

Mapping, memory and the city: Archives, databases and film historiography

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Abstract

This article critically assesses the role and broader applications of a place-based moving image database and online catalogue in researching film and cities. Unlike the sprawling metropolises of Berlin, London or New York (the archetypical ‘cinematic cities’), a medium-sized provincial city such as Liverpool offers a more localized urban landscape conducive to place-based studies of film. The form and structure of the database plays a crucial role in the mapping of historical film and urban geography, allowing for relational forms of spatial analysis. This prompts a wider set of questions: in what ways can the database inform and structure specific spatial narratives of the city over time? What, by extension, are the cultural and historiographical implications for research into film, place and space? Finally, to what extent might a database model of the ‘city in film’ be extended beyond local and regional boundaries to reshape national discourses of film historiography?

Keywords

archives, city, database, film, historiography, mapping, space

The City of Liverpool’s much anticipated period of tenure as European Capital of Culture was celebrated in 2008. Among the activities that took place as part of the busy programme of cultural events that year was the completion of two projects that drew on Liverpool’s rich archival heritage of the city in film. The first was the BFI’s Screenonline webpage *Liverpool: A City on Screen* (www.screenonline.org.uk/liverpool), an initiative which was made publicly accessible for the first time via educational institutions, museums

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and libraries in Liverpool and Merseyside, a selection of digitized archive footage of the city from 1901 to the present day, along with contextual information. The other was the return of the celebrated filmmaker Terence Davies to the city of his birth, and the UK premiere of his long-awaited follow-up to *The House of Mirth* (2000), the autobiographical documentary or visual poem, *Of Time and the City* (2008).

The City in Film project, a partnership between film studies and architecture, contributed to both of these projects, drawing on an extensive database of film and video material that depicts the city and its urban architectural environment from the earliest known footage to the present day. The project is the first attempt to comprehensively trace and catalogue the wide range of genres and production practices that have contributed to the way in which urban space has been perceived and projected in moving image media.¹ Initiated as part of Liverpool's 800th birthday celebrations in 2007 and European Capital of Culture activities in 2008, the project explores the ways in which actuality and factual genres such as newsreels, documentaries and amateur footage have depicted the city's architecture and urban landscape at different times. Regarded at the end of the 19th century as the 'gateway to the [British] empire', Liverpool provides an exemplary instance of a city in which film has played a key role in shaping perceptions of the urban environment, maintaining and modifying the social relations that territorialize the landscape. Film and video production can be understood as one site amid a variety of competing flows (of people, travel, migratory and touristic practices, for example) that shape the internal and external relations of the city at any one particular time. The project has explored the ways in which various forms of film and video practice are imbricated in mediating the city's spatial dynamics, and how these depictions can be understood in relation to new forms of moving image practice that are attempting to reconfigure access to, and investments in, the urban environment. To explore these questions in depth, the project created an online database that embraces all moving image forms made in and about the city, from the earliest known footage shot by the Lumière Brothers' film operator Jean Alexandre Louis Promio in 1897 to the premiere of Terence Davies' poetic eulogy to his hometown.

Marking a departure for Davies, more renowned for his work as a director of fiction film, *Of Time and the City* comprises 85 percent archive footage, most of which was shot in Liverpool in the period from 1945 to the early 1970s, before Davies moved away from the city. Acclaimed at the Cannes Film Festival as a quintessentially Terence Davies film, *Of Time and the City* filters the director's subjective remembrances of post-war Liverpool through a selection of carefully chosen archive sequences, juxtaposed with Davies' own commentary, poetry, clips from BBC radio archives and, most strikingly, classical and popular music. This evocative soundscape works in haunting counterpoint to the on-screen images, many of which detail the crumbling urban fabric and increasing decrepitude of a city in the throes of post-industrial decline – an environment which Davies, as a young gay man growing up in a strict Catholic family, found increasingly alienating.

As well as marking an absolution of sorts for a director whose poetic, autobiographical and unique style of filmmaking had long been pushed to the margins of British film (Davies' difficulties in securing funding for his comparatively low-budget productions have remained a constant constraint on his creative output; see Hattenstone, 2006), the release *Of Time and the City* coincided with a growing interest in and recognition of the

role of archive film in the cultural and historical remapping of cities such as Liverpool. Featuring footage from prominent Liverpool documentaries such as *A Day in Liverpool* (dir. Anson Dyer, 1929), *Morning in the Streets* (dir. Denis Mitchell, 1959), *Liverpool Sounding* (dir. Ken Pople, 1967), *Who Cares* (dir. Nick Broomfield, 1971) and *Behind the Rent Strike* (dir. Nick Broomfield, 1974), as well as newsreel and amateur film documenting a wide selection of events, landmarks and everyday urban spaces in and around the city, *Of Time and the City* itself can be looked upon as a visual archive: a cinematic repository of urban memories where audiences can navigate the filmic, architectural and lived spaces of post-war Liverpool.

In 2008 Liverpool's filmic heritage was also celebrated by the launch of the BFI Screenonline webpage *Liverpool: A City on Screen*. The first of what is aimed to be a series of pages on the ways in which moving images have been filmed in, around and about the UK's major cities, the project was coordinated by Northwest Vision and Media in partnership with the BFI, North West Film Archive, city libraries and the City in Film project. Screenonline makes available to schools and colleges throughout the UK extracts from the internationally renowned collection of moving images held in the BFI National Archive. For this project, as well as using existing digitized footage, Screenonline drew on material held in other publicly funded archives as well as digitizing a number of amateur films held in private collections, drawing on the information database collated by the City in Film project. In recent years, museum curators, archivists and researchers have become increasingly aware of the importance of the contribution of moving image collections to stimulating and maintaining the collective memories that give shape and substance to ideas of citizenship and local identity, in the face of the economic upheavals wrought by modernization and globalization. In Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture, screenings of archive material such as the North West Film Archive's collection of films made in and about the city, *Liverpool on Film* (2007), and screenings in association with the BFI and Tate Liverpool, played to packed houses, demonstrating a public appetite for all types of film genre (Figure 1).²

The digital age is making access to moving images in archives potentially easier than ever before, but given that much of the material is copyright restricted and that master copies exist in a diversity of film and video formats in collections owned and managed by various public and private organizations and individuals, access of any kind, digital or otherwise, is rarely a straightforward matter. How to make these collections more accessible to a wide range of potential users figures highly on the agenda of archivists and funders alike. Since the announcement of an additional £25 million of government funding in 2007 to secure the preservation and accessibility of the UK's publicly funded moving image archives for future generations, issues of digitization have played a major role in shaping debate.³

As 'custodians of visual history' (Norris Nicholson, 2007), institutions such as film archives play an important and influential role in making accessible moving image materials in the nations and regions of the UK, particularly in the context of widening access through digitization and online cataloguing, as well as dissemination through public screenings and the commercial release of DVD/video compilations of archival footage. Nonetheless, how representative are these digital extracts and DVD compilations of a

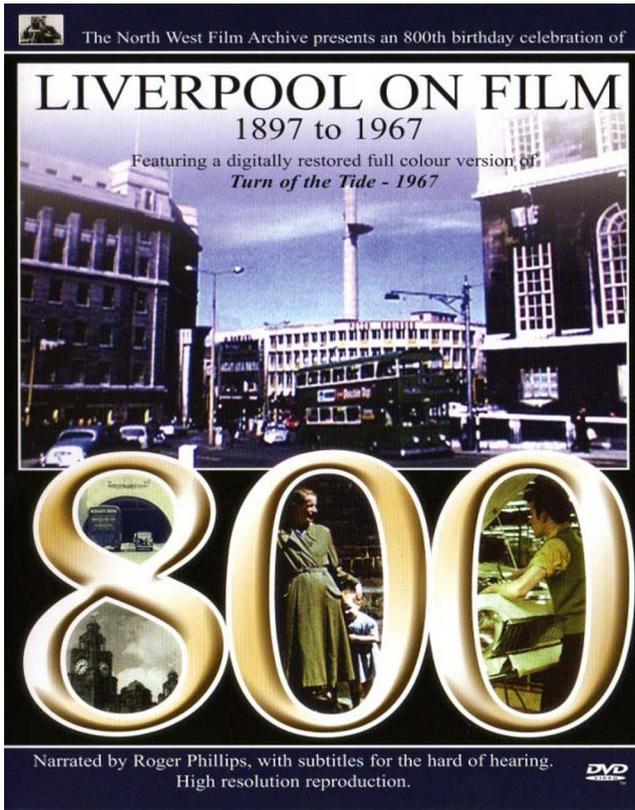


Figure 1. Liverpool on Film

Source: North West Film Archive (2007)

city or region's film heritage? What material is overlooked in the selection process, and why are certain choices made about which images should be digitalized rather than others? How these materials are collected and accessed has profound implications for both the kinds of research questions that can or might be asked in the future, and for the ways in which any such research might be undertaken by professionals and non-professionals alike. In cities without their own dedicated film archive (such as Liverpool or London), access to facilities that enable researchers or members of the public to locate moving image materials held in non-specialist archives such as city libraries, public records offices, commercial and educational institutions, independent production companies, galleries and museums or private collections has depended upon key individuals with specialist knowledge. How might greater accessibility and awareness of this material shape and re-inform narratives of national and regional film culture, encouraging a multifaceted understanding of the ways in which moving image materials made in and about particular places are embedded in localized conceptions of place and identity?

Initiatives such as the City in Film project are aiming to tackle these questions through the creation of publicly available databases that bring together information on films made in and about a particular place from a wide range of archives, collections and individuals. A similar attempt to collate the film and video resources held by diverse range of local archives and groups is coordinated by the film and media agency for London, Film London, which has set up London Screen Archives. This is a regional network of organizations ranging across museums and galleries, schools and colleges, public and private collections and commercial audiovisual libraries that hold archive material made in and about the city. Through its web portal, Film London provides links to information for researchers and the general public on archive holdings and how to access them, as well as acting as a lobby group for preserving materials, many of which are held in non-specialist libraries that lack the resources to preserve vulnerable tape and film collections. Drawing together a wide and diverse range of film material such as this, what broader and longer-term impacts might the construction of database catalogues have on engagements with, and accessibility to, these otherwise neglected aspects of local film heritage? In this article, we will discuss some of the broader theoretical issues raised by compiling a comprehensive catalogue of moving image materials of this kind, spanning a wide range of genres (actualities, documentaries, newsreels, features, shorts, amateur and independent productions) focused on a particular city such as Liverpool. Part of the remit of the City in Film project has been to digitize a wide selection of amateur films currently held in private collections, with the aim of contributing to a permanent exhibition in the new Museum of Liverpool that will be accessible to the public through an interactive interface based on geographical district. A consideration of the role of the database/catalogue and the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology to explore or 'navigate' the relationship between film history, film space and a sense of historical place underpins the questions and issues raised in the following discussion.

Memory, identity and the cinematic city

A spatial history of film could, for example, construct an inventive collage of cine cities, for cities are 'made' in the cinema and recreated in different historical periods by filmmakers of different national backgrounds. (Bruno, 2002: 362)

A medium-sized provincial city that developed worldwide significance in the 19th century due to its deepwater port, Liverpool provides an interesting example of how it is possible to collate moving images from a wide range of genres and to study their contribution to understandings of place-making activity and landscape change. Unlike the archetypical 'cinematic cities' such as Berlin, London, Los Angeles and New York, all of which have been the subject of intense studies of their cinematic fictions (see, for example, Brunson, 2007; Clarke, 1997; Donald, 1999), peripheral cities offer a more geographically focused range of sites and environments such as civic buildings, urban gateways and work and leisure spaces that enable moving image materials, irrespective of their genre, to be analysed according to their spatial function (using an architectural definition associated with specific buildings or spaces) and spatial use (i.e. the way these

spaces are used at specific historical moments). By pulling together material from a wide range of sources (held by amateur and independent private collectors, newsreel and television companies, in national, regional and local archives and made by filmmakers with very different motivations and agendas), and analysing this material in relation to spatial use, it becomes possible to develop a fine-grained analysis of how the city has been imagined and depicted in moving image media at both local and national levels at different times. The database enables a range of questions to be asked that interrogate specific issues such as how iconic buildings and vistas, present in so many of the films, figure in the making and marketing of place (Roberts, 2010a), the ways in which these symbolic icons are depicted in relation to changing conventions of amateur, professional and independent film practices (Hallam, 2010), and how consumption of place is inextricably entwined with this iconic cinematic cartography (Roberts, 2010c).

For example, in an article discussing the role of amateur and independent filmmakers in depictions of the modernization of Liverpool in the 1960s, the database enabled access to a wide range of films in different genres made in and about the city at this time. From this, it was possible to make an informed and qualified assessment of the ways in which these filmmakers created films that were personal responses to urban change (Hallam, 2007). However, it is only by drawing on a wide range of contextual material such as local press items, maps, city planning documents and amateur and professional film journals, that the filmmakers' motivations and rhetorical strategies become clear. Norris-Nicholson (2007) has emphasized the importance of context to this kind of 'archaeological' work, of uncovering the layers of meanings within and around the images. We would add that these layers of meaning will be constituted differently by groups and individuals who have particular interests in the material. Attention to context, as Ian Christie (2006) has suggested, opens up the possibilities of multilayered and multiple readings by a multiplicity of users. As consumer engagement with both film and history changes from one of passive consumption to active participation, a renewed concern with the cultural context in which films are made and consumed underlines much of the recent work in this area.⁴

More conventional approaches to place-based research in film studies have tended to focus on thematic and generic readings, and the 'impossible geographies' created by the imaginary use of place (Brunsdon, 2007). Brunsdon's study *London in Cinema*, which examines the representation of the city in feature films since 1945, is an exemplary example of this method. Her book 'investigate[s] the kinds of London that are found in cinema and, using critical categories such as genre, explore[s] significant patterning in these cinematic Londons' (2007: 6). Drawing on the work of historical geographer Miles Ogborn, Brunsdon argues that films are part of the textual production of space, and that 'neither spaces nor texts can be the *a priori* basis for the other' (Ogborn, in Brunsdon, 2007: 6). However, despite acknowledging the broader contextual framings underpinning filmic images of London, Brunsdon has little interest in exploring the extra-diegetic spaces and histories which have informed the city's cinematic geographies. As she notes, 'the films [come] first, with sometimes only fleeting reference to significant aspects of London's history and geography' (2007: 6). As such, in works such as *London in Cinema* there is no attempt to engage with the pro-filmic contexts that create the imaginary landscapes under discussion, or to explore their contextual underpinnings and significance. Similarly, although a conventional analysis of feature films of Liverpool produces a

range of richly evocative sites and spaces which create metaphorical and emotionally resonant landscapes for their characters (most notably the waterfront and docklands) (Koeck and Roberts, 2007), an exclusive focus on feature films can limit the scope of place-based research on cities in film. Yet arguably, it is the ways in which place itself becomes characterized and imbued with emotional significance, how moving images resonate with feelings about place, which makes the filmic analysis of place so compelling. As Brunson suggests, the ‘dramatically poignant’ (2004: 71) invocation of place in film, particularly in the case of familiar landscapes and locations that have changed or disappeared as a result of urban development, exerts a powerful symbolic and emotional charge that is tied to a specific characterization or imaginary of the cinematic city. This is especially apparent in the work of a filmmaker such as Terence Davies.

Davies describes *Of Time and the City* as a reflective memoir on the painful experience of losing a sense of place, of seeing the city that he has loved and hated in equal measure respond to the forces of modernization and globalization (see: www.oftimeandthecity.com). The cinematic city is conceived invariably in terms of its fictional representations: Davies’ award winning documentary, constructed of fragments of archive film created by numerous filmmakers juxtaposed with contemporary footage, points to the ways in which factual and actuality footage also construct powerful imaginaries of place. On the film’s website, a still photograph depicts Davies and his cinematographer standing in the same place that Alexandre Promio stood in 1897, in knowing homage to the first known moving images of Liverpool, a series of scenes of horsedrawn traffic and pedestrians on St George’s Place in front of the iconic St George’s Hall (Figures 2 and 3).

Similarly, Davies’ childhood remembrances, rendered through archival footage of the docklands Overhead Railway, recall the equally iconic landscape of the docks and river first captured by Promio in a series of tracking shots filmed from the railway (then just four years old). Closed and demolished in 1956, the Overhead Railway, or ‘Dockers’ Umbrella’ as it was and still is affectionately known, was more recently the inspiration behind the artist Ben Parry’s site-specific installation *Terminus* (2008): a virtual reconstruction of the panoramic view obtainable from the Overhead Railway, had it still been in operation today. Filmed at the height of elevation of the former railway and projected onto the side of George’s Dock Building at Pier Head, the cinematic geographies of *Terminus* draw on a popular imaginary of place, one that remaps the waterfront as a space of absence and urban memory. The ‘Pier Head’ sequence from Parry’s *Terminus* also features in Davies’ *Of Time and the City*.

Echoing Giuliana Bruno’s suggestion that our sense of place ‘which is also our sense of history’, has been ‘mapped haptically onto the field screen of “moving” images’ (2002: 253), Marita Sturken argues that ‘cultural and individual memory are constantly produced through, and mediated by, the technologies of memory’ (2008: 75), and that these technologies are increasingly visual: photographs, films, television shows and digital images. The use of popular cultural forms to create ‘memoryscapes’ that invoke personal as well as collective associations raises complex issues about the nature of personal memories, and whether it is possible to disentangle them from the flow of popular media, particularly television programmes and popular music, through which collective memories of the past are regularly constructed. Alison Landsberg (2004) has developed the concept of ‘prosthetic memory’ to describe how our own personal memories are increasingly welded with



Figure 2. Shoot photograph from *Of Time and the City*
Source: Terence Davies (2008)

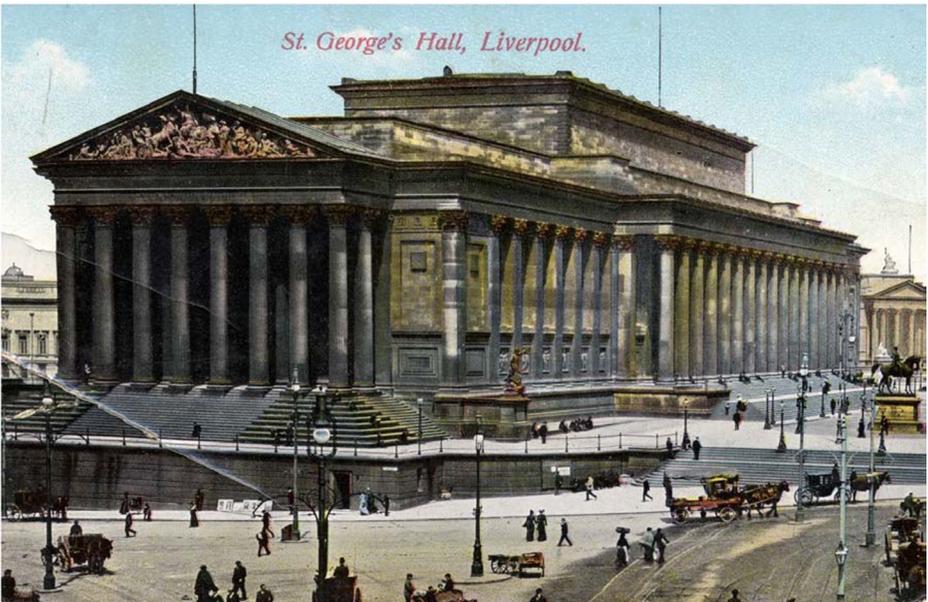


Figure 3. St Georges Hall, Liverpool: late 19th century postcard, a view replicated by Alexander Promio in his first film of the city recorded in 1897
Source: reproduced courtesy of the Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield

what she terms synthetic memories; direct experience and the memories that originate from it can no longer be separated from the memories that emerge from encounters with a wide range of popular forms. During the passage of time, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate personal experience from the mediating technologies which have (re) constructed both personal and collective experience of the past: although not directly experienced, the montage of attractions and associations becomes part of personal memory, melded to feelings and emotions connected to particular experiences.

As well as intercutting newly-shot contemporary footage with sequences from recent works such as *Terminus*, Terence Davies was demandingly precise about finding and incorporating archive images that evoked and expressed memories of very particular emotions, with the self-spoken voiceover narration serving as a meditative contemplation on this visual evocation.⁵ He furnished his memoryscape with familiar generic tropes and an audiovisual style associated with documentary modes of moving image production from the late 1950s and early 1960s accompanied by popular and classical music, inducing a bitterly nostalgic sense of place and time not only through the reproduction of views and songs that can ‘touch’ the ears and eyes with a sense of emotive recognition and familiarity, but also through the associative connotations of the forms of production themselves. Made primarily in black and white, with colour used in certain sequences to emphasize emotional affect, *Of Time and the City* is associated with the celebration of northern working-class identity found in the black and white realism of the films of the British New Wave such as *Room at the Top* (dir. Jack Clayton, 1959), the documentary style of the radio and television journalist Dennis Mitchell⁶ and original copies of recordings of American popular music brought to Liverpool in the 1950s by seamen who worked the shipping lines between Liverpool and New York (Cohen, 2007).

The response to Davies’ film poses interesting questions about the irresistible attractions and pleasures of recognition that accompany viewings of archive film, and the ways in which it can infuse contemporary viewers with feelings of joyful familiarity and a painful sense of loss. As the producers of the film observed, screenings of *Of Time and the City* proved particularly popular amongst ex-pats and other members of the Liverpool diaspora who, like Davies, look back with affection and poignancy on memoryscapes from a past – and a city – long left behind.⁷ Andrew Hoskins has noted with some concern how modern societies are using the mediated past increasingly in this way to find ‘some kind of anchor’ (2001: 333), a stable link to an increasingly fragmented, precarious sense of identity in the present. Referring to the state of memory in media-saturated societies as ‘new memory’ to distinguish it from the pre-television era, he suggests that ‘the “traces” of history are increasingly televisual traces’ (2001: 345). However, as more moving image footage from both public and private sources is brought to light and made publicly available, television’s remediation of the past, with its emphasis on national narratives of identity and belonging, is increasingly open to challenge. It becomes possible to create moving image maps of the archive city that enable personal excavations, psychogeographic journeys, through urban space and time. Digitization is making such journeys more possible to increasing numbers of people. The availability of archive footage on not only publicly-funded websites such as the BFI’s Screenonline but also on commercial sites (albeit in a degraded capacity) and through filesharing is creating new forms of engagement with moving image history. At the time of writing, on YouTube there are more than 350,000 clips of everything Liverpoolian, from football to music, with an additional 5,700 clips on

Liverpool's 'scouse' heritage, some of them extracted from copyright materials.⁸ Echoing the optimism of early internet users who stressed the web's liberalizing potential and the opportunity it presents to create communal memories (see for example Casalegno, 2004), for media researchers such as Patricia Zimmerman, digitizing archive materials and the networking opportunities that this creates challenges the institutional fixity of the archival image by mobilizing other sets of meanings and discursive practices. What Zimmerman terms the 'migratory archive' is a resource that is constantly in process, creating opportunities for new alliances and theorizations emerging from changes in the ways that moving images are being made, distributed and consumed. Within this conception of an emerging ecology, her notion of viewer engagement is less the passive consumer-observer conceptualized by Hoskins, and more an active citizen-participant in a virtually reconstituted public sphere where public works are created with others. These works are public in the sense that they are shared works, 'enabled, emboldened and energized through collaboration, hybrid temporalities, layering different times on top of one another, and migration through and around different [media] spaces' (Zimmerman, 2007). For Zimmerman, the migratory archive, with this renewed notion of 'public work', lies at the heart of a cultural shift that is impacting on the ways in which moving image practitioners and critical analysts are engaging with archive materials.

However, for some researchers, freeing the archive image from the time and place of its production raises a number of questions. For example, the amateur film historian Heather Norris Nicholson is concerned about what is lost when it is only the image that can be accessed by online users. Attention to the analysis of contextual materials such as family histories of filmmakers, diaries, scrapbooks and other documentary material that may be housed in archives and institutions can seem irrelevant once the digital image is readily accessible. Her concern emphasizes the importance of context in research into archive film, of uncovering 'the successive layers of meanings within and around the images' (Norris Nicholson, 2007). In the case of place-based geographical contextualization, historical maps and planning documents are essential tools for contextualizing the images within a material and social history of the urban landscape, informing and enriching a spatial reading of place in film. In the same way that metaphors of mapping are suggestive of an epistemological shift in the way that we think about and relate to archive film imagery or reorganize the entry portals to online moving image libraries, the archaeological trope of 'excavation' is one that connotes a shift towards a fundamentally spatial mode of historiographical engagement.

Archaeologies of the moving image

The modern experience of memory is, quite simply, a moving representational archive. (Bruno, 2002: 253)

Following the art historian Erwin Panofsky's proposal that linear perspective is the defining symbolic form of the modern era, Lev Manovich has suggested that the database is the new symbolic form of the computer age, 'a new way to structure ourselves and our experience of the world' (Manovich, 1999: 81). The computer privileges the database as its *modus operandi* rather than other forms of cultural expression such as

narrative: 'Database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world' (Manovich, 1999: 85). Basing his analysis on Ferdinand de Saussure's system of general linguistics (semiotics) and the modifications made by Roland Barthes (1968) to analyse sign systems, Manovich argues that the organizational logic of the computer privileges the paradigmatic axis, collections of like items, whereas the syntagmatic axis favours a linear cause-and-effect sequence. New media, he suggests, reverse the ways in which traditional literary and cinematic narratives work: instead of foregrounding linear cause-and-effect sequencing, the database interface that users view to search and navigate (the paradigmatic axis) comes into the foreground. The open-ended, paradigmatic nature of database structures means that they always have the potential to grow by adding new elements or links to them – this contributes to what Manovich argues is the anti-narrative logic of the web. Within this context, a database of archive images such as Screenonline has the potential for infinite growth: it has potential to become a resource for image play, with juxtaposition, montage and collage the favoured modes of construction, similar to the ways in which avant-garde and experimental filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov in the 1920s and Peter Greenaway today construct films based on catalogues of items organized in the paradigmatic manner of a database, in which the viewer has to navigate a meaning from the film or media objects.⁹ The potentialities offered to artists, filmmakers and others by the database and the online archive, as Zimmerman and others have suggested, bring into play multiple temporalities and spatialities which, in turn, offer a range of possibilities for place-based studies and historiographies of film. The spatial logic governing the database model of film history is one in which metaphors of activity such as 'navigation', 'mapping', 'sorting', 'searching' and 'excavating' come to predominate over those of more passive activities such as 'spectating', 'gazing', 'viewing' and 'watching'.

If Greenaway's films and Manovich's theories are an indication of the forms that new media are taking, what importance might this have for thinking about how to present and theorize historical footage in the context of contemporary exhibition environments? Manovich (1999) describes what he calls the 'virtual museums genre' as a paradigmatic example of database form: the museum becomes a database of images that represents its holdings, which can be accessed in a range of different ways: by keyword, country, name or title, chronologically. Although a simulated journey of moving from room to room around the museum is often a mode of access to images, this 'narrative' is not given special status in comparison to other methods on offer on the CDROM – narrative is one method among others of accessing data. Using the potential that these simulated environments offer for actual gallery installations, the filmmaker and architect Patrick Keiller offers one interpretation of how the database might inform the construction of a navigable moving image archive exhibition environment. Drawing on a database of more than 68 items of urban street scenes and phantom rides shot from moving vehicles such as trams and trains, selected from early material filmed between 1896 and 1909 held by the BFI National Archive, Keiller's installation 'The City of the Future' uses a series of screens on which historical maps of a range of different places are projected. By clicking on a particular place on the map, 'users' can navigate between different footage ordered spatially and geographically, opening up the otherwise fixed meanings attached to each



Figure 4. Patrick Keiller, *The City of the Future*, 2007 (installation shot at BFI Southbank Gallery)

film in isolation and offering alternative means of engaging with, ‘mapping’ or ‘sorting’ a range of archival materials (Figure 4).

These new forms of engagement prompt a series of questions as to the ways in which the database and online archive can provide a spatial catalogue of the city over time, and by extension, as these projects develop, how they might contribute new understandings to the ways in which we conceptualize national film culture. How can mapping different moving image practices further our understanding of the relationship between filmic representations of urban spaces and the historical changes in the material and social fabric of cities? In order to address such questions, it is increasingly incumbent on researchers to explore new and innovative ways of opening up the representational spaces of film to critical interdisciplinary analysis, and to map, both figuratively and geographically, the spatial histories which have shaped the production and consumption of a city’s cinematic representations.

Excavations, mappings and film historiography

The use and adaptation of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology by film historians and geographers of film – a resource which, after geography, is associated most closely with the discipline of archaeology – is itself an indicator of increasing predominance of ‘layering’ in theoretical approaches to film, space and memory. In the USA, scholars such as Robert C. Allen and Jeffrey Klenotic have begun to use GIS

mapping in historical studies of film reception. For Allen, in spite of the much flouted 'historical turn' in film studies, the discipline continues to be dogged by ambivalence towards using empirical methods to illuminate film history. He argues that even within the strand of film history where the use of empirical research might be deemed to have the most relevance – on exhibition, spectatorship and the social experiences of movie-going – film studies scholars continue to be uncertain about the nature and relevance of empirical research, a situation conditioned, he suggests, by film studies' theoretical heritage and the 'tendency to confuse intellectual engagement with the empirical world outside of the text with empiricism' (Allen, 2006: 49). As Allen points out, scholarship on narrative cinema post-Christian Metz has been dominated by a theoretical model of the cinema spectator that denies subjectivity to the historical individuals who went to the cinema, in spite of the very particular material, physical and social circumstances of cinema-going on which Metz's theory is based (Allen, 2006). Allen seeks to relocate film history in the activity of movie-going and as part of his project, to rethink the relationship between cinema and place. In partnership with the university library he has constructed a database, 'Going to the Show' (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/gtts/>) that documents 'the first comprehensive inventory of silent-era commercial film exhibition ever developed for an entire state, encompassing more than 600 exhibition venues in more than 100 communities in operation at some time between 1907 and 1930' (Allen, 2007). The inventory is searchable by, among other categories, geographic location and uses geo-coded Sanbourn fire insurance maps to situate movie-going within the social, economic and cultural spaces in which they operated. In a similar venture, Jeffrey Klenotic is using GIS technology to explore the social and geographic contexts of movie-going and film consumption in New Hampshire during the 20th century (Klenotic, 2007).

In the case of the Liverpool film research, GIS software functions as the principle methodological and organizational platform from which to navigate the city's cinematic geographies. From a practical standpoint, there are two main advantages of using GIS in place-based research on film and urban memory. First, the ability to geo-reference film data (plotting on-screen locations, buildings, journey itineraries, etc. to accurate geographical coordinates) lends itself to a specifically *spatial* mode of historiographical research. Mapping the spaces and places captured in archival film imagery not only embeds these representations within the historical geography of the city, but also provides opportunities to examine the correlations between otherwise unrelated or unevaluated variables, for example:

- the relationship between genre and location (how cinematic geographies are shaped by different film practices and narratives);
- the ways in which landmark or iconic buildings and vistas are framed by different filmmakers at different moments in time (Hallam, 2010);
- the filmic mapping of boundaries, gateways, points of transit and connection (Roberts, 2010b);
- the way that ideas of the 'local' and 'regional' have been variously construed in film;
- the shifting geographies of contested space, festivals and parades, sites of leisure, industry, and so on (Hallam and Roberts, forthcoming, 2011).

The geo-referencing of location points and nodes is digitally mapped in the form of point data. This refers to specific markers of place and location that are recorded on the map as points: place names, sites of interest, buildings, points of arrival and departure, and so forth. GIS also allows for the plotting of routes and journeys by the digital inscription of line data: the aforementioned Lumière tracking shot from the Overhead Railway could be mapped in this fashion, for example, or Mitchell and Kenyon's *Liverpool as Seen From the Front of an Electric Car* (1901), or for that matter, any film with sequences in which the *mise-en-scène* is composed of linear, contiguous movements through time and space. The mapping of polygon data (area shapes) provides further opportunities for the cinematic cartographer insofar as it enables the spatial referencing of specific urban areas. These might refer to cinematic 'hot spots' or density clusters: areas of the city that feature predominantly (e.g. the 'waterfront', 'city centre', or the 'Lime Street area'); or also could relate to areas defined by their function or use (e.g. sites of leisure and recreation, festivals and parades, commerce and industry, etc.). Moreover, the cinematographer's perspectival range and motility can be mapped as polygon data, thus drawing direct correspondence between the cinematic geography of individual shots (pan, tilt, track, etc.) and the architectural and urban specificities that inform the framing of these shots.

Therefore, one of the foremost practical benefits of being able to geo-reference a city's historical film data is the extent to which existing database resources can serve to enhance the development of new applications. A comprehensive compilation of data relating to Liverpool films, assembled and made accessible in an online catalogue as part of the first phase of the City in Film research, provides the raw material from which the development of a spatial database of the city in film becomes possible. Using GIS to geo-reference existing datasets (insofar as these extend to location and geographic data) opens up new directions in archival film practice by privileging processes of navigation through a city's cinematic geography – through layers of time *and* space – thereby laying the foundations for a spatial historiography of film and the city. If examples such as Keiller's 'City of the Future' are illustrative of what might be dubbed a 'cartographic turn' in contemporary moving image practice – a consequence, in turn, of a more widely acknowledged 'spatial turn' that has influenced debates in social and cultural theory in recent decades (Warf and Arias, 2008) – then the uptake of digital mapping resources such as GIS in film studies research represents a practical response to the challenges and opportunities posed by these new critical landscapes of theory and practice. The literary scholar Franco Moretti has observed that maps function 'as analytical tools ... bringing to light relations that would otherwise remain hidden' (Moretti, 1998: 3). Therefore, GIS-based archival film practice can be seen in the first instance as a 'geospatial' extension of the database logic to which Manovich refers, as well as a spatialization of Zimmerman's idea of the migratory archive: a resource where the synchronic layering of temporalities, and migration through and around different spaces of representation, creates the possibility for new forms of navigation through a city's spaces of memory, and by extension new forms of historiographical critique.

The second important practical benefit of using GIS, arising from the first, is the connectivity that it offers in terms of linking otherwise unrelated geo-referenced datasets, thus extending the potential geographical, empirical and collaborative reach of specific GIS projects. For port cities such as Liverpool, with its historic links to global destinations

served by well-established shipping, migrant and trading routes, this has obvious applications. Although this is outside of the remit and scope of the research conducted to date in this area, following these diasporic connections through GIS mapping would bring into play the possibility of a fuller realization of the idea of a migratory archive. In the case of Liverpool, its historic connections with destinations such as Australia, Halifax, New York, New Zealand or Shanghai could form the basis of an archival network of city film geographies, where patterns of movements and migrations map the city's global routes of memory through film. For the establishment of any such geographic and scholarly links to be sustainable or even possible of course there would be certain key technological barriers to be overcome, not least the development of metadata standards whereby projects undertaken in different cities and countries can be brought into dialogue and incorporated into a broader geospatial framework of research and analysis. However, the rapid inroads being made in this field, and the growing international recognition of the value of GIS resources to cultural memory projects, provide some positive signs that these kinds of networked initiatives are both realizable and far-reaching (theoretically and geographically) in terms of their capacity to inform critical discussion on film, space and memory.

Alongside the radial and geographic connectivities potentially fostered by GIS are those operative across disciplinary boundaries. Inasmuch as issues of place and spatiality constitute the common intellectual meeting grounds of these interdisciplinary exchanges, the ability to bring the representational spaces of film into dialogue with other modes of spatial practice (e.g. cartographic, architectural, planning, archaeological, ethnographic) challenges established or fixed disciplinary perspectives, thus opening up new and potentially productive arenas of critical enquiry, and contributes towards theoretical discussions surrounding questions of spatial epistemology. The multilayered and dynamic model of urban space represented by GIS-based cinematic cartography allows renewed reflections on the role and place of moving image cultures in the production of everyday social spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). In this respect, GIS proves to be far from antithetical to the more humanistic geographies of place and space which, within the discipline of geography at least, early critics feared GIS would push further to the margins (Schuurman, 2004). With its classificatory and positivistic bent towards 'objective' forms of spatial analysis, GIS's reputation as a mechanism of state and military power, not to mention precision as an instrument of niche marketing and corporate hegemony, is certainly well founded. However, the development of arts and humanities-focused applications of GIS technology, such as research in historical GIS (Gregory and Ell, 2007; Gregory and Geddes, forthcoming, 2011), and the emergence of new spatial methodologies in the study of the moving image (Hallam and Roberts, 2011), provide some indication as to the ways in which GIS resources can furnish insights into the spatial histories of cultural representations and practices.

Furthermore, the interactivity offered by GIS enables researchers, archivists and curators alike to embed digitized contextual information (audio and video files, scanned documentation, weblinks, etc.) as attachments to geo-referenced point, line and polygon data. As such, Barthes' injunction to 'multiply the readings of the city' (1997: 171) is given further impetus by the interpolation of oral histories, video interviews or digitized archive footage within the geohistorical framework of a GIS interface. While spatially embedding this geo-referenced data offers new ways of critically navigating archival spaces of urban representation, and thus enhances the resources available for researchers into place,

memory and moving image practices, it also provides new and as yet largely untapped opportunities for public navigation of these spaces via interactive museum exhibits, which take the form of what Keiller (2008) has described as ‘spatial assemblies’ of the moving image: audiovisual representations which are accessed and organized geographically and cartographically. These new forms of audiovisual interactivity stand in contrast to the fixity of audiovisual presentations, designed to contain and ‘manage’ visitor experiences that currently populate contemporary museum gallery and exhibition spaces. Just as both personal and collective memories are being ‘relocated in the landscapes of new media technologies’ (McQuire, quoted in Hoskins, 2003: 8), so these self-same technologies have the potential to relocate personal and collective memories and anchor them in the landscapes of place.

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Notes

1. See the *City in Film* website for a full list of publications and the online catalogue of films: www.liv.ac.uk/lisa/cityinfilm/.
2. These projects include screenings as part of Tate Liverpool’s *Centre of the Creative Universe Exhibition* (2007), *Mitchell and Kenyon in Liverpool: Films of an Edwardian City* (May 2008), *Magical Mysterious Regeneration Tour: Artists, Architecture and the Future of the City* conference, Tate Liverpool and University of Liverpool (12–14 June 2008).
3. See for example, the Film Archive Forum (2005). In 2007 the Department of Culture, Media and Sport announced that an additional £25 million funding for digitizing the national and regional film archives would be made available via the UK Film Council. (see: www.film-london.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=1142)
4. See for example, the Cinema Context website: www.cinemacontext.nl/.
5. The producers in discussion with Les Roberts, *Of Time and the City* screening, University of Liverpool, May 2009.
6. Mitchell was particularly credited with recording the voices of ordinary people using modern portable equipment in radio series such as *People Talking* (BBC 1953–58); Davies uses a number of sequences from his early television documentary *Morning in the Streets* (1959).
7. The producers in discussion with Les Roberts, *Of Time and the City* screening, University of Liverpool, May 2009.
8. See: http://www.youtube.com/results?search_type=&search_query=scouse+%&aq=f, and http://www.youtube.com/results?search_type=&search_query=Liverpool&aq=f.
9. See for example *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (2003–05), Peter Greenaway’s media convergence project.

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