

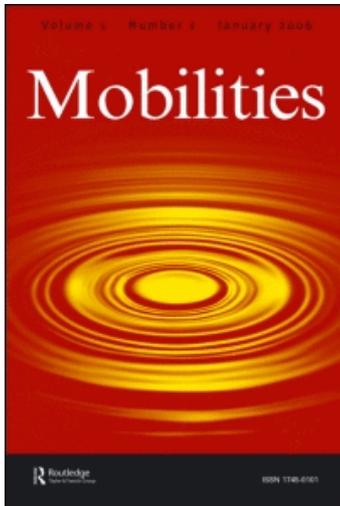
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Les Roberts^a

^a School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

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Making Connections: Crossing Boundaries of Place and Identity in Liverpool and Merseyside Amateur Transport Films

LES ROBERTS*

School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

ABSTRACT *In this paper I draw on a selection of local transport films, dating from the 1930s to 1970s, to explore issues of mobility, place and identity in Liverpool and Merseyside. The archive footage discussed in the paper includes amateur film of the Birkenhead and Wallasey tunnel openings, commuter ferry services to Liverpool, and also of the river crossings at Runcorn. Mapping the changing social and cultural geographies of mobility in Merseyside, it is argued that these films engage in a spatial dialogue expressive of a shift between, on the one hand, local, organic spaces of place and identity and, on the other, centrifugal spaces and non-places of transit, which, since the 1960s and with the expansion of regional and national motorway networks, have shaped much of Liverpool's contemporary urban fabric.*

KEY WORDS: Space, non-places, Liverpool, amateur films, transport, motorways

Ferries, Tunnels, Bridges...and Non-Places

The people who first built a path between two places performed one of the greatest human achievements...the will to connection had become a shaping of things. (Simmel, 1994, p. 6)

In 'Bridge and Door', written in 1909, Georg Simmel lays out the mappings of what he describes as a 'metaphysics of connection' in which the inter-connectedness of self and other is given spatial and symbolic form. Prising open the spatial taxonomy of a positivistic and instrumental 'ordering of things', Simmel ruminates on the symbolic significance of 'the bridge' in the development of human and social relations:

Here the human will to connection seems to be confronted not only by the passive resistance of spatial separation but also by the active resistance of a

Correspondence Address: Les Roberts, Research Associate, School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Leverhulme Building, Abercromby Square, Liverpool, L69 3BX. Email: les.roberts@liverpool.ac.uk

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special configuration. By overcoming this obstacle, the bridge symbolizes the extension of our volitional sphere over space. (1994, p. 6)

As a form of spatial practice the volitional desire to ‘build bridges’ is one which has wider resonance within more recent debates in the social sciences and humanities on the boundedness or porosity of place in the socio-political imaginary. The bridge, along with its spatial correlates the tunnel and the ferry crossing, both symbolises and enacts practices of communication, exchange and spatial dialogue that call into question the autonomy (and autochthony) of a given social community. By spatialising these relationships, tropes of connection draw attention to the various forms of mobility and ‘border-crossing’ that both define and erase boundaries of place, culture and identity.

In this paper, I draw on some of the recent discussions on place, space and mobility to explore the shifting cinematic geographies of transit and connection in Liverpool and Merseyside. Focusing on a selection of local transport films made by amateur filmmakers in Merseyside between the 1930s and 1970s, I examine the ways in which these representational spaces have been shaped by, and embedded in, an urban geography in which an architectural ‘will to connection’ has remained an instrumental factor in the growth and development of the modern city. The opening of Speke airport and the Queensway Tunnel in the 1930s marked key moments that symbolised the city’s modernity. Several decades earlier, the construction of the dockside Overhead Railway (the world’s first elevated electric railway) and the electrification of the tram system in the 1890s marked similar milestones in the shaping of the modern city. More recently, the opening of the second tunnel crossing in 1971, and plans for the construction of a new bridge across the Mersey at Runcorn serving as a gateway to Merseyside from the south, provide further evidence of the on-going importance of transport links and communications to Liverpool’s urban development.

By (re)embedding amateur films of the city within their social, geographic and historic context, my aim is both to open up to closer critical scrutiny the relationship between the material and symbolic, the urban-architectural and filmic, and to explore the scope for the development of a cinematic geography of mobility in which archival and place-based research on film provide renewed methodological and analytical perspectives on space, visibility and memory. In this respect, the paper forms part of wider on-going research into film, mobility and urban space, drawing in part on Geographic Information Systems resources to map a historical geography of filmic practice and representation in the city from the 1890s to the 1980s.¹

Insofar then as I am concerned with structures of place and mobility as articulated in local transport films, this paper also advances the contention that the representational spaces under discussion represent a response to, and product of, a gradual disembeddedness and de-localisation of place. Capturing disappearing landmarks and spaces of mobility – the Transporter Bridge at Runcorn, for example, or the busy commuter ferry services connecting Liverpool with the dormitory towns on the Wirral – the films which I discuss in this paper are at the same time mapping an absence of place; an absence which connotes a particular quality, affect or sociality that may be attached to – or invoked by – these ‘spectral’ urban geographies (Pile, 2005). In her ground-breaking work on the psychogeographic mobilities of emotion, as relayed through filmic, architectural and cartographic forms of spatiality, Bruno (2002)

pushes forward theoretical debates on visibility, memory and the affects of place. Yet this notwithstanding, an archival mapping of emotions, filmic or otherwise, remains an exercise that is fraught with difficulty and open to multiple readings and interpretations. Given the limited historical or contextual detail surrounding the production (and consumption) of much of the amateur film material of Liverpool (which would have often had only a small audience, consisting largely of family and friends, or members of local cine-clubs), the emotional disposition of the filmmaker towards his or her subject is in most instances far from easy to discern. The films are invariably without sound or intertitles, and in the case of the older archival material, many of the local amateur filmmakers and cine-club members are no longer alive. As a result, the layers of meaning surrounding amateur film productions have remained largely untapped in studies to date, although historical and ethnographic work on amateur filmmaking activity in Merseyside, as well as the north west region more generally, has begun to be developed (see Hallam, 2007; Norris Nicholson, forthcoming).

In the present discussion, it is less questions of authorship, production and aesthetics in relation to amateur transport films that are the focus of my concern, but rather the spatial and ethnographic readings that are prompted by the representations themselves. As actuality films which document everyday urban spaces and social practices of mobility, it is instructive to look upon these representations as ‘topographic films’, a distinction they share with early actuality films of urban landscapes, as explored, for example, in artist and filmmaker Patrick Keiller’s recent installation *City of the Future* (Keiller, 2003; 2008).² By focusing on the spatial and geographic context in which these representational spaces are embedded, I examine the extent to which topographic films of Liverpool and Merseyside form part of a wider urban discourse on planning and transport policy in the region; one which, by the 1950s and 1960s, with the large-scale development of road schemes beginning to leave their mark on the built environment, had begun in earnest.

As cultural texts, the films are thus approached in terms of their ‘grounded-ness’ within the physicality and everyday sociality of the urban environment. As such, my reading of the films is essentially *realist* insofar as it confers on them the status of ethnographic texts. For Highmore, realism describes ‘a mobility that moves...from cultural text to lived actuality and back again. Realism is the convergence of the textual and actual’ (2005, p. 22). The imbricated geographies of the lived and the representational, or the recognition of such, informs a methodological perspective in which the topographic film maps an experiential urban terrain composed of social, spatial and embodied practices of urban mobility. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s writings on the social production of space (1991), Highmore’s realist approach fuses together the imaginative and material, reflecting the essentially open and dynamic nature of social space. As he asserts, by treating cultural texts such as films or novels as ‘navigations of actual urban space, they offer experiential maps of urban environments from very particular viewpoints...[providing] material that registers social, spatial and historical differences in particularly vivid and dense ways’ (2005, p. 24).

Mapping amateur transport films in relation to the shifting geographies of mobility in Merseyside, I argue that the representational spaces they (re)inscribe in the urban imaginary constitute responses to perceived and material changes in the built environment. Narrating a spatial dialogue – a ‘dialectic of dis/embeddedness’ (see Roberts,

2009) – transport films such as *The Last Transporter*, about the closure of the Runcorn Transporter Bridge in the early 1960s, invite reflection on the ways in which new urban forms of transit and mobility (such as motorways and urban expressways) impact on social structures of place, identity and history. I develop these arguments with reference to Marc Augé’s seminal and insightful writings on the anthropology of ‘non-places’ (1995).

As a major seaport and former ‘gateway to Empire’, Liverpool’s constitutive relations with other places and destinations – its histories of Empire, of global trade, of emigration and immigration; its economic relations with Britain’s industrial heartlands; its transatlantic musical routes; its post-industrial geographies of tourism, leisure and consumption (exemplified by the city’s status as European Capital of Culture, 2008) – have long shaped the city as a place of local, national and global connections. Yet it is the particularities of the city’s embedded spaces of connection I wish to focus on here. These entail the more proximate and everyday geographies of commuting, of transport and communication, of a ‘will to connection’ made manifest in feats of engineering such as the construction of the two Mersey Tunnels, the bridges at Runcorn, or the high-speed road links that have had such a profound impact upon the development of the city’s post-1950s urban fabric.

In my discussion of cinematic geographies of transport and mobility in Merseyside, I examine three tropes of connection and urban forms that have been key to both the material and symbolic construction of the modern city: (1) the Mersey ferries, a popular and recurrent theme among the amateur filmmakers, (2) the Birkenhead and Wallasey Tunnels and (3) the Transporter and Jubilee bridges which span the Mersey, linking the towns of Runcorn and Widnes.

In the preceding sections, I briefly outline what has variously been termed the ‘spatial’ and ‘mobility turn’ in recent theoretical discourse, with particular reference to discussions on Augé’s concept of non-places. I follow this with an introduction to ideas on ‘cinematic cartography’, illustrating ways in which the methodological approach outlined in this paper contributes towards the development of new historiographical perspectives on film and urban space.

Mobilising Place

In marked contrast to a ‘sedentary metaphysics’ (Cresswell, 2006, p. 26) that has hitherto informed much social and cultural understanding of place (as an ostensibly local, bounded and rooted entity), the more recent focus on ‘mobility’ in theoretical perspectives, in particular a growing literature on automobilities (see for example, Edensor, 2004; Featherstone *et al.*, 2005; Sheller & Urry, 2000; Wollen & Kerr, 2002), driving places and roadscapes (Borden, 2007; Edensor, 2003; Massey, 2000; Merriman, 2004; 2007; Robertson, 2007) and cinematic geographies of travel (Bruno, 2002; Laderman, 2002; Rascaroli & Mazierska, 2006; Roberts, 2002; 2005a; 2005b) has brought into sharper view the constitutive nature of movement in the shaping of everyday understandings of place and locality. Within this contextual framework, the historical mapping of Liverpool’s spaces of transit and connection, here rendered present in footage shot by local amateur filmmakers, can provide insights into the ways in which the shifting spaces and practices of mobility in Liverpool, and the Merseyside region more broadly, have historically shaped the city. As I show, these

representational spaces of film are materially embedded within a social and urban landscape which, since the 1960s and with the rapid expansion of regional and national motorway networks, has witnessed the profusion of non-places and centrifugal spaces of transit that have come to define much of the city's contemporary urban fabric (Augé, 1995; Dimendberg, 1998; 2004).

Augé's concept of 'non-places' (*non-lieux*) has proved highly influential in recent debates on place, mobility and the urban experience. While many critics have been quick to fix upon the socially inert, de-actualising and nodal properties of non-places (Adey, 2006), linking the concept with broader discussions around ideas of 'deterritorialisation' (Tomlinson, 1999; pp. 108–113), spaces of flows, nomadism and such like, it is important to keep in mind that for Augé the non-place is ostensibly defined in opposition to what he refers to as 'anthropological place': an organic sociality, localised and bounded in time and space, and sharing common symbols, narratives and coherent structures of identity. While Augé certainly opens himself to the charge of romanticising this uniquely Durkheimian conception of anthropological place (Osborne, 2001, p. 188), the constitutive bipolarities of place/non-place draw attention to the relational qualities which these spaces harbour; a fact, as Merriman observes (2004, p. 149), which critics tend to overlook (a factor he rightly attributes to Augé's style of writing in *Non-places*, which is often elliptical, suggestive and lacking empirical foundation).

Spaces of transit and circulation, such as airports, supermarkets, high speed roads and railways, as well as transit camps and holding areas for refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced persons: for Augé, these spaces – or non-places – that are 'surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting...and ephemeral' (1995, p. 78) are increasingly central to an understanding of what he describes as 'supermodernity'. Crucially, however, neither place nor non-place exist in pure form; the former is never completely erased, the latter never fully completed (Augé, 1995, pp. 78–79). Determining the singularity (or lack of it) of anthropological places (i.e. those replete with history, identity and sociality) becomes therefore not merely a process of measuring its absence or negation in the proliferating landscapes of the non-place, but also of paying closer attention to 'the singularities of all sorts that constitute a paradoxical counterpoint to the procedures of interrelation, acceleration and de-localization sometimes carelessly reduced and summarized in expressions like "homogenization of culture"' (Augé, 1995, pp. 40–41).

This dialectical reading of place, while instructive, is not sufficiently developed in Augé's work on non-places to offset criticisms that round on his neglect of 'the complex habitations, practices of dwelling, embodied relations, material presences, placings and hybrid subjectivities associated with movement through [non-places]' (Adey, 2006, p. 345; Merriman, 2004, p. 154). To take the example of one quintessential 'non-place', there has of late emerged a number of studies on the social geography of motorway driving (Edensor, 2003; Merriman, 2004; Sheller, 2004) which question the idea that motorways are necessarily just inert, socially empty spaces of transit. By contrast, it is argued that motorways may reflect not so much an abstraction of space, but rather lived spaces of sociality and affective mobility, fostering imaginary flights, 'ontologies of distraction' (Morse, 1990), or the 'multiple, partial and relational "placings"' (Merriman, 2004, p. 147) that shape social geographies and spaces of mobility.³

My application of ideas stemming from Augé's work on non-places is thus drawn from the recognition that the negation of anthropological place – the *non-place* – harbours in turn its own negation, made manifest in the spatial practices of those (in this instance the amateur filmmaker and local transport enthusiast) who engage with and respond to the perceptual, symbolic and material changes accompanying processes of urban renewal. Indeed, perhaps in response to critics who have overlooked this more nuanced understanding of the non-place, Augé has recently written on 'the beauty of non-places' (2004). In this regard, my reading of the concept concurs with Osborne's view that non-places may *potentially* be configured 'less as "empty" or "solitary" versions of traditional places and more as radically *new ontological types of place*, constituted qua places through their relations to *another* spatiality' (2001, p. 189, emphasis in original).

Mapping the Field

Before moving on to examine a selection of amateur transport films of Merseyside, I wish to briefly extend the methodological discussion initiated in the introductory section, and consider for a moment some of the spatial implications attached to a project of 'mapping' Liverpool's urban landscape in film. One of the main objectives of the *City in Film* research⁴ was the compilation of a database catalogue of Liverpool films, from 1897 to the 1980s, which includes geographical, architectural and spatial data relating to each of the films listed. At the start of the project, in order to define (or territorialise) a coherent object of analysis (the 'city in film'), a geographical area was selected roughly approximate with that marked out by the semi-circular boundary of the Queens Drive ring road, with the River Mersey forming a natural boundary to the west and south (see Figure 1).

For practical purposes more than anything else (a necessary delimitation of potential research material) it was agreed that the area within these boundaries was that which was to constitute 'the city'. As an abstract representation of urban space the object is therefore clearly delineated. Yet when attempting to relate this abstraction to the rather less disciplined spaces of representation contained within the films themselves, the object of study (as a clearly defined geographic entity) becomes less easy to sustain. This is particularly the case in relation to depictions of spatial mobilities on, beneath or across the River Mersey, as well as to the extended conurbations and transport connections that radiate out beyond the boundaries of the 'city limits'. Views of Liverpool's waterfront cityscape observed from vantage points on or across the river, or of spaces of transit and mobility ('phantom rides' from trams and trains; journeys by ferry or bus; bridges and tunnels; gateways/places of arrival and departure such as railway stations, ferry terminals, etc.): these otherwise disconnected fragments of the city in film have all become inextricably interwoven into the heterotopic fabric of Liverpool's urban imaginary.

Given this, the rationale for focusing on Liverpool transport films is one that is clearly founded on the specificities of a social, cultural and historical geography in which movement and mobility have remained key factors in the shaping of the city's urban landscape. Mapping these cinematic geographies can yield insights into, on the one hand, the ways in which practices and architectures of mobility influence an 'image of the city' (Lynch, 1960) as a space of urban identity; and, on the other, the



Figure 1. Map of Liverpool and Merseyside (©2008 Google – Map data ©2008 Tele Atlas).

interrelations between filmic space and other forms of urban spatial formation. Writing on film noir and urban space, Edward Dimendberg contends that

Parallelisms between the built environment, film noir, and other cultural forms present an opportunity to analyze the manner in which space is similarly lived, conceived, and perceived across different cultural and social contexts ranging from the actual city to its representations. (2004, p. 108)

Dimendberg's illuminating application of Lefebvrian critical spatial theory opens up cinematic geographies of representation – in this case those of 1940s and 1950s American film noir – to engagement with a much broader field of urban spatial discourse. Critical of prevailing trends in film studies which overlook the significance of the city in film noir, Dimendberg observes that

Few commentators...travel to the extracinematic precincts of geography, city planning, architectural theory, and urban and cultural history... Treating the city as expression of some underlying myth, theme, or vision has tended to stifle the study of spatiality in film noir as a historical *content* as significant as its more commonly studied formal and narrative features. (Dimendberg, 2004, p. 9, emphasis in original)

His discussion on the development of 'centrifugal space', in particular the impact of the car, highway and mass media on depictions of urban space in film noir in the late

1950s, examines the growth of new spaces of modernity that were analogous to those being mapped by the amateur filmmakers on Merseyside during the same period.

In methodological terms, therefore, Dimendberg's spatial analysis of American film noir lends itself productively to the 'mapping' of Liverpool's urban landscape in film as advanced below. Moreover, as I have discussed elsewhere, this multi-disciplinary and multi-layered approach to film and space informs the further refinement of 'cinematic cartography' as a mode of geo-historical urban enquiry (see Hallam *et al.*, 2008; Roberts, 2008); especially in connection to shifting practices and structures of mobility. The multi-layered functionality of database or digital cartographic resources, such as Geographic Information Systems, opens up archival images of cities to a broader analytical framework of spatial and moving image culture. The multi-disciplinary potential this offers enables researchers to formulate new questions and approaches to the study of film, space and memory.

In the following sections I examine a selection of amateur films which document, in turn, the following geographies of connection in Merseyside: the Mersey ferries; the Birkenhead and Wallasey tunnels; and the Transporter and Jubilee bridges at Runcorn.

Ferries

The importance of transport connections to the development of Liverpool can be traced back some 700 years to the establishing of the first 'ferry cross the Mersey'. This was operated by Benedictine monks from Birkenhead Priory, who, around 1330, were granted a charter to ferry passengers across the river to Liverpool. The symbolic importance of the Mersey ferry crossing in myths and narratives of place-making in Liverpool is, of course, well-established and needs little in the way of rehearsal here (see Danielson, 1992; McIntyre-Brown, 2003). Indeed, the song 'Ferry cross the Mersey' by the Merseybeat group Gerry and the Pacemakers has assumed such iconic significance for the city that it is played on the actual ferries themselves on tourist cruises of the river. For a song so firmly imprinted on the collective consciousness of the city, however, it is worth remarking that it is the Mersey and the river crossing (from the Wirral to Liverpool) to which the song pays tribute rather than the destination itself (Roberts & Koeck, 2007, p. 91).

Over the last 50 years or so, much of the known amateur film material of Liverpool has been shot by filmmakers and cine-clubs based in the Wirral. Groups such as Swan Movie Makers from Bebington (established in 1954 by Angus Tilston and others, and still active), or the Hoylake and Heswall cine-clubs have all played an active role in committing Liverpool to film. While the cine-clubs produced a range of genres, including comedies, dramas and 'mood films' (which aimed to invoke a particular feeling or emotion), it is the local topographic films that are of particular note. As exemplars of 'local films for local people' (Toumlin, 2001), the main audience for the amateur productions consisted of the family and friends of the filmmaker(s) (who often appeared in the films), as well as interested members of the local community who attended events and screenings organised by the cine-clubs. In addition, a selection of the films was screened regionally and nationally as part of the wider amateur filmmaking scene. This included entry to competitions such as the Amateur Cine-World magazine's 'Ten Best' films of the year.

Given the constitutive role of mobility in constructions of place, space and identity, the fact that most of the amateur film footage of Liverpool originated from filmmakers based on the Wirral is certainly intriguing. Although detailed ethnographic research into Merseyside amateur film practices has yet to be undertaken, the underlying reasons for this geography of film practice are doubtless linked to the social habitus of the cine-club members. While the collective nature of much of the cine-club activity meant that filmmaking equipment was able to be shared among members, thus reducing overheads (Angus Tilston, personal communication), amateur filmmaking in the 1950s and 1960s was still a relatively expensive hobby (although the introduction of the cheaper Super 8 format in 1965 made home movie making more accessible). As a consequence, amateur filmmaking tended to be largely a middle-class pursuit, as depictions of the social practices in the films themselves suggest (Norris Nicholson, 1997, p. 202). Scenes of everyday life, family, travel and leisure in and around Merseyside provide a visual insight into a social milieu broadly consistent with middle-class patterns of work and consumption in the 1950s and 1960s. The social geography of amateur film practice in Merseyside was thus in part reflective of broader structures of difference operative across the River Mersey in which the middle-class environs of the Wirral defined a markedly different sense of place than that characterised by Liverpool's rather more gritty urban landscapes. This was particularly the case in the post-war period when many of the cine-clubs were established. Regional demographic change as a result of the heavy bombing which Liverpool suffered during the Second World War, meant the loss of a substantial section of the city's middle-class population who evacuated themselves to the Wirral. Although evacuees, many did not return to the city at the end of the war, choosing to settle permanently across the river (Bor & Shankland, 1964, p. 23).

These contextualising factors are therefore crucial to understandings of the production and consumption of amateur films of Liverpool. The heterotopic spatialities underpinning much of the Wirral-based productions are, as with features such as *Ferry Cross the Mersey* (Jeremy Summers, 1965) or the New Brighton-based Ealing comedy *The Magnet* (Charles Frend, 1950), given narrative expression in the trope of the river crossing. The river plays host to a symbolic geography in which the iconic panorama of Liverpool's waterfront landscape (dominated by the 'Three Graces': the Liver, Cunard and Port of Liverpool buildings at Pier Head) is functionally re-inscribed in the visual imaginary of the city. The requisite vantage point on or across the river enables the 'elsewhere' or 'other space' of the traveller/spectator's consolidating perspective (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 116) to be woven into the city's symbolic landscapes. Views of the city from the river have of course long played a prominent role in visual geographies of Liverpool, as is indeed the case with filmic representations of the city (Roberts, 2009). The amateur transport films, while further contributing towards the Mersey's rich mythos of place, invariably map the more localised and everyday experiences and practices of life on the river, providing a glimpse into some of Liverpool's historical spaces of transit and connection.

Of the many amateur films which focus on the river and ferry crossings are *Boat for Businessmen* (Norman Couche/Heswall Cine Group, 1961), *Ferry – Birkenhead to Pier Head* (Angus Tilston/Swan Cine Club, 1960), *A Tribute to the Mersey* (Les Holloway/Curzon Productions, 1967), *Fair Play* (George Gregory/Swan Cine Club, 1960s) and *Liverpool to New Brighton* (Harry Larkin/Swan Cine Club, 1960s). A

documentary, *Ferries Across the Mersey* (1996), made by local transport enthusiast Martin Jenkins, features a compilation of archive footage, much of it amateur material, dating from 1901 to 1996, and includes the first ever moving images of a Mersey ferry shot by the early film pioneers Mitchell and Kenyon in 1901.

While these films all provide interesting examples of the ways in which amateur filmmakers have visually engaged with the river, it is *Boat for Businessmen* that I wish to briefly focus on here. A film showing a commuter ferry service operating from Woodside Ferry terminal at Birkenhead to Liverpool, *Boat for Businessmen* opens with commuters arriving at the ferry terminal, followed by a shot of the ferry approaching. The commuters board the ferry – a man runs to catch it at the last moment. The ferry departs. For the duration of the crossing, the businessmen walk around the deck in the same direction. As the ferry approaches Pier Head, the Liver Building is visible in the background. The gangplank is lowered and the commuters disembark. The ferry crosses back over the river; the shot then dissolves into the same view across the river at sunset.

Aesthetically, this four and a half minute film offers little in the way of interest. Yet despite, or because of its unremarkableness, *Boat for Businessmen*, as with Couche's Runcorn film, *The Last Transporter* (Norman Couche/Heswall Cine Group, 1961), which I discuss below, casts an anthropological and memorialising gaze (Hallam, 2007) over a vibrant social landscape that was undergoing rapid historical change. Focusing, as many of the more interesting amateur films do, on the mundane practices of everyday life, the film records some of the minutiae of ethnographic detail attached to everyday activities such as going to work. In *Boat for Businessmen* both the film, and the river crossing it depicts, can be said to constitute a 'ritual space' (Turner, 1969), in which certain performative enactments (e.g. the on-deck circumambulation of the commuters, a long-standing Merseyside tradition; gazing towards Pier Head, already bustling with early morning activity; or rushing to catch the ferry before the gates are shut) mark out a transitional space between the worlds of home and work. The repetitive nature of these ritual and spatial practices, whether daily as part of the commuter journey, or, filmically, in their virtual replay and consumption, informs an embedded space of representation in which the functional relations and connections between places are foregrounded. In *Boat for Businessmen* this space is semiotically enhanced by the inclusion of a sunset scene at the end of the film. Sunsets appear in many of the amateur films of the river, and in this example would appear to suggest a certain timeless and cyclical pattern of social activity, as if the ferry crossings were in some way attuned to the rhythms of nature.

As a filmic document of commuter spaces of transit in 1960s Merseyside, *Boat for Businessmen* not only attests to the dormitory status of towns such as Birkenhead or Wallasey, but also maps a symbolic geography in which the boundary between places becomes the spatial and narrative focus. As such, for all its simplicity and brevity *Boat for Businessmen*, and other amateur films like it, draws from and contributes to a spatial imaginary in which the singularity of what Augé describes as 'anthropological places' is celebrated and affirmed: localised and bounded places of history, identity and organic sociality. As I go on to discuss in relation to other examples of Liverpool transport films, these crossings of boundaries of place and identity arguably have the effect of 'knitting together' the landscapes across the Mersey in ways that pay tribute to both their uniqueness as well as their interdependence.

Tunnels

Although ferry services had been operative between Birkenhead and Liverpool for hundreds of years, by the 1920s the demand for improved communications for vehicular traffic crossing the Mersey meant that alternative transport solutions were necessary if further economic development of the region was to be sustained.

The inadequacies of the ferry services had already become apparent in the nineteenth century, prompting the construction of the first Mersey tunnel: the Mersey Railway Tunnel which opened in 1886 connecting James Street station in Liverpool to Hamilton Square in Birkenhead. While the tunnel went some way towards satisfying the demand from commuters crossing the river to and from Liverpool, the growth in transportation by road led to the eventual construction of the first Mersey road tunnel (Liverpool City Council, 2003, p. 137–138).

Opened by King George V on the 18th July 1934, the Birkenhead, or Queensway Tunnel, connected Kings Square in Birkenhead to Old Haymarket in Liverpool, the site of the main tunnel entrance. An additional branch, which exits at New Quay on the Strand, served traffic bound for the docks.⁵ The tunnel is 2.13 miles in length, and at the time of opening was the longest underwater tunnel in the world (Liverpool City Council, 2003, p. 140).

Given the importance of the tunnel to the commercial and industrial growth of Merseyside, and the sheer scale of the engineering involved in its construction, the project was to attract much attention from news reporters and filmmakers, both local and national. Newsreel titles, such as *World's Largest Subway* (British Pathe, 1925), *World's Longest Underwater Tunnel* (British Pathe, 1927), *1700 feet below the Mersey* (British Pathe, 1928), *250,000 People* (British Pathe, 1934 – a report on the mass public walk through of the newly opened tunnel), provide a filmic record of the tunnel at various stages of its construction. The opening ceremony was also widely reported in the newsreels, as archive records of companies such as Pathe, Gaumont British News, British Movietone News and Topical Budget amply attest.

As well as these official filmic records of the Tunnel opening, there is also extensive archive footage shot by amateur filmmakers. The sense of occasion which accompanied the opening ceremony is particularly well captured in footage shot from among the crowds gathered at Old Haymarket at the Liverpool entrance to the tunnel. Shot by unknown filmmakers, this footage is included in the documentary *The Mersey Tunnels: 60 Years – 1934 to 1994* (Pleasures Past, 1994), produced by Angus Tilston. In contrast to the typically formal and statically framed shots of the newsreels, the shaky, hand-held camerawork of the amateur filmmakers reflects a more spatially embedded and embodied gaze. Filmed at eye level, the camera often peers out between the heads of other on-lookers in the crowd, each trying to catch a glimpse of the ceremonial proceedings, whether it be the assembled local dignitaries, the military display, the eventual arrival of the royal party or the King's speech (Figure 2).

Tilston's compilation of footage of the event also includes several high-angled shots, shot by newsreel cameramen, looking down at the crowds on Old Haymarket and stretched along William Brown Street. Scanning the landscape, buildings and assembled masses, the cinematographers' panoptic vantage point enables them to convey the impressive scale and grandeur of the occasion (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Stills of amateur footage from *The Mersey Tunnels: 60 Years – 1934 to 1994* (Angus Tilston, 1994) (Courtesy Pleasures Past).



Figure 3. Stills of newsreel footage from *The Mersey Tunnels: 60 Years – 1934 to 1994* (Angus Tilston, 1994) (Courtesy Pleasures Past).

With its grand public buildings and neo-classical monuments, such as St. George’s Hall, the Walker Art Gallery, the Picton Library and the former College of Technology, this area of Liverpool has, since the mid nineteenth century, formed the main civic and cultural heart of the city. Of all the key historical events committed to film in the first half of the twentieth century, there are probably few examples which pay such a celebratory tribute to the proud civic identity evoked by this landscape. While the newsreels certainly play their part in the framing of these symbolic spaces, the narrative context is one in which the tunnel, or more accurately the modernity and engineering prowess it represents, is connotative of a wider sense of place and belonging, one that speaks of nationhood and Empire. By comparison, the situatedness of the amateur footage anchors an altogether more localised space of identity. Adorned with flags and other symbols of civic and national belonging, the public spaces and buildings around the tunnel entrance inform a richly iconic space of representation in which the city’s cultural and civic centre is woven into the symbolic fabric of a new and significantly transformed regional geography.

The opening of Liverpool airport at Speke in 1933 marked a similarly important moment of civic pride and identity. Attended by 30,000 people, for many Liverpudlians the opening ceremony and accompanying air pageant symbolised a new beginning in which ‘[a]ircraft mobility was seen as the destiny for Liverpool’s future’ (Adey, 2006, p. 359). As Adey argues, the local embeddedness of the airport stemmed ‘not only from economic viability...but from the civic pride and competitiveness, local social problems, and persevering personalities that led to the airport’s initial construction’ (Adey, 2006). The estimated 200,000 people who assembled for

the opening of the tunnel a year later represented an even greater celebration of civic pride and occasion, attracting local, regional and national media interest.

On the Birkenhead side of the tunnel, captured in the amateur film *Opening of the Mersey Tunnel* (unknown filmmaker, 1934), the opening celebrations are conducted with similar pomp and ceremony. Three miles of crowds line the streets throughout the town to await the arrival of the King and Queen. At King's Square at the tunnel opening, local dignitaries prepare to greet the royal couple, accompanied by the Band of the Grenadier Guards, and the marching ranks of the Cheshire Regiment. Birkenhead's oldest inhabitant, a 102-year-old man, is introduced to the King. As in Liverpool, ranks of newsreel cameramen can be observed in some of the Birkenhead amateur footage, an indicator of the rather less privileged vantage point of the amateur filmmakers in relation to their professional counterparts. Again, as is the case with the Liverpool ceremony, in both the newsreel and amateur footage of the event, it is the local and civic identity of the town that is foregrounded. The ceremonial space represented in the film thus serves as a metonym for Birkenhead itself; celebrated both in terms of its uniqueness and singularity as well as its spatial connectedness to Liverpool.

These relational geographies of place and identity as revealed in spatial readings of the tunnel films are given further impetus by references in King George V's opening speech to 'citizens of this *double city*...[who] may for many generations find profit and comfort in this *link that binds them*'. By comparison, the royal address given by Queen Elizabeth to mark the opening of the Wallasey Tunnel in June 1971 draws on a significantly different spatial imaginary, one shaped in no small part by the huge growth in vehicular traffic over the previous two decades and the development of new road networks in the region (see below). In her speech, the Queen announces that she is 'delighted to be *on Merseyside* today, both in Liverpool and very shortly in Wallasey'. Repeated references to 'Merseyside' throughout her speech rather than the names of the city and town at either end of the tunnel signals a more prominent regional identity in which it is less the 'links that bind' that are celebrated as the more diffuse spaces of transit operative across the Mersey, beyond the immediate localities and urban centres that are the centrepiece of the 1934 opening. A comparative spatial analysis of films of the 1934 and 1971 opening ceremonies provides a further illustration of these shifting geographies of place and region.

In amateur as well as news footage of the Wallasey Tunnel opening what is particularly noticeable in comparison to the 1934 films is the absence of any markers of *place* in the representational spaces that frame the ceremonial events on either side of the river. The opening proceedings are conducted instead in what are the quintessential 'non-places' that Augé describes: empty, processual spaces of transit and flow, bearing few if any markers of history, identity or organic sociality. At the tunnel opening on the Liverpool side, the ceremony takes place in the tunnel approach road. The crowds, assembled dignitaries, royal party, military bandmen and lines of soldiers that inhabit the space are all flanked by high and otherwise featureless walls of concrete, adorned only with a few flags and banners to mark the occasion. Similarly, when the Queen rides through the tunnel to conduct the ceremony on the Wirral side of the river, it is not Wallasey that is represented in footage of the event, but rather the area around the toll-booths on the tunnel approach road which now links up with the M53 motorway.

Several days after the official opening, a public walk through the tunnel took place, continuing the tradition established 40 years earlier at the opening of the Birkenhead tunnel, and, in the present context, perhaps itself suggestive of a desire to reclaim, through the act of walking, a more embodied sense of place from the abstract spatialities (Lefebvre, 1991) that characterised the new tunnel.⁶ In amateur footage of this event, shot by Angus Tilston, crowds are shown walking along the approach roads as well as through the tunnel itself. The only recognisable symbol or marker of place that is visible is the point half-way through the tunnel that marks the boundary between Liverpool and Wallasey, with each of the names and city/town crests represented on the tunnel wall. When the walkers emerged on the Wallasey side of the tunnel, as there was ‘no place’ to go buses had been laid on to take the walkers to the ferry terminals, where, it is assumed, the travellers were able to reclaim a more authentic and historically resonant mode of river crossing. Fittingly, Tilston’s film of the tunnel walk through ends with a view of the Three Graces taken from a Liverpool-bound ferry at Seacombe.

The juxtaposition between the space of transit and mobility represented by the ferry journey and that of the Wallasey tunnel, a semiotically ‘empty’ social landscape, is replicated up river in the case of the two historical bridge crossings at Runcorn, to which I now turn.

Bridges

[Liverpool] is a very cinematic city. As soon as you go over Runcorn bridge on the train coming into Liverpool, it’s beautiful: the slats of the bridge skitter and slice up the Mersey; it’s almost like footage, like you’re watching a film, like you’re entering a film... (Paul Farley, BBC Radio 4, 17/09/2008)

In terms of their filmic representation, the bridges at Runcorn feature most prominently in footage shot from boats travelling up and down the Manchester Ship Canal. In the North West Film Archive’s collection of Merseyside material, there are a number of films made between the 1930s and 1970s which chart journeys along the Canal and the Mersey. Titles such as *Inward Bound* (Metropolitan-Vickers Amateur Cine Society, 1934), *Down to the Sea* (Cuthbert J. Cayley/Kinograph, 1938), *Voyage Along the Manchester Ship Canal* (Mr Malcolm Watts, 1960s) (by which time the new Runcorn-Widnes Bridge has opened, replacing the Transporter Bridge that had preceded it) or *The Mersey Way* (Mr J N Newton/Stockport Cine & Video Society, 1978), all display a fascination with the landscape topography of the Mersey Basin. As geographical films, these map a sense of place and regionalism that is defined by the course of the river and canal.⁷ In many of these films, the road and rail bridges appear to function as geographical markers and symbolic gateways marking the boundaries to and from Liverpool via the canal. Alongside these more lateral ‘Runcorn crossings’ are of course the transport mobilities operative across the bridges themselves, linking Runcorn in Cheshire with Widnes on the Lancashire side of the river.

Prior to the construction of the Transporter Bridge, the only means of crossing the river for those travelling by road was the Runcorn ferry service which operated

between Runcorn and Widnes. Immortalised in Marriott Edgar's poem of the same name, the Runcorn Ferry had been in operation for some 800 years, much like its more famous cousins down river. A railway bridge and footpath was opened in 1868, but it was not until the Transporter was opened in 1905 that Runcorn finally lost what was, for the road user, its *cul-de-sac* status. Unless crossing by ferry, pre-Transporter travellers by road had to return by the same route that they had entered (Nickson, 1887, p. 199; Starkey, 1980, p. 4).

The Transporter Bridge was therefore to have a quite profound impact on transport communications around this area of the Mersey, strengthening economic and geographic ties between the towns of Runcorn and Widnes and establishing a modern gateway to and from Merseyside, one equipped to meet the increased industrial growth and movements of goods and people around the region. Inevitably, though, the rapid expansion in traffic and car ownership meant that by the 1950s, with its limited carrying capacity and slow pace of operation, the Transporter was no longer able to sustain the demand placed on its services, and, in 1961 the bridge carried its last passengers, making way for the new Runcorn-Widnes road bridge which opened in the same year.

Completed in 1961, shortly before the demolition of the Transporter, Norman Couche's film *The Last Transporter* captures the bridge in all its iconic splendour.⁸ The road bridge had already been opened and both this and Transporter are depicted in the film; brief footage of the former bookending the Transporter sequences which comprise the bulk of the four and a half minute film. As well as memorialising the soon-to-be demolished bridge, the film also invites reflection on its passing and draws tacit comparisons between the Transporter and the new road crossing.

The film opens with a view of the Transporter Bridge filmed from Widnes, followed by a rostrum shot of a map of the region which zooms in on the area around the Runcorn Gap, the narrow stretch of the Mersey which the bridge spans. It then cuts to a travelling shot filmed from inside a car crossing south towards Runcorn on the newly opened road bridge. Looking towards the road ahead, the camera frames a view of the car in front approaching the towering arch of the bridge (Figure 4).

This dissolves into another travelling shot, this time following a much older car driving along Mersey Road in Widnes which descends towards the river. The Transporter Bridge can be seen in the background above the rows of terraced housing which line Mersey Road. The cars are travelling at a much slower speed than those on the road bridge. In the following sequence the pace of mobility slows down even further with



Figure 4. Stills from *The Last Transporter* (Norman Couche/Heswall Cine Group, 1961) (Courtesy Angus Tilston).

the action resuming on foot in the shape of a man and young boy who are filmed walking down Mersey Road. As they approach the toll bridge, a view of the pedestrians walking towards camera reveals a sign for ‘Lancashire’, marking the border crossing from Cheshire for Widnes-bound travellers. The man and boy purchase tickets for the crossing and wait for the Transporter carriage or gondola, which, laden with passengers and vehicles, pulls slowly into dock. A second cinematographer can be glimpsed very briefly in one of the shots.

Cars and motorcycles are driven onto the gondola, as the operator, filmed at work in his cabin, prepares to depart. Views of and from the gondola as it pulls away from Widnes are intercut with shots of wires and pulleys springing into motion. A long shot filmed from the riverbank at Mersey Road in Runcorn frames an iconic view of the suspended gondola in operation, with the railway bridge visible in the background (Figure 5).

Interestingly, what is missing from this shot is the steel arch of the road bridge which, in 1961, would have been visible from this viewpoint, thereby dating the Transporter sequences in the film to the late 1950s or before, prior to the construction of the arch.

During the crossing the filmmaker scans the overhead steel frame of the cantilever gantry from which the gondola is suspended; foot passengers seated on a bench pass the time of day with fellow travellers; a ticket collector takes fares on the car deck; the man and boy look out from the deck as a large ship, pulled by a tug, makes its way along the Manchester Ship Canal towards Liverpool.

Eventually the gondola pulls into dock at Runcorn and the passengers disembark. Walking towards the town, the man and boy approach a sign for ‘Cheshire’. At the point where they pass the sign, the film cuts to another travelling shot filmed, like that at the start of the film, from the front of a moving car crossing the Runcorn-Widnes road bridge. The film ends, much like it begins, with a long shot of the Transporter bridge viewed from Widnes.



Figure 5. Still from *The Last Transporter* (Courtesy Angus Tilston).

What, then, does this prosaic and otherwise unremarkable amateur production tell us about ideas of place, mobility and identity in 1950s and 1960s Merseyside? First, it demonstrates a committed engagement with the social history and geography of transport on Merseyside, particularly with regard to its disappearing landscapes and practices of transit and connection. Couche, like many of the local amateur filmmakers, provides a visual document that at once both engages with wider discourses on development and change in the region during this period, and, at the same time, establishes a filmic archive that memorialises these vanishing spaces and practices, informing what would later become the nostalgic consumption of Liverpool and Merseyside's cinematic geographies through the screenings and archival compilations of local film collectors such as Angus Tilston or Clive Garner.⁹

While it is certainly apposite, therefore, to critically situate amateur films such as *The Last Transporter* (or Couche's ferryboat film *Boat for Businessmen*, made in the same year) within contextual framings of nostalgia, consumption and heritage discourses, this should not occlude the importance of these filmic narratives in terms of their engagement with contemporary issues of urban planning, development and transport policy, and their reflection on the impacts of urban change on everyday social practices. One such impact is that of a perceived de-localisation of place and identity, and it is this which, in spatial terms, *The Last Transporter* appears to be most critically (if understatedly) reflective. The bookending of the two-road bridge/automobile sequences, for example, invites the viewer to draw clear comparisons between the two forms of river crossing. The anonymous and socially atomistic journeys by car are considered alongside the more localised and collective mode of crossing represented by the Transporter. Consequentially, it is the film's treatment of time that provides the most prominent semiotic marker differentiating these two cinematic geographies of mobility. The re-routed traffic across the new Runcorn-Widnes bridge inhabits a social landscape that effectively by-passes markers of place and locality; its geography is that of a functional and processual space of mobility predicated on speed, flow and circulation. As such, although the Runcorn-Widnes bridge has since come to inscribe its own iconic presence on the cultural map of this area of Merseyside¹⁰, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the 'centrifugal' (Dimendberg, 1998; 2004) spatial geometries from which it was in part conceived arguably underpinned a critical space of representation in which the bridge functioned less as a marker of place than as a metonym for the growing agglomeration of non-places that the increasing demands of the automobile had in large part contributed towards (see below).

The Transporter sequences, unlike the travelling shots taken on the road bridge, denote a temporal geography rooted more firmly in localised structures of place. The pace and rhythms of the social activities depicted in these sequences are indicative of a grounded sense of everyday mobility; one which pays tribute to both the singularity and the historical interdependence of the towns of Runcorn and Widnes. In the film, the bridge, in effect, 'gathers' (Heidegger, 1971, p. 152) the two landscapes on either side of the river, thus 'placing' them more securely on the symbolic map of the region. As such, the film rehearses a symbolic geography in which the Mersey has long shaped local understandings of identity and community, as well as the broader affiliations of a regional or county-wide sense of belonging. By contrast, the (auto)mobilities actualised by the road crossing signal the beginnings of a shift towards a new sense of regionalism: one notably less observant of local inflections of

place, history and identity. In the following two sections, I examine the wider urban context in Merseyside in the 1960s, particularly in relation to the impacts of major road developments in the region, before drawing together some final conclusions.

Urban Transitions

Bridges, as Urry observes, 'initiate new social patterns' (2000, p. 132). In the case of Runcorn the opening of the new road bridge coincided with a period of intense social and demographic change affecting the town and wider region. Whereas the time-space geographies attached to the Transporter permitted slow and 'lingering' movements across the river (Urry, 2000), informing, in turn, the production of social spaces where local people would often gather to watch the world go by (Howard, 1993, p. 18), the arrival of the road bridge articulated, for some, a growing sense of de-localisation, heralding the onset of a new, more challenging era in the town's history (Howard, 1993, p. 97). As social histories of Runcorn show, the sense of optimism and modernity associated with the new road bridge was tempered by more ambivalent associations. With the closure of the Transporter Bridge, the town was once again felt to have lost what was perceived to be its *cul-de-sac* status (Starkey, 1980, p. 4): the new bridge effectively by-passing Runcorn and Widnes. Given the traffic congestion the bridge had been designed to alleviate; this was of course a development very much welcomed by many residents. However, at the same time, the opening up of these localities to wider geographies of mobility brought in its wake a certain structure of feeling in which the transience and ephemerality associated with the new road networks was linked to a growing sense of social anomie and rising crime rates (Howard, 1993, p. 96).

The shifting social geographies inaugurated by the opening of the new road bridge were compounded by the designation, in 1964, of Runcorn New Town. The rationale for the new town, as with the establishment of developments such as Skelmersdale and Kirkby, was to meet Liverpool's need for more housing land, providing accommodation for the overspill population from inner-city Liverpool and North Merseyside (Couch & Fowles, 2006, pp. 89–90; Ling, 1967). These displaced communities were in large part the result of the slum clearances in Liverpool, a policy described by Alan Stones as a 'blitzkrieg against the inner city' by the Liverpool Corporation (1972, p. 110). Ironically, much of the clearances were themselves carried out to make way for major road scheme developments in areas of inner-city Liverpool such as Scotland Road. *Us and Them*, a documentary film made in 1969 by Peter Leeson provides a critical insight into some of the controversies surrounding the Corporation's housing policies in the 1960s and their impact on communities living in the Scotland Road area of the city.

The development of Runcorn New Town, and the inward migration of displaced communities from Liverpool that followed, introduced further areas of tension insofar as it brought questions of identity and difference to the fore (Berthoud & Jowell, 1973, p. 65). Moreover, as Couch and Fowles argue, the rational, modernist approach to urban planning adopted by the Runcorn Development Agency created what were felt to be 'sterile urban environments' – perhaps best exemplified by the Shopping City retail development in the new town centre – in marked contrast to the more organic social and functional spaces of the Old Town (2006, p. 102).

Although the opening of the road bridge was not in itself the principal factor behind these changes, it nevertheless marked a symbolic juncture in the modern history of Runcorn: one that was crucially tied to the shifting geographies of mobility that impacted upon this area of Merseyside in the 1950s–1970s. Seen from this perspective, *The Last Transporter* captures a moment of historical (and geographical) transition that was at the same time extraordinarily significant regionally and nationally in that it marked a key moment in the historical development of social space itself: the urban shift towards centrifugal space and the coming of age of the motorway (Starkie, 1982).

Centifugal Space

If centripetal space is characterised by a fascination with urban density and the visible – the skyline, monuments, recognisable public spaces, and inner-city neighbourhoods – its centrifugal variant can be located in a shift toward immateriality, invisibility, and speed... Largely ignored by architects, the highway may well be the preeminent centrifugal space of the twentieth century. (Dimendberg, 2004, pp. 177, 181)

The UK's first motorway was the Preston By-Pass (now part of the M6) which was opened in 1958. Today the north west region of England has a greater concentration of motorways than any other part of the UK, with the M53 (Mid-Wirral Motorway), M56 (North Cheshire East-West Motorway), M57 (Liverpool Outer Ring Road), M58 (Aintree-Skelmersdale Motorway), M62 (Lancashire to Yorkshire Motorway) and the M6 all contributing to a network connecting Liverpool and the wider Merseyside region to other parts of the north west and beyond (Yeadon, 2005). Merseyside also boasts Britain's first purpose-built high-speed intercity road, the Liverpool-East Lancashire Road between Liverpool and Manchester. This was opened by King George V on the 18th July 1934 on his way to the opening ceremony of the Birkenhead Tunnel.¹¹

The Runcorn-Widnes bridge was an important factor in plans for the proposed M56 motorway in North Cheshire. In a report published in 1965, establishing the case for the motorway the need for a connection to the bridge formed one of the main criterion for the motorway's construction (Yeadon, 2005, p. 124).¹² The motorway, which passes through the southeast of Runcorn New Town, is connected to the bridge via an urban motorway or Expressway system which was conceived as part of the New Town development plans in the late 1960s (Ling, 1967, pp. 68–70).

While the inadequacies of existing road transport communications pointed to the need for more effective links between the Port of Liverpool and the national motorway network (Gibson-Martin, 1961; 1963), the embrace of urban motorway schemes by planners in the 1950s and 1960s led to proposals for an elevated motorway, encircling the centre of Liverpool, as part of plans to regenerate the city (Shankland, 1962 – see Figure 6).

Although plans for the Liverpool Inner Motorway (LIM) were eventually shelved, elements survived in the form of the Churchill Way flyovers which connect Islington to Dale Street and Great Crosshall Street (Figure 7).

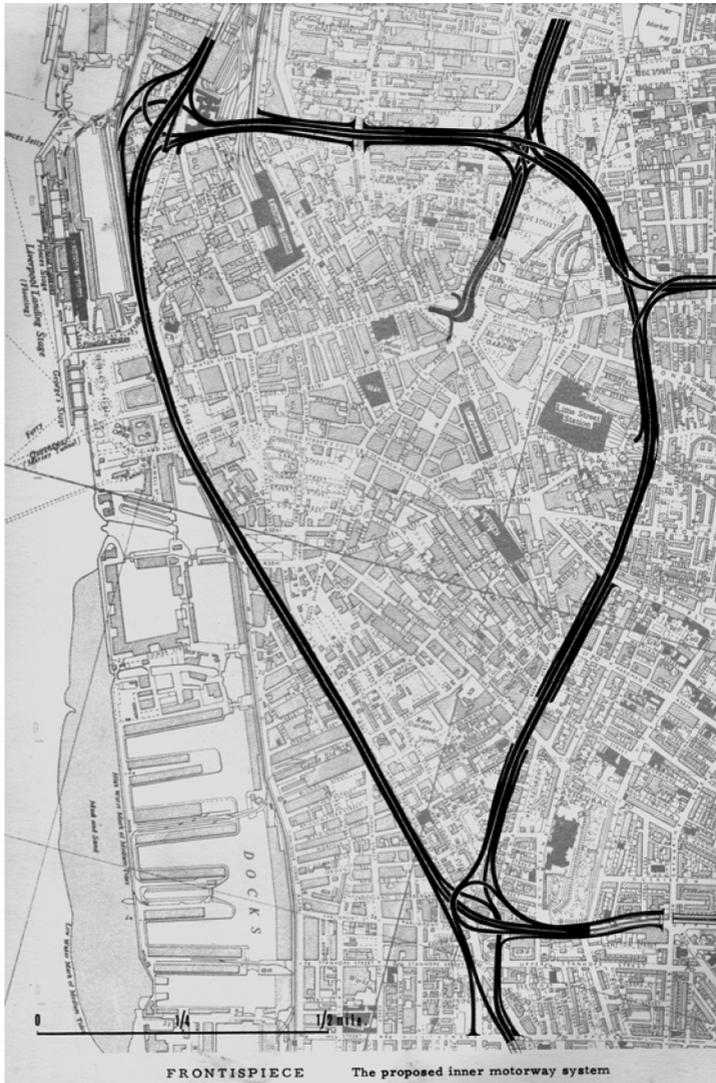


Figure 6. Map of Proposed Liverpool Inner Motorway (from Shankland Report No. 7, 1962, City and County Borough of Liverpool).

The impact of the LIM plans on the built environment, as well as on communities affected by subsequent road schemes in the city centre (most notably around Scotland Road), was also felt by those businesses and residents who were displaced as a result of the council's compulsory purchase of land for the proposed LIM, much of which was subsequently left vacant and derelict for years (Botham & Herson, 1980, p. 118; Stones, 1972, p. 108).¹³

The regional significance of the LIM, as detailed in the Shankland report, hinged in large part on the fact that 70 percent of the total traffic passing through the Birkenhead tunnel was travelling to destinations outside the city centre (Shankland, 1962, p. 7). As



Figure 7. Construction of Churchill Way flyovers, Liverpool. Still from amateur footage shot by Eric Knowles, c. 1968 (Courtesy Angus Tilston).

a growing focal point for the whole region, the central area was therefore in need of a more effective means of circulating these regional flows (Figure 8).

Making the case for a second Mersey crossing, the report goes on to assess possible location options (including a bridge crossing south of the city centre), recommending the construction of a second tunnel with a northern portal connecting with Scotland Road. The tunnel scheme proposed in the report was much the same as that which was later developed for the Wallasey Tunnel, built between 1966 and 1971 (see above).

The period from the late 1950s to 1970s was therefore a time of dramatic, social and urban change in Liverpool and Merseyside. The spaces of transit that formerly shaped relational geographies of place and identity in the region were transformed by the development of transport communications designed to meet the many challenges posed by the growth in car ownership and road traffic. The forms of urban cognitive mapping that may be discerned from (and celebrated in) the amateur transport films are representative of a geographical imagination in which Liverpool's earlier spaces and practices of transit (such as the Mersey ferry crossings, the Birkenhead Tunnel or the Transporter Bridge at Runcorn) were perceived as integral to the construction of an embedded sense of place and locale: a structure of feeling which the new geographies of (auto)mobility – typified by the motorway – were felt to in some way undermine.

As Sheller and Urry point out, the growth of car-only urban environments coupled with a societal embrace of 'automobility' more generally, 'has fragmented social practices that [formerly] occurred in shared public spaces' (2000, p. 744). Charting the shifting geographies of mobility in Liverpool and Merseyside, the amateur transport films discussed in this paper, in particular *The Last Transporter*, provide a good illustration of this. Indeed, in many respects the bookending travelling shots taken on the new Runcorn-Widnes bridge in Couche's film represent a rare and exploratory foray into a cinematic geography of transit that has remained largely unexplored in many subsequent amateur transport films, certainly in the north west.

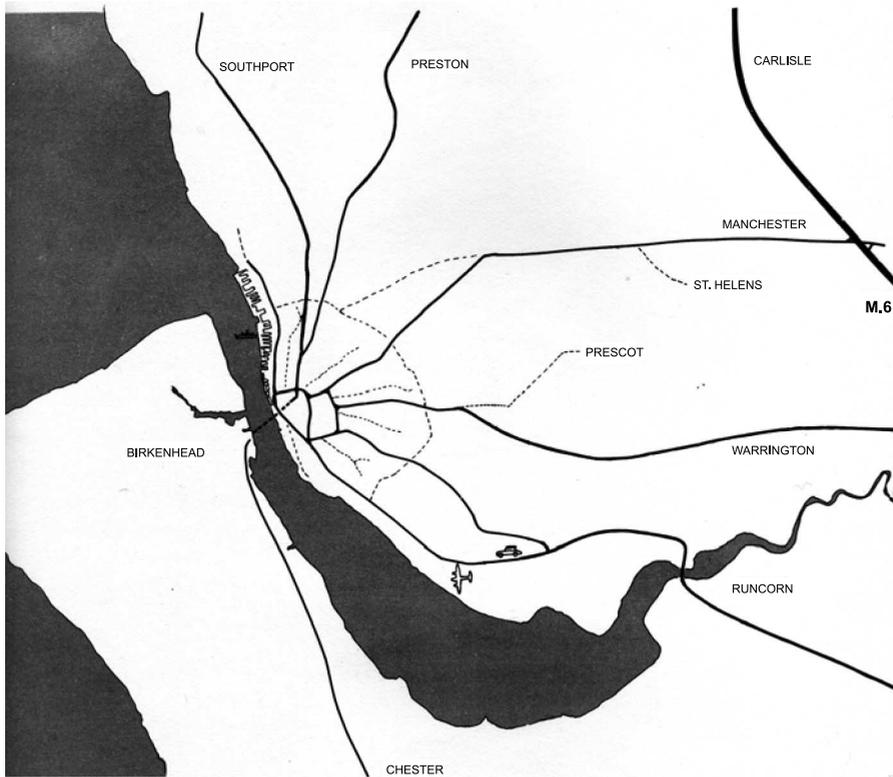


Figure 8. Map showing regional road network as part of proposed plans for Liverpool Inner Motorway (from Shankland Report No. 7, 1962, City and County Borough of Liverpool).

If Augé's thesis on non-places was in part conceived as a response to the challenges posed to ethnographers by the new socio-spatial landscapes of 'supermodernity'¹⁴, then, by extension, the potential challenges confronted by an ethnographer of motorway space have a direct corollary in terms of the mapping of these representational spaces in film. As commentators have noted, with some minor exceptions¹⁵, the motorway remains comparatively under-represented in British cultural and cinematic discourses on travel (Edensor, 2003, p. 162), as well as in research into the representation of motorways in film more generally (Dimendberg, 1998, p. 56). It is not altogether surprising therefore that, unlike the older and more 'traditional' geographies of travel in archival collections of Merseyside film, there is little if any footage of motorways, or of views taken from moving cars passing through tunnels or across overpasses, bridges, expressways and other urban forms 'shot through' with 'ways' of mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2000, p. 740). While it is no doubt the case that the motorway and its service areas were, by the 1960s, being experienced as 'places of spectacle, dwelling, socialization and excitement' (Merriman, 2004, p. 159), their lack of representation in cinematic geographies of travel (in the north west and Merseyside region, at least), suggests that the primary interests and emotional investment of the amateur filmmakers lay in the 'spectacle' of disappearing spaces and places of connection such as those discussed above.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how the critical insertion of amateur transport films within a contextual framing of urban planning and social geographies of mobility can yield insights into some of the spatial contradictions that were emerging in Liverpool and Merseyside during the 1950s and 1960s. While it is perhaps easy to dismiss these films, certainly from a contemporary perspective, as mere exercises in nostalgia that recall an idealised past of ‘traditional’ *Gemeinschaft*-style social configurations and transport practices, by exposing these filmic documents to critical spatial analysis it is possible to map some of the shifting socio-spatial dynamics impacting on the region during this period.

Although innovations in transport technology and infrastructure have for centuries transformed the social landscapes of urban environments – the development of the railways in the nineteenth century being an obvious case in point (Schivelbusch, 1986) – the expansion of spaces of mobility associated with the car and other road transport vehicles has pushed many former public and social areas of the city further into spatial abstraction (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 359); as such, they define a moment of social and urban transition specific to that of late modernity.

Comparing the urban spaces depicted in the Mitchell and Kenyon series of films (c. 1900) with those of today, Keiller remarks that these earlier spaces should be looked upon not so much as ‘traditional’ (hence lost), but rather ‘in terms of a modernity which was marginalised by later developments’ (2004, p. 199). Similarly, the older (cinematic) spaces of transit and mobility discussed in this paper are representative of not so much ‘traditional’ forms of social and spatial engagement as of a modernity that has become evermore encrusted with, and effaced by, the architectonics of ‘supermodernity’: the ‘installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods’ such as high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports and other non-places (Augé, 1995, p. 34).

As counter spatial narratives – representational spaces which prompt critical reflection on the de-localising affects of (automotive) spatial abstraction – it is instructive therefore to look upon films such as *Boat for Businessmen* or *The Last Transporter* as cinematographic enactments of an embedded poetics of place or place-making. Viewed thus, the films’ respective spaces of transit and mobility can be seen to function as ritual markers symbolically grounding everyday spatial practices within localised structures of anthropological place.

At the same time, these filmic spaces, and the centripetal forces they invoke, belie the realities of an urban and (post)industrial geography that has been increasingly shaped by a counter, more diffuse spatial geometry. As Keiller points out, the deindustrialisation of Liverpool’s docks and waterfront, and the containerisation of its shipping industry (based at Seaforth Container Terminal, north of the city) have rendered barren an industrial landscape where the ‘warehouses that used to line both sides of the river have been superseded by a fragmented and mobile space: goods vehicles moving or parked on the United Kingdom’s roads at any given time – the road system as a publicly funded warehouse’ (2001, p. 448). This image of an urban-industrial centre displaced, dispersed and re-routed along the nation’s road networks is as graphic an illustration of centrifugal space as any you are likely to find. If, as Simmel suggests, the will to connection had become a shaping of things, then the localised

spaces of transit mapped in Couche's transport films helped fashion an affective urban geography which by the early 1960s was already feeling the impacts of an evermore demanding – and de-localising – 'will to motorisation' (Dimendberg, 1998).

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. See <http://www.liv.ac.uk/lisa/cityinfilm>.
2. Arranged on a series of screens and historical maps, Keiller's exhibit comprises actuality footage of urban landscapes filmed between 1896 and 1909, showing street scenes and 'phantom ride' views shot from moving vehicles such as trams and trains. The exhibition was held at the BFI Southbank in London between 23 November 2007 and 3 February 2008.
3. Peter Adey's (2006) study of Liverpool airport similarly questions the extent to which such spaces of transit may prompt other forms and readings than those associated with Augé's conception of 'non-places'. As with Merriman's work on the motorway, Adey explores ways in which airports were experienced as spaces that were invested with localised and geographically specific structures of meaning, history and identity.
4. See <http://www.liv.ac.uk/lisa/cityinfilm>.
5. It is worth noting that, upon emerging from either of the two branches, the first landmark that greets the Liverpool-bound motorist is a view of one of the two main iconic buildings associated with the city: the Liver Building (at the New Quay exit) and St. George's Hall (at Haymarket).
6. The tradition of the public walkthrough has continued to this day. In June 2008, a walkthrough of the Birkenhead tunnel, the first since 1994, was conducted as part of Liverpool's European Capital of Culture celebrations. It is instructive to note that there has been no public walkthrough of the Wallasey Tunnel other than that which marked its opening in 1971.
7. See North West Film Archive catalogue: www.nwfa.mmu.ac.uk.
8. The complete film can be viewed online on the British Film Institute's Screenonline Liverpool website: www.screenonline.org.uk/liverpool/.
9. Angus Tilston uses footage from *The Last Transporter* in screenings of his Merseyside amateur film collection. These screenings are mostly for elderly audiences, including those in residential care homes as a means to stimulate remembrances of earlier times and places in their lives. Clive Garner is a Wirral-based film and music collector and former broadcaster for BBC Radio Merseyside. He too puts on regular screenings and nostalgia events (in his own 12-seater cinema attached to his house in Wallasey Village), using archive film, music and period newsreel footage to create an 'authentic' memoryscape of times past (Tilston, personal communication).
10. The bridge has appeared in Alan Bleasdale's 1991 drama *GBH*, as well as popular BBC programmes such as *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*, *Merseybeat*, and *Drop Dead Gorgeous*.
11. Film of the opening of the Liverpool-East Lancashire Road was shot by the Preston Brothers and included in their *Glengarry Topic News no. 17* compilation (see www.nwfa.mmu.ac.uk).
12. A new bridge crossing between Runcorn and Widnes is scheduled to open in 2014. The Mersey Gateway, as the bridge will be known, will provide a 'major strategic new transport route linking the Liverpool city-region, north Cheshire and the north west to the rest of the country' enabling the existing bridge to be 'redesigned to deal with local traffic, cyclists, pedestrians and those using public transport' (Halton Borough Council – www2.halton.gov.uk/merseygateway/).
13. For a discussion of the disruption and urban upheaval caused by the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway in New York, see Marshall Berman's chapter 'Robert Moses: The Expressway World' in his *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982, pp. 290–312).
14. To illustrate his point Augé invites the reader to imagine a Durkheimian analysis of a transit lounge at Roissy airport (1995, p. 94).

15. For example, Iain Sinclair and Chris Petit's seminal motorway film, *London Orbital* (2002). See also the BBC's three-part documentary *The Secret Life of the Motorway* (BBC4, 2007).

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