‘We have come to be destroyed’: The ‘extraordinary’ child in science fiction cinema in early Cold War Britain

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Abstract
Depictions of children in British science fiction and horror films in the early 1960s introduced a new but dominant trope: the ‘extraordinary’ child. Extraordinary children, I suggest, are disturbing because they violate expected developmental norms, drawing on discourses from both the ‘psy’ sciences and early neuroscience. This post-war trope has been considered by film and literature scholars in the past five years, but this existing work tends to present the extraordinary child as an American phenomenon, and links these depictions to adults’ psychoanalytical anxieties about parenthood and the family. This article, considering Village of the Damned (1960), Children of the Damned (1963), The Damned (1963), and Lord of the Flies (1963), will contend that the extraordinary child was British before it was American, and tapped as much into nuclear anxieties generated by the early Cold War as fears about the ‘permissive society’, especially given that many of these films preceded the peak of the ‘Swinging Sixties’ and were based on British science fiction of the 1950s. The ‘psy science’ that was dominant in these films was developmental psychology, not psychoanalysis. Moreover, adolescents as well as adults were key audiences for these films. Drawing on self-narrative essays written by English adolescents aged 14 to 16 between 1962 and 1966, I will demonstrate that this age group employed their own fears of nuclear war and their knowledge of psychological language to challenge adult authority, presenting a counter-narrative to adult conceptions of the abnormal and irresponsible ‘rising generation’.

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In 1973, the most familiar of all fictional extraordinary children, Regan MacNeil, was released into cinemas. *The Exorcist* depicted a sweet 12-year-old girl on the verge of puberty who became possessed by a demon and started performing sexually explicit and violent acts; the film ends after the demon is exorcised by a Catholic priest. As William Paul (1994: 287) has argued, ‘It is impossible to exaggerate the phenomenon of *The Exorcist*’; it was an unprecedented commercial success both in Britain and the USA, and attracted an enormous amount of critical commentary, discussion, and coverage. The success of *The Exorcist* led to a series of US movies that have been dubbed ‘the demon child cycle’ or the ‘evil child boom’ by film theorists (Heffernan, 2004; Twitchell, 1985); these included *It’s Alive!* (1974), *The Omen* (1976), *Carrie* (1976), *Demon Seed* (1977), *Full Circle* (1978), *Halloween* (1979), and *The Children* (1980).

This framing of the emergence of the ‘evil child’ motif means that the USA dominates much of the existing historiography on this theme (Renner, 2016), despite the fact that ‘evil’ children films were produced by a number of national cinematic traditions, sometimes before 1973. The Italian films *Kill, Baby, Kill* (1966) and the ‘Toby Dammit’ segment of *Spirits of the Dead* (1968) formed part of the late 1960s ‘boom’ that immediately preceded *The Exorcist* (Heffernan, 2004: 187), while Japanese and Spanish films such as *Ringu* (1998) and *The Devil’s Backbone* (2001) kicked off another wave of interest in this theme globally in the 1990s and early 2000s (Balanzategui, 2018). However, it was in early 1960s Britain that some of the earliest cinematic examples of ‘extraordinary’ children films were produced and made, and these films highlighted a rather different set of concerns about the rising generation than did their ‘long sixties’ American or Italian counterparts.

In the past five years or so, there has been a parallel ‘boom’ in academic writing by US scholars about this string of depictions of children in post-war film; these have been termed ‘monstrous’, ‘evil’, ‘revolting’, ‘cruel’, and ‘dangerous’ (Gregory, 2018; Kord, 2016; Renner, 2013; Scahill, 2015). The difference in terminology is not merely semantic but highlights a difference in approach; while I analyse the depictions of children in this group of British horror and science fiction films in the context of developmental psychological conceptions of childhood, this work by US scholars tends to focus on psychoanalytical and sociological concerns. Karen Renner, perhaps the dominant scholar in this field, argues that these films express the hidden ‘resentment’ of adults living in a child-centred period, expected to focus their energies entirely upon their offspring, while Andrew Scahill makes a similar argument from a flipped perspective, suggesting that a queer reading of these films allows space for the viewer to identify with the children by rejecting mature heterosexual adulthood, which entails having children of one’s own (Renner, 2013: 21; Scahill, 2015: 26). While this existing work cites British films – although these citations are usually confined to *Village of the Damned* and *The Damned* – the context within which this corpus of work is situated is firmly American. Therefore, while these readings of the films offer useful insights, they do not relate these
films to their specific British contexts, or spend much time analysing their relationship to developmental psychology, despite its popularity in the United States as well as in Western Europe (except Gregory, 2018).

The nature of the threat posed by what I term ‘extraordinary children’ looks different when we consider British films of the early 1960s. These films explicitly use developmental psychological language, and on occasion feature specific psychological tests designed to measure intellectual development. This reflects the prevailing climate in post-war Britain, where psychoanalytical language tended to be more frequently employed to discuss infants and children under five; once children reached the age of the children in these films, developmental psychology became dominant in discourses both at school and at home. These films also engage with transnational concerns about ‘gifted children’, who were portrayed as both potential saviours of the nation and threats to national security in this period; in Britain, this arose from the tension between seeking exceptional individuals who would help the nation retain its place in the global order and at the same time promoting social conformity and collaboration (Crane, 2019; Gregory, 2018). In these films, children display physical, mental, and emotional abilities that dramatically exceed the expected norms for children of their age. The familiarity of this developmental psychological language is reflected in contemporary self-narratives written by both adolescents and adults, and the films play off the assumption that the audience will understand these discourses. However, they also use the apparatus of the biological sciences, such as microscopes and scans, to suggest that these psychological differences are evident in the children’s physical bodies, engaging with the emerging discourses of neurology and ethology.

The four films that I consider in this article are all British films, and all were based on British science fiction novels of the 1950s. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) most famously features a group of amoral children whose primitive society falls apart when they are shipwrecked on an island after an atomic explosion. John Wyndham’s ‘cosy catastrophe’ *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) spawned both *Village of the Damned* (1960) and its sequel *Children of the Damned* (1963), although it has been argued that the first few chapters of Wyndham’s abandoned and unpublished sequel to *The Midwich Cuckoos*, *Midwich Main*, point more towards the themes of *Children of the Damned* than does his previous novel (Sawyer, 1999: 80). Finally, H. L. Lawrence’s almost forgotten *Children of Light* (1960) formed the basis for *The Damned* (1963), renamed to capitalise on the success of the two previous ‘Damned’ films.

Not all of the children in these films are ‘evil’, but all of them are ‘eerie’. The group of alien Children in *Village of the Damned* are straightforwardly threatening, using their psychic powers to compel adults to do what they want and reacting with disproportionate violence when they are crossed. The group of six extraordinary children in *Children of the Damned* possess the same supernatural abilities as their predecessors in *Village of the Damned*, but the film depicts their actions more sympathetically, as a matter of self-defence or, in one case, as a response to a brutal upbringing. Nevertheless, the opening scene of the film emphasises that, while these children may not be malicious, they are still fundamentally unnatural. When one of the boys, Paul, completes a psychological block test in a fraction of the time required by the three ‘ordinary’ children competing alongside him, his adult audience are visibly unsettled, and this discomfort is transmitted
to the viewer as the camera moves along the row of boys to show Paul standing calmly by his finished test, with no sense that he is tempted to gloat or celebrate. When another boy bursts out in anger, knocking his incomplete blocks across the room, this serves to underline the weirdness of Paul’s composure. Extraordinary children may not be evil, but they are uncanny, because they do not behave or think in the way that we think children should (Balanzategui, 2018).

The origins of all these films lay in printed science fiction that, in Golding and Wyndham’s cases, drew from the utopian progressive pedagogical tradition of interwar Britain. Utopian progressives postulated that setting children free by removing adult influence over their upbringing would create a generation that was better and wiser than the generation that had preceded it, which had caused the futile slaughter of the First World War. However, written after the Second World War, both of their novels display uneasiness with the progressive inheritance, depicting groups of children who are violent and destructive when left to their own devices (Tisdall, 2016). As Golding reflected in 1965:

Before the second world war I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society would produce goodwill; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganisation of society. It is possible that today I believe something of the same again; but after the war I did not because I was unable to. (Golding, 1965: 86)

Rather than seeing children as the key to humanity’s salvation, he argued that the children in Lord of the Flies realise that ‘wisdom… is to be found in the world of grown-ups… now they have begun to find the inadequacy of their own powers’ (ibid.: 94). While adults are not presented as blameless saviours in these novels, these self-governing, autonomous groups of children are a force for evil rather than good.

In contrast, Lawrence’s text, like the film it inspired, presents its group of radioactive children as victims rather than threats. Nevertheless, adult assessments of the children in the novel emphasise that their advanced intellectual abilities are disturbing, even though their intentions may be benign: ‘These children seem to be experts in every damn branch of knowledge. . . . Each one knows more than any kids I’ve ever met’ (Lawrence, 1960: 124). Wilmar H. Shiras’s American science fiction novel Children of the Atom (1953; first published in Britain in 1954) is an interesting comparator and predecessor in this context. As in Lawrence’s text, Shiras depicts an accident in an atomic plant that produces a group of benign but intellectually ‘superior’ children; 13-year-old Tim, for example, is so smart that ‘there were no tests yet devised that could measure his intelligence’ (Shiras, 1954: 25). However, Shiras’s novel features a much happier ending than Lawrence’s, as the local adults come to terms with the children’s abilities, and the children plan to join public schools rather than secluding themselves from society.

These novels and films are dominated by the Cold War. While both British and American films featured nuclear fears in the 1950s and early 1960s, the significance of this trope in British films about extraordinary children, unlike their US counterparts, may reflect different public assessments of the likely impact of a nuclear war (Boyer, 1984). Matthew Grant has argued that while the British public was ‘resolutely pessimistic’ about the population’s chances of survival in a nuclear war from the 1950s onwards,
in contrast, in the USA, ‘nuclear war was often imagined as a survivable, though terrible, event’ by American adults (Grant and Ziemann, 2016: 18; Grant, 2016: 103). Adrian Bingham suggests why this might have been the case in Britain, noting that popular newspapers such as the Express and the Mirror did not engage in “carefully managed “nukespeak”’ in the 1960s but ran sensationalist stories that used graphic imagery of nuclear fallout (Bingham, 2012: 612–13). Comparing illustrated magazines in the USA and Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, Scott C. Zeman argues that the USA’s Life maintained an optimistic take on atomic technology, at least until the early 1960s (Zeman, 2012). In contrast, Christoph Laucht found that coverage in Britain’s Picture Post was more mixed, especially after the USA’s Castle Bravo nuclear test in 1954, which led to unforeseen levels of fallout in the Marshall Islands and the surrounding area and became an international incident (Laucht, 2012).

Civil defence preparations were much more visible in the United States than in Britain in this period – most famously personified by school ‘duck and cover’ drills – but, as Joseph Masco has argued, this may actually have served as an ‘emotional inoculation’ of American adults against the idea that a nuclear war would actually destroy civilisation (Masco, 2008; Weart, 1988). US government propaganda from the 1940s and 1950s, such as the notorious clips collected in the 1982 documentary The Atomic Cafe, aimed to reassure Americans about the atomic bomb by emphasising the survivability of a nuclear attack (Wills, 2020). In contrast, despite government efforts to promote civil defence in Britain after 1945, early confidence in Britain’s ability to deal with an attack was falling apart by the mid 1950s, with Coventry City Council announcing in 1954 that it would stop funding civil defence programmes as they were a waste of time (Grant, 2016: 104). By the mid 1960s, the Civil Defence Corps had been discontinued, with even some of its former recruits acknowledging that its mission was futile (Douthwaite, 2019).

In 1981, the horror writer Stephen King, analysing horror fiction in US print, film, radio, television, and comics in his Danse Macabre, called The Exorcist ‘a movie for all those parents who felt, in a kind of agony and terror, that they were losing their children and could not understand why or how it was happening’ (Petley, 1999: 98). Four years earlier, King had published his own ‘extraordinary child’ horror story, ‘The Children of the Corn’, in which children create their own society ruled by a pagan god and sacrifice any adults foolish enough to stray into their cornfield. In this later non-fiction text, King argued that the dominance of the ‘evil’ child in the 1970s was a response to the ‘permissive society’ and the widening generation gap between teenagers and their parents (King, 1981). However, extraordinary children films first emerged in Britain at the very beginning of the 1960s, when the post-war consensus was supposed to have reasserted traditional social norms and when an affluent working class had ‘never had it so good’. One could simply shift King’s assertions about ‘permissiveness’ to an earlier period; although it is unlikely that children experienced greater personal freedom as a consequence of child-centred parenting, this did not mean that parents and caregivers did not feel greater pressures and strains as a result of new child-rearing advice, and hence positioned the recipients of their care as ungrateful and selfish (Tisdall, 2017). However, to consider this discourse in isolation would be to ignore both the nuclear themes in these films and the ways they reflected anxieties about the future that were expressed not only
by adults, but by an even more numerically significant group of cinemagoers: school-age teenagers.

As Christine Grandy has recently argued, the cultural history of popular art forms such as film and television has long suffered from an ‘absent audience’ (Grandy, 2019). While ‘new cinema history’ has explored the embodied experience of going to the cinema, the responses of ordinary people to the films they saw have remained elusive (Maltby, Biltereyst, and Mears, 2011). Some cultural historians of post-war British film have attempted to address this by conducting oral history interviews with people who went to the cinema in this period (Andrew, 2000; Glen, 2019; Manning, 2020; O’Brien and Eyles, 1993; Richards, 2003), while projects such as UCL’s ‘Cultural History and British Cinema-Going of the 1960s’ (2013–16) have employed innovative methods such as running showings of especially well-known films to spark recollections alongside conducting interviews and questionnaires.

However, while this work is valuable, it is also problematic from the perspective of historians who are especially interested in the experiences of children and young people. It is possible to interview only the adult who still exists today, not his or her adolescent self; the particular subjectivities that shaped teenagers’ responses to these films have disappeared. This audience, therefore, remains ‘absent’; however, it is possible to consider how the kinds of discourse teenagers employed at the time may have conditioned their responses to the media they consumed. In the second half of this article, I use large archival collections of essays written by English adolescents in the early 1960s to think about how the ‘extraordinary’ children in these four films may have appeared to adolescent viewers, who made up an ever-increasing proportion of the cinema audience in this period, and how they tied into their own understandings of age, generation, and the nuclear threat.

The ‘extraordinary child’ in British science fiction films

Developmental psychology started to redefine the characteristics of the ‘normal child’ from the turn of the 20th century onwards. While the idea of stages of development was not new in this period, the schema produced by the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget in the 1920s and 1930s was much more detailed than previous iterations, and was based on first-hand observations of children that supported its veracity, even if later critics would challenge Piaget’s methodology (LeVine, 2007). Furthermore, Piaget’s argument that children and adolescents’ mode of thought was fundamentally different from that of adults and only progressed in sequential, disconnected leaps was at odds with earlier ideas about child development, which had postulated a smoother continuum between childhood and adulthood and had emphasised the role of life experience (Tisdall, 2020: 53–4). Piaget’s findings were widely disseminated across Western Europe and the United States in the following decades, and became strongly influential in pedagogical and childcare advice for children over seven after the Second World War (ibid.: 64–6).

Piagetian developmental psychology postulated that children acquired certain crucial capacities – the ability to think rationally and reason logically, the understanding of genuine empathy with others, and the desire to pursue true sociability – only as they
progressed through preset stages of development (Piaget, 1926, 1929, 1932). While Piaget’s early publications suggested that these stages could be linked to experience and so were not completely maturational, popular versions of developmental stages reproduced in texts aimed at teachers and parents tended to simplify Piaget’s complex ideas and suggested that the stages could be neatly linked to specific chronological ages (Tisdall, 2020: 63–6). In post-war Britain, developmental psychological assertions were also bolstered by other relatively novel schools of thought. On the one hand, sociological work on children and adolescents emphasised the importance of the environment but did not necessarily challenge fundamental assumptions about the abilities of young people and their separation from the world of adults (Burchell, 2018). On the other hand, new biological and ethological findings suggested that the earlier psychological work of researchers such as Piaget and his co-author and research assistant, Bärbel Inhelder, might be further supported by evidence provided by early neurology.

This emerging consensus on child development was evident in a study group on the Psychosocial Development of the Child, which met annually at the World Health Organisation’s headquarters in Geneva from 1953 to 1956. The list of participants could have served as a ‘Who’s Who’ of significant figures in Europe and America involved in the scientific investigation of child development in the early 1950s. It ranged from Piaget and Inhelder to the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, the British psychiatrist John Bowlby, and the neurophysiologist and pioneer of electroencephalograms (EEGs) in Britain, William Grey Walter. At first glance, the odd one out seemed to be the Austrian Konrad Lorenz, whose work in ethology – the study of the social behaviour of animals – led to the discovery of the mechanism of filial imprinting in geese (Tanner and Inhelder, 1971). However, ethology was to prove central to these pivotal mid-century conferences on the nature of the child.

Ethology both served as a consolidation of the trends that had been emerging since 1918 and prefigured the concerns that would occupy researchers in child development in the second half of the 20th century. As Adrian Wooldridge (1994: 370) argues, this interest by social scientists in the biological basis of human nature had begun in the early 1950s, leading psychologists to ‘rediscover’ the concept of instinct, and shaping later bestsellers such as Desmond Morris’s The Naked Ape (1967). In the wake of the Second World War, there was an increased focus upon the origins of emotions like aggression, which were now viewed as biologically programmed rather than socially constructed. At the WHO study group, the evidence provided by ethologists was used to support new biological claims about child nature. Many participants took a particular interest in William Grey Walter’s novel research on EEGs and their potential for diagnosing juvenile abnormalities (Tanner and Inhelder, 1971: 50).

Most significantly, Piaget became fascinated by the idea that his developmental stages might be able to be attached to specific maturational sequences of brain development. His co-authored text with Inhelder, The Growth of Logical Thinking From Childhood to Adolescence (1958), suggested that the progression of stages of development might be related to social context and that the evolution of formal logic was perhaps more dependent on social than neurological factors (Piaget and Inhelder, 1958). However, the WHO conference two years earlier revealed significant differences of opinion between the two psychologists, suggesting that this text more closely reflected
Inhelder’s views. At the WHO conference, she gave a presentation entitled ‘Criteria of the Stages of Mental Development’, where she outlined Piaget’s theories; she stated that the order of the stages was constant but the age at which they emerged was relative to the environment (Tanner and Inhelder, 1971: 85). However, in the discussion that followed the paper, Piaget objected to this characterisation (ibid.: 90, 93). He argued that his identification of the series of operative structures that developed throughout childhood and adolescence gave ‘some hope of co-ordination between psychology and neurology’. Confidently declaring that ‘it is evident that such general structures are based on the activity of the brain’, he thought that ‘we can go further in developing the comparison between the various cybernetic models and the activity of intelligence’ (ibid.: 30, 32).

Furthermore, it was Piaget’s formulation of the relationship between psychology and biology, rather than Inhelder’s, that was to shape popular conceptions of childhood in England. To take just one example, the Plowden Report on English primary education (1967) drew on his research to suggest that it was probable that the higher intellectual abilities also appear only as maturation of certain structures occurs. These structures must be units of organisation widespread through the cerebral cortex, rather than localised areas. Piaget and Inhelder have described the emergence of mental structures in a manner strongly reminiscent of developing brain or body structures; the mental stages follow in a sequence, for example, which may be advanced or delayed, but not altered. There seems good reason to suppose that Piaget’s successive stages depend on progressive maturation or at least progressive organisation of the cerebral cortex. (Department of Education and Science, 1967: 11–12)

As this indicates, early neurology had an innate attraction for educationalists, because it provided a ‘hard’ basis upon which to rest their assumptions about child development. This new focus on children’s brains formed part of a greater interest in ‘brain-based’ explanations for behaviour that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, although neuroscience itself became more firmly established as a discipline only from the 1980s onwards (Stadler, 2012).

British ‘extraordinary children’ films of the early 1960s drew on developmental psychological tropes that emphasised the otherness of children and how unsettling it was when children displayed abilities that were deemed unsuitable for their chronological age, but they also utilised the apparatus of the biological sciences to demonstrate how this accelerated development was visible in the children’s bodies and brains. Village of the Damned and Children of the Damned use psychological and biographical assessments of normality most explicitly. The children in Village of the Damned grow too fast; in an early scan of one of the pregnancies in the film, the doctor exclaims, ‘It’s one of the most perfectly formed embryos I’ve ever seen – seven months after only three months’. By the time the children are four months old, they have a developmental age of 18 months, both physically and mentally. In Children of the Damned, it is discovered that the children’s blood cells are different from normal human blood cells; they are human cells advanced by a million years of evolution, causing the scientist analysing them to exclaim, ‘They’re another species’.
However, both these films present their child antagonists as not only physically but intellectually and emotionally mature for their age. Both films have the children do familiar box- or block-based psychological tests of the kind that might have been used by educational psychologists in British schools to assess progress through Piagetian developmental stages (Brearley and Hitchfield, 1966); as we have seen, they complete these tests unnaturally quickly, and their speed is explicitly compared to the slowness or inability of ‘normal’ children. The composure of the child actors is also used to underline their uncanniness in both films; they move tidily, often remain motionless, and express no obvious emotion, even when they are killing adults (Village of the Damned) or anticipating their own destruction (Children of the Damned). While this article is focused primarily on British film rather than television, it is worth noting that this early 1960s concern with unnaturally precocious development was not confined to the big screen. For example, the first episode of Doctor Who, ‘An Unearthly Child’ (1963), plays directly into familiar ‘extraordinary child’ tropes in its depiction of Susan, a strange 15-year-old girl who troubles her teachers because she is a ‘genius’.

The Damned presents a group of radioactive children who have been brought up in captivity by Bernard, a base commander and scientist who believes that their natural resistance to nuclear radiation offers the only hope for the survival of humanity after a nuclear war. This film does not present the children as exceptionally physically mature, but it retains Lawrence’s original emphasis on their unusual intellectual abilities. While the children are not as composed as their counterparts in Village of the Damned and Children of the Damned, they do still come across as mature for their age, especially in the context presented by the film, when a group of unwitting adults stumble across the prison and have to be educated by the children about the realities of the situation. Similarly, Lord of the Flies uses the adult gaze in its final scene, when a naval officer arrives on the island, to demonstrate how little adults understand about what its child protagonists have experienced. Ralph discovers the naval officer only after he has crawled towards him; the camera pans slowly up the officer’s body, clad in a pristine white uniform, to emphasise how tall he is compared with the small boy and the authority of adulthood that he wields. We suddenly see the boys from the naval officer’s perspective as a group of misbehaving children, but we cannot forget the violent acts that they have committed.

All three of the Damned films underscore how peculiar these ‘extraordinary children’ are by making them appear externally as sweet innocents, with blue eyes, blonde hair, and pigtails or braids on the little girls. Costume choice for the child actors in Village of the Damned underlines their eerie appearance: padded blonde wigs make their heads look slightly larger than normal and are subtly at odds with their natural brunette colouring (Newman, n.d.). Lord of the Flies does not employ this aesthetic quite so consistently, although both Ralph’s light brown and Jack’s red hair appear fair in the black-and-white film. These depictions also play into racial tropes – valorising whiteness in film and associating it with ‘cuteness’ served to exclude black children from the category of childhood (Olsen, 2017). In these films, the typical white child is employed to demonstrate how these unsettling children are not as ‘cute’ as they may initially appear – these children are white rather than black precisely because they are meant to look like children but behave otherwise (Merish, 1996).
Children of the Damned is unusual in its inclusion of three children of colour – one Indian, one Chinese, and one Nigerian – as its central message about global peace requires the film to present a group of six children who hail from different countries. Moreover, the way these children are depicted challenges contemporary assumptions about black and ethnic minority children and adolescents in Britain and their inevitable links to juvenile delinquency (Waters, 2018: 127–30). When Rashid, the Indian boy, is introduced, the camera zooms in on his eyes while also catching flames flickering in the foreground. This seems to associate Rashid with riot and unrest, but later in the film, a man from the Indian embassy is shown advocating a policy of non-violence towards the children, in contrast to his Western counterparts, while a portrait of Gandhi is shown in the background. This is immediately juxtaposed with Rashid’s violent death as British intruders break into the church. As Rashid comes back to life near the end of the film, this sequence of events positions him as a Christ-like, innocent figure. The flames reflected in his eyes can be seen to foretell his destruction, along with his fellow children, at the hands of the adults, rather than his own propensity for violence.

A focus on the children’s eyes in a number of these films – most obviously in Village of the Damned and Children of the Damned, but also in the marketing material for Lord of the Flies and The Damned – emphasises that their childlike appearance masks their true selves, with the eyes representing the ‘windows to the soul’. The classic ‘stare’ of extraordinary children – with fixed pupils looking up from beneath eyelids, as if gazing at a taller adult – also serves to emphasise their eeriness (Lennard, 2015: 51). In both Village of the Damned and Children of the Damned, the children’s eyes glow when they are exercising their psychic powers (although this effect was not used in the first British cut of Village of the Damned); this effect is perhaps most memorable in Village of the Damned, where it is associated with the pure evil of the children. However, Children of the Damned not only utilises a similar special effect but relies heavily on close-up shots of the children’s ordinary eyes to illustrate their uncanniness; this makes the film feel more subtly unsettling than directly horrific. In this film, the children’s stares do double duty, both emphasising their unnaturalness and calling adults to account for their inability to satisfy the children’s demands. Sometimes – as in Village of the Damned – these demands are either impossible or amoral, but in both Children of the Damned and The Damned, ‘extraordinary children’ ask adults more difficult questions about what they owe to them.

Adult audiences and the rising generation

Psychological and biological discourses about child development were common to all of these films; the other common language was that of nuclear fear. These two themes might have appeared to contemporary audiences to be naturally linked. Images of children were prominent in anti-nuclear campaigns from their inception. Women, in particular, often cited fear for the futures of both unborn and existing children as a reason for becoming involved in groups like CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), which was founded in 1958. Claire Langhamer’s work on Mass-Observers’ responses to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 indicate that this was already beginning to crystallise from the time the first bomb was dropped: a 32-year-old housewife reflected
in her MO response that ‘I feel detached from it all though I feel my children cannot escape annihilation’, while one man wrote, ‘I have three children and we have all along planned to have four. My wife revived the question: I hesitated and thought of the future in terms of the atom bomb’ (Langhamer, 2019: 208–9, 220).

Working-class women interviewed in the 1950s often framed nuclear fears around discourses of childhood and motherhood. These concerns often centred around fallout from nuclear testing: one woman said, ‘When I read the effects of radiation on children I feel that it’s no longer worth having a family’, while another, interviewed in the same ‘works canteen’, argued that ‘I think the tests should be stopped for the sake of the children. There is too much radiation already’ (Hogg, 2012: 545). CND picked up on these kinds of narrative in its advertising campaigns. The CND symbol itself inherently pointed to the centrality of future generations to the campaign, with the circle symbolising the unborn child (Duff, 1971: 115). CND’s Women’s Group (1958–60), which churned out literature warning mothers about the hazards of strontium-90 in milk, proclaimed ‘the right of our children to live, uncrippled by nuclear poisons’ (Wittner, 2000: 207). Even after the demise of this group, the regular feature on the Women’s Campaign in the CND newspaper Sanity, which appeared from 1967 onwards, appealed explicitly to motherhood, with one 1969 article entitled ‘The End of All Children’ (Burkett, 2016: 428, 432).

These young mothers provided one key audience for British films in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, the Screen Advertising Association estimated that, in the average audience, 39% of attendees were aged 16 to 24, 21% were aged 25 to 34, and only 13% were aged 35 to 44 (Manning, 2020: 30–1). Although this first figure fails to differentiate younger from older teenagers, it seems evident that a substantial proportion of this category may have been young couples. The average age of first marriage dropped sharply from the 1940s to the 1970s, especially among the working class, who made up the majority of cinema audiences. While the average age at first marriage for women was 26.0 in 1945 (28.0 for men), it dropped to a low of 22.5 in 1971, rising to 22.8 by 1973 (24.0 for men). The average age for a women to give birth to her first child was also 26.0 in 1945, but dropped to a low of 23.5 in 1968 and had recovered only to 23.9 by 1973 (Pugh, 2008: 127; Thompson et al., 2012: 23). As Claire Langhamer has argued, this meant that marriage penetrated youth culture, and to an extent, the distinction between teenagers and the ‘young married’ collapsed, with a quarter of working-class brides still teenagers in 1959 and more than three-quarters under 25 (Langhamer, 2013: 151).

Given these figures, one audience for these films was married couples who might already have children of their own, or be considering starting a family. They hence fed adult fears and desires, reflecting British concerns about nuclear apocalypse and its impact on future generations, but combining these with worries about child development and the political maturity of the young. While explorations of nuclear threat were common in British science fiction in the 1950s and 1960s (Hogg, 2012: 542), ‘extraordinary children’ provided especially fertile ground for exploring these fears, because of the way they pulled together a range of adult concerns about the rising generation. Looking at short science fiction published in the American magazine Astounding in the
1940s and 1950s that featured this trope, Kristen Gregory concluded that ‘the gifted child evokes much of the same ambivalence as the atom bomb’ (Gregory, 2018).

This same connection holds true for these British films of the 1960s, which used nuclear anxieties as a way to highlight adult worries about what the next generation had inherited from them. In a reflection of the dominance of the developmental psychological model, which penalised children who developed abnormally fast as well as those who developed abnormally slowly, gifted children were viewed as potentially maladjusted and delinquent in this period (Tisdall, 2020: 195–6). However, transnational discussions about the importance of identifying and supporting gifted children linked Britain, Western Europe, and the United States, as their potential as national assets became even more prominent in the era of the Cold War (Crane, 2019). As the US ambassador argues in *Children of the Damned*, having realised the power that the children can exercise, ‘A small difference in the ability of one man allowed us to beat Hitler to the atomic bomb. . . . But this is a gigantic difference’.

This set of films therefore united two kinds of adult fear about the uncertain future of the ‘world that had been won’ in the Second World War. All three of the *Damned* films raise questions about who will inherit the earth, and none of them gives comfortable answers. In *Village of the Damned*, the children have been planted in the wombs of the women of Midwich by an alien entity and pose a threat to the continuation of the human species. Professor Zellaby, the protagonist of the film, who has taken a close interest in the education of the children, makes the difficult decision to sacrifice himself in order to destroy this dangerous threat to humanity, framing his argument by references to evolution and the ‘survival of the fittest’. While, morally, this film is the most straightforward of the three, the final image of the children’s school exploding is inevitably troubling, even though their evil nature has been established, and it retains the sense that this is an unpleasant necessity rather than a triumphant conclusion. Maintaining adult human dominance in a world where nature is ‘red in tooth and claw’ requires violence to be met with violence.

Of these four films, *The Damned* deals most explicitly with nuclear fears. In its climax, Bernard acts to protect the children that he has nurtured, and explains his motivations to his mistress, Freya:

> They were born as they are. Their mothers were exposed to an unknown kind and level of radiation by an accident [nuclear testing]. I don’t need to tell you that there are such accidents. . . . To survive the destruction which is inevitably coming [nuclear war] we need a new kind of man. An accident gave us these nine precious children. The only known beings who have a chance to live in the conditions which must inevitably exist when the time comes. . . . My children will go out to inherit the earth.

However, Freya is horrified by Bernard’s plan: ‘After all that man has made and still has to make, is this the extent of your dream? To set nine ice-cold children free in the ashes of the universe?’ When Bernard realises that Freya will never support him or his plan, he kills her to protect his investment. This conversation between Bernard and Freya dramatises two different visions of the future. In one – mirroring Arthur C. Clarke’s earlier British science fiction novel *Childhood’s End* (1953) – the children are humanity’s
saviours, but at a horrific cost, outliving all other members of the species and making past adult achievements irrelevant; in the other, they are freakish victims of adult wastefulness and violence, born to die in ‘the ashes of the universe’.

Children of the Damned, released in the same year, picks up on the same questions and arguably gives the most complex answers. When the children gather together in a London church near the end of the film to issue a plea to the adults, they state that they have ‘come to be destroyed’, suggesting that the world is not ready for them and that their presence is inciting violence. However, the adults hesitate over destroying these children, especially when they join hands in a symbol of interracial harmony and pacifism. Like the children in Village of the Damned, they are eventually blown up, but rather than this being the result of a deliberate and heroic plot, it is portrayed as a tragic mistake. One member of the army corps who have been waiting to attack the children if they prove violent accidentally lets a screwdriver roll down to set off the alarm, and the explosives that have been planted are triggered. The penultimate shot of the film is the children’s hands protruding from beneath the rubble; the final shot is a close-up on the screwdriver. This sequence of events, released a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, clearly mirrors concerns that the world could descend into nuclear holocaust through accident rather than design, and puts the blame for this firmly on the shoulders of the adults. Nevertheless, as with the ‘ice-cold’ children in The Damned, the portrayal of the children themselves remains markedly ambivalent.

Finally, Lord of the Flies is unusual – both among ‘extraordinary children’ films and among nuclear fiction of this period more broadly – in depicting a world living through the aftermath of nuclear war, rather than anticipating and averting disaster (Grant, 2013). While Lord of the Flies does not concern itself with the details of nuclear fallout in the way that later films would do, it still emphasises the context in which the central story is taking place through its opening scenes. The film opens with a series of still images backed by a rapidly shifting soundtrack. The first shots depict an elite, traditional England – boys studying Latin, a choir singing in Greek, cricket pitches, and a college dinner – but these then shift to stills of nuclear missiles and the image and sound of Big Ben striking the hour with warplanes arrayed behind it. The juxtaposition of photographs indicates that this war is the reason for the boys’ evacuation from their school and that the plane they are travelling in was shot down, stranding them on the island. Therefore, the film, like The Damned and Children of the Damned, imagines a future where children are the only ones left to inherit the earth – even if this is not literally the case in Lord of the Flies. But, like Village of the Damned, it suggests that such an occurrence would lead to the end of adult civilisation and a total breakdown of valuable social norms such as collectivism and compassion; precisely the norms that post-war developmental psychology suggested that children were unable to comprehend.

Adolescent audiences and the nuclear apocalypse
Developmental psychological language was not only absorbed by parents and teachers in post-war Britain. Adolescents’ self-narratives from the early 1960s indicate how adeptly they engaged with these discourses, and how they used them to both confirm and challenge adult ideas about teenagers and the ‘next generation’. As the single biggest
group of cinemagoers in the post-war period, adolescents formed another key audience for these films, despite their X certificates – which can be assumed to have been frequently evaded (Manning, 2020: 38). As the historian of horror Andrew Tudor writes, ‘I have been enjoying horror movies since, at the age of 14, I discovered that long trousers and an appropriately casual cigarette would gain me admission to the X-certificated *The Quatermass Experiment* [sic] [1955]’ (Tudor, 1991: viii).

The interviews and questionnaires conducted by the UCL British Cinema-Going project suggest that a number of respondents who were in their teens in the early 1960s enjoyed horror and science fiction films, especially those released by Hammer, who produced *The Damned*; the X certificates encouraged rather than deterred these adolescent viewers.¹ One lower-middle-class male respondent from London, who was 12 years old in 1963, recalled how ‘exciting’ it was to sneak into X films wearing a ‘beige anorak’ that made him look older, because he was ‘seeing things I was not meant to see’.² A handful of respondents, mostly men, cited Joseph Losey, the director of *The Damned*, as one of their favourites, and one lower-middle-class respondent from Reading recalled that *Village of the Damned* and *Children of the Damned* had been two of his favourite films.³ Female respondents were less likely to remember horror films fondly, but there were some female horror fans, including two working-class women from east London; one, who was 15 years old in 1963, said that she liked Hammer horror because ‘it made me feel glad I was safe in the cinema’, while the other, who was 14, thought that ‘to be terrified is fun in your teens’.⁴

Researchers from the Institute of Education collected thousands of essays written by adolescents in southern England between 1962 and 1966 as part of the Multiple Marking of English Compositions (MMEC) and Development of Writing Abilities (DWA) projects. Neither MMEC nor DWA asked their participants directly about their film or television viewing habits. However, adolescent writers sometimes independently cited an interest in science fiction. One particularly enduring memory for these writers was the *Quatermass* serial, the last instalment of which had first been broadcast on the BBC in January 1959. All three series – *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *Quatermass II* (1955), and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958–9) – were still being mentioned by these teenagers as an example of good science fiction in 1963, alongside another BBC science fiction serial, *A for Andromeda* (1961).⁵ Film versions of the Quatermass series were released by Hammer in 1955, 1957, and 1967.

The Quatermass serials did not utilise the ‘extraordinary child’ trope, but through their depiction of a heroic scientist who dealt with various horrific extraterrestrial encounters, they often evoked nuclear fears. For example, in the opening episode of *The Quatermass Experiment*, when a rocket ship crashes in South London, a working-class woman exclaims, ‘It’s one of them things, they’ve finally dropped one’. The opening episode of the sequel, *Quatermass II*, picks up even more explicitly on concerns about nuclear testing, as it shows the explosion of a nuclear motor that had been intended to power Quatermass’s next spacecraft; the visual of the explosion clearly depicts the by-now familiar mushroom cloud (Rosenthal, 1991). Both serials go on to deal with unrelated monsters, but these openings frame the series around viewers’ fears of a real threat from unrestrained scientific experiment. As Quatermass reflects in *The Quatermass Experiment*, ‘Thirty years ago I’d almost decided to devote my life to land-surveying
in the tropics. That at least would have harmed only myself’. Although the Quatermass serials were seen as unsuitable for child viewers, with some episodes screening formal warnings at the start, their Saturday night slot meant that, as reported by the MMEC writers, children were likely to be among the millions who were watching (Pixley, 2005: 25).

The MMEC and DWA projects never asked their respondents to write about the nuclear threat, or even about related topics such as ‘war’ or ‘politics’; the set topics tended to be very closely focused on the everyday lives of teenagers, with one typical example reading, ‘Look back over the past year or so and select an occasion which for any reason stands out sharply’. However, a number of the respondents brought the topic up spontaneously. These adolescents’ sharp awareness of the threat posed by nuclear war in the early 1960s indicate that they may have interpreted the anxieties dramatised by ‘extraordinary children’ films in different ways to their adult counterparts. Glen argues that adolescents saw films as one way of engaging with perceived generational differences between themselves and their parents, citing one male interviewee’s remembered testimony of being a teenager in the 1960s:

Many films carried the anti-authority spirit which we all liked and our parents, who had endured hardships during the [Second World] War, did not. This was in tune with our view, or perhaps just a wish, that power was transferring from authority to us. (Glen, 2019: 360)

Another respondent from UCL’s British Cinema-Going project explicitly connected his love of horror films with a desire to distinguish himself from his family: ‘Parents dis-approved of Hammer, so of course I couldn’t miss out on them’. MMEC respondents frequently mentioned the idea of a ‘generation gap’ between teenagers and their parents; whether or not this ‘gap’ was more apparent than real (Todd and Young, 2012), this was clearly a discourse that had meaning for these adolescent writers. This was especially relevant for anxieties about nuclear war, where sociological studies from the early 1960s onwards have shown that parents and children often shared the same concerns, but parents often avoided raising the subject with their offspring (Ptacek, 1988: 438–9). One male secondary modern school pupil, asked to write about ‘what is wrong with the world’ in his English lesson in 1966, argued that nobody cared about the Vietnam War, as ‘the parents of all my friends that I have asked said drop a bomb on it and left it at that’. His classmate concurred about adult apathy: ‘People will continue in this way unless they are shaken by a war of a larger scale than man has ever thought possible, most probable that of Atomic size’.

Youth support for organisations like CND was impressive from the start; 4 in 10 marchers in 1959 were under 21 (Sandbrook, 2005: 264). Support for anti-nuclear activism was also not confined to those who could legally vote. Ian Welsh remembers being involved in a protest as a child in north-east England in the early 1960s:

I marched around a school playground chanting ‘ban the bomb’ along with the majority of other children. Our passive occupation of the playground and refusal to return to lessons until something was done about ‘the bomb’ resulted in a stern lecture from the headmaster and block detention for everyone involved. (Welsh, 2003: 1)
Contemporary accounts of nuclear activism in Britain, while conceding high youth involvement in organisations like CND, tended to downplay teenagers’ nuclear fears because they were assessed through a traditional lens of party membership and official political activism. Writing in 1965, the sociologists Philip Abrams and Adam Little confidently asserted that ‘the young are today massively agreed as to their own political incompetence. It does not trouble them. Politics is for the grown-ups’, adding that only 5% of young people were members of a political party (Abrams and Little, 1965a: 315; 1965b: 96). Conducting interviews with young people who were party members, they took their assessment of their peers at face value, stating that all the interviewees agreed that the participation of youth as a distinct interest group in politics would be undesirable: ‘We’d never get anything done anyway’ (Abrams and Little, 1965a: 331). Because of this, Abrams and Little argued that the young were ‘not a new political generation’, as they had no collective political self-consciousness (ibid.). This tied into developmental psychological assertions that teenagers were incapable of true altruism, empathy, or independent thinking (Edwards, 1965).

Early historians of the anti-nuclear movement concurred with Abrams and Little, playing down teenagers’ support for CND by arguing that their parents tended also to be ‘middle-class radicals’, and that young people were thus simply modelling themselves on the older generation. ‘It is by no means certain’, Frank Parkin wrote, ‘that the problem of the Bomb has weighed particularly heavily on the young, in the sense that they regard it as the major issue confronting them in modern times’ (Parkin, 1968: 144). However, these early interpretations made several assumptions about teenage activists. Firstly, it was assumed that young activists who also had activist parents participated in CND and other related anti-nuclear protests for the same reasons as their parents. Secondly, the only young people deemed to be concerned about the nuclear threat were those taking political action; this ignored teenagers who were afraid of nuclear apocalypse but did not have the means or motivation to take part in protests, with black, working-class, and northern or rural adolescents especially marginalised and isolated.

Notably, even MMEC respondents who disapproved of CND’s activities and criticised their peers who were involved, stigmatising them as irresponsible and thoughtless, were not necessarily against CND’s objectives. One writer, when asked to describe ‘a demonstration’, imagined an anti-nuclear march where the teenagers were misbehaving, shouting, screaming and singing songs on the subject of the Bomb. . . . It is a well known fact that certain teenagers join every political society in their city, and then use them as ‘glorified Youth Clubs’ without knowing anything of their views. This makes a mockery of it all.

However, the same writer still seemed concerned for the future of the protesters’ objectives: ‘If this was a typical example of the members of the C.N.D. movement there was not much hope of the bomb being banned ever!’ Another MMEC respondent was even more explicit; they thought that demonstrators were ‘foolish . . . exhibitionists’ but that “Ban the bomb” and other such slogans are just a way of expressing an opinion that a majority of people hold.’
Teenage writers, however, also employed nuclear war as a rhetorical strategy in order to argue that it was their parents’ generation that was really immature, because they had unleashed this potential destruction upon the earth. One MMEC respondent wrote in 1963, in answer to the question ‘What are some of the commonest causes of disagreement between young people of your age and their parents?’:

I have heard it said of the modern teenager by some father, ‘teenagers today – too clever by half!’ This, of course shows sheer ignorance, just because we know more than he did when he was fifteen he thinks that we shall do something that will destroy the world, he made a bit of a ham fisted job of putting the world in order in 1914 and in 1939… The teenager of today has brains. he does not want a war, his brains will see to that… By the time the modern youth is of age we shall be able to correct the world in many ways, of this I am sure.¹³

Another, writing on the same subject, argued that

it is apparent that a cold war has developed between the younger generation and the old timers of yesteryear…. Some young people dislike the older generation because of the threat of Atomic war they feel, and rightly so in my opinion, that it was the old scientist of years ago that gave us this threat because of their childish instinct to create things that cause mass destruction.¹⁴

These essays reflect the kind of intergenerational uncertainty expressed in British ‘extraordinary children’ films, especially *Children of the Damned*, released in the same year these essays were written, which featured a notable encounter between Paul, the leader of the group of children, and a British psychologist, Tom. Concerned by the willingness of the children to kill in self-defence, Tom tells Paul, ‘You must learn not to kill’. Paul responds, ‘But they kill’. Tom answers, obviously struggling, but willing to include himself in the group of violent adults, ‘I know we kill… But it’s wrong’. When he finds out that Paul has designed a destructive machine that is solar-powered, he, again, asks him not to use it. This time, he anticipates Paul’s defence, even if he has no answer for it: ‘I know we make machines, horrible machines, but…’ As these teenage writers argue, it was difficult for adults to maintain their ‘natural’ authority if they had abdicated moral responsibility.

Another rhetorical strategy employed by some of these writers was to argue that the supposed ‘irresponsibility’ of teenagers, exemplified by their lack of financial planning, was actually a rational response to the uncertain future that they faced:

Mabye they [adults] feel we should save the money, for we will need it on a ‘rainy day’ but what they don’t realise is that there might never come a ‘rainy day’ with the threat of Atomic war.¹⁵

Most young people do not believe in a future for this World. While they are having fun there is in the back of their mind the threat of the little man who has his finger on the red button of the H-bomb… Parents are confused. They know it is partially their fault, but also the fault of society.¹⁶
Another male writer was a member of CND but faced resistance from his parents to his political activities, with his mother calling the protesters ‘Stupid Beatniks’ and his father terming them a ‘bunch of hairy nits’. When he was staying in a boarding house with his parents, the landlady did not allow him to wear his ‘Ban the Bomb’ badge down to dinner, and so he refused to attend dinner ‘on a matter of principles’. However, ‘my mother took [the badge] from my jacket when I was taking a bath, and I have not seen it since’. He used the same kind of rhetoric to criticise his parents’ priorities, arguing that they had forced him to stay on at school, so he was constantly short of money, unlike his friends who were out earning. ‘I bring this point up regularly’, he wrote, ‘but all I get is “think of the Future”, I am, we might not all be here, with all these things flying around’.¹⁷

This was echoed by 17-year-old David MacMillan, from Hull, in the Generation X survey of 1964:

> I understand how some teenagers go astray. They think they are living on the brink of the H-bomb, and want to have a good time before it’s too late. I think they should be more down to earth. But again a lot of them are forced to be superficial because they think the world is in ruins. I think we have a Middle Age problem more acute than the Teenage problem. If they had set a better example things might be different for us. (Hamlett and Deverson, 1964: 42)

As Freya asks Bernard in the climax of The Damned, released a year before this survey was published, when he explains his long-term plan for the nine radioactive children to ‘inherit the earth’, ‘What earth, Bernard? What earth will you leave them?’

As the anti-nuclear rhetoric in some of the MMEC and DVA essays demonstrates, the developmental psychological language of age that was utilised by ‘extraordinary children’ films was both understood and challenged by teenagers. One rhetorical strategy was to emphasise the fact that teenagers were physically developing more quickly than they had been in previous generations, and so deserved to be seen as emotionally mature earlier as well.¹⁸ One MMEC respondent wrote:

> Parents of today are out of touch with the modern world, or at least ninety nine percent are. . . . The younger generation have increased greatly in adolescence, being much older than they really are, parents failing to realise this definitly restrict their children from more grown up affairs.¹⁹

However, other respondents, showing an especially sophisticated grasp of developmental psychological language, emphasised that physical maturity did not equal emotional, social, and intellectual adulthood, as it depended on the mentality of the individual:

> Young people are growing up quicker now. There is nothing that anyone can do about it because it is both physically and mentally, so why try to stop it. . . . At this age everyone is growing and developing, physically and mentally at different rates, and so it must be accepted that some children although they are . . . younger than one child they may look and behave perhaps a year older, and so the child, who is older in years, will resent this fact,
and also younger children will be wanting to do what older ones are doing just because they are as tall as them, but this does not mean they are as mature mentally.20

This challenged the normative concepts of childhood and adolescence that were presented in ‘extraordinary children’ films, indicating that there was nothing disturbing about development that proceeded at different rates. In this way, young people’s familiarity with developmental psychological language allowed them to construct their own narratives about age and the life cycle, challenging the rationale that underlay the threat posed by the ‘extraordinary’ child.

Fears about the future were common among both adolescents and adults in early Cold War Britain. ‘Extraordinary’ children films of the early 1960s made these fears manifest in the groups of uncanny and gifted children that they presented, managing to appeal to both teenagers and their parents in their ambivalent visions of the value and power of the rising generation. Village of the Damned and Lord of the Flies explored concerns about the increasing freedom being permitted to children through the growth of child-centred education and parenting, drawing upon the foundation laid by the novels upon which these films were based (Tisdall, 2016). But Children of the Damned and The Damned asked what kind of inheritance adults were passing down to their offspring, drawing explicitly on anxieties about the annihilation of the world and the curtailing of a generation born only ‘to be destroyed’. These depictions of ‘extraordinary’ children suggest how accessible the developmental psychological model of age stages had become to both adolescent and adult filmgoers by the early 1960s, and how it curtailed expectations of children and adolescents’ abilities by forcing them to fit into a model of normal development. Adolescents’ own essays challenged the idea that maturity was neatly linked to one’s chronological age group by employing the language of age, arguing both that adults could be seen as ‘childish’ or ‘immature’ for their implicit support of nuclear weapons, and that their own generation was growing up faster than had the generation before it. In this way, British science fiction films played out debates about freedom and responsibility nearly a decade before their American counterparts, and situated these debates in a specific national context that engaged with the way concepts of childhood and adolescence were changing during the early Cold War.

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Notes

1. University College London, ‘Cultural Memory and British Cinema-Going of the 1960s’, available at: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/digital-collections/collections/cinema (hereafter, ‘BCG’), Interviews 0705, 0964; Questionnaires 0320, 0421, 0484, 0546, 0571, 0604, 0664.
2. BCG, Questionnaire 0494.
3. BCG, Questionnaires 0129, 0141, 0441, 0516, 0582, 0797; Questionnaire 0546.
4. BCG, Questionnaires 0275, 0631.
5. Multiple Marking of English Compositions, Institute of Education Special Collections (hereafter, ‘MMEC’), WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 9/26; 9/118. The writers of these essays frequently make spelling and grammar errors. I have decided not to insert ‘[sic]’ after each of these errors because the number of errors means that this would break the flow of the text and obscure what the writers are trying to say. I have inserted words in square brackets when the meaning might otherwise be unclear. All spelling and grammar errors in direct quotations from these essays can be assumed to be the writer’s errors.
6. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8, 1 of 3.
7. BCG, Questionnaire 0532.
8. For example: MMEC, WRI/1/1/1, 3 of 3, 5/414; WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 11/31; WRI/1/1/2, 2 of 3, 11/357; WRI 2/9/1, ‘The way I think, write and act’, 125, p. 66.
9. Development of Writing Abilities, Institute of Education Special Collections (hereafter, ‘DWA’), WRI/2/1/54, 1 of 3, ‘A. R’ (full name redacted to preserve anonymity).
10. DWA, WRI/2/1/54, 1 of 3, ‘D. H.’ (full name redacted to preserve anonymity).
11. MMEC, WRI/1/1/1, 1 of 3, 4/3.
12. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 2 of 3, 11/330.
13. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 11/181.
14. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 2 of 3, 11/257.
15. Ibid.
16. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 11/126.
17. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 11/67.
18. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 11/37.
19. MMEC, WRI/1/1/2, 1 of 3, 11/54.
20. MMEC, WRI 1/1/2, 3 of 3, 11/468. See also WRI 1/1/2, 3 of 3, 11/637.

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