

REFEREED PAPER

The Bulger Case: A Spatial Story

Les Roberts

University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK
Email: Les.Roberts@liverpool.ac.uk

This paper contributes to debates in the emerging field of cinematic cartography (Caquard and Taylor, 2009) by exploring the ways in which strategies of digital cinemapping can function as tools of critical spatial practice and urban wayfinding. More specifically, the paper considers the scope for digital video technologies to reshape, contest and 'ground' spaces of urban representation and the 'spatial stories' these bring into play. Basing my analysis on the mediation of the events surrounding the abduction and murder of the 2-year-old boy James Bulger in 1993, I examine the case as a constellation of spatial narratives within which I weave my own spatial story in the form of a video mapping of the abduction route (in Bootle near Liverpool) and the responses and issues this further mediation has provoked. Methodological reflections on the map-making process are discussed alongside narratives generated by the video on YouTube. The paper argues that, by adopting practices of wayfinding, and by being critically attentive to the ways in which film and video-making practices are also spatial practices, moving image cartographies can provide insights into lived and embedded spaces of memory, and the hidden or muted spatial stories to which they play host.

Keywords: cinematic cartography, cinemapping, spatial practice, wayfinding, James Bulger, Liverpool, YouTube, dark heritage

INTRODUCTION

A traumatic event such as the high profile murder of a child leaves traces and echoes that are imprinted, often indelibly, on the material and symbolic landscapes of the places in which they occurred. Over the years, the narratives that attach themselves to these irrepressibly dark *lieux de mémoire* cast shadows across the folds and imbrications of spaces that are increasingly the product of multiple mediations. In the case of the 2-year-old Merseyside toddler James Bulger, who was abducted and murdered in 1993, the intense media interest sparked by the killing, news of which was met with revulsion around the world, has – in addition to the two decades of scrutinous reporting in the news media itself – given rise to television documentaries, a slew of 'true crime' books, accounts of those who investigated the murder, recollections of the boy's parents, even art exhibits¹. More recently, there have been a growing number of YouTube videos uploaded by those moved to contribute their own narrative reflections on the case.

Contained within this mosaic of Bulger narratives are cartographies of memory and trauma which are the intermedial product of specific, and at times contradictory spatial stories. As I will demonstrate in this paper, critical scrutiny of the Bulger case as a constellation of spatial narratives prompts questions as to the 'place' of the local in mediations of violent and traumatic crimes, and the ways in

which specific spaces of representation shape the symbolic landscapes of places burdened, if not quite defined by the dark legacy of these crimes. Key to such questions is the extent to which these mediated spaces are embedded in – or disembedded from – the material and everyday urban landscapes that 'flesh out', more acutely, the shape and contours of a given spatial story (Roberts, 2010). Put another way, this analysis takes as its cue the dynamism and dialectical correspondence between representations that serve to spectacularize and fetishize local topographies of crime and those more reflective of the embodied, sensory and ambulatory mappings that 'ground' these stories in specific social and spatial environments.

At either end of what is presented here as a continuum rather than binary opposition, is, on the one hand, the grainy CCTV footage of James Bulger being led away by his abductors in the Strand Shopping Centre in Bootle; an image that quickly became an iconic and disturbing signifier of the case and which has anchored the story in one of a handful of very specific locations (Figure 1). On the other is a 42-minute video *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story*, shot by the author in June 2010, which followed, in real time, the abduction route from the shopping centre, along the two and half mile route through Bootle and nearby Walton to the location – a railway track – where the victim was killed and his body later found (Figure 2). If one could be said to have ceded a space of representation that has 'located' the story in an ever more



Figure 1. CCTV image of James Bulger abduction from Bootle Shopping Centre, 12 February 1993

de-localized and virtual realm, the other has sought to make more tangible the immaterial accumulations of images that have permeated the ‘ether’ (Lundemo, 2010, p. 315) of Web 2.0 platforms such as YouTube and to re-embed their associated spatial stories in the ‘opacity and solidity’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 97) of everyday embodied practice.

To explore these stories is also to engage in a critical intervention in the spatial anthropology of media worlds and, by corollary, the ‘mapping cultures’ (Roberts, 2012a) and spatial practices that configure specific, and often contested narratives and place myths that constellate around affective landscapes such as those linked with high profile crime stories. *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story* is firstly discussed in terms of its status as a map of the abduction route: a cartographic representation that enables those navigating it on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/liminoid1>) to locate themselves in the crime *mise-en-scène* and to explore a space of representation that provides insights into a very different spatial story from those that can be found, in abundance, elsewhere on the video sharing site. Methodological reflections on the map-making process – the wayfinding practice that constituted the act of filming/walking the abduction route – are discussed alongside narratives generated by the video in the form of comments added by YouTube viewers. The paper concludes by arguing that, while the abstract spatial logic of these mediations can serve to deterritorialize their associated narratives from the place of the local, by adopting practices and tropes of wayfinding, and by being critically attentive to the ways in which film and video-making practices are also fundamentally *spatial practices* (Roberts, 2012b, p. 7), moving image cartographies can provoke insights into the anthropological and lived spaces of memory and trauma, and the hidden or muted spatial stories to which they play host.

The contention that the hyper-mediated ‘mappings’ that have shaped geographical understandings of the Bulger case are anchored in the immaterial environs of the ‘ether’ or ‘cloud’ is one that draws parallels with debates that weigh the cartographic abstractions of *maps* against the performative



Figure 2. Still from *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story* (Dir: Les Roberts, 2010)

and situated practices of *wayfinding* (Turnbull, 2005, p. 24). This tension is also played out in the historically shifting spatialities of the modern city and the emergence of what Ed Dimendberg describes as ‘centrifugal’ urban spaces:

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. Separation replaces concentration, distance supplants proximity, and the highway and the automobile supersede the street and the pedestrian. Where centripetality facilitates escape or evasion by facilitating invisibility in an urban crowd, centrifugality offers the tactical advantages of speed and superior knowledge of territory. Frequently lacking visible landmarks, centrifugal spaces substitute communication networks and the mass media to orient those who traverse them. (2004, pp. 177–178)

A countervailing emphasis on the merits of *walking* as a means to re-frame or replenish the otherwise abstract spaces of the city is one that underpins a whole host of critical perspectives and practices. From Baudelairean *flânerie*, to de Certeau’s discussion of geometric and anthropological space (1984, pp. 91–110), or the Lynchian-based cognitive mappings of urban spatial anthropologists such as Jinnai Hidenobu (1995; Lynch 1960), through to the well-entrenched, if increasingly diffuse practices that cluster under the label of ‘psychogeography’ (Cooper and Roberts, 2012, p. 91); the gravitational (or centripetal) pull of the street as a performative space of embodied practice has furnished a rich cultural history and milieu within which the present discussion is situated.

By critically aligning the embodied practice of cinemapping with that of wayfinding, my intentions in this paper are: (1) to explore more closely the spatial narratives that have come to define media representations of the Bulger case; (2) to examine the ways that digital tools can enhance strategies of wayfinding and urban memory; and (3) to counterweight the mediated abstractions of centrifugal

space with the movement, contingency and messy vitality of anthropological space. Moreover, by seeking to engage with a wider social constituency through digital platforms such as YouTube, its aim is to show how urban cinemapping, as Turnbull notes more generally in relation to wayfinding, is not just limited to the experiences of the individual filmmaker, but that it is also ‘socially shared as gossip’ (2002, p. 137).

Also worth mentioning in these introductory remarks is the importance attached to the acquisition of knowledge that is facilitated by acts of wayfinding. Stressing the capacity of wayfinding to garner ‘route-based knowledge’, Golledge notes that, through wayfinding, ‘local regional knowledge may accrue in the vicinity of a route’, and that maps ‘represent the commonly stored knowledge of individuals of societies’ (1991, p. 11, 13): knowledge, in other words, accrued through the act of wayfinding. Turnbull takes this a step further with his suggestion that knowledge is essentially performative (‘in the sense of embodied engagement with cultural and physical materiality’), and that, by corollary, ‘knowledge *is* our practices...’ (2005, p. 24). This view finds resonance with arguments developed by the social anthropologist Tim Ingold. Drawing a distinction between mapping (wayfinding/wayfaring) and cartography (map-making), for Ingold, knowledge is ‘cultivated by moving along paths that lead around, towards or away from places’; it is ‘ambulatory...we know *as* we go, not *before* we go’ (2000, pp. 229–230, emphasis in original). Viewed thus, the social world is constituted and reconstituted by the *mappings* conferred upon it by movements and itineraries, not by cartographic representations (*maps*) by which it is otherwise bound in time and space, and from which geographical knowledges are otherwise framed. As Ingold points out, ‘all wayfinding is mapping, though not all mapping is wayfinding’ (2000, p. 232). This distinction between mapping-as-wayfinding and *maps* – between knowledge as the product of embodied spatial practices and that imposed by the abstract uniformity of fixed spaces of representation – informs much of the analysis and discussion presented below.

REALISM, REPRESENTATION AND PLACE

The abduction, torture and killing of the 2-year-old boy James Bulger in February 1993, while a tragic and deeply disturbing incident in its own right, was made all the more unsettling by the fact that the perpetrators of the crime were themselves young children. The murder sent shock waves across Britain and around the world². News footage of the case featured CCTV images of the toddler being led away by his killers, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, both of whom were 10 years old at the time. The images were captured in the Strand Shopping Centre in Bootle where Bulger and his mother were out shopping for the afternoon. Bootle is located north of Liverpool, a port city in the north west of England (Figure 3).

In view of the importance attached to CCTV imagery in the Bulger case, it is worth remarking that Britain now has more CCTV than any country in the world, with more cameras than the rest of Europe put together (Minton,

2009, p. 47). Indeed, such was the impact of the Bulger killing and the role CCTV imagery played in the police investigation that the case proved pivotal in the subsequent development, expansion and justification of CCTV systems in the UK (Knifton, 2010, p. 83). Given the sheer volume of CCTV material, it is not surprising that much of this footage has found its way into the popular media in the form of real-life crime programmes, or shows such as BBC’s *Crimewatch* in which the programme makers work with the police to issue appeals to the public to help solve crimes, broadcast CCTV footage of crimes taking place and stage reconstructions of crimes in their actual locations. Moreover, with the rise of video sharing sites such as YouTube, the fascination with true crime stories has meant that incriminating surveillance footage is endlessly consumed as part of user-generated narratives that feed off cases such as the Bulger killing. One of the areas where the respective genres (TV crime reconstruction programmes and the virtual pick ‘n’ mix of YouTube video content) become divergent is the degree to which each is spatially embedded in the place of the local.

Responding to a question about location filming in Britain, the writer and filmmaker Chris Petit commented that one of his favourite television programmes is *Crimewatch* because it is specifically about *place* (Brown, 1995). As mentioned above, *Crimewatch*, as with similar programmes that adopt the same format, features CCTV footage of crimes, as well as reconstructions which trace in detail the actual locations where crimes have taken place. These programmes and other real-life crime genres are now a well-established subject of academic scrutiny in television and media studies (Jermyn, 2003, 2005). Yet what seems notably absent from much of the extant literature on real-life crime media is detailed engagement with issues of place and space. Chris Petit’s argument about the importance of place in television crime genres therefore raises salient questions about the relationship between image, representation and place in an urban context.

In the case of Bootle and the Bulger murder, it is interesting to note that the first crime reconstruction film ever made was filmed only a short distance away from the Strand Shopping Centre. *Arrest of Goudie* was shot by the early film pioneers Mitchell and Kenyon in December 1901 less than 2 days after the real-life arrest of Thomas Goudie, a bank employee who had stolen £170,000 from the Bank of Liverpool to pay off gambling debts and who had subsequently disappeared. Thought to have fled to London, Paris or even Brazil he was in fact discovered in a house less than half a mile from the local police station in Bootle. Toulmin (2004, p. 37) points out that the film’s uniqueness and originality lied in the fact that the film used the actual locations where the event occurred; it was advertised as a factual and authentic account of the arrest; and that it was filmed so soon after the arrest had taken place. This early fascination with the local topographies of topical crime stories would be echoed, nearly a century later, when Bootle was once again fated to be the subject of crime news media attention as the horrific details of the Bulger case became known.

In the two decades that followed the murder, there have been two key historical moments which reignited national

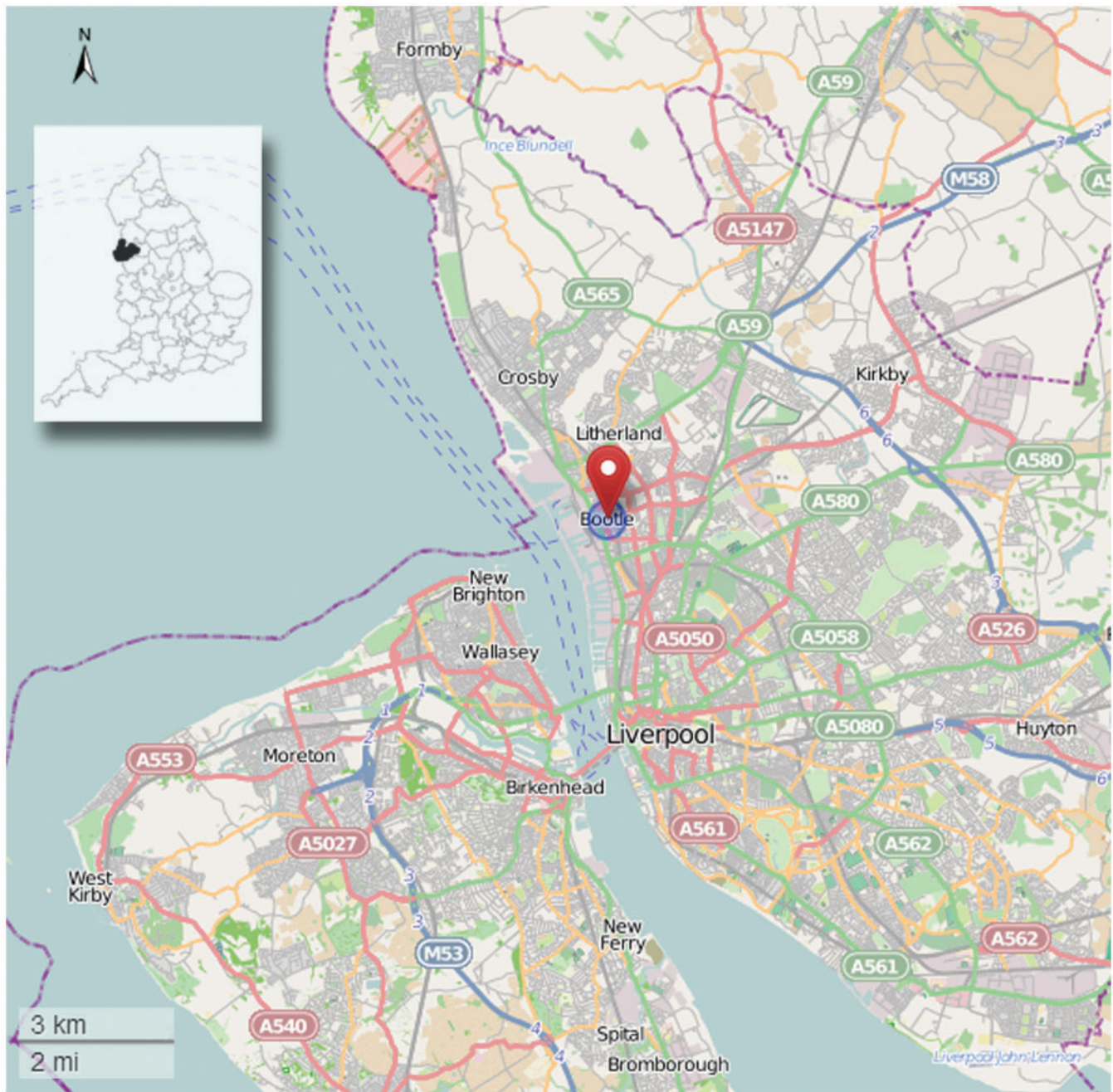


Figure 3. Map of Merseyside showing the location of Bootle (Base map © OpenStreetMap contributors)

media interest in the Bulger case: the release of the killers on license in 2001, and the return of Venables to prison for breaking the terms of his probation (in July 2010, he was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment for downloading and distributing indecent images of young children). In *Eyes of the Detective*, a BBC documentary made in 2001, the filmmakers revisit many of the locations linked to the Bulger abduction and murder. Although the events took place in Bootle, the opening images of the documentary are of the Liverpool landmark the Liver building at Pier Head. The film includes many travelling shots of Liverpool, Bootle and Walton taken from inside the car of Albert Kirby, the detective who had led the investigation in 1993. Kirby is

filmed revisiting locations along the two and a half-mile route which the killers took following the abduction of Bulger at the Strand. In this respect, it provides a more detailed mapping of the local geography relevant to the case than that found in the majority of media representations, which almost exclusively focus on the shopping centre and the railway line at Walton. Yet framing it within the wider symbolic geography of Liverpool reinforces the perception that for many – especially in the national media and those outside Merseyside – that this was a Liverpool story rather than a more local Bootle and Walton-based narrative. Andrew Lees recalls an article published in the *Times* newspaper asking ‘where had *the city’s* community conscience gone?’ (2011, p.

MAP: The route James Bulger's killers Jon Venables and Robert Thompson took him on before his death

Mar 3 2010 By Jo Kelly

The disappearance of two-year-old James Bulger in Liverpool sparked 11 days of horror, grief and disbelief across the world.

This is the route his killers took him along before killing him.

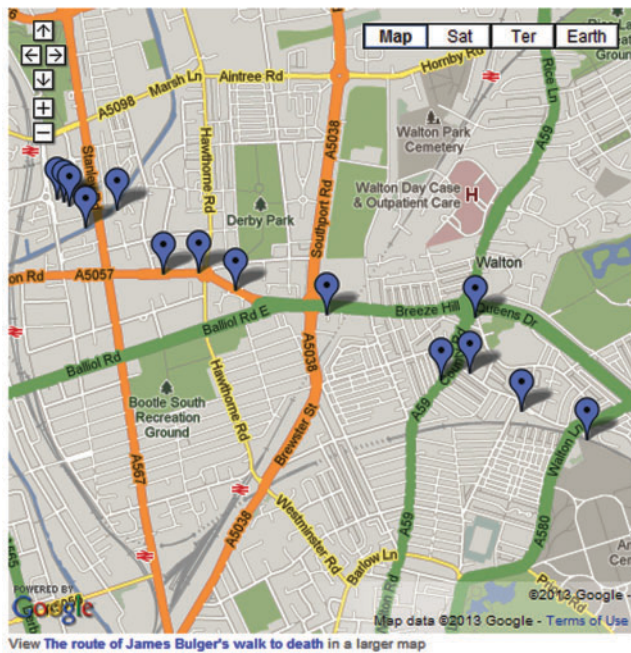


Figure 4. Google Map of abduction route published in the Liverpool Echo, 3 March 2010 (courtesy of Trinity Mirror North West & North Wales Limited)

217, emphasis added), a comment which tarred, in a stroke, all Liverpoolians with the same brush of collective culpability. For many in the overwhelmingly London-based news media, similar sentiments, such as claims that the ‘Self-Pity City’ was ‘getting off’ on its own misfortune (Lee, 2011, pp. 204–206), were the stock in trade of a press that has never fought shy of demonizing the city and its people, and for whom the Bulger case was seen as being indicative of the city’s disreputable character, reinforcing pervasive stereotypes about Liverpool. The fact that Bootle, where the abduction took place, is in the Merseyside borough of Sefton, and that the Bulgers lived in Kirkby, an overspill town in the Merseyside borough of Knowsley, did not detract from the overall impression that the Bulger killing was fundamentally a Liverpool story: a tale of the city and its people.

WAYFINDING, CINEMAPPING, AND DARK MEMORY

Within a few weeks of Venables’s re-imprisonment in 2010, the Liverpool Echo newspaper published a Google map showing the route that Bulger’s killers took the boy along before murdering him, providing at least one indicator that the renewal of interest in the case had also taken the form of a geographical curiosity as to the exact locations where the crime had taken place (Figure 4). Responses posted to the

newspaper’s website struck a decidedly negative tone, one read: ‘let the poor lad rest in peace, nobody wants a map, pity the scum who took his life have to keep reappearing’³. However, if the number of user-generated media on YouTube is anything to go by there remains an enduring interest in the Bulger case, no doubt prompted by the widespread media coverage it still attracts. The majority of these YouTube videos take the form of tributes to the dead boy, with typically emotional or sentimental choices of soundtrack accompanying the images. They often feature images (still and moving) of the key locations – the Strand, the nearby canal, the railway track – which have been pulled from the news media and documentaries such as *Eyes of the Detective*, or *James Bulger – a Mother’s Story* (ITV 2008). Yet none feature the less well-known locations or provide much in the way of evidence of local forms of visual engagement with the case. As with the professional media representations, these videos reproduce and endlessly recirculate the CCTV images of the shopping centre. The surrounding geography is largely ignored, with little or no information on the local urban context provided. This elision of place contributes to what is arguably the fetishisation of the Strand as a semiotic marker of an event that has become detached from the spaces and locations in which it unfolded.

The apparent resistance to acknowledge the Bulger killing as a local spatial story, as evidenced by the response to the Liverpool Echo map, provokes consideration of the relationship between representation, space and place, and the ways in which film practices might elicit different forms of engagement with local urban geographies. Prompted by the publication of the route map, in June 2010, I decided to film the route in order to explore more closely the sites linked to the Bulger abduction (Figure 5). Having established as accurately as possible the exact locations, I set about the task of walking the route and filming it in one continuous take. Starting off outside a butchers shop in the Strand Shopping Centre where the abduction took place, I walked with a digital camera held at approximately waist level to avoid attracting attention. The other reasons for this method of filming was that it framed both an eye-level perspective of the walk as it might have been experienced by a 2- or 3-year-old boy, and an embodied and peripatetic gaze: a perspective informed by the physical act of walking. The walk/film took approximately 40 minutes to complete and offers at least a partial insight into how this two and half mile journey along and across busy streets and junctions might have been experienced by a toddler in an acute state of distress.

It has been well documented that no fewer than 38 people saw the boys at various stages of the route. Branded by the press as the ‘Liverpool 38’ – the ‘ones Who Saw But Didn’t Act’ (Morrison, 1997, p. 68)⁴ –, the fact that not one of these intervened, possibly preventing Bulger’s death, has been the cause of much soul-searching in Merseyside, not least amongst those individuals concerned. That this constellation of narratives is a product of the contingent geography of the route adds another tragic dimension to the spatial story that underpins the case. Near the end of the walk, not far from the railway bridge at Walton Lane, I was questioned by two men in a car who had spotted the camera

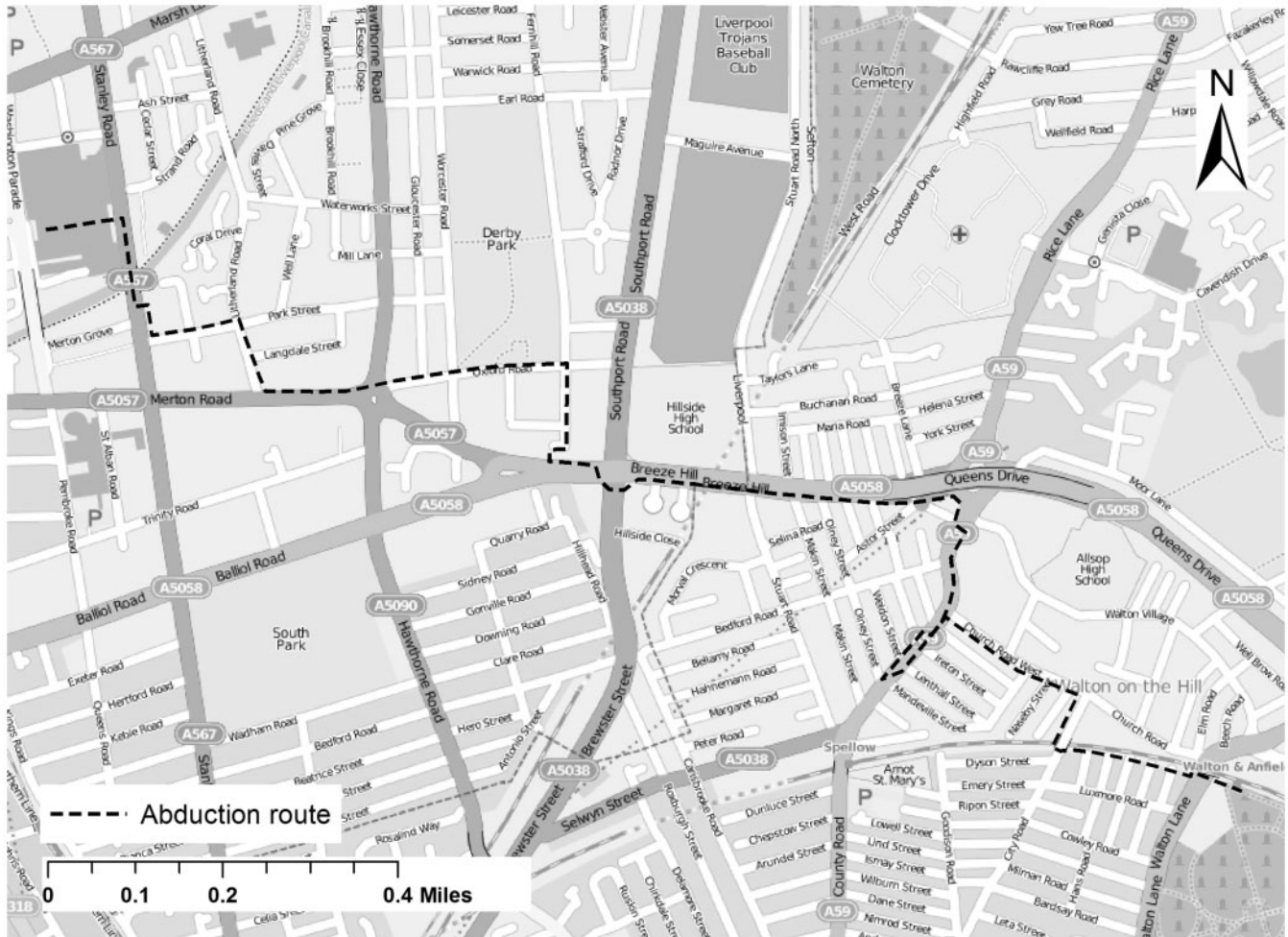


Figure 5. Map of abduction route (Base map © OpenStreetMap contributors)

and were demanding to know what I was doing. The confrontational approach of the men, who lived nearby, conveyed quite clearly their anger at my actions, even though I had been filming public rights of way and not private residences or individuals. As I was reluctant to abandon the unbroken edit of the walk, particularly as I was so close to the end of the route, demands for me to stop filming were responded to with the untruthful assertion that the camera was switched off. As other people, local residents who appeared to know the men, had now joined the chorus of disapproval, it seemed clear that dialogue was not a favourable option and that the best course of action was to carry on and hope for the best. Yet the use of the word 'nonce' as part of the invective directed towards me by one of the men suggested that the context of filming – the connection with the Bulger case – was well understood. Nonce is a colloquial term typically reserved for sexual offenders and child abusers. The local sensitivity surrounding the Bulger killing, still very raw, would explain the suspicions felt by some local residents towards a filmmaker perceived to be encroaching on spaces and communities that have had to endure the dark and unwanted legacy of the killing⁵.

However naive this exercise in embedded cinematic cartography may have been, the intention was to explore a space of representation that was deliberately at odds with

that which has long dominated visual discourses surrounding the Bulger case. Re-framed as a spatial story, the 'grounding' of its virtual geographies provides a counterpoint to the abstract iterations of place that have over the years secured an ever-greater foothold in centrifugal spaces of media spectacle. The use of the shopping centre CCTV footage, although time and place specific (the date and time is on the images, as is the name of the shop where the CCTV camera was located), conveys more of a deterritorialized sense of place and locale: an *any-space-whatever* to use Deleuze's concept:

Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connections of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. 'It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as the pure locus of the possible.' (Deleuze, 1986, p. 109, emphasis added)

The narratives surrounding the CCTV images of the Bulger abduction have played centrally on the actions that were to follow, often imagining 'what if' scenarios of other possible (happier) outcomes or temporal connections that could have emerged from the *any-space-whatever* of the

shopping centre. The spectral, haunted spaces of memory (Pile, 2005) which the low-resolution images invoke are those whose affective potency lies in the conjunctive irresolvability of time and space. Locked in an endless replay, and spiralling further into a centrifugal vortex of non-space, the images cannot sustain a contradictory logic in which the repression of space conceals the temporal inevitability of events whose afterlife is rehearsed in real space and real time.

To the extent that it exhibits ‘topographic continuity’ (Misek, 2012, p. 55) and spatial embeddedness, the moving image ‘capture’ of quotidian urban landscapes such as those I set out to explore represents what is essentially a *performative* space of cartographic engagement. That is, like any form of locative media, these spaces of representation provide the means by which spectators or readers can transform themselves into *users* or *wayfarers*, on the terms elaborated more fully in the introduction to this paper. Commenting on the affinities between film and cartography, Tom Conley notes that, ‘by nature [film] bears an implicit relation with cartography...films *are* maps insofar as each medium can be defined as a form of what cartographers call “locational media”’ (2007, pp. 1–2). However, insofar as film – as a spatial practice – is also a form of *mapping* it is the ‘spatial anthropology’ (Roberts, 2012a) of film, place and memory that is of particular import. The fine-grained distinctions that delineate what is meant by ‘cinematic cartography’ or cinemapping in this context are thus to draw attention to the performative and embodied semiotics of cartographic knowledge⁶. Ingold’s distinction between mapping-as-wayfinding and the ‘totalizing vision’ and ‘transcendent consciousness’ of cartographic reason (2000, p. 230) is thus steered towards a greater recognition of an anthropology of mapping practices that is rooted – or *routed* – in movement and time. This critical emphasis on the performativity of mapping-as-wayfinding accords with de Certeau’s temporalized notion of space as ‘practiced place’ (1984, p. 117): the everyday journeys, narrative trails and *storylines* (Ingold, 2007, pp. 90–96) that shape anthropological understandings of environment and place.

Of course, in the mediation of the Bulger case, what may also be described as storylines or narrative trails have unravelled themselves through the disembodied spaces of virtual conjunction (any-spaces-whatever) that platforms such as YouTube help nurture and propagate. Yet these are spatial stories that do not presuppose, or necessarily lay claim to, an intrinsic connection to the anthropological spaces of memory that are resonant with the emotional geographies and local sensitivities that the wayfarer might seek to map (or, indeed, unwittingly trespass upon). However, in instances where these spatial stories bear the archaeological imprints of pasts burdened by the weight of dark heritage (White and Frew, 2013), the fact that narratives that are generated might allow connections with other spaces, identities and their associated emotions, might, for some, have the benefits of meliorating the burden of memory: of ‘forget[ting] in order to remain present’ (Augé, 2004, p. 89).

By way of summary, the video, *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story*, is an attempt to reconfigure the spaces of representation that have dominated the mediations and narratives

connected with the 1993 murder. Conceived of as a mapping *practice*, its aim is to explore and ‘map’ cartographies of knowledge that are ambulatory: the product of embedded and embodied spatial engagement. As an exercise in wayfinding, the video, and the cinemapping strategies of which it is a product, has sought to narrate a *spatial story*, not as a palimpsest or corrective to those it might otherwise claim to overwrite, but as a means by which the crosscurrents of space, place and memory might be brought more sharply into view. In so doing, its overarching aim is to make more explicit the spatialities that shape the production and consumption of local narratives, and to provoke and explore the contested iterations of place and cultural memory that mediations of the Bulger case have refined in the two decades since James Bulger’s murder. Accordingly, in the final section, I consider some of comments posted on YouTube by those responding to the video before drawing together some concluding remarks and points for discussion.

YOUTUBE, SPACE AND NARRATIVE

Perhaps unsurprisingly, discussions on the spatiality of Web 2.0 platforms such as YouTube invariably focus on the connectivity, flow and relational cartographies that propel its narratives and imagery into the ‘ether’ (Lundemo, 2010, pp. 315) or ‘non places’ (Iverson, 2010) of cyberspace (cf. Meek, 2012). Elsaesser, for example, imagines himself as a ‘Web 2.0 flâneur’ (2010, p. 169), posing the question as to what stories and spatial narratives YouTube offers ‘once a user engages with the site’s dynamic architecture...and then lets him/herself be taken to different sites, spaces and places...by the workings of contiguity, combinatory and chance’ (Elsaesser, 2010, p. 167). The apparently limitless abundance of spaces the YouTube *flâneur* may happen to chance upon reinforces the sense of a ‘plenitude’ and totality of virtual and archival spaces ‘out/up there’ within which to roam (Lundemo, 2010, p. 314). The weightless and immaterial suggestiveness of the ‘archival cloud’, while antithetical to the embedded corporeality of material spatial practices (the ambulatory mobilities of the wayfarer), is also architecturally indicative of a new spatial logic underpinning modes of cultural consumption. In this respect, Geert Lovink’s observation that ‘we no longer watch films or TV, we watch databases’ (in Snickers, 2010, p. 304) is one that echoes Lev Manovich’s (1999) contention that the database is the new symbolic form of the computer age, supplanting other modes of cultural expression such as the narrative (syntagmatic, linear cause and effect sequencing, characteristic of traditional literary or cinematic forms). The anti-narrative logic of Web 2.0, Manovich suggests, initiates new forms and structures of cultural production and consumption, by which token we might deduce that, by dint of its ether-like capacity to induce paradigmatic patterns of virtual *flânerie*, YouTube is itself antithetical to conventional modes of narrative ‘ambulation’.

However, it is clear that this need not necessarily be the case – without, that is, discounting the extent to which YouTube videos are able to sustain, over time, extra-textual narratives and dialogues in the form of comments on the

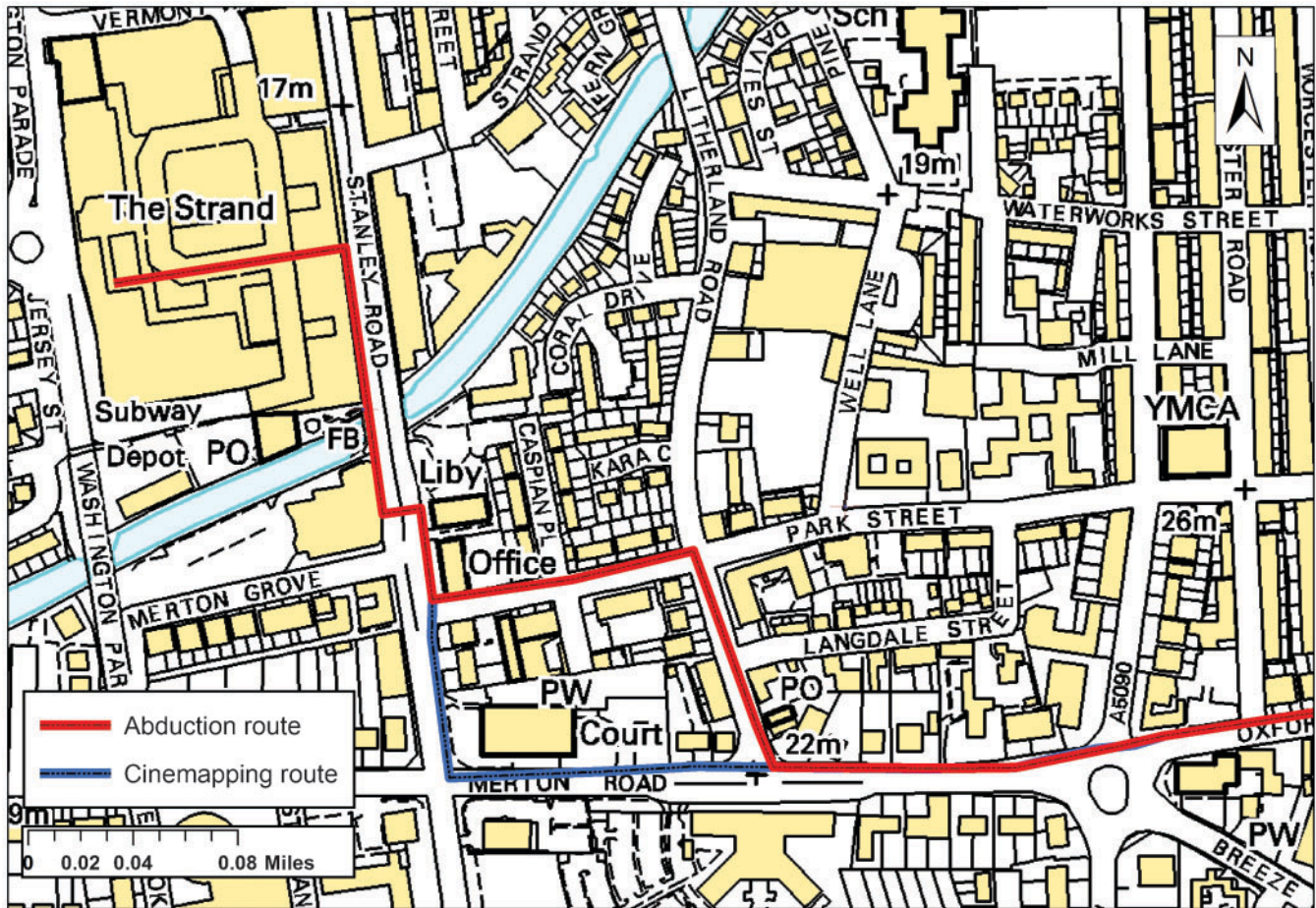


Figure 6. Map showing error in cinemapping tracking of the abduction route (Base map © Crown Copyright/database right 2012. Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service)

video made by users, as well as comments on other users' comments. In a more recent article, Manovich picks up on this, noting that 'web infrastructure and software allow such conversations to become distributed in space and time; people can respond to each other regardless of their location, and the conversation can in theory go on forever' (2009, p. 327). When more pointedly applied to the theoretical specificities of cartography and narrative, the otherwise incidental reference in this quote to 'regardless of their location' underscores the degree to which the 'located-ness' of enunciation is by no means incidental when critical enquiry is pegged to questions of how, why and where particularly spatial stories are located in place.

One of the first comments added by users responding to *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story* addressed a particular aspect of geographical detail:

The route is not correct. They went into Park Str., pass the jawbone [Jawbone] tavern, and then they went into the Merton Rd.

This is true (Figure 6). After completing the video/walk, I realized that I had overlooked a short part of the route and should have turned left off Stanley Road earlier before then joining up with Merton Road via Park Street and Litherland Road. The user's reference to the Jawbone Tavern in his/her comments suggests familiarity with the

local geography, and enables us, with a certain degree of confidence, to situate the user as someone who lives in the area or has at least good local knowledge. It is also worth noting that the user's YouTube Channel reveals a number of videos linked to the Bulger case, many of them tributes or memorials to the murdered boy. Responding to this comment (2 years later), another user posted the word 'correct'. That user's YouTube profile picture is of the Liverpool Football Club logo, again suggesting a possible local connection.

The majority of the responses to the video commented on the length of the abduction route and how this fact alone would have contributed to the suffering of the toddler. For example:

It seems the way is so long...poor kid.

I'm still amazed that ten year olds, much less a two year old, could walk all this way without collapsing.

Given the length of the route, other commentators questioned how or why so few people had intervened, a subject that obviously touches on particular sensitivities for those who lived and worked in the area:

Really stupid.. they walked for such a long time.. a long distance and yet NOBODY noticed something:(poor James <3



Figure 7. Still from *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story* (Dir: Les Roberts, 2010)

What is amazing is that no adult intervened..... WHY

[Reply to this comment:] *People did talk to them about James but the boys always made up excuses and the adults accepted them. I'm sure a lot of them are still angry with themselves for doing so.*

Your point in this is very clear.....pretty busy isn't it.....so many people could have stopped this. tried to stop you filming as well mmmm. Open up a debate here.

This last example also mentions the issue that many other users commented on: the confrontation prompted by my filming a street in Walton near the end of the route:

Why did that person ask about the camera? Did s/he think you were casing the neighbourhood or are you not aloud [sic] to film why [sic] you are walking?

Several of the comments – probably from those located outside the region – used the incident to make abusive comments based on negative stereotypes of Liverpoolians or ‘Scousers’:

The mentality of Scousers is amazing isn't it? 'Turn it off now you nonce'. What right minded person automatically assumes he's up to no good?

Addressing the same issue, a comment posted by a Liverpoolian demonstrates an awareness of how such representations can reinforce negative images of Liverpool:

they are an embaersment [sic] to Liverpool allways [sic] someone who lets us down.

Finally, one of the comments posted was in response to a sequence in the Strand Shopping Centre where a mother tells her young son (who appears suddenly in the frame – see Figure 7) not to wander off – a fear prompted, perhaps, by a spatial story that still haunts the emotional geographies of Bootle and Liverpool:

Mum-'Lewie', Lewie-'Yeab?', Mum-'I won't tell you again, stay with me'. Just stuck out to me that part...

CONCLUSION

The spatial practices of cinematic cartography or cinemapping that I have discussed in this paper are strategically oriented towards the objective of ‘fleshing-out’ the place of the local and of re-focusing the gaze on those narratives and spatial stories that these practices lay bare. Emphasizing the situated and embodied characteristics that distinguish the wayfarer from the cartographer, cinemapping practices can stake out the contours and parameters of spaces of representation whose function is to provide a counter-weight – an antithesis – to the centrifugal mediations that shape spatial understandings of our place in the world. This is not to suggest that the proliferating image banks through which we increasingly refract these worlds by necessity cede distorted or fictive representations (and that these, therefore, mask some ill-defined sense of socio-spatial realism). It is rather to prise open and (contradictions aside) illuminate what Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 27) described as ‘the illusion of transparency’: the visually fetishistic conceit that inhibits understandings of the multi-faceted, contested and potentially transformative dynamics that mobilize the production of social spaces. Maps, and the narratives that these help inform, are similarly mobilized by the practices of *wayfaring* and *mapping* that flesh out the contours of these spaces and which enable us to feel their pulse.

However, as counter-mappings, it is important to note that the wayfinding practices outlined in this paper are inescapably bound by the constraints and contingencies that come with the territory (so to speak) – challenges that beset the task of mapping what remain dark and emotionally raw spaces of local embedded memory. The practical necessity of having to film in such a way as not to draw attention to myself, for example, meant that there was little room for flexibility in terms of camera action or closer interactive engagement with the abduction route as a social landscape. The intrusive presence of the camera militated against any attempt to map anything other than the embodied geographies of the route as experienced by myself as walker-filmmaker-wayfarer; in other words, a map of the spaces through which, and in extraordinarily different circumstances, James Bulger was taken on his last journey. Similarly, the ambient street noise and shopping centre soundscapes are nothing more than as I found them – unedited, undubbed and without commentary – and represent a field recording particular to the specific day and time of my performance. The incident on City Road in Walton where I was confronted and challenged was also an otherwise random encounter. In 1993, Venables and Thompson had turned into a back alley off this road which ran alongside the railway track near to where James was eventually murdered. As it is no longer possible to access the alley, I had to perform a 180° turn at this point and walk back down City Road to follow the longer route around. It was at this moment that the two men happened to be driving past, whose attention was no doubt drawn to what must have appeared a slightly odd-looking manoeuvre. Had I been 30 seconds earlier or later my presence would, in all likelihood, have passed without incident.

As a wayfinding practice, cinemapping can therefore potentially encompass a wide range of different methodological strategies, but only insofar as the circumstances and

'on the ground' logistics permit. Given the sensitivity surrounding the Bulger case, the limited scope for interaction *en route* or *in situ* meant that other methods designed to prompt reaction and socio-spatial engagement – wayfinding that is 'socially shared as gossip', as Turnbull remarks – needed to be employed. The difficulties in securing permission to film in the Strand Shopping Centre (which would almost certainly have been refused), or of trying to organize, in advance, interview subjects who would be willing (and able) to discuss the Bulger case *en route*, fed into the development of a strategy that has sought to explore the scope of online resources such as YouTube to solicit local spatial narratives and trigger conversation and debate. In this respect, *The Bulger Case: a Spatial Story* is presented as a provisional, experimental and slightly haphazard intervention in the emerging field of digital cinematic cartography. Building on these preliminary forays into what might be more persuasively dubbed 'cinematic wayfinding', future research in this area will continue to examine the methodological opportunities offered by video sharing websites and cinemapping initiatives as part of the expanding arsenal of critical tools being developed by scholars working across and beyond the digital spatial humanities.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



Les Roberts is a Lecturer in Digital Cultures in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool. His research interests are in the cultural intersections of space, place and mobility, with a particular focus on film and popular music cultures, ideas and practices of cultural mapping and critical cartographies of memory. He is author of *Film, Mobility and Urban Space: a Cinematic Geography of*

Liverpool (2012), editor of *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice and Performance* (2012) and co-editor of *Locating the Moving Image: New Approaches to Film and Place* (2013), *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-between* (2012) and *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections* (2010). For information on recent research activities and publications, see <http://www.liminoids.com>

NOTES

¹ Still images taken from a television news report showing James Bulger and his abductors were exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1994. Press outrage ensued, resulting in the gallery being closed for 2 days, the

artwork being vandalised and the artist receiving death threats (Knifton, 2010, p. 86; Roberts, 2012b, p. 39).

² The worldwide interest in the case can in part be gauged by the singer Michael Jackson's reported desire to meet Bulger's killers, believing that he had the powers to heal them. He mistakenly believed that the killing took place in London rather than Liverpool – see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/michael-jackson/6229338/Michael-Jackson-wanted-to-meet-James-Bulggers-killers> (accessed 30 September 2010). For background to the events surrounding the Bulger case, see Morrison (1997) and Lees (2011, pp. 203–217). See also Gill Valentine's article 'Angels and Devils' (1996), in which she examines the impact of the Bulger murder on public attitudes to childhood in the UK.

³ <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/liverpool-news/local-news/2010/03/03/map-the-route-james-bulger-s-killers-jon-venables-and-robert-thompson-took-him-on-before-his-death-100252-25954779/> (accessed 30 September 2010).

⁴ See also Euan Ferguson's article in the *Observer*, 'Ten years on': <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/feb/09/bulger.childprotection> (accessed 30 September 2010).

⁵ The historian Andrew Lees relates a not dissimilar experience in his account of walking the abduction route, although his observations often resemble little more than caricature sketches that do little to dispel the stereotypical portrayal of many working-class Liverpoolians and 'scallies': 'Suddenly I faced the wizened hardness of several pre-teen hoodies whose childhood had been stolen from them. They were on BMX bikes outside a call box, defending their territory and doing dirty work for a drug gang. Their fearless malice made me freeze but then one asked me what I was doing...he probably had a knife and perhaps a gun' (Lees, 2011, p. 217). Rees's references to 'leering streets' and an air of 'downtrodden resignation' paint a grimly unflattering (if over-generalizing) portrait of 'a land of permanent lottery losses, bungled bank robberies', peopled by those 'who had missed the boat and now lived on a penn'orths of whiskey' (Lees, 2011, p. 216).

⁶ For a survey of recent studies and critical perspectives that can be defined in terms of 'cinematic cartography' see Roberts (2012c). See also Caquard and Taylor (2009).

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