

# Navigating the ‘archive city’: Digital spatial humanities and archival film practice

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## Abstract

This article examines the idea of the ‘archive city’: a spatiotemporal construct oriented around the central metaphor of the ‘city as archive’. Surfing the cusp between the material and immaterial, the tangible and intangible, the embodied and virtual, the producer and consumer and – not least – the analogue and the digital, the archive city denotes a conceptualization of ‘archival space’ that straddles the material and symbolic city and which invites reflection on the ways cultural geographies of memory – in this case those specific to cities and other urban landscapes – are enfolded across the multi-sited and multilayered spaces of everyday urban practice. Reframing the ontological question of ‘what is the archive in the digital age?’ in terms of ‘where is the archive?’, in the first part of the article I survey the theoretical precincts of the archive city before moving on to discuss how we might conceive of a digital spatial humanities in which this more open and purposefully elusive conceptualization of the archive can productively inform debates and practices relating to urban cultural memory. The article then discusses two case studies, both of which map the cinematic geographies of cities: Liverpool in the north west of England and Bologna in Italy. The article ends with some concluding thoughts on the role of digital spatial humanities in urban-based cultural memory studies and the broader theoretical and practical implications this has in relation to digital and ‘open’ archival practices.

## Keywords

Archival film practice, cultural memory, GIS, Liverpool, locative media, spatial humanities

## Introduction: where is the archive?

If one of the impacts of digital technologies on archival practices has been in part to reinvigorate ontological discussions as to what cultural memory ‘is’ or could be, then no less significant are the

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spatial implications of ‘the digital’ in relation to what is or could be ‘the archive’. The ontological parameters of debate prompted by the question ‘*what* is the archive?’ are thus given further reach by reframing this question in terms of ‘*where* is the archive?’ Where, in all its manifold incarnations – its tangible, intangible and simulacraic facets and forms – is cultural memory *located*? In the first instance such a question can be addressed on prosaic or pragmatic terms: why, it is ‘in’ the archive of course! By which is meant an institution or set of discursive practices predicated on the preservation, organization and access of materials that might variously qualify as historical and/or memorial and which in some shape or form contribute to what might broadly be understood as ‘heritage’. This could be a museum, of course, or a ‘dedicated’ archive in the sense that the North West Film Archive in Manchester is an archive, or the British Film Institute (BFI) National Archive is an archive. Alternatively, given that the possibilities of what an archive is or could be *digitally* have broadened the scope of what might count as archival practices, we might point to any one of the legion of online ‘archives’ and resources – whether ‘official’ or ‘Do-It-Yourself’ (DIY) (Baker and Huber, 2013) – devoted to the compilation, dissemination, curation, production, preservation, celebration and/or consumption of social and cultural memory. Memory, in other words, is no less ‘in’ these new digital public spaces as it is in more ‘traditional’ archival spaces and institutions.

If we extend the parameters of the ‘archival’ further, then the question of ‘where?’ brings with it consideration of the ways in which these digital spaces themselves resist straightforward processes of ‘location’. They are, almost by definition, *mobile* and hence can be accessed (and, where permissible, aggregated) virtually anywhere. Factor into the equation the locative configuration of these digital archival memories – that is, the extent to which they are often geotagged and in part contingent on the site-specific ‘locatedness’ of the archive user (or ‘archivist’?) – then the question of ‘where is the archive’ becomes one that rides precariously on the cusp of the material and immaterial, the tangible and intangible, the embodied and virtual, the public and private, the producer and consumer or the analogue and the digital. In short, the more we delve into the question of ‘where’, the more it highlights the spatial, ontological and taxonomic challenges not only of defining what the ‘archive’ is but also of demarcating the parameters of what might be deemed ‘archival’ in such a way as to distinguish it from the cultures and practices of everyday life more generally (de Certeau, 1984; Roberts, 2013). If, in the digital age, the ‘archive’ has steadily migrated out of the institution (out of the archive) and become more closely woven into the warp and weft of the everyday, then just how meaningful is the concept anyway? Whether channelling a YouTube video showing a nation’s proud sporting moment, or dipping, via Spotify, into the back catalogue of an artist who has long ceased to have a visible (‘tangible’) presence in any high street store, or perhaps tweeting our mood – to whoever wishes to listen – as we shuffle our way past yet another public building fallen into terminal decline, aren’t we all in some way engaged with archival practices as part of our routine cultural ‘journeys’?

In this article I will approach these questions by following an oblique pathway through the precincts of what I have elsewhere dubbed the ‘archive city’ (Roberts, 2012a). Surfing the cusp referred to above, the archive city denotes a conceptualization of ‘archival space’ that straddles the ‘material and symbolic city’ (Highmore, 2005) and which invites reflection on the ways cultural geographies of memory – in this case those specific to cities and other urban landscapes – are enfolded across the multi-sited and multilayered spaces of everyday urban practice. Developing this further, in the following section I examine more closely the idea of the ‘archive city’ before moving on to discuss how we might conceive of a digital spatial humanities in which this more open and purposefully elusive conceptualization of the archive can productively inform debates and practices relating to urban cultural memory. The article then discusses two case studies, both

of which map the cinematic geographies of cities: Liverpool in the north west of England, and Bologna in Italy. As well as mapping the historical geographies of film in their respective cities, these examples also draw on oral histories and qualitative research data to more densely layer the representational spaces of film and memory and thus to rethink the possibilities and future scope of archival film practice. The article ends with some concluding thoughts on the role of digital spatial humanities in urban-based cultural memory studies and the broader theoretical and practical implications this has in relation to digital and 'open' archival practices.

## The archive city

To describe a city itself – its physical and material urban fabric – as an 'archive' is, on one level, nothing too far-reaching conceptually. Urban landscapes bear the archaeological traces of the recent past in any number of ways, such as, graffiti; monuments; historic buildings; site-seeing markers (MacCannell, 1976); heritage plaques (Roberts and Cohen, 2013, 2014); high-street facades that have not completely erased the presence of otherwise forgotten spaces of consumption (e.g. former retail establishments, old cinemas, places of worship, pubs and performance venues); the fading but still visible lettering of an advertising banner on brickwork or bridge girders; the weathered layering of concert flyers pasted on construction hoardings; sex worker 'business cards' affixed to the inside of telephone boxes; or perhaps even telephone boxes themselves insofar as the widespread consumption of mobile devices have begun to render them ever more obsolete items of urban street furniture. The list obviously could go on and on, but the basic point that cities, as de Certeau (1984), Barthes (1997) and others have observed, are 'texts' – albeit subject to various gradations of legibility or illegibility (Highmore, 2005; Lynch, 1960) – is one we can quite readily extend to the idea that cities can be 'read' for signs and narratives that convey aspects of a city's past and of those that have inhabited its spectral (Pile, 2005) but otherwise coeval urban spaces. This provisional *textual* underpinning to the 'archive city' finds close resonance with Sheringham's (2010: 12) call to rethink the city as a library, 'an aggregation of reading material'. Although every city has its own distinct archive, Sheringham suggests, 'the archival, in its materiality, its layeredness, its endless transformations, is a dimension that cities have in common, and that we *access by consenting to let go of our familiar reference points in personal and collective time and space*' (2010: 14, emphasis added).

The point where the metaphor of the city as archive starts to become less straightforward is knowing how to populate this putative 'archive': do cities have archivists, and if so who are they?; is there a coherent and intact discursive framework to sustain general recognition of the city *as* an archive? (i.e., does merely calling it an archive make it so?); do those 'reading' or 'accessing' the archive necessarily recognize themselves as archive users? If the answer to these questions is 'no', then surely this undermines the validity of such a conceptual conceit and runs the risk of spreading the 'semantic field' of archival debate a little too thin? Sheringham's suggestion that access to the archive city is granted 'by consenting to let go of our familiar reference points' provides a key pointer as to where we need to be looking in order to understand how and why this need not necessarily be so. The metaphor of the archive city can offer a productive framework to rethink not only the temporal geography of cities but also the methodological, practical, critical and aesthetic orientations that can be brought to cities as cultural spaces and 'theatres of memory' (Samuel, 1994). To *consent* to let go implies a certain collective subscription to an idea, a project, or a set of objectives. These could be political, scholarly, artistic, psychogeographic, 'playfully surrealistic' or a combination thereof. Or they might be more individually calibrated, perhaps responding to an

emotional or familial desire to map one's own historical trajectories and 'place' within the city. Either way, the idea of 'letting go' here denotes a certain acquiescence to a process of readjustment – cognitively and historiographically – to a mode of urban cultural and spatial engagement that potentially taps into catchments of memory that ordinarily remain a less visible facet of everyday urban experience. Moreover, the 'familiar reference points' in time and space that the archival *flâneur* or psychogeographer is detaching himself or herself from (albeit temporarily) allude to a normative or mundane spatiotemporal register that needs shaking off in order to attune oneself to a different set of affective and cartographic rhythms. In this sense the metaphor of the *archive* bears close family resemblance to that of the *archaeological*. The archaeologist at work in the archive city 'unearths' (or at least strives to) *deep* memory; memory that, as Benjamin remarks, is excavated through 'the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam' (1999a: 576) of urban 'archival' space.

The archaeological here also denotes a Foucauldian sense of the archive as a discursive formation that inscribes within itself an *enunciative* function (Foucault, 1972: 129–131); that is to say, the archive as an inexhaustive, partial and fragmented entity that demands of itself a systemic process of analysis, description and a mapping of the 'enunciative field' by which, discursively, the 'totality' of archive is both spoken *to* and spoken *through*. For Foucault, the archive is '[not] that which collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more, and which may make possible the miracle of their resurrection; it is that which ... differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration' (Foucault, 1972: 129). The archivist, by extension, steps up as a figure whose business is the 'enunciation' of the archive, which, in spatial terms at least, transcribes as that which mobilizes an archaeological, cartographic or navigational mode of discursive engagement. For it to be recognized as such the archive city requires a cohort of actors whose *archivism* (howsoever defined) is similarly acknowledged, thereby enshrining a sense of the archive as both a space of habiting and a space given over to the disciplinary task of *performing* the archive.

The subjectivity of the archive city 'dweller' (a necessarily provisional appellation) is capacious enough to accommodate a number of disciplinary orientations: archaeologist, cartographer, historian, *flâneur*, urban explorer (Garrett, 2013), deep topographer (Papadimitriou, 2012), psychogeographer, navigator, writer, filmmaker, performer, pedestrian, possibly even 'ghost hunter'. While historically all of these figures have remained deeply enmeshed in the textuality and intertextuality of city spaces – whether moving from map to street and back again to map (from *map-reader* to *map-maker*), or to and from literary or cinematic cartographies, or by decoding the archival layers that reveal themselves as surfaces peel away and absence osmotically seeps up through the asphalt – the convergence of these (inter)textual geographies with the immaterial architectures of digital space has ceded new possibilities for navigating the archive city, as well as new understandings of what and where the archive city – and, by extension, the archive – in fact *is*. Reframing the question ontologically, to reiterate the opening remarks of this article, is thus to once again ask 'what is the archive?' and 'where is the archive?' As I will go onto discuss below, these are questions that cannot be adequately addressed without also examining the practices, cultures and disciplinary orientations of those who are laying claim to, or seeking in some way to 'access' the spatiotemporal precincts of the archive city. Analysis and navigation of the archive city is in part therefore a re-cultivation of the *anthropological* ground upon which these discussions and discursions are necessarily founded.

The space of the archive city, then, is multifaceted, multi-sited and multilayered. In epistemological terms it does not privilege any one spatial domain over another. Inasmuch as the 'archival'

geography of cities might variously encompass cinematic, cartographic, literary, touristic, architectural, archaeological or psychogeographic readings and habitations, then the urban geography of the 'archive city' is one that correspondingly needs to acknowledge, on the one hand, the spatiotemporal interplay of these and other mediations and practices, and, on the other, that these same mediations and practices are increasingly enfolded in and across digital spaces. From the vantage point of multiplatform digital convergence, the archive city can therefore be conceived of in terms of an 'open' space of mythohistorical *bricolage*: a space of possibility, creativity, agency and (up to a point) 'multi-user' democracy. What, then, might digital spatial humanities that took as its main focus of analysis the relationship between archival practice and the city actually look like? This is a question I examine more closely in the following section.

## Digital spatial humanities and the archive

As a scholar whose work falls within the broad (and rather nebulous) disciplinary field of 'digital humanities', I have noticed that a question that crops up with increasing regularity – one likely to be posed as much by colleagues sharing this disciplinary label as by curious onlookers – is 'what, exactly, *is* digital humanities?' Surely, the reasoning goes, in the digital age, when all cultures, texts and practices are potentially refracted through digital platforms and frameworks, *all* humanities is digital, if not by default then at least by the inevitable processes and exigencies of convergence? The general sense of frustration and imprecision with regard to this disciplinary moniker is one I broadly share, not least on account of the fact that what qualifies as 'digital' is now so diffuse as to render its semantic acuity rather blunted, and its application at best scattergun, and, at worst, dysfunctional. If the term 'digital humanities' can arguably be said to encapsulate a whole lot of not very much, then 'digital spatial humanities' at least narrows the parameters to more manageable dimensions. Indeed, even with 'digital' removed from the equation, the term 'spatial humanities' defines a loose but not over-malleable constituency that groups together arts and humanities fields of scholarship that have begun to consolidate areas of research interest strongly shaped by the impact of what many have dubbed a 'spatial turn' in social and cultural theory (Warf and Arias, 2008). The shift towards questions of space and place has helped shape new and frequently productive cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary dialogues and practices, bringing into closer proximity scholarship in film, music, performance and theatre, literature, anthropology, history, geography, architecture and cultural studies: subject fields that, to a greater or lesser extent, and in their own particular ways, have all claimed a common purchase on questions of spatiality. More significantly, however, these cross-disciplinary excursions have not just been instrumental in opening up new, more 'spatially inflected' theoretical frameworks. What they have also helped stimulate is renewed questions of *how* to spatially engage with cultural texts and practices. That is, what practical and methodological opportunities (and challenges) do these theoretical reorientations pose? And, by corollary, what *digital* opportunities and challenges do these bring, and how might these productively inform cultural analyses pertaining not only to specific subject domains (e.g. film or literary studies) but also to humanities disciplines more broadly?

Digital spatial humanities, then, on the terms outlined here, provide a generic label that clusters together a range of orientations and perspectives but which are otherwise united on at least two fronts: they all in some way engaged with questions of spatiality and they all have explored the possibilities offered by digital tools as part of the research process, whether methodologically or in terms of outputs and dissemination (including greater provision for open access and knowledge exchange: the weighted recalibration of what counts as 'measurable' research impacts under an

increasingly audit-driven neoliberal research policy agenda). Insofar as these interdisciplinary reorientations are representative of a more conspicuously defined *spatial* humanities, it is perhaps not all that surprising to note that their *digital* mobilization – that is, the growing uptake of digital tools and methods in spatial humanities research practice – has largely been focused around geospatial digital technologies, namely Geographical Information Systems (GIS) tools; digital mapping; locative media and global positioning system (GPS)-enabled mobile devices; geotagging, etc. Moreover, in the context of the present discussion on memory and archival practices, it is also worth noting here that much of the research to date in the field of digital spatial humanities has been centred on questions of history, heritage and historiography. The work of scholars such as Ian Gregory, who have pioneered development in the field of Historical GIS (Gregory and Geddes, 2014), or Bodenhamer et al. (2010), whose collection of essays *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* marked an important milestone in the disciplinary embedding of scholarship in this field, sit alongside that of a growing cohort of researchers and practitioners who are exploring the productive interface between space and place, memory and history and digital humanities practice. This is evident across a number of subject areas, including, most notably, film and cinema (Hallam and Roberts, 2014; Klenotic, 2011; Roberts, 2012a, 2012b; Verhoeven et al., 2009), but also literary studies (Cooper and Gregory, 2011; Cooper et al., 2015), popular music (Cohen, 2012; Long and Collins, 2012), theatre and performance (Robinson et al., 2011), architecture and the built environment (Speed, 2012), and psychogeography and artistic practice (McGarrigle, 2010), to cite just a handful of the emerging scholarship in this area.

However, it is also worth noting that what might potentially fall under the otherwise capacious banner of ‘digital spatial humanities’ constitutes a diverse and in many ways fragmented field of practice that cannot be assumed to exhibit a common and transferable set of characteristics, motivations, objectives, epistemological predispositions, or, perhaps most crucially, technological discursive frameworks. This is both advantageous and potentially problematic. Advantageous in that it accommodates a broad range of perspectives and critical orientations that are nevertheless tied loosely together around common engagement with questions of spatiality and (as is often the case) cultural memory. Problematic in that the technological ‘frontiers’ that invariably need to be breached in terms of the digital architectures of interdisciplinary research practices are diffuse, multi-sited and by no means uniformly negotiated. In other words, the difficulties that are invariably faced by humanities scholars as they venture further into digital and geospatial research environments are those which have hitherto tended to inhibit processes of dialogue and exchange between different digital spatial humanities projects. First and foremost these are technological in nature, namely, acquiring the requisite knowledge and specifically tailored skills to embark on the initial steps, having the requisite technological infrastructure and support networks to sustain and nurture scholarship in this fast-moving (in technological terms, at least) field of practice, and the compatibility (or otherwise) of software programmes with those adopted (or adapted) by other projects that in all other respects might have very similar objectives. Similarly, for many attempting to navigate the at times disorientating field of digital spatial humanities the difficulties likely to be encountered are those that stem from the compatibility (or otherwise) of specific disciplinary or epistemological frameworks. Although these challenges can often yield very productive outcomes and partnerships, it is nevertheless important to note that collaborations between scholars from a more traditionally conceived arts and humanities background and those from, for example, the geospatial sciences and computing can bring with them problems that render less seamless the process of interdisciplinary exchange (for a fuller discussion of this see Roberts and Hallam, 2014).

For the purposes of the present discussion, negotiating the disciplinary boundaries that coalesce around what we might understand by the ‘archive city’ is perhaps best illustrated by reflexively drawing on aspects of the research process that developed as part of the *Mapping the City in Film* project at the University of Liverpool. Reframing, as ‘digital spatial humanities’, research that combined archival film practices with GIS-based analyses of urban landscape and cultural memory highlights what was very much a process of retroactively identifying the project as something that appeared to fit that description (rather than nailing colours to a disciplinary mast that unequivocally signalled a coherent way forward in terms of *what* the project was and *where* it was thought to be heading). For much of the early phase of the research, the process was very much about negotiating – somewhat uncertainly it has to be said – a number of disciplinary boundaries, not least those that marked off that rather daunting and alien territory known as ‘GIS’. In the next section, therefore, I sketch a brief background to the *Mapping the City in Film* project, highlighting some of the ways that digital and geospatial technologies are reframing the scope of what constitutes archival film practice and considering more closely some of the practical applications of the concept of the ‘archive city’.

## The archive city I: Liverpool

With hindsight, then, and to expand on the point made in the previous section, it is by accident rather than design that *Mapping the City in Film* can be said, on the one hand, to demonstrate ways in which ‘archival film practices [can] articulate an historiography of radical memory’ (Russell, 1999: xv) and, on the other, to provide an illustrative case study of *digital spatial humanities* research focused on film, space and archival memory. This interdisciplinary project, a collaboration between architects, film scholars and anthropologists, grew out of earlier research conducted into Liverpool’s urban landscape and the moving image. This had resulted in the compilation of an online database featuring information on over 1700 films shot in and of the city of Liverpool between 1897 and the present day. The database is searchable by a number of variables, including genre, date, synopsis keyword, as well as, more pertinently, spatial data: building and location, spatial function (the architectural characterization of landscapes in each film) and spatial use (the ethnographic and social forms of on-screen engagement with the city’s spaces).<sup>1</sup>

However, although, as a database, the resource allowed users to search city film data by location, street or building, the limitations of the database format (and, at the time, the lack of adequate technological support) did not readily accommodate the use of maps or for the geo-referencing of the film data. Much of the early, developmental stages of *Mapping the City in Film* therefore stemmed from the recognition that the compilation of spatial data drawn from an extensive archival trawl of moving images of a city provides the basis of an urban geospatial resource that is at its most effective when it is itself organized and interacted with spatially. As a *mapping* resource, the digital infrastructure of the archive city is significantly enhanced by upgrading the database model to that of a *spatial* database, utilizing GIS and digital mapping technologies to geo-reference a city’s archival images spaces. Embracing the many possible opportunities offered by what, in 2007–2008, were relatively nascent developments in the field of urban cinematic cartography (Caquard and Taylor, 2009; Misek, 2012; Roberts, 2012b), the layered, ‘navigable’ and dynamic spatialities of a GIS-based model of the archive city thus underpinned much of what *Mapping the City in Film* was conceived to be ‘about’ in terms of exploring, harnessing and consolidating the digital archive as a geospatial resource. At the other end of the process – at that stage no less

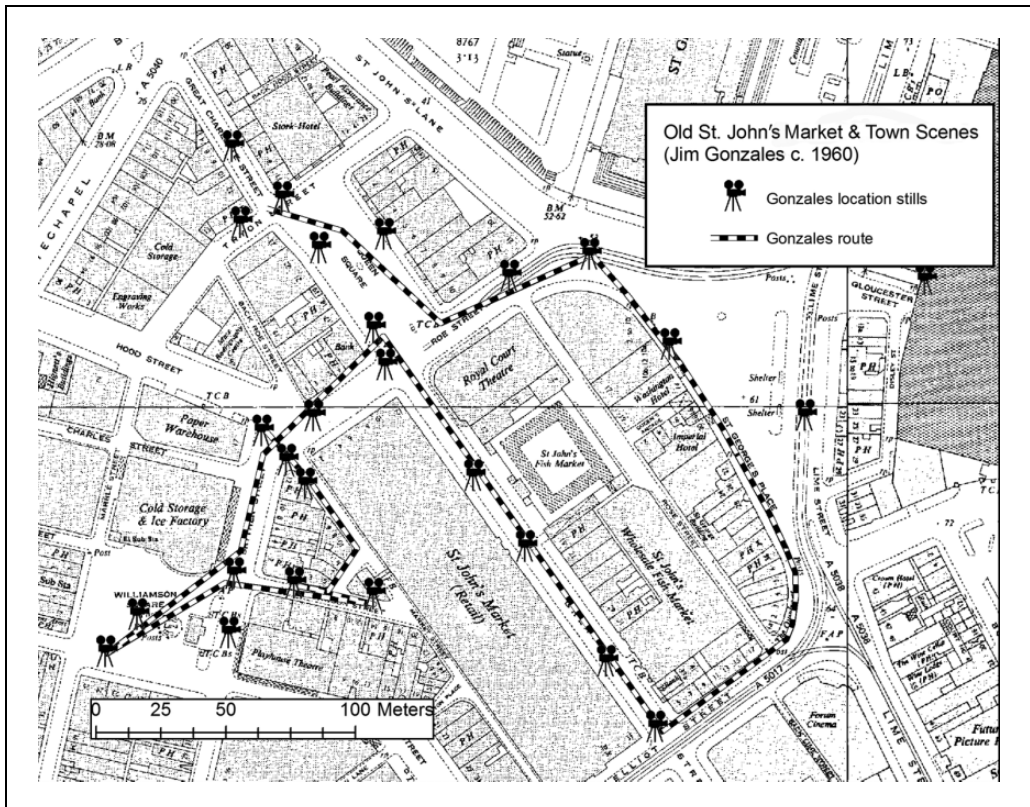
exploratory or provisional – lays the prospective opportunities for the dissemination and ‘opening up’ of the archive city to a wider constituency. In both instances – that is, project design and the design of an interactive cartographic ‘output’, two distinct but closely intertwined elements of the research process – one of the overarching objectives has been to extend understandings of what the archive city is and how it can be ‘accessed’ or ‘opened up’ to encompass both the representational spaces of the archive (the immaterial architecture of urban cinematic mediations) and the lived and embodied spaces of the ‘archive city’ (the affective, material and symbolic architecture of the city as a space of everyday urban practice). In other words, taking and refining Alsayyad’s prescription ‘to make the urban a fundamental part of cinematic discourse and to raise film to its proper status as an analytical tool of urban discourse’ (2006: 4), the aim becomes one of striving to make the ‘archive’ an analytical tool of urban discourse – of ‘putting’ the archive more securely in place within the material and symbolic spaces of the city itself.

A core objective of *Mapping the City in Film* has therefore been to provide new critical perspectives on the visual and spatial cultures of cities by bringing into sharper relief the contradictions and heterogeneity of the urban, and by foregrounding the spatial embeddedness of moving image cultures within wider structures and dialectics of urban space. To this end, the critical potential of geospatial and digital mapping tools lies less in their Euclidean capacity to attach urban cultures to specific points, areas or vectors in space (although this has many undoubted benefits) as in their functionality as a critical spatial interface from which to explore and *map across* the differential spaces of the city. Accordingly, one of the main aims of *Mapping the City in Film* was to develop a resource that could bring into dialogue different experiences, representations and practices that have variously constituted Liverpool’s historical urban landscape, whether these be archival, cinematic, cartographic, ethnographic, embodied, architectural or psychogeographic in their inception. In other words, to explore the qualitative and humanistic imbrications of the city’s built environment and lived spaces of memory.

The qualitative dimension to *Mapping the City in Film* – the geospatial embedding of archive film imagery in a GIS map; the geo-referencing of place-specific film data drawn from extensive archival research on a wide range of film genres; the ‘constellation’ (Benjamin, 1999b: 462) of past and present geographies of film; interviews and ethnographic research conducted with amateur filmmakers and others involved in film production in Liverpool and Merseyside; site-specific fieldwork conducted in key film locations; the use of video and still photography as visual research methods – these all provide the foundations for a richer and more complex navigation of the historical geographies of Liverpool that render the archive city as much a form of spatial practice – a spatial anthropology (Roberts, 2012c) of the city in film – as a representational space by which the city *in film* might be more extensively mapped.<sup>2</sup>

As the Liverpool case study shows, the elemental task of mapping the archive city can shed practice-based insights into the spatial histories and geographies surrounding the production and consumption of film texts and practices. Virtual ‘wayfarers’ of the archive city can navigate spatial film data by decade, genre, film gauge (16 mm, 9.5 mm, 8 mm, etc.), building and location, architectural characterization, spatial practices or plotting film geographies on and across layered historical maps dating back to the 1890s. They can follow routes and communications, whether journeys mapped on film around particular city locations (Figure 1), historic tram and ferry routes, mobility networks linked to amateur film activity in Merseyside, films shot on or around bridge crossings, or the road tunnels underneath the River Mersey (Roberts, 2010). They can query attribute data relating to over 1700 films to map correlations between, for example, film genre (e.g. amateur, newsreel, promotional, municipal, documentary, etc.) and topographic categories of



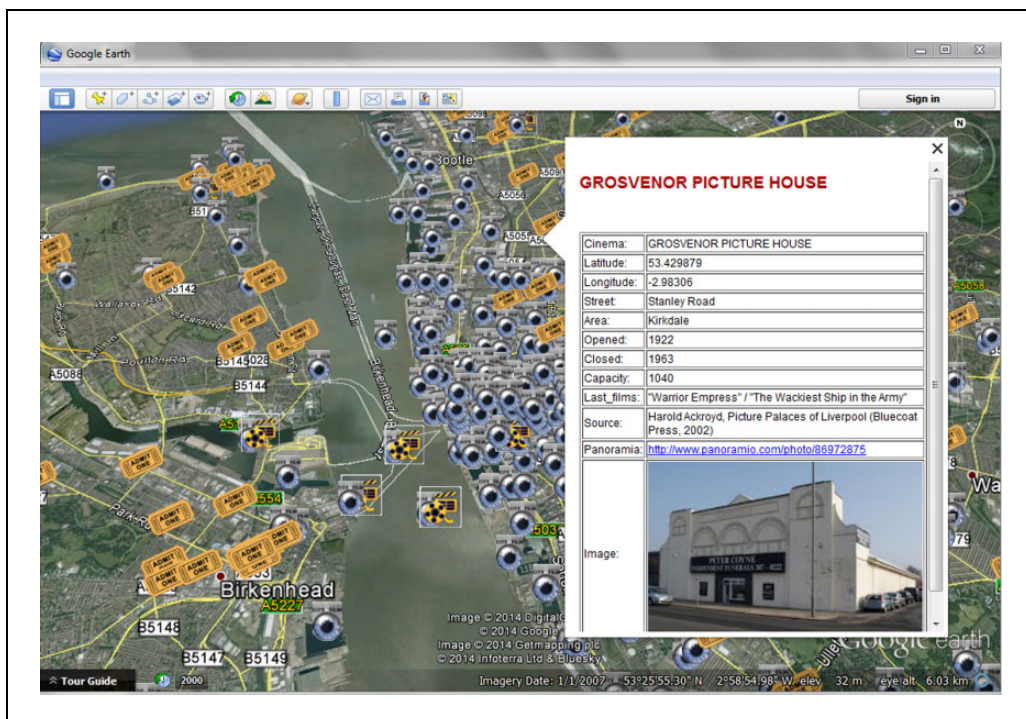


**Figure 1.** Map showing route filmed in *Old St John Market and Town Scenes* (Jim Gonzales/Liver Cine Group, circa 1960). (Ordnance survey map © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited, 2010. All rights reserved, 1955).

spatial function (e.g. industrial and commercial, housing, public spaces, leisure and recreation, etc.) or spatial use (everyday life, contested and political, festivals and parades, etc.). In addition, the attachment of hyperlinks to location data offers the user the opportunity to view geo-referenced film clips, videos of interviews and photographs of sites of all former cinemas in Liverpool and the surrounding region, alongside related contextual information.

*Mapping the City in Film* is, then, first and foremost a geospatial compendium of multimedial information relating to over a century of filmmaking and film practice in Liverpool and Merseyside. Alongside its instrumental function as a geo-historical research tool, as an interdisciplinary 'hub' of urban historiographical engagement, the GIS resource marshals together a range of spatial forms and practices which, deracinated from their otherwise localized constituencies, are rendered contingent and partial. In this regard, they may be considered as interventions in a wider cultural politics of the urban: the critical *mobilization* of space as a form of urban *bricolage*.

When we extrapolate these factors to consider more closely the pressing question of access and navigability – that is, to the extent to which anyone can become an engaged and free-roaming citizen of the archive city – there nevertheless remain certain barriers in place that focus critical attention to considerations of how these can practically be overcome or at least mitigated. In the case of



**Figure 2.** Google Earth version of *Mapping the City in Film*. The map icons represent (1) location points featuring data on geo-referenced films, (2) location points featuring data on historical cinema sites in Merseyside (the Grosvenor Picture House in Kirkdale is displayed), and (3) location points featuring spatially embedded videos of archive film footage (to access the map see: [www.liv.ac.uk/communication-and-media/research/cityfilm/map/](http://www.liv.ac.uk/communication-and-media/research/cityfilm/map/)).

Source: 'Liverpool and Birkenhead' 53°24'24.64"N and 2°59'12.80"W, *Google Earth*, 19 April 2011, accessed 10 June 2014.

film, as with other media, copyright is a perennial (but not necessarily insurmountable) issue that inhibits 'open' public engagement. Another is the proprietary or open-source status of the host software. In the case of *Mapping the City in Film*, which was developed using ArcGIS, an Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) Corporation product, the technical level of expertise required to use the software and navigate the spatial data meant that other, more user-friendly formats had to be adapted for the purposes of public dissemination (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> While this has the disadvantages of limiting functionality, the upside is the basic provision of a navigable digital *map* that allows anyone access to Liverpool's archival spaces of memory and hence not only makes the otherwise restricted spaces of the archive more accessible and open, but also, and more importantly, those of the archive *city* are brought within closer reach.<sup>4</sup>

## The archive city II: Cinematic Bologna

*Cinematic Bologna* was an exhibition and series of workshops held at the Urban Centre located in the Salaborsa in Bologna city centre between November 2012 and January 2013. Drawing on a

wide range of amateur films shot in Bologna from 1950s to 1980s, the exhibition was organized by Associazione Home Movies, the National Family Film Archive, also based in the city. The archive was founded in 2002 by Paolo Simoni and Karianne Fiorini, along with technical director Mirco Santi. Developed through collaboration with the Istituto Storico Parri Emilia-Romagna, the Regional Institute of Historical Research, named after the antifascist leader Ferruccio Parri, Associazione Home Movies has built up a collection of some 16,000 family films/home movies on a range of small-gauge formats, establishing Italy's de facto national amateur film archive and one of the largest collections anywhere dedicated to the recovery, conservation and enhancement of a nation's amateur film heritage (Edmonds, 2007: 423).<sup>5</sup>

Marking the 10th anniversary of the founding of Associazione Home Movies, *Cinematic Bologna* provides a unique and absorbing insight into a city's cinematic geographies framed exclusively through the lens of amateur film. Spanning three decades, the films depict scenes of everyday life in and around the city. As with the case of Liverpool, the films capture an urban landscape undergoing rapid change and growth in the post-war years, although, unlike Liverpool, much of Bologna's historic urban fabric remains intact and has been spared some of the dramatic and convulsive transformations of the like visited on large parts of the port city.

As with *Mapping the City in Film*, one of the central features around which the curatorial activities of *Cinematic Bologna* revolve is a map. Dominating the main exhibition space, a large pictorial map of Bologna in black background depicts the city's prominent urban features and buildings that are hand-drawn in white chalk (Figure 3). Mounted at a number of locations around the wall map are small monitors on which visitors can view a selection of digitized amateur films shot at or near the locations represented on the map. With its high contrast white-on-black graphics, the aesthetic design of the map allows for a visually engaging form of cine-spatial interaction, further enhanced by the hand-drawn cartographic representation of the city that is well in keeping with the spirit and aesthetics of an amateur mode of filmic practice. Moreover, as 'unofficial' or 'unauthorized' forms of urban cultural heritage (Roberts and Cohen, 2013), these vernacular cartographies help bolster the symbolic structures of a critical urban imaginary that offers the possibility of alternative ways of thinking about and engaging with cities.

Amongst the other exhibits on display in *Cinematic Bologna* is a split screen installation of a selection of home movies, which are viewable on the right hand side of the screen. On the left is video interview footage, produced by the Bologna archivists, of the filmmakers who shot and donated the films and who provide a scene-by-scene commentary on the film being simultaneously projected on the right of the screen.<sup>6</sup> Amongst the challenges routinely faced by archivists working with and cataloguing amateur films is the lack of contextual information surrounding their production, making it difficult, or in some cases impossible to reliably determine the filmmaker's motivations, the locations filmed, or any biographical information on those involved in the production and/or consumption of the films. This lack of local knowledge is often compounded by the absence (or loss) of synchronized sound, meaning that to all intents and purposes many amateur cine productions are (or have become) silent films (Shand, 2013: 197). The process of conducting video interviews and oral histories with the filmmakers and donor families can, therefore, furnish far greater insights into the social, cultural and urban contexts that have historically shaped the production of amateur films of the city. In addition, by incorporating video ethnography and oral history methods into the standard historiographic toolkit used by film archivists, organizations such as Associazione Home Movies are pushing back and redefining the boundaries of what archival film practices can or should potentially encompass. As Paolo Simoni explains:



**Figure 3.** Cinematic Bologna wall map. The map was hand-drawn by Cristina Portolano (courtesy Associazione Home Movies).

We are working on filmic material that is perhaps nearest to oral histories or autobiography. Memories recorded onto film mean that you need to provoke a reaction between the footage and the people to recontextualize the old images, to elaborate the gap created by the passage of time. . . . To be strictly a film archivist is not enough. (cited in Edmonds, 2007: 424)

In the case of the *Cinematic Bologna* initiatives, the research-focused and qualitatively enriched approach to the archival process that Simoni describes opens up the possibilities for critically engaging with amateur films (as well as other genres) as part of a wider urban historiographical project. In this respect, the Bologna case study echoes many of the objectives that underpinned the Liverpool-based *Mapping the City in Film* activities discussed earlier. Both projects have sought to (a) establish a more emphatic link between a city's archival image spaces and its historical urban landscape; (b) explore the practical and curatorial role of maps and the geospatial embedding of a city's cinematic geographies; (c) flesh out the ethnographic layers of meaning and interpretation that underpin the *practice* and *spatial histories* of amateur filmmaking in an urban context; (d) mobilize processes of critical engagement – or, in Simoni's words, provoke a reaction – between and across the layered and heterotopic spaces of urban representation constitutive of a city's cinematic geographies; and (e) populate and 'flesh out' these spaces as lived and anthropological spaces of urban habiting. In other words, to establish a more emphatic link between people, urbanity and a city's archival image spaces. In their different ways, then – and to bring this discussion to its conclusion – both case studies exemplify what I have described as *archive cities* on the terms elaborated throughout this article.

## Conclusion: Populating the digital archive city

By way of conclusion, it is important to note that the viability and efficacy of the archive city can only be adequately gauged by considering how and in what ways it is *populous*. Without a ready, willing and able citizenry it is as sterile and abstract a space as an architect's model, a planner's geometric design or a glossy, computer-generated imagery-sculpted cityscape.

The examples I have considered in this article relate to urban-based archival film practices: representational spaces of memory that are necessarily contingent on available and accessible archive materials as well as geospatial resources by which to navigate, host, locate, map and excavate these archival fragments of space and time. However, whatever their provenance and form, the geospatial organization of these and other fragments of archival memory (and, in this regard, the place and space of 'the digital' can be seen as a crucial factor in enabling us to apprehend memory as both fragmentary and mosaically spatial) offers the possibility of imagining them as part of a larger organic urban configuration that resists the fixity of representation and the embalming of memory. The efficacy of the archive city is thus measured by the extent to which it functions not so much as a *virtual* space of representation as an *anthropological* space. The two are, of course, coextensive rather than binary; dialectically rather than statically configured. However, the fine line that divides the conditional spatialities of the archive city demands a certain degree of vigilance inasmuch as the 'centrifugal' (Dimendberg, 2004) pull of the virtual ('up' and 'out' into the digital 'cloud' or ether) can all too easily catapult the user/wayfarer/navigator away from the centripetal groundings of the lived experiential city with the effect of reducing the archive city to little more than a spectacle: a vicarious, perhaps cloyingly nostalgic glimpse of a city disconnected and disembodied from that which he or she routinely inhabits and moves within.

The value of what might be deemed the 'archival' here is therefore a measure of the capacity to prompt reconsiderations as to our stake within the city as a lived space of everyday memory. It is also an appraisal of the critical potential of digital spatial humanities as part of a broadly conceived history of the present. Digital cultures and technologies, while in one respect antithetical to the idea of a spatial *embeddedness* of memory (after all, only the hardware has material form), are at the same time demonstrably effective in their capacity to mobilize, in ways previously unimaginable, a city's embedded spatial memories and stories. Digital spatial archives exude an instrumentality: a performative affect that has consequences in the analogue world. Read in this light, the task of *mapping* the archive city (figuratively and cartographically) translates to that of mapping *across* the multivalent spatialities that define the layered topographies and temporalities of cities. Configured thus, digital spaces are also *convergence spaces*, spaces that potentially provide capacity for the mobilization of archival practices that cut across geographic, architectural, visual, embodied or archaeological spaces of representation. Of course, in one sense the archive city is only as populated as the provision of archival materials renders possible. In this respect the question is one of access or of a functional 'supply chain': in other words, digital and nondigital spaces of memory that sustain the resources from which the archive city is or continues to be built. In another, no less importance sense, the archive city is only as populated as those who recognize and value it as such make possible. These include 'archivists' as we might more conventionally understand the term. But also, and more pointedly, it extends to the 'everyday archivists' and digital wayfarers whose navigations, excavations, forays, *dérives* and ambulations give more solid foundation to the archive city as a space we actively inhabit and furnish and on which, with an eye to posterity, we are desirous to lay down our own archival 'inheritance tracks'.

## Notes

1. See <http://www.liv.ac.uk/communication-and-media/research/cityfilm/>. See also Hallam (2010, 2012), Hallam and Roberts (2011), Roberts (2012a) and Roberts and Hallam (2014).
2. A recent example that illustrates similar developments in digital spatial anthropology is MyStreet, an online user-generated resource that hosts geo-referenced films that can be searched via a map and by place name or postcode. Developed by anthropologists at UCL, MyStreet is described thus, 'It's where you are, who you are and how you live . . . your place on the map. MyStreet is a living archive of everyday life, encouraging you to make your mark and bring your area to life' <http://www.mystreetfilms.com/> (accessed 6 August 2013).
3. In 2013, a version of the Liverpool GIS film map was adapted for use in Google Earth. The full database attribute data are accessible online via location points, as well as a range of digitized content, including clips from archive films that feature the location in question and photographs and information relating to Liverpool and Merseyside's cinema heritage. See <http://www.liv.ac.uk/communication-and-media/research/cityfilm/map/>
4. A version of the GIS digital film map of Liverpool has been developed in partnership with curators at the Museum of Liverpool and forms part of the 'History Detectives' permanent exhibition that opened in 2011. The interactive exhibit enables public access to archival materials via a map-based touchscreen interface to images, films and audio detailing the history, geography and cultures of Liverpool and the wider Merseyside region.
5. See <http://www.homemovies.it> (accessed 6 August 2013).
6. For example, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NMIqid6Adc>. For a selection of other films uploaded to the Associazione Home Movies YouTube channel see <http://www.youtube.com/user/archivio-homemovies> (accessed 6 August 2013).

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