays a vital role in the audience experience. Another approach is to create a new type of cinema, a **prototypical example** by using the essence of what a cinema needs to offer. The idea of cinema will be connected with the urban context by innovative positioning of the screen where the public square acts as the cinema auditorium. “... Invert the idea of a cinema as a closed space, isolated from

the city by opening it and merging it with the urban setting.” (Andersen 1999: 103)

Working with a company like **Numetro Theatres**, as a client, the feasibility of these new technologies will be explored. The project will be situated, and take form in the second phase of the **Melrose Arch development** in one of the three buildings adjacent to the second **public square**. Only one of the three buildings is proposed for **entertainment** by the urban developers and this building will be preferred. The development is situated between the Johannesburg CPD and Sandton on the M1 motorway.

## 1.4 TERMINOLOGY

**Cinema multiplex** – A complex that houses more than at least five or more cinema auditoria. A cinema multiplex is usually an individual building, functions independently and is not part of shopping centre, for example, Sterland in the Pretoria CBD.

**Cinema centre** – A cinema centre is a complex that houses cinema auditoria as well as other facilities related to the moving image like exhibition spaces, galleries or film studio. A cinema centre houses less auditoria than a cinema multiplex. Examples like this are not common to South Africa. The closest example is the shopping centre cinema like Ster-Kinekor Classic in the Brooklyn Mall, Pretoria.

**Digital cinema** – “Digital cinema is the replacement of celluloid-based distribution and projection with digital technologies.” (Husak 2004: 921)

**Alternative content** – “Alternative content is defined as other types of entertainment displayed on a large screen in a theatrical setting. Common applications are sporting events such as football and soccer, concerts and stage plays, and potentially large-scale interactive gaming events. Alternative content will generally be presented in real-time or in near real time.” (Husak 2004: 922)

**Prototype development** – An initiative that will be develop in the aim to test its feasibility before it is sold to a leading company that specializes in the related topic.

**Concession stand** – A stand where one can buy refreshments, like soft drinks and popcorn. These refreshments are usually very expensive as they are the primary source of profit for theatre owners.

### 1.5 DELIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Due to the time limit of the project there will be certain constraints on the research dissertation and design. The goals of this project (2.3) will act as framework for the design. The spatial layout of the part of the building excluding the cinema centre will not be included in the detail design, but will be included in the development process and will act as guideline for further development. Certain assumptions will be made regarding the design of the building, such as the height, the building footprint as well as any other guidelines stipulated by the Melrose Arch Design Guidelines from Arup et al (2004).

The history of the cinema theatre has only been discussed briefly in section 1.2. More emphasis has been placed on current precedents and future trends in chapter 4.

The parking for the project will be delimited from the design, as the precinct has a super basement that will run underneath the whole development. The people visiting the cinema will also use this parking. It will also be assumed that the existing portion of the basement's structural grid will merely be extended beneath part two of the development.

Maps and any other research will be based on the most recent surveys and databases available.