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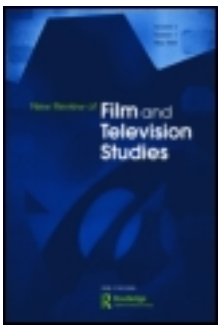

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Film, space and place: researching a city in film

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Film, space and place: researching a city in film

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The relationship between film and the city is increasingly recognised as the archetypical ground for examining visual and sensory experience, form and style, perception, cognition and the meaning of the filmic image and filmic text. Liverpool, widely regarded at the end of the nineteenth century as the 'gateway to the British empire', provides an exemplary instance of a city in which moving image culture has played an ongoing role in shaping perceptions of its urban environment. With cities such as New York and Philadelphia often taken as standard examples of 'film cities' in the North American context, Liverpool, the first UK city to create a film office to promote the city as a location, is an excellent example of how moving image culture has contributed to changing the identity of a city from post-industrial wasteland to post-modern playground. This paper explores how an approach informed by interdisciplinary perspectives can expand understandings of the relationship between moving image environments and perceptions of the urban landscape through a study of the ways in which Liverpool's character, form and identity were projected between 1897 and 2008. The *City in Film* project (www.liv.ac.uk/lsa/cityinfilm) has catalogued over 1700 film and video recordings made in and about the city, available on a publicly accessible database. The database creates opportunities for quantitative and in-depth analysis of a relationship that Charlotte Brunsdon (2007) describes as a background presence, always there, often a source of interest and speculation but rarely the focus of explicit commentary and excavation.

Keywords: film and place; film and city; film databases; film archives; film and memory; city iconography

Since the putative 'spatial turn' in the humanities in the mid-1990s, a growing vanguard of researchers has been studying the relationship between film, space and place from disciplines that range from geography, urban studies, architecture and history, to literature, film, media and cultural studies. What motivates much of the work across this apparently disparate field is an interest in the ways in which the interdisciplinary study of moving images, and the cultures of distribution and consumption that develop in tandem with the production of those

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images, provides renewed insights into our knowledge of the development of urban modernity and modern subjectivity.

The *City in Film* project, a partnership between film studies and architecture funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, is the first interdisciplinary project to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which moving image cultures are imbricated in place-making activities. Initiated as part of Liverpool's 800th birthday celebrations in 2007 and as part of European Capital of Culture activities in 2008, the project aimed to locate a wide range of film and video material that depicts the city and its urban architectural environment from the earliest known footage to the present day. A particular focus was to explore the ways in which actuality and factual genres such as newsreels, documentaries and amateur footage have depicted the city's architecture and urban landscape at different times. Liverpool, regarded at the end of the nineteenth century as the 'gateway to the empire' provides an exemplary instance of a city in which film has played a key role in shaping perceptions of the urban environment, maintaining and modifying the social relations that territorialise the landscape. Film and video production can be understood as one site amidst a variety of competing flows (for example, of people, travel and migratory or touristic practices) that shape the internal and external relations of the city at any one particular time. The project has explored the ways in which various forms of film and video practice are imbricated in mediating the city's spatial dynamics and how these depictions can be understood in relation to new forms of moving image practice that are attempting to reconfigure access to, and investments in, the urban environment. To explore these questions in depth, the project created an online database that embraces all moving image forms made in and about the city from the earliest known footage shot by Alexandre Promio of the Lumière Bros. in 1897 until the premiere of filmmaker Terence Davies' poetic eulogy to his home town, *Of Time and the City* (2008). Two of the most prominent themes that emerged during the process of researching and collating films for the database are explored in this paper: the development of the 'local' film as a significant form of entertainment in industrialised provincial cities such as Liverpool from 1900 onwards and its contemporary significance to both official and more personal memories of place; and the relationship between film and promotional cultures of leisure, tourism and travel. To place this work in a multi-disciplinary context I will begin by situating the work of cultural geographers, who emphasise the role of moving images in shaping perceptions of space and landscape in useful tension with that of early film scholars, who emphasise issues of class identity and subject formation. Finally, I will suggest that a database model of film history focused on landscape and place poses interesting challenges to conventional ideas of national film culture as it is currently conceived in the scholarly historical imaginary.

Within this context, the relationship between film and the city is increasingly recognised as the archetypical ground for examining visual and sensory experience, form and style, perception, cognition and the meaning of the filmic image and filmic text, yet less attention has been given to the ways in which film creates

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space as place, and in doing so, territorialises the depiction of the landscape. As human geography scholars David B. Clarke and Marcus Doel have argued, throughout the nineteenth century the moving image played a key role in bringing together and articulating changes in the perceptual landscapes of space and time captured through various visual media and this tendency was eventually perfected in the cinema:

> a space-and-time machine that spliced together the 'mobility' of the magic lantern, Phenakistiscope, and Praxinoscope; the 'space-lapse' of the panorama; the 'time-lapse' of the diorama and chrono-photography; the realism of photography; and the haptical obscenity of the stereoscope. (2005, 41)

What these developments accomplished was a stationary voyage into the abstract fabric of space and time itself, a re-engineering of space and time in visual culture that paralleled the embodied experience of the reconfiguration of space and time achieved by the development of the railways and the motor car. Similarly to historians of early film such as André Gaudreault (2003) and Tom Gunning (1990, 2006), Clarke and Doel argue that 'the abstraction of space and time independent of actuality and the engineering of that reality into new configurations' reached its apotheosis in cinema. Drawing on Wolfgang Schivelbusch's theories (1986) of how the development of the railways industrialised the relationship between time and space, creating a new perceptual paradigm described as 'panoramic perception', Clarke and Doel suggest that visual culture:

> has constantly reconfigured reality in a way that parallels the reconfiguration achieved by technologies and cultures of transport. Thus, from the many hours of exposure time fixed onto the earliest photographs, via the near instantaneous exposure time of the hand-cranked Cinématographe, to the plasticity of so-called 'Bullet Time' (or 'Time Slice') showcased by the Wachowski brothers in the Matrix film trilogy, there has been a progressive abstraction of space and time in visual culture, which parallels other forces of abstraction in modernity. (2005, 42)

It is therefore no surprise to discover that amongst early film genres, it was the travelogue that became a popular staple of early film shows until around 1910, replacing simulated phantom rides in fairgrounds and amusement parks such as the well-known 'Hale's Tours of the World'.[1] As far as the nascent film industry was concerned, however, the rate at which cinema gained ground against other entertainments was relatively slow in England. Before the development of commercial newsreels around 1910, trade journals promoted the use of local subjects to drum up public enthusiasm: 'The showman who has not tried a "local" does not really know what success means' (cited in Clarke and Doel 2005, 16). As Stephen Bottomore has emphasised, local film is only 'local' 'if there is considerable overlap between the people appearing in the film and those who watch it or are intended to watch it' (2004, 33). Typical of early 'locals' are the well-known factory gate films which involved workers being filmed as they left the workplace with the showmen encouraging them to come to the film show later on to see themselves on screen.[2] A standard early work on cinema management makes the point that, 'Everyone loves to see himself, or herself, or friends, or

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children, on the screen, and the local topical is the best means of gratifying this desire.'[3] Other popular subject matter in 'locals' included pageants and parades, local news and, in the USA in particular, locally produced dramas (34).

The discovery in 1995 by amateur filmmaker Peter Worden in his home town of Blackburn, northern England, of more than 800 films by the pioneering photographic production company Mitchell & Kenyon has changed the status of the 'local' film in early film history. Once a neglected genre, 'locals' have come to be acknowledged as a major attraction in fairgrounds, music halls, entertainment venues and early film theatres (Bottomore 2004; Gunning 2004; Toulmin 2001, 2004, 2006). Given the major re-evaluation of the evolution and development of early film that followed in the wake of this discovery,[4] the 'local' film, as a distinct category of film culture, has attracted little scholarly interest beyond the first decade of cinema in spite of the enduring popularity of 'local' dramas with audiences in the USA beyond the 1920s (Bottomore 2004, 42) and the continued, if sporadic, production and exhibition of 'local' topicals in some areas of England until the early 1950s (Hallam 2008). Nonetheless, the spatial imaginary of the 'local' film hints at the possibilities of developing a new chapter in film historiography, one that acknowledges the territorialising aspects of film culture and privileges an analysis of how the material and symbolic geographies of film are implicated in the wider social and cultural production of 'space as place' (Lefebvre 1991).

'Local films for local people'

In the *City in Film* project, the 'local' film has become central to exploring the ways in which place has been projected in moving image cultures; by extending Stephen Bottomore's definition to include films from a wide range of genres made in and about a particular place, with a view to examining in greater depth both the cross-generic imaginary of place and the spatial dynamics of the (re)production of place, the role of moving images as products of differential power relations is brought into sharper focus. Bottomore excludes from his definition of the 'local' film any films where the primary audience is from outside the area, for example, visitors such as tourists, business investors or prospective immigrants. Some films, such as newsreels depicting local events like civic occasions, disasters and local sports, blur this distinction because at least some of their audiences are constituted from the same people who were filmed. Absent from Bottomore's definition are amateur productions, local films made by, as well as seen by, local people; these films are playing an increasingly important role in creating both personal and public memories of place. Ryan Shand suggests that the explanation for the lack of scholarly attention given to this 'remarkable cine movement' can be found in a range of associations with, for example, its technically 'substandard' ethos that has coloured aesthetic expectations, unexamined assimilations of amateurism with a range of socio-cultural conservatisms and the 'personal' dimensions of the medium, all of which distance amateur filmmaking from the

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'master' narratives of 'history-proper' (2009, 156). As he points out, 'amateur filmmakers have perhaps been most active in the exploration of both actual and imagined local worlds, enjoying a particular intimacy with geographies close to home, and a characteristic sensitivity to often highly nuanced aspects of localised social practice' (157). This intimacy with local landscapes and the people who inhabit them moves beyond the professional filmmakers' engagement, where, as Shand clearly states, local scenes and behaviours are essentially commodified assets, available to be captured on film for sale and consumption (and profit!) elsewhere (157).

While an inclusive definition embracing a range of genres of what I have loosely termed the 'local' film might seem too overly generalised to be useful, the focus on one particular city, Liverpool, offers a case study of how a spatial approach to film history can complement existing definitions of the 'local' film and situate local cultures of production, distribution and exhibition more centrally in national/transnational film cultures. In a list of categories of what could be included in a moving image catalogue of material made in and about the city are promotional films made by the city and county municipal authorities, films sponsored by local businesses, films commissioned by local cinemas, and all forms of amateur and independent productions made by filmmakers who at some point have lived and/or worked on Merseyside.[5] Expanding on the categories and conceptual frameworks suggested by Bottomore (2004), Vanessa Toulmin and Martin Loiperdinger (2005) and Shand (2009), moving image materials about place can be divided into two more broadly defined groupings: films made for a locally reflected and frequently familiar gaze of recognition (in Toulmin and Loiperdinger's terms 'Is that you?') such as amateur productions across a range of genres, and local newsreels and documentaries, and films made for an external (in Shand's terms) 'unfamiliar' gaze, including promotional films, national newsreels, documentaries and feature films.

With research into film, space and place, the 'local' film takes on a particular significance, not least because films made in and about place now constitute part of popular memory and are playing their role in the mythologisation of place that has accompanied the re-branding of post-industrial cities such as Liverpool. Although Liverpool is not, in conventional academic understandings of the term, a 'cinematic city', feature films have been made in and about the city since the early days of cinema, the majority dating from 1950s onwards, with a distinct peak in the 1990s.[6] In many of these later films, Liverpool frequently stands in for other places; it is primarily in feature films created by well-known local writers and directors such as Chris Barnard, Alan Bleasdale, Frank Cottrell Boyce, Alex Cox, Terence Davies, Jimmy McGovern and Willy Russell that the city 'plays itself'. Unlike the archetypical 'cinematic cities' of Berlin, New York, Los Angeles and London, which have all been the subject of intense studies of their cinematic fictions (Brunsdon 2007; Clarke 1997; Donald 1999), a provincial city such as Liverpool, because of its size, offers an exemplary range of iconic sites and environments such as civic buildings, urban gateways, work and leisure

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spaces that enable moving image materials to be analysed according to their spatial function and use.

Within this context, a strong motivation underlying the development of the *City in Film* project was the necessity to catalogue films held in private and public collections on Merseyside which, for political and economic reasons, had not been curated by North West Film Archive (NWFA). Set up to initially collate films of working-class life in Manchester and its immediate environs (Gomes 2007), the NWFA had not accepted works about Merseyside since the mid-1980s; consequently, films were scattered across a wide range of public and private archives and were difficult to find and access. Working closely with colleagues at the NWFA, one aim of the *City in Film* project was to create an easily accessible online catalogue of films made in and about the city; material was gathered from a wide range of sources including amateur and independent private collections, commercial newsreel and television company archives, national, regional and local museums, libraries, public record offices and film archives. The database currently holds information on over 1700 moving image items ranging from short sequences to feature films.[7] As well as the usual search categories such as title, director, production company, date and genre, etc., where ever possible films have been viewed and their spatial content and use analysed drawing on criteria developed by Robert Kronenburg (2002) for use in architectural history such as public buildings and spaces, commerce and industry, education and health, law enforcement and military installations.[8] The category of spatial use was created to accommodate the changing functions of buildings and spaces over time as the city responded to the twin forces of economic and social modernisation, and re-development. Using these keywords, a fine-grained analysis is developing of how the landscape of the city has been spatially depicted and imagined across all moving image genres at different times; the influence of technical innovations and national or international aesthetic trends in and between different genres can also be assessed. The database enables a range of questions to be asked that interrogate specific issues such as, for example, how iconic buildings and vistas, present in many of the films, figure in the making and marketing of place (Roberts 2010a), the ways in which these symbolic icons are depicted in relation to changing conventions of amateur, professional and independent film practices (Hallam 2008), and how the consumption of place is inextricably entwined with this iconic cinematic cartography (Roberts 2008).

Film and memory, space and place

> Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see before its advent. [...] Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life. (Kracauer 1960, 299–300)

Museum curators, archivists and researchers have become increasingly aware of the importance of the contribution of moving image collections to stimulating

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and maintaining the collective and subjective memories that give shape and substance to ideas of citizenship and local identity in face of the economic or social upheavals wrought by modernisation, migration and globalisation. In the years of Liverpool's 800th anniversary (2007) and Capital of Culture celebrations (2008), screenings of archive material such as the NWFA's *Liverpool on Film* programme and *City in Film* screenings organised in association with the British Film Institute and Tate Liverpool, played to packed houses (Figure 1).[9] Liverpool's moving image heritage was also celebrated by the launch of the BFI's *Screenonline* pilot 'city' page, *Liverpool: A City on Screen*, the first of a planned series of pages examining the ways in which moving images have been produced in, around and about the UK's major cities. This was coordinated by Northwest Vision and Media in partnership with the BFI, the NWFA, the city libraries and the *City in Film* project. *Screenonline* makes available to schools and colleges throughout the UK extracts from the internationally renowned collection of moving images held in the BFI National Archive. *Screenonline* drew on material held in other publicly funded archives as well as digitising a number of amateur films held in private collections drawing on the information held in the *City in Film* database.

It was however the return of filmmaker Terence Davies to the city of his birth to make a digital film largely composed of fragments of archive footage

Figure 1. *Liverpool: A Journey in Space and Time* (Angus Tilston/Richard Koeck, 2006), BBC Big Screen, Liverpool, November 2006. Courtesy of Les Roberts.

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that highlights the ways in which moving images can be used to construct both personal and public memories of place. Marking a departure for Davies, more renowned for his work as a feature film director, *Of Time and the City* (Terence Davies 2008) is comprised of 85% archive footage, most of which was shot in Liverpool between 1945 and the early 1970s before Davies moved away from the city. Acclaimed at the Cannes Film Festival as a quintessentially 'Terence Davies film', *Of Time and the City* filters the director's subjective remembrances of post-war Liverpool through a selection of carefully chosen sequences, juxtaposed with Davies' spoken commentary, poetry, clips from BBC radio archives and, most recognisably for those familiar with his earlier 'Liverpool' films, classical and popular music. This evocative soundscape works in haunting counterpoint to the on-screen images, many of which detail the crumbling urban fabric and increasing decrepitude of a city in the throes of post-industrial decline, an environment which Davies, as a young gay man growing up in a strict Catholic family, found evermore alienating. Featuring footage from prominent Liverpool documentaries such as *A Day in Liverpool* (Anson Dyer 1929), *Morning in the Streets* (Denis Mitchell 1959), *Liverpool Sounding* (Ken Pople 1967), Nick Broomfield's *Who Cares* (1971) and *Behind the Rent Strike* (1974), as well as newsreel and amateur film documenting a wide selection of events, landmarks and everyday urban spaces in and around the city, *Of Time and the City* can itself be looked upon as a visual archive: a cinematic repository of urban memories where audiences can navigate the filmic, architectural and lived spaces of post-war Liverpool. Indeed, as the producers of the film have claimed, screenings of *Of Time and the City* have proved particularly popular amongst ex-pats and other members of the Liverpool diaspora, who, like Davies, look back with affection and poignancy on memoryscapes from a past – and a city – long left behind.[10]

Some of the segments of amateur footage used by Davies were obtained from local collectors, most notably films owned by Clive Garner and Angus Tilston. Garner, a former broadcaster for BBC Radio Merseyside, is a Wirral-based film and music collector who creates authentic nostalgic memory trips into times past by running regular screenings in his own 12-seater converted 'garage' cinema of period feature films with suitable accompanying newsreel footage, local amateur archive film and music. Tilston is a collector of amateur films and a driving force in the cine society movement both locally and internationally; his work as a filmmaker and producer has made a wealth of amateur material available for public consumption as part of his 'Pleasures Past' series. Compiled from a personal collection of more than 800 films with contributions from friends and colleagues, footage donated by the partners and heirs of deceased filmmakers, and small amounts of commercially produced material, the series ranges from transport and tram films to local historical compilations including six films featuring Liverpool through the decades.[11] His collection contains around 200 items featuring the city and its immediate environs, the bulk of which date from the early 1950s to the early 1980s, the heyday of the amateur film movement in Britain and the Merseyside cine societies. Founder of Swan Movie Makers Wirral

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in 1954, Tilston is well known in amateur circles for his video productions and has developed connections with other amateur cine societies and organisations worldwide that encourage people to donate their footage to him. Keen that these films continue to be shown rather than languishing in storage or thrown away, Tilston has kept them in circulation through regular screening events at local clubs and old peoples' homes. As well as owning an extensive collection of amateur films in a range of different gauges and formats including 16 mm, 9.5, standard and Super-8, in the absence of the regional archive accepting material from Merseyside he also helped to preserve and maintain films held in local libraries, schools, colleges and museums. Many of these were made by local independent and amateur filmmakers, 'citizen cinematographers' who set out to record processes of urban change such as the construction of the first Mersey tunnel in the early 1930s, the damage caused by bombing in the Second World War, and the reconstruction and modernisation of the city's transport infrastructure in the 1960s (Hallam 2010; Roberts 2010b).

These films map what cinema historian Patricia Zimmerman has called 'localised microhistories' (2001, 109), recording for example the systematic destruction of the city centre as domestic housing was cleared to make way for new road networks during the 1950s and 1960s, the dereliction of the once popular seaside resort New Brighton, and a day in the life of a popular city centre square.[12] Continuing a tradition of 'local films for local people' (Toulmin 2001), these amateur filmmakers recorded city streets and buildings, mapping 'time as it was being lived' (Bruno 2002, 259) in the everyday spaces of the city's central shopping and market areas.

As well as this ethnographic aspect, amateur films reveal how place is constructed not only materially in the form of buildings, streets and architectural sites but also through spatial use. I have discussed in some detail (Hallam 2007) how some of these films are primarily memory texts offering personal records of spatial and topographical detail. Walking through the city streets with a camera, scanning the buildings and street names, the journey or movement undertaken implicitly locates point of view with the cinematographer. Soon to be demolished areas are captured and mapped through a series of repetitive sequences. These films personalise the camera's gaze as a moving relationship between self and place and appear to have been produced with the explicit intention of creating 'memory maps' of a local area.

For Zimmerman, in contrast to the 'nationalised phantasmatic representations' that dominate discourses of national film culture, the visual structures of these works map 'localised microhistories' that 'are not simply local, but are crisscrossed hybrids between the local and the global, between the psychic and political terrains' (2001, 109). While it has been customary to ignore amateur films due to their 'middlebrow' aesthetic and uncritical political position (Macpherson 1980; Dickenson 1999), with regard only given for their documenting function, recent scholarship on amateur film points to the ways in which amateur aesthetics parallel the mainstream and enter into critical dialogue

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with it (Shand 2008, 2009). Annette Kuhn suggests that memory texts of all types share certain formal attributes, one of which is the distinctive organisation of time in which 'events are repetitive or cyclical' (2000, 189). The insistent, repetitive, framing and scanning creates time for viewers to ponder on the changes wrought in the material fabric of place by re-development, a significance not lost on contemporary local audiences who recognise in the repetitive, roving gaze an implied attachment to the buildings and streets: this was a known and well-loved familiar place. Although, in most cases, these films exist without soundtracks to register their 'mood', the films function today as emotive vehicles for personal reflection, psychogeographic journeys that map shifting contours of identity, place and locality. Perhaps the films resonate so powerfully with contemporary audiences because, as Susannah Radstone suggests, 'at the heart of the heritage industry and nostalgia culture lies the desire for immediacy in the "experience" of the past' (2000, 8). Neither straightforwardly ethnographic document nor documentary record, these moving images record the specificity of place with a personal intensity and immediacy that visualises an emotional response to modernisation as the known city becomes another place.

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Film and landscape, iconography and tourism

> Siteseeing signals a shift in film theory away from its focus on sight towards constructing a theory of site – a cartography, that is, of film's position in the terrain of spatial arts and practices … Speaking of siteseeing implies that, because of film's spatio-corporeal kinetics, the spectator is a *voyageur* rather than a *voyeur*. (Bruno 1997, 9–10)

> When a film shows Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square, St Paul's Cathedral, Piccadilly Circus, red buses and black taxis, you know you are in London. This is the shorthand iconography of location, 'landmark London'. (Brunsdon 2007, 21)

On the website for *Of Time and the City*, a still photograph depicts Davies and his cinematographer standing on St George's Plateau close to the place that Alexandre Promio, an employee of the Lumière Brothers, set up his camera in 1897 to record the first known moving images of Liverpool.[13] Promio, 'one of the most valued and prolific cinematographers working for the Lumière company' (Aubert and Seguin 1992, 298, quoted in Koeck 2009, 63), went on a tour to England and Ireland, arriving in Liverpool sometime between 21 June and 21 October 1897. During his visit he shot eight rolls of film, which, at least in part, were shown at the Gatti Theatre in London shortly thereafter (63). Unlike the Mitchell & Kenyon films, which aimed to entertain local people with a photogénie of themselves, the motivation for the Promio films was to record the city's well-known landmarks for screening elsewhere as spectacles of attraction. They focused on known and familiar images already popular with tourists such as those commonly found on postcards. The attraction of a moving view of these landmarks was not, of course, the image of the landmark building itself, but

the movement of people and vehicles framed in front of it. As Clarke and Doel point out, what the Lumières filmed in 1895 and 1896 was 'the *demolition* of a wall, workers *leaving* a factory, the *fluttering* of leaves, the *disembarking* of passengers, Jerusalem from a *moving* train, and the *arrival* of a train' (2005, 44). The first Liverpool sequence, *Lime Street*, is shot on St George's Plateau and records the busy horse-drawn and pedestrian traffic passing to and from the railway station in front of St George's Hall, acknowledged as one of the finest neo-classical buildings in Europe. A second sequence, *Church Street*, records the pedestrians, trams and vehicles in the city's main shopping and business area, and a third, perhaps the most famous sequence, *Panorama Pris du Chemin de Fer Électrique*, is a panoramic view of the docks taken from the now demolished overhead railway.[14] One of the first known tracking shots, this sequence is of particular interest because it records the waterfront prior to the erection of the iconic Royal Liver, Cunard and Port Authority buildings, now known as the 'Three Graces'.

The Liverpool Overhead Railway, opened in 1893, was the world's first elevated electric railway; it ran for a distance of over six miles along the waterfront, which in the 1890s housed the busiest docks in England outside of London. Although it was built to ease the congestion of passenger traffic and goods on the Dock Road, the overhead railway soon became popular as a tourist destination, offering visitors 'unrivalled views' of the docks, ships and river, until that time obscured from public view behind the high security perimeter walls that cut off the waterfront from the city. Promio recorded approximately 1.1 miles of this route with four rolls of film. By comparing the Promio footage with maps and photographs of the day, it became clear to Richard Koeck that the sequences of Promio's virtual tour are an inaccurate record of his actual journey as the rolls of film from which the current 35 mm print is taken appear to have been labelled in the wrong order.[15] Koeck has reconstructed Promio's footage using a methodology derived from architectural practice combined with the use of digital Ordinance Survey (OS) maps and digital imaging tools. An animated, three-dimensional OS map was created and the Lumière material linked visually to it, breaking the illusion of uninterrupted continuity; this has led Koeck to conclude that the current presentation is a 'panoramic montage' rather than a 'panoramic view' and 'bears no spatial consistency' (2009, 65). His rigorous reconstruction of Promio's railway journey footage demonstrates the ways in which early film does not document landscape but spatially and temporally engineers it, creating an attraction that only *appears* to recreate the movement undertaken and experienced by the tourist gaze.[16]

Trips on the Liverpool Overhead Railway provided an exciting 'cine opportunity' for amateur filmmakers, many of whom recorded their family holidays to various destinations in the region including Liverpool. Les Roberts notes that these films, appearing in greater frequency in the 1950s, present a much more haphazard and fragmented form of mobile gaze than that of Promio's 'panoramic montage', more indicative of what Tom Gunning has termed a 'view

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aesthetic' (Gunning cited in Griffiths 1999, 283) where the way of seeing is determined by the more fleeting nature of the viewer's perspective, a gaze that is more specifically touristic in its spectacular and mobile engagement with the visual landscape. With the closure of the Overhead Railway in 1957, the socially embedded spaces of representation that formerly defined this view of the city are, as Roberts points out, now only navigable through the 'impossible geographies' of film (2010a). Film has charted the changing fortunes of the docks and waterfront from the height of the city's economic power as a maritime, mercantile city through succeeding waves of modernisation and re-development. 'In these "city projections", historical narratives [of identity and belonging] are played out within a symbolic landscape in which the iconography of the waterfront becomes expressive of broader metonymic patterns of history and identity' (ibid.).

Approaches to place-based research in film studies have tended to focus on thematic and generic readings that examine, for example, the 'impossible geographies' created by the imaginary use of place in feature films. Brunsdon's study *London in Cinema*, explores the ways in which films since 1945 have created a cinematic geography of the city ranging across the iconic landscapes of 'landmark London', the West and East Ends, the underground and the river. Her book, as she comments, 'investigate[s] the kinds of London that are found in cinema and, using critical categories such as genre, explore[s] significant patterning in these cinematic Londons' (Brunsdon 2007, 6). Although Liverpool has featured in numerous feature films since the earliest days of narrative cinema, the iconic markers of place that create the kinds of instant recognition noted by Brunsdon are often absent until the 1960s; many of the films prefer to exploit the waterfront, an image of the city that has attracted filmmakers from the earliest days. *Waterfront* (Michael Anderson 1950), a melodrama of post-war working-class life set in and around the docks, foregrounds 'the vast maritime-industrial landscape in its opening and closing sequences without reference to iconic landmarks such as the Royal Liver Building' (Roberts and Koeck 2007, 87). The dynamic movement of ships, trains, lorries and factory fumes contrasts with the overwhelming sense of entrapment and stasis experienced by the characters, a recurring theme in films as various as *Violent Playground* (Basil Dearden 1958), *Beyond This Place* (Jack Cardiff 1959) and, more recently, *Letter to Brehznev* (Chris Barnard 1985), *The Dressmaker* (Jim O'Brian 1988), *Shirley Valentine* (Lewis Gilbert 1989), *Dockers* (Bill Anderson 1999) and *Liam* (Stephen Frears 2000). Narratively the waterfront functions as a liminal landscape of transition in which the identities of those who inhabit the port city are played out as dramas of stasis and mobility, migration and escape. Roberts and Koeck provide a detailed analysis of these and other waterfront films such as *Ferry Across the Mersey* (Jeremy Summers 1965), emphasising how the dialectic between mobility and stasis, departure and entrapment, consists of recurring urban architectural elements such as paths (overhead railway), nodes (tunnel entrance/exits) and edges (the waterfront, the River Mersey) which continue to be important

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perceptual elements of the city's legibility, particularly when presented as all-embracing panning shots (86).

The 'legibility' of the cityscape, the apparent ease by which we are able to recognise and organise the cityscape into a coherent perceptual environment, was first proposed by Kevin Lynch (1960) in his book *The Image of the City*. Lynch argues that five central elements – landmarks, districts, nodes, edges and paths – shape our cognitive mapping of urban environments. As Roberts and Koeck argue, it is a perceptual facility that filmmakers have long been aware of (84). Our ability to 'read' the cinematic cityscape as 'any place' (as Edward Dimendberg (2004) argues is the case in many films noir of the 1940s and 1950s, for example) or as a particular place (Brunsdon's 'landmark London') is also one that is taken for granted by those marketing film locations as tourist destinations. Yet, in our everyday travels through the modern city, 'a fundamental illegibility confronts us: a city composed of multiple or fragmentary readings; of contradictory rhythms, temporalities and structures of feeling; a city that defies, to use Lynch's term, instant "imageability" – a city, in short, in need of legibility' (84). Hence, for the *City in Film* project, rendering visible the virtual gazes of the past from the obscurity of the archive and reconstituting them in their social, historical, political and economic as well as geographical context becomes a first step in making 'the archive city' legible. For Roberts and Koeck,

> a cinematic repository of iconic, forgotten or half-remembered glimpses demands not only a process of rendering present the spaces and moments of the city's past, but also, and more crucially, of plotting their absence, palimpsestically, within the multi-layered textures of the city's present. (84)

Writing about his experience of exploring the urban landscape in early films for his project *The City of the Future*, the architect and filmmaker Patrick Keiller observes that films are evidence of how little the material fabric of our cities has actually changed; people continue to live and work in urban environments inherited, in the main, from the nineteenth century and adapted for twenty-first-century purposes (Keiller 2003, 376). Yet, if Keiller had focused his attention on films made in and about Liverpool, he might have come to a different conclusion: the city was bombed extensively in the Second World War, with some residential dockland areas losing more than half of their buildings. This 'spectral presence of absence' remains a powerful constituent in shaping Liverpool's affective and emotional film geographies and is particularly apparent in the work of a filmmaker such as Davies, who has used the public and private spaces of the city to inform his elegiac journeys of remembrance. In the opening sequence of Davies' autobiographical study of his post-war working-class childhood *Distant Voices Still Lives* (1988), a mother calls to her children from the foot of the stairs; as she exits the frame, the camera remains fixed on the empty staircase. We hear the sounds of the children descending, yet the staircase continues to be empty, offering no visual presence; it is a memory 'caught in the act of remembrance itself, temporally detached from all but the present' (Roberts and Koeck 2007,

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86). Davies is fascinated by the paradoxical nature of time (Everett 2006, 29) which emerges as the real subject of all his Liverpool films, yet his intimate landscapes chart a spatial terrain that is as much about the trauma associated with a violent and abusive father as they are about childhood, locality and belonging. In *The Long Day Closes* (1992), memory and remembrance drift 'amongst the oneiric landscapes of childhood reverie: subtly shifting patterns of light on a carpet; the transcendent sociality of cinema and song; the textures, rhythms and [what Bachelard describes as] the "countless alveoli" of intimate space' (Roberts and Koeck 2007, 84). The wider landscape of the city and its social geography rarely intrudes; the action is centred almost exclusively on domestic space and the places that, in the 1950s, contained working-class female leisure, the cinema and the pub. An image of the city is created in which the architecture of everyday domestic life, such as a staircase or a fireplace, can be as iconic and as redolent of time and place as any public building or notable landmark (84). This urban landscape is one comprised of temporal and spatial ellipses, liminal spaces that Davies has animated with the virtual realities of archive footage in *Of Time and the City*, an elegiac, angry lament for the city of his childhood that he loved and hated in equal measure.

The 'dramatically poignant' invocation of place in film, particularly in the case of familiar landscapes and locations changing and disappearing, exerts a powerful symbolic and emotional charge that is tied to a specific characterisation or imaginary of 'the cinematic city' (Brunsdon 2004, 71). The re-coding of significant architectural buildings as film locations and heritage sites, buildings documented and projected for their 'to-be-looked-at-ness', has received renewed emphasis in recent years, with increasing acknowledgement from film practitioners, policy makers and local tourist offices that film and tourism are inextricably connected; people come to see the locations and settings that feature in their favourite films. It is therefore no surprise to find the iconicity of landscape and place increasingly features in British feature films becoming, as Brunsdon notes, a marker of easy recognition and identification that 'brands' British films, making them readily identifiable to international audiences in the global mediascape (2007, 21). Liverpool City Council's determination to attract film production to the city as part of its regeneration strategy in the late 1980s was a defining moment in acknowledging the role that the creative industries (and film production in particular) could play in reversing the economic fortunes of the city during a decade in which public images of civil strife, social unrest and industrial disruption were perceived to be major factors in the decline of inward investment in the city. It was not however the prospect of projecting an image of the city, positive or otherwise, that was a primary concern at this time; basing their strategy on post-industrial cities such as Philadelphia in the USA, the city council sought to attract major film production companies to use derelict industrial sites as film locations to create freelance opportunities for local film and media workers and develop supporting industries such as catering and hospitality, a strategy that has proven to be very successful.[17] Liverpool was the first city in the

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UK to establish a film commission in 1989 and has become the second most filmed city in England; however, within the economic context of post-industrial culture-led regeneration in which the uptake of 'cinematographic tourism' is increasingly regarded as a viable means of brand promotion and place recognition, the extent to which the city's on-screen identity is reflected or enhanced in the wealth of film and television productions based in Liverpool is far from clear (Roberts 2010c).

Liverpool frequently serves as a stand-in for narratives based in other locations and historical periods including Cannes, Vienna, Moscow, St Petersburg, Dublin, Amsterdam, Rome, New York, Chicago, Paris, war-time Germany and London; it is less the 'star' than 'body double', to quote Brown (1995, 10). One of the questions this raises in relation to the promotion of Liverpool and Merseyside film locations for tourist consumption is therefore the extent to which the city's topography, landmarks and architectural identity are represented through these film geographies: how, and to what extent, do they reflect the diversity of the city's heritage and identity, its communities and localities, or its rich and less acknowledged archival film heritage? These questions form part of ongoing research into a complex and richly rewarding study of the relationship between film, space and place in which the development of the database has played a pivotal role in isolating themes and issues for closer analysis.

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Databases and film history

> Database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world. (Manovich 1999, 85)

The use of a film database as an analytical tool to map the shifting dynamics of urban space has a precedent in the work of the filmmaker and architect Patrick Keiller. For his *City of the Future* project, Keiller collated a corpus of over 2000 films dating from the early 1890s to the 1950s which he used to explore the relationship 'between the familiarity of old city fabric, the strangeness of the past, and the newness of present-day experience' (Keiller 2007). Drawing on this database, Keiller constructed a navigable moving image archive exhibition environment at BFI Southbank using more than 60 sequences of early urban street scenes and phantom rides selected from material filmed between 1896 and 1909 held by the BFI National Archive. Keiller's installation used a series of screens on which he displayed historical maps of a range of different places; by clicking on a particular place on the map 'users' could navigate between different footage ordered spatially and geographically, opening up the otherwise fixed meanings attached to each film in isolation and offering an alternative means of engaging with 'mapping' or 'sorting' a range of archival materials. On his unpublished DVD *The City of the Future* (Keiller 2007) two options are presented; one a landscape of 68 films of urban and other landscapes of *c*.1900 that can be explored by selecting individual films from their location on a network

of maps from the period, the other a programmed sequence in the form of a journey (Keiller 2007). The journey follows the quest of a fictional time traveller seeking to trace the path of Dr Karl Peters, a German, who comes to Britain to escape retribution from his government for atrocities committed in a German colony. In structure, the programmed sequence has strong similarities with Keiller's earlier works *London* (1994) and *Robinson in Space* (1997); the fictional time traveller is a narrational device through which the visual imagery is defamiliarised, here communicated through intertitles in the style of early feature films rather than the spoken voice. Through this narration, the disparate montage sequences are given a coherent unity which, as Clarke suggests, 'serves to confer a stable sense of identity on the subject, insofar as the act of narrativizing affords a fixed position for the narrator' (2007, 41).

Keiller's work presents in artistic form the dilemmas faced by archivists and museum curators; how to select the objects that constitute the catalogue or database and how to organise the ways in which material can be retrieved and presented. The organisational logic of the computer privileges the paradigmatic axis, collections of like items, whereas the syntagmatic axis favours a linear, cause and effect sequence. New media reverse the ways in which traditional literary and cinematic narratives work; instead of foregrounding linear, cause and effect sequencing, the database interface which users view to search and navigate (the paradigmatic axis) comes into the foreground. The open-ended, paradigmatic nature of database structures means that they always have the potential to grow by adding new elements or links to them; this contributes to what Manovich argues is the anti-narrative logic of the web. Within this context, a moving image database and archive such as *Screenonline* has the potential for infinite growth; it can potentially become a resource for image play, with juxtaposition, montage and collage the favoured modes of construction, similar to ways in which avant-garde and experimental filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov in the 1920s and Peter Greenaway today construct film and media experiences based on catalogues of items organised in the paradigmatic manner of a database in which the viewer has to navigate a meaning from the film or media objects. The online archive offers 'a new way to structure ourselves and our experience of the world' (Manovich 1999, 81); the spatial logic governing the database model of film history is one in which metaphors of activity such as 'navigation', 'mapping', 'sorting', 'searching' and 'excavating' come to predominate over those of more passive activities such as 'spectating', 'gazing', 'viewing' and 'watching'.

Echoing the optimism of early Internet users who stressed the web's liberalising potential, Patricia Zimmerman argues that the digitising of archive materials and the networking opportunities this creates through file sharing marks an end to a focus on the fixity and sanctity of the archival image which she claims is primarily a white, male, patriarchal, institutionalised phenomenon. In her theorisation of what she terms the 'migratory archive', her notion of 'the public' is less the engaged citizen conceptualised by Habermas' theory of the public sphere and more that of the engaged activist who works with others to create

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works that are public in the sense that they are shared works, 'enabled, emboldened and energized through collaboration, hybrid temporalities, layering different times on top of one another, and migration through and around different [media] spaces' (Zimmerman 2007). The 'migratory archive', a resource that is constantly in process, creates opportunities for new alliances and theorisations which are emerging from changes in the ways that moving images are being made, distributed and consumed. For Zimmerman, the 'migratory archive', with its renewed notion of 'public work' lies at the heart of a cultural shift that is impacting on the ways in which moving image practitioners, critical analysts and database users alike are engaging with archive materials. The *City in Film* project is a modest contribution to these innovative forms of engagement, engagements that seek to create new opportunities for multiply personalised, psychogeographic journeys through local film culture, journeys that are beginning to reveal the gaps, ghosts and absences in current conceptions of the national film imaginary.

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Notes

1. Les Roberts (2010a) notes that 'Hale's Tours of the World' opened in the Tower Grounds of New Brighton, Liverpool's seaside resort across the Mersey, in 1907. On Hale's Tours and their relationship to virtual reality, see Fielding 1970.
2. Films could be developed and shown in as little as four hours (Toulmin 2006).
3. 'The Value of Local Topicals', Chapter 15, in *How to Run a Picture Theatre*, London: E.T. Heron & Co., 1912, pp. 121–5, quoted by Bottomore 2004, 34.
4. See, for example, the special edition of *Film History* dedicated to local film edited by John Fullerton (2005).
5. Definitions of place present a further set of problems, not least due to changing city and county boundaries; for a summary, see Hallam and Roberts 2009 where we map some of the contradictory and ambiguous spatialities that historically have mediated ideas of 'the local' and 'the regional' in a range of moving image genres with the aid of geographical information systems (GIS) software.
6. Figures are drawn from an analysis of feature film productions on the *City in Film* database, http://www.liv.ac.uk/lsa/cityinfilm/catalogue.html
7. The *City in Film* database, accessed at http://www.liv.ac.uk/lsa/cityinfilm/catalogue.html
8. *City in Film* co-investigator Professor Robert Kronenburg, School of Architecture, University of Liverpool.
9. Projects included the 'Waterfront' series of screenings at Tate Liverpool's *Centre of the Creative Universe* exhibition (2007), *Mitchell & Kenyon in Liverpool: Films of an Edwardian City* screening in St George's Hall (May 2008) and *Magical Mysterious Regeneration Tour: Artists, Architecture and the Future of the City* conference, Tate Liverpool/Liverpool School of Architecture (12–14 June 2008). A 10-minute montage constructed by Dr Richard Koeck *Liverpool: A Journey through Space and Time* was screened on the BBC Big Screen, Liverpool, in October

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and November 2006 as a prelude to the first City in Film symposium, 1 November 2006.

10. In a public interview with Les Roberts, School of Architecture, 28 April 2009, the producers made this claim based on the numerous emails they had received from Liverpudlians living abroad who had seen *Of Time and the City*. It has not been verified by the research team.
11. *Victorian Liverpool* (Angus Tilston, *Pleasures Past*, 1995), *Liverpool, Memories of a Vibrant City: The 1920s and 1930s* (Angus Tilston, *Pleasures Past*, 1993), *Liverpool, Echoes of the 1940s and 1950s* (Angus Tilston, *Pleasures Past*, 1994), *Liverpool and the Swinging Sixties* (Angus Tilston, *Pleasures Past*, 1994), *Liverpool in the 70s, 80s and 90s* (Angus Tilston, *Pleasures Past*, 2002) and *Liverpool 1907–2007: A Look at the Last 100 Years* (Angus Tilston, *Pleasures Past*, 2008).
12. See, for example, films *Us and Them* (Peter Leeson, 1969–70), *Pleasures Past* (Graham Kay/Swan Cine Club, 1974) and *The Pool of Life* (Angus Tilston, *c*.1975).
13. Website dedicated to the promotion *Of Time and the City*, http://www.oftimeandthecity.com/index.php (accessed 10 January 2010).
14. Koeck (2009) argues that the length of the shadows of the people in the sequences indicates the order in which the sequences were shot.
15. Koeck's conclusions are based on his research at the *Centre National de la Cinématography*.
16. See Roberts (2010a) for a more detailed discussion of this landscape and the tourist gaze.
17. Interview with Lynne Saunders, Liverpool Film Office, 5 November 2009.

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