The last slave ship: A practice-led exploration, via the production of a literary artefact, into the possibility of harnessing tonal signifier texts to make a creative intervention into the cultural amnesia surrounding Liverpool's slaving past: Exegesis and The last slave ship: PhD Core creative text

Martin Edward Chatterton
Southern Cross University
The Last Slave Ship

A practice-led exploration, via the production of a literary artefact, into the possibility of harnessing tonal signifier texts to make a creative intervention into the cultural amnesia surrounding Liverpool’s slaving past.

Martin Ed Chatterton

Supervisors:

Dr Moya Costello

Dr Grayson Cooke

EXEGESIS

4th April 2017
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Abstract

Liverpool – Cooke’s “infernal town” whose “every brick . . . is cemented with an African's blood” – is a city built on the Atlantic Slave Trade, yet one whose pivotal role in that genocidal atrocity has become paradoxically dessicated through a process of musealisation, and simultaneously degraded through the collective amnesia of an utterly dominant white identity. This situation has metastasized into the ghettoization and invisibility of Liverpool’s contemporary black population and gives credence to claims that Liverpool is Britain’s most racist city, cherry picking narratives of memory that place the denizens in a flattering light and discarding those that do not. It is my contention in this research that through using (what I term) “tonal signifiers” to unlock a discourse into site-specific themes of memory, silence, temporality and witnessing, an alternative intervention into Liverpool’s fogged narrative can be attempted by bringing the city’s slaving past into its racially volatile present. This thesis examines the question of how tonal signifiers play a role in this process of translating Antony Gormley’s “things which cannot be articulated” through the production of a novel. The content of this novel will centre on a contemporary narrative of race-hate crime and civil unrest, paralleling a campaign of disobedience and sacrifice aboard the final slave trading voyage from Liverpool in 1809. Using my family’s genealogical connection to the black Liverpool community as an entry point, characters linked by blood form the core of a narrative of displacement, forced migration and rebellion. While not being limited to the following, the thesis references the politics of civil disobedience, nationhood/identity, the culture of memory/amnesia, and the work of Antony Gormley, Rachel Whiteread, Terence Davies and other artists whose work engages with what Machery calls the “ideological

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Martin Ed Chatterton
necessity” of silence. The thesis is comprised of the template components of creative research – specifically creative writing and an exegesis.
Introduction

As someone born and raised in Liverpool it is difficult to argue with Cooke’s assertion that the city remains an “infernal town” whose “every brick . . . is cemented with an African's blood” (Paxman, 2011, p.32). What is less easy to digest is why Liverpool, a city which benefited so emphatically from the Atlantic Slave Trade, has allowed that genocidal atrocity to become a locally disavowed narrative. The collective amnesia around the tainted mercantile seeding of Liverpool’s rise to eminence has been made possible by an aggressively defensive, highly localised white “Scouse” (Liverpool) identity, and paradoxically desiccated through a process of musealisation, rhetoric and memorial which has also served to assuage any residual community guilt. This abandonment (of any ownership of the Atlantic Slave Trade legacy) has resulted in the continuing ghettoization and invisibility of the contemporary black population, leaving Liverpool firmly occupying the unwanted position of Britain’s “most racist” city, cherry picking narratives of memory that place the denizens in a flattering light and discarding those that do not. In this research I suggest an alternative intervention into Liverpool’s fogged narrative can be attempted by bringing the city’s slaving past into its racially volatile present by using tonal signifiers to unlock the largely abandoned discourse into site-specific themes of memory, silence, temporality and witnessing in a narrative. The central component of this thesis is occupied by The Last Slave Ship, a novel linking a narrative concerning a contemporary race-hate crime with one centered on the voyage of the final slaving ship to sail from Liverpool.
The exegesis itself falls into four distinct chapters, each of which is divided into related aspects of the subject of that chapter. These four chapters are followed by a concluding chapter. Since a central plank of this thesis is that the city of Liverpool (UK) is indeed Britain’s most racist, and occupies an “utterly peculiar” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p.341) position in Britain inextricably linked with a desiccated and disavowed (white) social response to the legacy of slavery, the first chapter seeks to identify and outline evidence to corroborate this stance. The second switches focus onto Liverpool’s role in the Atlantic slave trade, the contemporary social cost of that legacy on the black Liverpool community and the continuing failures of collective memory initiatives to adequately address the Liverpool/slavery narrative. The third chapter is concerned with the forced sublimation of black Liverpool identity within the “brutally localized, utterly white” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p.341) larger Scouse identity. The final chapter of the thesis details the creative process by which an intervention into the slaving legacy can be attempted. This portion of the thesis largely deals with the identification and implementation of a number of “tonal signifiers”: a phrase I’ve used to indicate artefacts that fuel the creative, ideological and intellectual components of an artistic endeavour by identifying and signposting tone, direction and approach.

Since each of these chapters deals with a wide range of subjects contained within the core creative text, it has been necessary to, in some respects, confine myself to a “broad-brush” approach which, while hopefully remaining pertinent and providing enough structure for the creative journey, lowers the risk of disorientation in a labyrinth of competing research directions. Of necessity, although not by choice, promising av-
venues of further exploration have had to be restricted in order to be able to complete this particular aspect of the research. In many ways, this editorial process echoes that which takes place within the creative process described in this exegesis. There is also one particular, deliberate omission, which is perhaps worth identifying and that is the choice not to reference literary antecedents. There are a number of reasons for this, some of which are expanded further in the text below but, primarily, this omission is best expressed as a desire not to have the content of the research (Liverpool and slavery) mired in a discussion of literary form. It was not my intention to write “literature”; it was my intention to make (a case for) an intervention in the existing narrative. A substantial part of this research concerns itself with an articulation of how “tonal signifiers” like Antony Gormley, Terence Davies and others, became (to me) what Birnbaum describes as a phenomenological “pathfinder[s]” (1996, p.4). In my professional practice, in order not to be consumed by a conversation centred around literary form, influences have in the past primarily been harvested from sources other than the literary. In preparations for writing The Last Slave Ship, it rapidly became clear that, if this was to be remotely successful in making an intervention outside the academic world, I needed (as a practitioner) to remain grounded in Paul Carter’s “material thinking” in which initial reflexive responses to potential tonal signifiers are examined, and subsequently discarded or retained after filtration through previously successful, ingrained research practice. The creative portion of The Last Slave Ship is written for the widest audience the complexity of the material will allow.
Chapter 1: Liverpool and Racism

1.1. Utterly Peculiar: Liverpool Exceptionalism

Historian Jessica Moody, of the University of Portsmouth, writing on the collective memory of slavery in Liverpool, (2014) makes a case that not only geographical “fortune” enabled Liverpool to become pre-eminent as slave trading port – to achieve “exceptionalism” (p.42) in the field – but also the enthusiasm of its citizens to embrace the trade with their “enterprising spirit” (p.42) and to then utilise that same enterprising spirit in the effective eradication of Liverpool’s pivotal role in that trade. Other writers have reached similar conclusions (Steele, 2006, Cameron & Cooke, 1992, Christian, 1998) about an eager propensity for the “historical airbrushing” (Steele, 2006, p.107) of slavery in Liverpool. Eleven years ago, in the aftermath of local black teenager Anthony Walker’s racially motivated murder, the Liverpool Daily Post & Echo (2005) asked if the city, as had been widely reported elsewhere, really was “Britain’s most racist”. A central plank in this research is that the answer to that question has to be a resounding yes. The second aspect which relates to this question is to investigate if, as has been suggested (Nassy-Brown, 2000, Christian, 1998, Belchem, 2007, Uduku, 2003), that Liverpool is in the grip of peculiarities of localised identity which hinder the progress in the field of racial politics when compared with other UK cities. Unfortunately supporting evidence for these suppositions is not difficult to find.

African-American anthropologist, Jacqueline Nassy-Brown, in her influential (if controversial) work on black identity in Liverpool, found the city, in its approach to racial discourse, to be “utterly peculiar within Britain” (2000, p. 341). Liverpool-born, Mark
Christian, Professor of African and African-American Studies at the University of New York, writing in the *Journal of Black Studies* unequivocally identifies an “unhealthy cloak of cultural racism” draped across his home town (Christian, 2008, p.295). Nassy-Brown, examining Liverpool exceptionalism, went on to observe that the city was profoundly lacking the “civilizing discourses on racial progress – that is, liberal antiracism – understood to obtain in the rest of contemporary Britain” (2000, p.341-342). It is, perhaps, worth deviating here to address the potential problems suggested by using such an eminently loaded word as “civilizing” within a racial/colonial narrative. Nassy-Brown, no doubt aware of the pitfalls in advocating “civilizing discourses” is careful to tie her usage closely to the rise and increasing acceptance (*pace* Brexit and Trump) of “liberal antiracism” as a measure of an inclusive and equal democratic society, and it is this narrower definition which is used in this thesis.

Historian, Professor John Belchem of the University of Liverpool, writing on the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade, noted that “Liverpool is now one of the least ethnically diverse cities in the UK” (2007, p.48). Dr Ola Uduku, writing on the assimilation of the Granby (an area of Toxteth) Somali community into the local black Liverpool community (and the wider white Liverpool community) found that “the Black presence in the city outside Granby, remains almost non-existent” (2003, p.137) and that (quoting a 1991 OPCS report on Toxteth) “the overall experience of the [black] community would therefore seem not to have changed in the last 50 years” (p.130).
Findings such as those outlined above are thrown into starker relief when seen against
the flawed, but nonetheless improved, racial discourse in operation in comparable UK
cities. 1989 saw the publication of *Loosen the Shackles*, the revealingly titled and
scathing Gifford Report into the racial issues which presaged the 1981 Toxteth (a de-
prived area of Liverpool synonymous with ‘black’ in the white community) riots. Gif-
ford, describing racism in Liverpool as “uniquely horrific”, laid out a complex, long-
standing, stubborn and emphatically institutionalised racist culture in which, amongst a
litany of “uncivilized discourses”, members of the black Liverpool population were rou-
tinely denied jobs “more systematically and comprehensively than any other major city
of black settlement”. Following publication of Gifford, Liverpool City Council, one of
the city’s largest employers, pledged to improve representation of the black Liverpool
community. The figure then targeted for council black employment was 10% (Boyd &
Charles, 2012, p.336). Twenty-five years later, Liverpool City Council’s staff profile
document reported (2013, p.3) that of the 6,349 staff employed, there were just 136
‘Black’ or ‘Black British’ employees, or 2.14%, a smaller percentage than had been in
place before the riots.

Liverpool, it is often claimed by champions of the city, has one of Europe’s oldest black
communities. There has been a black population present for centuries, although the ex-
act chronology is difficult to pinpoint. The very fact of being so long-established brings,
in itself, further difficulties of not being seen as “black” but as ‘Scouse” (see 1.4) and,
therefore, invisible.
The old Liverpool-born Black community is a case of a population who, having stripped away all the supposed causes of disadvantage – language, religious and cultural differences – are left with racism and, at best, ignorance. (Costello, 2008)

Paradoxically, the black community in Liverpool is simultaneously assimilated (albeit in a less than desirable manner) and invisible. That there has been a Black Liverpool for centuries in itself has become a source of ill-informed and self-serving complacency. This notion – that Liverpool as a cultural entity embraced an early black community and that this brought forth tolerance – has proven particularly resistant to efforts to argue otherwise. “We are called the world in one city” said Liverpool Mayor, Joe Anderson (Liverpool Echo, 2015). This assertion sounds convincing. It fits the view of the city that its citizens prefer. The problem is that, as has been shown previously (Nassy-Brown, Christian, Uduku, Costello, Boyle & Charles et al), it is simply not true. The “world in one city” designation, a contemporary regurgitation of the “world city” label first bestowed on it by the London Illustrated News (1886), was one the city had given itself in 2008 as an advertising catch-all slogan for Liverpool’s tenure as European City of Culture. This sleight of hand by Anderson – intimating a self-generated label, without basis in fact, and representing a putative positive outside view of Liverpool – is one that occurs frequently in the justifications by successive civic bodies of repeated failures in the arena of racial politics. The self-congratulatory tone flies in the face of the council’s continued lack of progress in making meaningful change. In May 2011, Boyle & Charles, revisiting the data from the Gifford Report, found that the situation in regard to representation in teaching, and on the council workforce, had remained largely un-
changed since 1989 with just 0.4% of teachers coming from the non-white community (which represents 9% of the Liverpool population). The response from the city council to the complete absence of progress in 22 years was described as “perfunctory”. Frequent reference is made in Liverpool by council and defenders of Liverpool’s racial record to the formal apology made by council in 1999 in which they expressed “unreserved remorse” (BBC, 2007a) for the city’s role in slavery. This apology may have been more effective as a PR tool if it had not been issued in St. Georges Hall, a grandiose monument to Liverpool’s trade wealth, the walls of which are decorated with images of African slaves. Activist James Hernandez of the Liverpool Anti Racist Community Arts Association described the apology as “little more than lip service to a paper exercise” (BBC, 2007b). In education, the number of black teachers in Liverpool has remained static since the Gifford Report was published (Boyd & Charles, 2102), a situation that may have contributed to Nassy-Brown observing black British women growing up in Liverpool unaware that the city had ever been a slave port (2000, p.343). In July 2015, the Liverpool Echo once again reported on the city being labelled as “institutionally racist” by poet and academic Levi Tafari. Tafari, speaking on the tenth anniversary of Anthony Walker’s death, went on to soften the accusation for the newspaper’s predominantly white readership by citing societal advances that Tafari had not expected to see in his lifetime – Mandela’s release, the dismantling of apartheid, the Obama presidency – and, through this process of editorialising his comments for an assumed sensitive white readership, unconsciously echoed Nassy-Brown’s (2000) reporting that slavery as a topic was being diluted by black Liverpool teachers in order to make it palatable to white students. It is significant, too, that Liverpool-born Tafari instinctively
placed his demonstrably accurate comments in a narrative setting of white societal advancement that flattered that very sensitivity. Of note also is that every example of racial improvement cited by Tafari took place outside Liverpool. This is not accidental: Liverpool is a city that is “utterly peculiar within Britain” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p. 341), an assertion that would, I think, meet with broad agreement in Liverpool itself, although that peculiarity would be seen as a positive evidence of independence, and as part of the complex, insistent and collectively narcissistic “Scouse” identity (the self-identifying label discussed in further detail below in 1.4). Nassy-Brown went on to explain that, while her discussion of black identity in Liverpool was rooted firmly in geographical place, “to understand Black people [in Liverpool] you’ve got to understand Liverpool” (2005).

The particularly powerful sway of specific locality and tribal behaviours in the city, is an oddly important factor in any Liverpool-based discussion of race. Nassy-Brown accurately pinpoints the “brutally local, excruciatingly white” (2000, p.341) nature of any racial discourse in Liverpool. This intensely defended (and aggressively defensive posture) of locality is fundamental to any potential understanding as to why a long-established black community in the UK is still measurably disadvantaged when compared with other black British communities. An illuminating example of this ingrained (white) defensive thinking could be seen in the cultural fallout following the Luis Suarez/Patrice Evra incident which occurred during the October 15th 2011 Premier League football match between Liverpool Football Club and Manchester United (a match with fiercely micronational connotations). Rasmussen defines micronationalism as a designed construct, as:
an entity created and maintained as if it were a nation and/or a state, and generally carrying with it some, most or all of the attributes of nationhood, and likewise generally carrying with it some of the attributes of statehood. (Rasmussen, 2001)

After the game, Liverpool’s Suarez was charged with, and found guilty of, racially abusing Manchester United’s Evra, a black Frenchman. Suarez was fined £40,000 and banned for eight games by the English Football Association. There have been many instances of this kind of racially aggravated charge before in world football: Milan Baros 2007, Lesandre Desabato 2005, Ron Atkinson 2004. In almost all cases the formula is simple: the football authorities impose a fine and a ban which is accepted by the club and individual concerned. What is pertinent in this micronational context was the reac-
tion of Liverpool Football Club and many in the city (where Liverpool FC occupy much the same place as the Church). Following the charge, Liverpool FC – headed by then coach (and Liverpool “legend”) Kenny Dalglish – mounted a vigorous campaign of denial during which he and the team wore t-shirts in support of Suarez, the day after the guilty verdict and expressed “disappointment” at that verdict. A Manchester United FC fanzine printed a sharply satirical Ku Klux Klan hood (fig.2a) to cut out and wear at the game following the verdict. What the club, Dalglish and those in the city who supported Suarez repeatedly failed to grasp was how out of step – how “utterly peculiar” – was their “brutally localized” reaction to the English football zeitgeist and how seemingly ignorant of the wider feeling of repugnance in the non-football community. Richard Williams, writing in The Guardian observed that “Liverpool being

Figure 2a, Manchester United Fanzine back cover, 2011. Figure 2b, Liverpool FC ‘religious’ banner, 2011. Image: Daily Mail, unknown.
Liverpool, and virtually impervious to outside opinion, they are unlikely to look back in the cold light of another day and feel a twinge of regret” (22nd December, 2011).

Why do academics, writers, journalists and commentators assume so readily that Liverpool is so “impervious”? What is so “utterly peculiar” there? This research is an attempt to answer those questions and, in the process, attempt to suggest an alternate narrative which, like the title of the Gifford Report, specifically links contemporary racism in my home town with its role in the Atlantic Slave Trade. Christian has written extensively on this subject. “Comprehending [slavery] in the history of the city of Liverpool gives us a way of understanding the contemporary position of the predominantly indigenous black population” (1998, p.294). Where I differ from Christian is that I am accessing this from a position of white privilege. I make no attempt to speak for the Liverpool black population (my family links notwithstanding): instead, what I hope to achieve is to reposition the story of Liverpool’s slaving past as a white narrative of shame requiring further and deeper intervention.

1.2. Family

The Carroll wedding photograph below (fig. 3) – an artefact so familiar to me as to render it essentially invisible – was the gateway through which I accessed an aspect of the family history which had never been articulated. This racial lineage was not part of the family narrative; it had been (self-)suppressed by a kind of energetically willful culture.
of amnesia which subsumes troubling questions of racial identity within the localised “Scouse” identity of Liverpool (see 1.4, below): a trend both endemic and

Figure 3. Carroll Wedding (Liverpool, 1957). Image: Annie Chatterton.

largely unquestioned, so entrenched is it in the wider cultural peculiarity of the city (Boland, 2008). The blackness of the family lineage, like much of Liverpool’s black narrative itself, had been simply ignored. A yawning chasm exists between the slave-trading history of Liverpool and the understanding and acceptance of that history by the 94.8% white (Liverpool City Council, 2013, p10) population: a population which (as will be developed in subsequent chapters) has a profound resistance to adopting the “civilizing discourses” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p.341-342) at work in the rest of the UK.
The photograph shows a bride and groom, Arthur Carroll and Audrey Kelly – my wife’s parents, my in-laws, working-class Liverpudlians – standing next to Audrey’s mixed race mother and grandmother, both of whom would be unquestionably identified in Liverpool as “black”. As a child I would have heard people with the same racial characteristics as Audrey’s mother described as “half-caste”, her grandmother as “coloured” or “negro” or other racially charged epithets. Christian, calling on personal experience, adds that in Liverpool (and seemingly in Liverpool alone – another curio of Liverpool racial “exceptionalism”) “persons of mixed-origin African descent have endured the added burden of being an historically socially stigmatized population” (1998, p.298), a stigmatization that runs counter to the usually prevailing racial “colour-coding theory” (Christian, 1998, p.299) of so-called racial assimilation. Outside my comparably liberal parental home, open racism was the cultural norm. In many areas of Liverpool, particularly those in the north of the city, that remains the predominant attitude towards a still largely “invisible” (Boyle, 2012, p.337) black community – a community which dates its presence in Liverpool to approximately the same time as the arrival of the Huguenots (Protestant immigrants who fled religious persecution in France) in 1685. Liverpool’s black community was not entirely a population of ex-slaves although many did arrive in that fashion (Fryer, 1984, Scobie, 1972). Although the establishing of a black community in Liverpool was a “direct or indirect result of the Slave Trade” (Costello, 2001, p.8), it is a “myth” (p.10) that those first settlers were all slaves. Some were often the personal “property” of slaving captains (File & Power, 1981), brought back to Liverpool as status symbols. Many others arrived at the behest of influential Africans keen to have their offspring educated in England (Costello, 2001, p.
Another influx into the city came via the American War of Independence (1175-183) which saw the arrival in Britain (and Liverpool) of “black redcoats”, black soldiers recruited by the British in America and turned against the (southern) rebels (Costello, 2001, p.13). The Liverpool black community, like all communities, has developed in a wide variety of ways.

The commonplace and complacent mistake often made (and which, I will argue, continues to be made by the majority of Liverpool’s white population) is an assumption that Liverpool’s racial awareness discourse had altered over time in tandem with the rest of Britain. As the researchers and writers outlined in 1.1 above found, this was not so. Liverpool is steeped in racism so completely that it is difficult for those so immersed to recognise how out of step that narrative is in relation to the “civilizing discourses” in place elsewhere. White defensive reflex in the face of perceived outside criticism is what has allowed Christian’s “unhealthy cloak” (2008, p.295) to settle too comfortably – especially when considering the role the city played as the major driving engine of Atlantic slavery. The suppression by omission of the complete story of slavery (discussed in later chapters) demonstrates a localised ability to filter narrative in such a way as to simultaneously claim the moral high ground while demonstrably failing to acknowledge the depth of complicity in an under-represented black Liverpool. Christian notes that “this form of historical exclusion relating to the nature of Liverpool’s past involvement in barbarity engenders a considerable distortion in comprehending its legacy to racial oppression today” (p.294). The distortion identified by Christian is so profound that, as Nassy-Brown (2000, p.358) observed in her encounter with a Liverpool...
museum security guard enraged by the idea that Liverpool has failed to remember slav-
ery, white Liverpool is perfectly capable of erecting a “moral cordon” around the narra-
tive, appropriating the notion of resentment for themselves. Of interest too when dis-
cussing resentment is how often that idea (of a community/entity being resentful of past
horrors) becomes a tool with which to beat that very community/entity. Jean Amery,
writing on Algeria, would find a receptive audience in Liverpool. In Amery’s view, past
horrors foster a resentment that “nails every one of us onto the cross of this ruined past.
Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be
undone” (Amery, in Sebald, 2003, p.156). This is a philosophical card-trick where re-
sentment, here situated in an emphatically post-colonial Algerian/French narrative, be-
comes a useless impediment to perceived progress. In the process, this pernicious argu-
ment in favour of “forgetting” also serves to relocate guilt for the sins of the past from
those responsible (the victors) onto those most affected adversely by the residue of
those sins (the victims). Amery’s phrase is illuminating, effortlessly seizing the moral
high ground by declaring a martyred, and unspecified, “us” on whom unjust “demands”
are being made. Amery makes clear that the past is “irreversible” and to claim other-
wise, absurd.

Laura Stoler, Professor of Anthropology and Historical Studies at the The New School
for Social Research in New York City, conversely identifies resentment as an essential
requisite in shaping a change in the way events are remembered and acted upon. Stoler
is clear about the way in which “colonizers and their communities are frequently treated
as diverse but unproblematic” (1989, p.136). This mix of assumed superiority, identifi-
cation of a white us and a problematic other, and the “absurd” nature of any suggested differentiation to the post-colonial narrative, is a breeding ground for unresolved and justifiable resentment. Civil unrest erupts with enough frequency in Liverpool to safely predict that it will re-occur. Each time the city burns, fuelled by a refusal to address one of the root causes of a resentment powerful enough to contribute to rioting, the dominant (white) identity in Liverpool bristles indignantly. That “brutally localised” mindset finds it only too easy to confine the riots and the causes of the riots geographically (to Liverpool 8/Toxteth) and temporally (happening “now”, unrelated to any long-term deep-seated racial problem). The white population regards looking back for answers as a process which “nails every one of us onto the cross of [a] ruined past” (Amery). White Liverpool is resentful of the idea of black resentment.

If an ingrained culture of racism within the wider white Liverpool community and the institutions of the city (Boyle & Charles, 2012) does exist, then it seems legitimate to examine further the possibility that Liverpool’s role in the Atlantic Slave Trade is a possible driver behind this (and the consequent erasing of the black story of the Carroll family). The particularities of Liverpool’s slaving history may constitute the primary differences between it and other British cities. Nowhere else was the local economy so defined by slavery with Liverpool ships making more slaving voyages than the next two largest slaving cities combined (Benjamin, 2010, p.26). On this issue, Liverpool has much to gain from amnesia.
It is my thesis that Liverpool’s pivotal position as the undisputed architect of slavery’s “golden age” (Rediker, 2007, p.5) has resulted in an unresolved legacy too easily consigned to a post-colonial black narrative. In turn, this has contributed to contemporary Liverpool occupying the unenviable position as “Britain’s most racist” city (Liverpool Echo, 2005) which, thanks to its “brutally local, excruciatingly white” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p.341) identity, continues to exist in a state of aggressive denial.

1.3 Liverpool and the Atlantic Slave Trade

In 1699, the year that Liverpool became officially an independent city, the first slave ship, The Liverpool Merchant, sailed from the port to West Africa, picked up a cargo of 220 slaves and delivered them to Barbados (Benjamin, 2010, p.25), beginning a trade that lasted until (and, in some cases, beyond) abolition in 1807. The ships, shuttling between Liverpool, Africa and Jamaica, the Carolinas, and other destinations in the New World, were “engines of death [in which the slave ship] was a factory and a prison, and in this combination lay its genius and its horror” (Rediker, 2007, p.44). In the one hundred and eighty years of the Liverpool/Atlantic slave trade, approximately eight million Africans were taken from West Africa and turned, via global trading, into cotton, sugar, steel and coffee. Forty percent of that number were carried on British vessels (Rediker, 2007, p.5) and, of those three million people, half were carried aboard ships
from Liverpool. Liverpool ships made 5000 slaving voyages, as many as London and Bristol, the next two largest slaving cities, combined (Benjamin, 2010, p.26). Liverpool is built on the misery of millions and, from the beginning, this was an institutionalized construction: “[t]he majority of the city’s list of distinguished bankers, merchants, and lord mayors had their hands stained with the profits of the British Slave Trade” (Christian, 1998, p.294).

Figure 4. Slave Restraint Hardware. Image: US Library of Congress.
It is difficult to overstate the physical and mental horrors inflicted upon the Africans taken during the trade, and Liverpool benefited hugely, rising to global eminence on the back of this complex form of industrialised human bondage. “By the 1780’s [sic] Liverpool was considered the European capital of the transatlantic slave trade” (Benjamin, 2010, p.26).

Most contemporary local references to the slave trade – including those contained in texts from the International Slavery Museum – continue to speak of it as simply one of many, including sugar, cotton and manufactured goods, that benefited Liverpool financially, without pausing to register anything more than tokenistic horror, and with no mention of Liverpool’s specifically lagging record on racism. It is worth recording that when the institution dedicated to marking slavery was opened in 2007, it chose as it’s title the International Slavery Museum as opposed to the Liverpool Slavery Museum: a significant emphasis that “marks the shifts in memory away from civic localism . . . in place of transnational titles” (Moody, 2014, p.93). As Moody goes on to note: “engagement with the public history of slavery is [in Liverpool] warped by the dominant notion that heritage tourism is a largely positive endeavour that primarily promotes place in a public relations capacity” (2014, p.90). Black Liverpool history, and ongoing white complicity in the legacy from slavery in Liverpool, has been, as I will explore in more depth later, effectively subsumed within a wider international, so-called “post-racism” narrative. In his text, *Black Liverpool: The Early History of Britain’s Oldest Black Community 1730-1918*, Costello writes “[t]his is the story of an invisible people” (2001, p.8), yet, when writing in *Transatlantic Slavery: An Introduction* (the official In-
ternational Slavery Museum publication), the same writer omits any reference to the issue (of invisibility). Costello is not alone in this respect. The lingering contemporary desire to compartmentalise the issue may have origins in the deserved vitriol poured on the city when memories were a little clearer. As actor George Cooke’s outburst on being booed offstage at the Liverpool Theatre in 1812 shows outsiders defining Liverpool as an entity built on subjugation, and misery is nothing new: “I have not come here to be insulted by a set of wretches, every brick in whose infernal town is cemented with an African's blood” (Paxman, 2011, p.32).

Rediker (2007) outlines a chilling catalogue of highly organised, creative brutality formed in the name of capitalism, which was then used to subjugate the enslaved. The wealth of historical research on the Atlantic slavery offers strong evidence for the notion that the defining story – the linear, contained narrative craved by our increasing musealized culture – has already been completed. However, there remains a specific need to bring the officially acknowledged, yet societally ignored, history of Liverpool into the present, to reposition the narrative as ongoing. The notion that Liverpool’s role in the slave trade has been dealt with is a civic blind spot with contemporary consequences. Belchem, writing immediately prior to Liverpool being named ‘European City of Culture’ in 2008, noted that “despite the absence of significant new immigration and the high levels of mixed dating, marriages and parentage” Liverpool continues to differ from other British cities where “inter-marriage has acted as a register of racial integration: in Liverpool, however, it was stigmatized and condemned as the ‘social problem’” (2007, p.55). Time and again we come back to the notion of Liverpool excep-
tionalism without considering the possibility that the scale of the slave trade in the city plays a role in this anomaly. The omission of this amounts to continued subjugation.

1.3.1. Designed subjugation: the role of terror as a capitalist tool in slavery

The dissonance (between Liverpool and the race discourses elsewhere in the UK) is most keenly felt in the absence of a meaningful narrative of resistance in the accepted Atlantic Slave story which concentrates instead on concepts of subjugation and depictions of misery. While both of these rightfully occupy important places in that narrative, the corresponding lack of stories of resistance and rebellion has marginalised, to the point of amnesia, the fact that, on board the slave ships, resistance was a constant.

Every act of resistance [aboard the slave ships], small or large, rejected enslavement and social death as it embraced creativity and a different future. Each refusal bound people together, in ever-deeper ways, in a common struggle


Resistance, and the excruciating lengths slavers went to in order to prevent resistance, defined everything about the Liverpool Atlantic slave trade. Slave resistance was an everyday occurrence that had to be factored into all profit and loss calculations from the outset in the same way as supplies, maintenance, wages, recruitment and ship
construction. Consequently, efforts to contain this resistance were brutal, complex and (mostly) effective, involving and informing every aspect of the slave trade, from vessel construction, to systems management and the balancing of the needs of security and profit via carefully calibrated “survival ratios”. Order was imposed by highly organised

Figure 5. Slave Ship Uprising. Image: US Library of Congress.

and industrialised terror. The marine architects of the Liverpool slave trade left nothing to chance. Slave ships were designed with flared sides “for the more commodious stow-ing [of] Negroes twixt decks” (Rediker, 2007, p51). The ships needed to be “sharp” (fast) enough to get the slaves across the Middle Passage as quickly as possible. They needed to be resistant to pitch (which increased seasickness) to ensure higher sur-
vival rates. Additional support rails were standard in order to support the suicide net-
ting installed by all but the most foolhardy slavers. The ships contained speculum oris,
or “horns”, in order to compel unwilling slaves to eat. “Anyone who resisted food posed
a direct challenge to the captain's powers, as the example might spread, with disastrous
results” (Rediker, 2007, pp 286). No-one was spared. Aboard the Black Joke, on a
slaver voyage in 1765, Captain Thomas Marshall flogged “a small child” (Rediker, p.
286) to death for refusal to eat. Multiple instances are recorded of transgressing slaves
being deliberately thrown to the sharks (which often congregated around the vessels) as
a deterrent. “The ship itself was in many respects a diabolical machine, one big tool of
torture” (Rediker, 2007, pp348). The reason for this barbarity was simple: once a single
slave came aboard, the ship was immediately transformed into a floating prison which
must then make a perilous cross-Atlantic journey containing a cargo consisting of
young, healthy, fearful and extremely angry people. The slaves on board were highly
motivated to resist and they outnumbered the slavers by around eight to one. Refusal to
eat may have been one of the most common forms of resistance but violent action, re-
fusal to conform to instruction, the singing of rebellion songs, mass and singular sui-
cide, were all part of the desperate toolbox available to the slaves. Instances are record-
ed of mass action, such as the slaves distributing their weight to further destabilise a
wallowing ship. This “culture of opposition” (Rediker, 2007, p.284) needed to be care-
fully negotiated by the slaver captain through a delicately balanced system of terror and
physical care.
Slave resistance lasted as long as the Atlantic slave trade and is firmly embedded in the slave trade narrative. Indeed, this dogged, communal and individual creative “culture of opposition” ultimately helped fuel the growing politicization of the anti-slaving movement through the continual forcing of the slavers into ever more domestically unpalatable acts of cruelty – a prime example being the 1781 Zong massacre in which 133 slaves were thrown overboard from a Liverpool-owned slave ship (*The Zong*) in order to preserve drinking water supplies and then capitalise on those deaths through an insurance clause (Walvin, 2011). In an ideal world (assuming the viewpoint of a slave ship captain), mute acquiescence on the route into bondage would have been infinitely preferable to a constant battle to maintain a balance between care and coercion. Century upon century of blood sacrifice gradually seeped into the public consciousness and was a significant element in the growth of the Abolitionist movement. Strangely, this narrative – one in which the subjugated resisted violent subjugation and thereby contributed hugely to the trade’s demise – is a narrative that has been largely disavowed in favour of one that casts Abolition as a “gift” of white enlightenment. It is difficult to see how this pattern of slave resistance would end with the end of the Atlantic trade. Examples of resistance and rebellion abound in the discarded narratives of slavery in the New World (Cato’s Conspiracy of 1739, Gabriel’s Rebellion (Louisiana) of 1800, the Creole Ship Uprising of 1841, the Little George Ship revolt of 1730 et al) so it seems unlikely that this pattern of resistance would not re-emerge when populations developed from slavery continued to be subjugated, post-slavery.

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1.3.2. The culture of opposition

From the Cholera riots of 1831, to the Toxteth Riots of 1981, and the enthusiastic participation in the (so-called) UK ‘economic’ riots of 2012, Liverpool has rebellion running through it like blood through an artery. Steven Kelly, in a prescient report in London’s *Independent* newspaper (2011), a year before the 2012 riots (which themselves followed riots in 1948, 1972, 1981, 1985 and 2011), quoted Liverpool 8/ Toxteth resident Darren Rawlins (being interviewed about the 1981 riots) as saying that “rioting was emancipating. It’s on my list of 10 things you should do before you die” (2011, para 6). The use of the word “emancipating” is apposite in the context of any discussion on Liverpool and racism. The politics of disobedience has a long and textured history in Liverpool and many within the city readily identify with the idea of

Liverpool’s “outsider” status (see fig.7, ‘We Are Not English, We Are Scouse’). In 1983, the same year that Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government was re-elected on a tide of post-Falklands euphoria, the Labour Party, controlled locally by the avowedly extreme left-wing Militant Tendency, won a landslide victory to take control of the city. So unpalatable was a Militant-dominated Liverpool to the Thatcher government that the cabinet discussed ‘writing off’ (Travis, 2011) the entire city and guiding it into “managed decline” – whatever that might have been. Paradoxically, Thatcher’s wish to be rid of the troublesome city was shared by many in Liverpool (Grady, 2014). Devolution from the rest of the UK was a serious proposal. Stances like the entrenched opposition to Margaret Thatcher, the 1984 Cammell Laird shipyard occupation, and the bitter (yet ultimately successful) 23-year Hillsborough Justice campaign, are largely embraced as evidence of a determined and gritty Liverpool identity, yet when contemporary civil unrest erupts in mainly black areas of the city, this form of resistance/rebellion is almost universally castigated as “criminal” and never linked to the city’s slaving past. At the same time, the process of institutionalised memory in the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool invites applause for the approved “historical” slave resistance discourse (resistance aboard the ships, slave revolts, political acts by slaves and ex-slaves) while studiously avoiding any suggestion of a link between contemporary unrest and Liverpool’s slaving past. Temporal distance renders historical slave resistance digestible. Resistance then is rendered heroic, resistance now seen as a de-politicised, criminal activity. There is a dissonance between how we choose to remember past and present.

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In the light of Liverpool’s enthusiastic participation in a system of subjugation for profit, and the city’s ongoing institutionalized racism (see 1.2 above), Papastergiadis’ observation below should be read as a call to arms: for a polemical, personally engaged, aggressive repositioning of this story that specifically links the bloody past with the racially and economically simmering present. “The representation of the past,” notes Papastergiadis, “[is] an intervention that speaks into the needs of the present, in order to understand the selves we are already becoming” (2005). Although the current post-colonial narrative would have it otherwise, black resistance to subjugation was not consigned to history once Liverpool’s participation in the slave trade ceased. While the city authorities (and, I would suggest, the larger, white population) would prefer it not to be so, the Toxteth riots, it can be argued, continued to demonstrate that black resistance had not ended with abolition. Interventions into the slaving narrative have often been ignored, primarily because they do not fit the approved expressive paradigm. If, therefore, traditional interventions have failed to make explicit the unbroken links between the then and the now, perhaps we should turn our attention to alternative means through which we may be able to access the narrative of resistance.

As an example of this, music historian, Mel Campbell (2003), in her research examining meanings contained within the non-verbal musical tics that abound in popular black music (Michael Jackson being offered as a case study), traced the source of these sounds and concluded it was likely that they originated aboard the slave ships of the Middle Passage. Singing aboard the slave ships was violently and ruthlessly suppressed: most especially singing in an African language. Dr. James Arnold, reporting on women
aboard a slaver singing “the History of their lives, and their separation from their
Friends and Country” (Rediker, p.284) noted that the captain of the vessel, Joseph
Williams, fully understood the rebellious power contained within the songs and had the
women flogged “in a terrible Manner” (p.284). This repression was commonplace and,
viewed from the viewpoint of those most in need of an acquiescent “cargo”, entirely
necessary. The problem for the slaver captains was that the impulse to resist was a com-
pulsion among the enslaved, and one which (in addition to many other outcomes) found
expression in non-verbal musical tics. The wails, cries, shrieks and hoots that punctuat-
ed the post-punishment music were just as understandable (to the slaves) as the songs
they were forcibly prevented from singing. Campbell suggests that these sounds, while
not precise about what they are articulating, and though containing a multitude of possi-
ble meanings to different listeners, are undeniably communicating something. She cites
reviewer Mark Neal as defining “non-verbal vocalisations [in songs]” as being explica-
table by black speech theorists as “tonal semantics”. And that “[t]he practice of ‘polyton-
al’ expression in which complex and varying meanings were conveyed via vocal tones,
represents a unique process emblematic of the African-American experience” (Neal, in
Campbell, p.21, 2003). A consideration of this covert communication used by slaves
denied both instrumentation and access to their own songs begins to open not only the
possibility of tangential pathways towards a possible meaningful intervention, but to
bridge the gap between past and present. After the 1981 riots which caused lasting dam-
age to the already toxic race relations in the city, initiatives were forthcoming, reports
prepared, judicial inquiries cranked into motion, all of which, in varying degrees, cited
unemployment, heavy-handed and institutionally racist policing, the abuse of specific
stop-and-search laws, gang culture, outside opportunism by anarchists, as contributory factors. Only Gifford (albeit obliquely) mentioned Liverpool’s slaving past and the city’s inability to articulate or acknowledge the level of post-slavery racism, or the recurring nature of the highly localised unrest (Gifford, 1989). This confining of the narrative to the present is nothing new in Liverpool. In 1919, white mobs attacked black (British) dock workers accused of taking jobs that would otherwise be occupied by white dock workers. As Fryer reports

An anti-black reign of terror raged in Liverpool. On 8th of June (1919) three West Africans were stabbed in the street. On 9 and 10 June mobs of youths and young men in “well organised” gangs, their total strength ranging from 2,000 to 10,000, roamed the streets . . . [severely beating up black folk] (p.301)

The same race-hate riots took the life of Charles Wooton, a local black seaman who was chased into the Mersey and stoned to death by a white mob (Fryer, 1984, p.300). As with previous and future riots, these were not aberrations: they were part of an ongoing, complex, locally textured racism (and the equally complex response to that racism) that stems from two key ideas: reading Liverpool and slavery as an ended narrative, and by a localised, finely honed, Liverpool capacity to resist criticism from outside agencies, a capacity bound up in micronational identity issues built into the “Scouse Nation”.

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1.4 Scouse Nation. Identity in Liverpool.

“Scouse” is a vernacular term that has come to describe someone born in Liverpool. The name derives from a one-pot stew of indeterminate ingredients (dependent for inclusion by availability) which was, originally, a product of scarcity and poverty. By identifying themselves positively with this meal, one so specific to the city (Kierans & Haeney, 2010), Liverpool citizens are making plain a conscious group metaphor with “hybridity” at its core. Being Scouse is (mostly) viewed in a positive light in Liverpool although it is worth noting that “the eating, or avoiding of this dish neatly separat[es] lower from higher social classes” (Kierans & Haeney, 2010, p109). It is axiomatic that cities and their citizens are defined and shaped by events, but for anyone born in Liver-

Figure 7. We’re Not English We Are Scouse (unknown date) retrieved from http://live4liverpool.com/2014/05/view-from-the-kop/scouserland

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pool, identifying (and being identified) as a “Scouser” brings with it additional external identity baggage. In Sonic Geography, Place and Race in the Formation of Local Identity: Liverpool and Scousers (2010), Philip Boland reflects on the Scouse identity as “Liverpool’s instantly recognizable badge of difference” (p.1). The idea of identity is bound up in differentiation and separation: the separation of one section of society from another, or of an entire society from other societies. Identity is predicated on celebrating and defining difference to outsiders while granting acceptance to those within the identity. Identity can be defined by a host of factors: geography, gender, sexuality, race, class, but always contains the mirror image of “sameness”: exclusion. In the same paper, Boland also discusses the competing research discourses into race and Scouseness unfavourably contrasting the work of “academics not from Liverpool” (p.15, original emphasis) in the form of Frost (2000) and Nassy-Brown (2000, 2005), with those of Liverpool-born locals, Christian (1998) and Uduku (2003), a perfect demonstration of unconscious Scouse exclusion at work. I understand this impulse completely. As a Scouser, the rejection of “other”, especially a critical other, can be an embedded defensive reaction if left unchecked. Detection requires a process of disengagement.

Almost any positivity (in identifying as Scouse) is largely confined to Liverpool. Boland suggests that “such is the extent of ‘cultural knowledge’ [about Liverpool] that almost anyone in the UK, and significant numbers across the world, would be able to posit a view of the city and its people” (2007, p.356). Boland outlines a number of negative stereotypical views attributed to the city (ie: fig.8) that have created an unwanted social identity (as, variously, self-pitying, criminal, aggressive, economically
sluggish and politically extreme). The strong feelings (of both observers and recipients) towards Scousers have contributed to a siege mentality fuelled by a collective narcissism that runs through the white Liverpool identity, particularly when it comes to situating that identity within the rest of the UK. Boland quotes Liverpool footballer Jamie Carragher (the very epitome of a Scouser by both upbringing and geography) addressing notions of local identity thus: “I’ve heard The Kop [the area of Liverpool Football Club’s ground most closely associated with home support] sing “We’re not English, we are Scouse”. There’s no affinity with the national team” (2010, p5). So localised is identity in Liverpool as Scouse first, that residual communal guilt about measurable and
troubling issues of race are subsumed by the overweening influence of identity within
the “Scouse Nation”. Black invisibility, and the consequent response to that invisibility,
is complicated by these slippery notions of scouse identity. It is likely that a more mean-
ingful self-identification by both black and white in Liverpool is being prevented by the
dominant “thereness” of the Scouse Nation. Criticism of Liverpool becomes criticism of
the Scouse Nation. If you’re not with us, you’re against us. The phrase “we’re not Eng-
lish, we are Scouse” (fig.7) contains an implication that Liverpool lies not only outside
England, but also outside English racial politics. The normal rules (regarding racial dis-
course) in tribalistic Liverpool are different. It is a city that is “utterly peculiar within
Britain” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p. 341) perhaps because Liverpool has a history of look-
ing outward: identifying as distinct from England, the citizens turn their backs on the
rest of the country. Scousers, I suggest, feel connected more strongly with (say) New
York, or Glasgow, or Dublin, than with London. In the nineteenth century, “Liverpool,”
reported *The London Illustrated News*, “has become a wonder of the world. It is the
New York of Europe, a world city rather than merely British provincial” (1886). London
has altered its gushing view of Liverpool since. Although Steven Bayley notes that
“[t]he people feel exceptional because it is an exceptional place” (Telegraph, 2011) and
is correct when he goes on to suggest that “Liverpool does not look to London, still less
to Europe. It looks first to Ireland, then at the cold Atlantic and after that, America”, he
still feels secure enough in his views on the city to observe that the population is com-
posed of “mischievous scallies, whining recidivists, drunken Micks, cheerful slappers,
benefits cheats, shrieking harridans, out-of-work poets and experts in larceny”. Ludi-
crously common articles such as Bayley’s, awash with gross stereotype, are part of the

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toxic relationship between the Tory south and left-wing north. Yet – leaving aside Bayley’s smugly privileged class hatred – in his analysis of Liverpool “difference,” and in linking Liverpool’s “dark psychology” (para.18) to slavery, he has a point. The links between Liverpool and the rest of the world are less straightforward than they would be in other northern English cities: Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle. There is, I believe, an underlying, self-propagated, local cultural discourse which rejoices in placing Liverpool as “somewhere else” – as a “world city”, as “not merely British provincial”. This process of micronationhood even extends to defining differentiation within a tiny local area: “Scousers sound and speak differently to other English people and especially those of the North West region in which Liverpool sits” (Boland, 2010, p.6, my italics). Scousers, Boland is suggesting, are more different to people in geographical proximity, not less. It is hard to read this as anything other than a desire to be seen as “other”: a desire which comes with a price tag. Operating and identifying as cultural outsiders, a significant element of the Liverpool cultural discourse centres on its (Scouse) hybridity: something which places it recognisably within the context of any analysis of the slavery diaspora. As Gilroy points out, “no one part of the Black Atlantic can be understood without considering its connections to the other parts . . . within the diaspora, all cultures are hybrid (Longhurst et al, 2008). However, since hybridity is already celebrated as a core component of the Scouse micronation, the invisibility of the black community may be at least partly due to a process of sublimation within the already existent “otherness” of being Scouse. If Scouseness is the primary identifier of a localised culture, then racial origin becomes marginalised, something more easily dismissed as irrelevant or, more disturbingly, as threatening. The terms “Black Scouser” and “White Scouser”
don’t exist. You are Scouse or not Scouse. For us or against us. The most highly visible example of this has been, as Zack-Williams notes, a process in which, “the black community in Liverpool [has] assumed the position of an internal colony with lack of control of its own resources and destiny” (1997, p.541).

Identifying as Scouse does then, perhaps, go some way to beginning to explain the Liverpool slavery discourse. These shifting subtleties of local identity act as a fog which masks – echoing Christian’s “unhealthy cloak” of racism – hard data which suggest strongly the unresolved connection between slavery and present day Liverpool. One further reason that this connection is denied lies in a localised collective habit of memory selection which consistently enables the dominant white identity to aggressively appropriate memory narratives, ignoring both evidence that indicates a contrasting interpretation, and the consequential effects set in motion by such appropriation. By placing the loci of the Atlantic slave trade in the New World, and by making it a narrative of post-colonialism, emphasised and reconfirmed year on year by systemic “institutional and structural racism” (Boyle, p.335) at the heart of the city institutions, (white) Liverpool has been the beneficiary of a framework in which Atlantic slavery is a temporally distant black (and therefore “other”) story of subjugation, rather than a contemporary and integral “part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole” (Gilroy, 1993a:49). Nassy-Brown suggests that discussions of the legacy of slavery in Liverpool must start with an approach that considers the particularity of the city’s identity. Those particularities contain more recent examples of Liverpool memory narrative failure which support the claim of selective white amnesia.
1.5 The Dessication of Memory

Miroslav Volf (2006) writes eloquently about two kinds of memory: literal and exemplary. With literal memory “we seek to remember in order to construct a plausible narrative of a wrong we have suffered, to understand precisely what has happened and why” (Volf, p.87). The main beneficiary of literal memory is ourselves as we “recover psychic or social health and stabilize identity” (p.87). Exemplary memory “pushes us beyond the concern for our own well-being by helping us learn lessons from the past so as to apply them in new situations” (p.87). There is an argument that these strands can be inverted to produce a “literal amnesia” in which we seek to forget in order to construct a plausible narrative of a wrong we have delivered, in order to recover psychic or social health and stabilize identity. “Exemplary amnesia” would then push us towards the concern for our own well-being by helping us forget lessons of the past. Volf makes a strong case that the process of forgetting is, in many cases, as beneficial, or more beneficial perhaps, to the individual, than is the process of remembering. It has to be said that Volf’s perspective is that of an individual. If “literal amnesia” is at work in Liverpool, then it is not simply the well-being of an individual that is of concern. We are here discussing collective memory. In Liverpool, the convenience of choosing what to remember and forget about key events comes at the expense of communities in the present in which the current narrative is acting solely as balm to the larger (white) popu-

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lation. Perhaps, if we are to have any chance of adequately remembering, we should consider what the process of memorialization means.


*Pero’s Bridge* in Bristol (1999), the *Captured Africans* memorial in Lancaster (2005) and the *Gilt of Cain* monument in London (2008) are all examples of public memorial to those cities’ slaving history. While it is true that Liverpool does have a museum dedicated to slavery (the International Slavery Museum), in addition to a “Slavery Remembrance Day”, it may seem perverse that as the dominant British slaving port, Liverpool has not followed (or led) the way in this respect, especially considering the contemporary vogue for making memorials (Moody, 2014, p.12). However, let us sup-
pose that the International Slavery Museum does represent a “slavery memorial”, what kind of memorial is it? Alan Rice (2010) notes that “the history of slavery and the middle passage has been dominated by wilful amnesia and silence” (p.224) but goes on to suggest that this amnesia has been exacerbated by a rise in civic manifestations (ie: fetishizations) of slavery memory aids. This seems paradoxical. However, contained within the public acknowledgements of slavery is a conundrum. Rice continues: “as long as the story of slavery in the city is mainly confined to the museum it is readily ignored, both by locals and by visitors to the city” (p234). In fact, Rice here is talking about Lancaster, not Liverpool, but the narrative confinement he is articulating echoes the same process occurring within the photographs entombed inside the pages of the Caroll family wedding album. Ironically the solution Rice proposes to remedy Lancaster’s amnesia is to urge the construction of a memorial: in other words, to once again “confine” the story of slavery. Time and again, despite the apparent logic of initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of slavery, the underlying urge is to contain uncomfortable and unpalatable stories within a memorial. The truth is that these bricks and mortar manifestations of atonement achieve exactly the opposite of memorial, deadening the (stated) desired response and confining it firmly in the past. Institutionalised fetishisation – in placing the story of Liverpool’s role in the Atlantic Slave Trade in the context of a museum – has led, not to the meaningful preservation of the Liverpool slaving narrative in contemporary life, but instead to the desiccation of that memory. Dr Jessica Moody, reviewing the institution she worked in, records that “a visitor [to the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool] leaves the museum with morally comforting and largely de-racialised narratives of contemporary abolitionist rhetoric” (2015), also
noting that as a specific subject for discussion on the legacy of “Liverpool itself has become somewhat lost” (2015). Allowing dust to gather on this apex of the triangular Atlantic slave narrative has rendered it effectively inert. While a focus on memory is vital to any attempted intervention into the narrative, the effect of institutionalised memorial often has the opposite result to that intended. The contemporary global memory fetishisation towards an agreed end point for an event is unattainable.

Andreas Huyssen (2000) suggests that the fetishisation of memory is an attempt to assuage the societal fear of forgetting, but, while a focus on memory may be important, the effect of memory fetishisation almost always has the opposite result to that intended. To commemorate an event is not the same as remembering. To be clear, it should be noted here that memory, in the context used by Huyssen, refers to the process of the institutionalising of memory discourses. In institutional terms, while there has been a contemporary global scramble to agree on a balanced story of an event, agreement on such an objective is unattainable. All memory, both musealised and personal, is subjective. Any agreed, apparently objective outcome, means that, no matter how well-meaning the intent, a multitude of alternate, subjective memories have been forgotten. The memory discourses on display at what Lennon and Foley define as “dark tourism” (2000) destinations around the world – Auschwitz, the War Graves in northern France, the battlefields of Culloden, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park – have a remarkably similar distancing effect to the process of memorialization discussed above. However, if as Huyssen suggests, organised, culturally approved modes of memory discourse are prov-
ing inadequate – are becoming ‘musealized’ – we must look elsewhere for alternative avenues of remembering.

1.6 Stalking the Past

A drawing from 1746 – *An Englishman Tastes the Sweat of An African* – depicts an English slave trader licking the face of a kneeling slave. Since the early 1990s, an increasingly politicized and murky debate has been raging in academic circles centred on the “Slavery Hypertension Hypothesis” (SHH). As proposed by Wilson and Grim (1991), the SHH suggests that the increased levels of hypertension found in present day African-Americans has a genetic cause derived from a process of “intense selection during the Middle Passage” (Armelagos, 2005, p.119). In essence, the argument runs that, since slave survival favoured those with a propensity for salt-conservation, this created a “genetic bottleneck” (Armelagos, p.119) with consequences for the descendants of slave survivors. Those in favour of the Slave Hypertension Hypothesis argue that the drawing above is evidence of the slaver sampling the saltiness of a slave prior to purchase. Strong counter arguments have been produced by distinguished scholars such as Curtin and Armelagos, keen to keep the Atlantic slave narrative free of genetically loaded suggestions of racial predisposition – seeing the slippery slope ahead if that line of thinking is accepted without rigorous examination (and, in the adoption of the SHH by the political right, it’s hard not to share their concerns). More recent research (Yehuda et al, 2015) into the idea of genetically inherited trauma has suggested...
Figure 10. *An Englishman Tastes the Sweat of An African*, (1746) Unknown artist.

that Holocaust survivors have transmitted trauma to their descendants via “epigenetic inheritance”. “If there’s a transmitted effect of trauma, it would be in a stress-related gene that shapes the way we cope with our environment” (Yehuda, 2015). This concept, that “one person’s life experience can affect subsequent generations” (Thompson, 2015), is an idea that arouses deep emotions on both sides of the argument. However, if we can, let us step away from this quagmire and merely entertain the possibility that epigenetic inheritance exists and that the Slave Hypertension Hypothesis may be correct. If so, then the increased mortality rates among contemporary African-Americans, and increased rates of stress disorders in descendants of Holocaust survivors, is something that can (at least partially) be traced directly back to ancestral subjugation. Contemporary African-Americans are living with the ongoing physically present conse-
quences of slavery. This is a potentially important addition (and deviation from) to the accepted “legacy of slavery” narrative in which it is contemporary social conditions (primarily) which are traced backwards to their historical source. With the thrust of *The Last Slave Ship* being that the past is, in many ways, entirely present, it can be seen that the pull of the SHH would be profound. Joel E Dimsdale, in an address to the American Psychosomatic Society, used the SHH to illustrate the way in which “the past stalks the present” (Armelagos, pp120). This phrase encapsulates the access point to this research: the wedding photograph an object of enquiry precisely because of the lack of any meaningful articulated memory narrative (at least regarding the family history). That image, like Liverpool, is stalked by the past. Fetishized artefacts like wedding photographs occupy an ambivalent cultural position, serving simultaneously as memory stimulators and also as memory repositories in which uncomfortable truths can be placed and forgotten. The very act of trying to create a time-sealed ruin/shrine identified as an act of remembrance is problematic because the process itself is one of absolution. The paradox is that the more we formalise remembrance the more we forget: an unexpected consequence of Huyssen’s (2000) “fetishisation of memory”. The admission of the SHH could be a tangible asset in any argument that “the Atlantic slavery story” is not restricted to the past. The SHH postulates that the trauma suffered in the Middle Passage is all too real. It – raised levels of hypertension in direct descendants of slaves – is not dependent on academic interpretation (and remember that this discussion is prefaced by the qualification that we allow the SHH for a moment to have been proven) and, like the abnormally low rates of black employment in Liverpool, entirely measurable.
1.6.1 Benjamin and the Angelus Novus

In the rush to agreement by the victors, in the desire to place the blood and terror behind glass, the conformity feared by Benjamin (1968, p.255) has already overwhelmed any chance of reading the history as it happened and as it continues to happen. It is in this continuation that the primary fault (of amnesia) lies. The Liverpool story of slavery hasn’t finished, yet this is the memory discourse we are invited to accept. Subjectivity should not be seen as undesirable if a more meaningful recall is the aim. The archiving/internment of objects and documents, and the rendition of “what happened” are proposed in order to preserve memory. The problem is that contained within the medium (of contemporary public memory display) is the paradox that the harder we try to remember, the more desiccated and distant becomes both the subject and the legacy of that subject. Walter Benjamin articulated this idea most pertinently by referencing Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus* (1920). Benjamin (1940) suggested that The Angel of History is being driven “irresistibly . . . into the future, to which his back is turned” (p. 258), unable to act, unable to alter anything. The noise of this endlessly receding history, becoming progressively more confused and chaotic as catastrophe piles upon catastrophe, means that arriving at an agreed ‘truth’ by observation, no matter how hard those involved in the memory business try, is impossible. “The world is being musealized,” states Huyssen and “[t]otal recall seems to be the goal” (2000, p.25). If that utopian ideal is the case, it is clear that at least some of the population consider this aim has been achieved. The “brutally localised, excruciatingly-white” culture observed by Nassy-Brown (2000) has been effective in delivering a
neatly defined story of the city’s parasitical involvement in the first truly global, capitalist-driven genocide. “You have misunderstood,” suggests a defensive Liverpool tour guide when quizzed on the possibility of a link between the invisibility of Liverpool’s black community (Boyd & Charles) and the slave trade; “there were no slaves here. Liverpool just made the ships.” The dissonance between actuality and perception in that
statement is engendered, I would suggest, by a failed memory culture which places Liverpool’s role in slavery in a box marked “museum”. By identifying a building, or a monument, or an environment as playing the role of witness, we risk failing the very people we claim to be remembering by cutting the link between the then and the now. In the rush to sober memorialism, and in the desire to place the blood and terror behind glass, the conformity feared by Benjamin (in Arendt, 1968 p.255) has already overwhelmed any chance of reading the history as it continues to happen. It is in this lack of continuation that the primary fault lies: the Liverpool post-colonial slaving narrative is the memory discourse we are invited to accept, yet confining the story of slavery within a white-owned memory culture ‘gifts’ the narrative to the victim, implicitly setting slavery in a discourse of ‘otherness’ that allows white Liverpool the comfort of temporal distance.

1.7 Choosing Narratives

The last section of this chapter deals with two closely related events: the football stadium disasters at Heysel Stadium in Brussels (Belgium) in 1985 and in Hillsborough in Sheffield (UK) in 1989. As someone born and raised in Liverpool, as a de facto member of the “Scouse Nation” and fully conscious therefore of the intensity of feeling engendered by any reading of these narratives that differs from the “brutally localized” versions, I am reluctant to discuss the cultural reaction to either event critically. Yet to not articulate what I consider to be clear links in collective memory (and collective amne-
sia) in both these events to memory failures in the Liverpool Atlantic Slave Trade narrative would be negligent and an act of academic cowardice.

It is worth starting by outlining the facts of the disasters. During the European Cup Final in 1985 between Liverpool and Juventus (Italy) at the outdated Heysel Stadium in Belgium, crowd trouble resulted in a stampede which saw a wall collapse and 39 fans, mostly Italian, killed. In 1989, after a number of ticketing and policing errors, 96 Liverpool football fans were crushed to death at the Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, England. The two narratives share many characteristics: the same club (Liverpool) involved in both, the manner of the deaths, crowd control problems, antiquated policing, stadium safety, and hysterical and inaccurate post-disaster reporting. However, in Liverpool, the two narratives are treated in a markedly different manner.

Following Hillsborough, blame was laid erroneously and vigorously on the supporters of Liverpool Football Club by a rabidly acquiescent right-wing British tabloid press. This narrative wrongly blamed the Liverpool supporters for the deaths of the fans (Travis, 2011). It took a tenacious 23-year, Liverpool-based campaign co-ordinated by the Hillsborough Family Support Group to force the re-opening of inquests on the dead, which revealed a concerted, multi-layered campaign of deceit and cover-up by the police, media, and local and national government. The campaign was a concerted and concentrated act of stubbornness, protest, politics and memorialisation that eventually arrived at a consensus on the “truth”. During that long, emotive and exhausting campaign, the exhortation to “never forget” was everywhere in Liverpool. It has become axiomatic
there to “remember the 96”. The message is clear: Liverpool doesn’t forget. Liverpool remembers. However, the memory narrative and mechanism of justifiable outrage of the Hillsborough campaign is markedly different when it comes to how the Heysel disaster is remembered in Liverpool. Blame for the tragedy can be laid at several doors – shoddy policing, poor ticketing, decrepit stadium, fan violence. 26 Liverpool fans were initially arrested for manslaughter. However, it is not the detail of these events which is the essence of this discussion; it is how each has been remembered in Liverpool. Some of the memory discrepancies can be attributed to the length and size of the Hillsborough campaign. While an internet web search for “Hillsborough” turns up 29.9 million results. “Heysel” re-
turns just 0.95 million. There are almost no scholarly articles on Heysel while Hillsborough is well represented. Amazon returns 1,159 search hits for “Hillsborough”, “Heysel”, 60. Of those on Heysel, only one book, by Italian journalist Francesco Caremani, is a fully-researched account of the disaster, and it is unavailable in English. In an effort to explain the disparity in the two narratives, I spoke to Caremani directly. “The shame of the British,” he says “is that they have only ever tried to forget Heysel” (2014). Caremani’s suggestion stands in stark contrast to the constant exhortations on Merseyside to “never forget” the Hillsborough 96. Liverpool, it seems, has collectively decided to choose to remember one disaster and all but forget the other. The roiling immediacy, and violently emotive tenor, of the battle for control of the Hillsborough story stands in
stark contrast to almost total amnesia when it comes to any cohesive or objective local analysis of Heysel. The Hillsborough narrative is now so firmly entrenched in Liverpool culture as a defining narrative that to even suggest a disparity exists in how Hillsborough and Heysel are remembered is to invite immediate and heated conflict. So profound has this narrative gripped the city that I have had to seriously consider the possibility of physical attack should the contents of this thesis become an object of wider discussion in Liverpool. The Hillsborough narrative has become a powerful Liverpool brand in which the Heysel narrative is ignored precisely because it does not fit the hard-won Hillsborough narrative. As “Hillsborough” has solidified into a shrine composed of grainy videos, services of remembrance, horrifying photographs, charity singles, Parliamentary apologies, Sun headlines and respectful minutes of silence before football matches, it has rendered the Heysel narrative mute in a chilling echo of the way in which the Liverpool slave narrative too has become a thing of dust.
Chapter 2: Towards a Creative Intervention

2.1 Tonal Signifiers: Another Place


The creative and intellectual approach to The Last Slave Ship is underpinned by a number of texts, defined here as tonal signifiers. As discussed earlier, tonal signifiers are key artefacts which fuel the creative, ideological and intellectual components of an artistic endeavour by identifying and signposting tone, direction and approach. The most influential of these tonal signifiers in the context of the construction of The Last Slave Ship is Antony Gormley’s Another Place (2006) on Crosby Beach, Liverpool – an installation consisting of one hundred life-size, subtly-differentiated, cast-iron figures, “placed
between 50 and 250 metres apart along the tideline and one kilometre out towards the
horizon, to which they will all be facing” (Caiger-Smith, p.90).
The first time I saw Another Place I was aware immediately that an internal, fundamen-
tal, qualitatively differentiated, and profoundly reverberative exchange had taken place
between the artwork and myself. An important “something” had been communicated of
an order higher than that experienced through previous readings of any other artwork. I
had little idea what that something was, or what the layers of meaning behind my reac-
tion meant (or if, indeed, they meant anything), I just knew Another Place was commu-
nicating a profound truth that went beyond the aesthetic simplicity of Emerson’s “point
of astonishment in the meeting of the sky and the Earth” (1850, p.544). I had spent a
large part of my creative professional life looking at and responding to visual cues. I
had the tools at my disposal to deconstruct my reactions and form opinions on art and
those reactions had been honed over decades. Another Place was different, personal. It
spoke.

At this time, I was not writing theoretically: I didn’t have an imperative to explain how
and why Gormley’s work, occupying that particular space, provoked such a singular
reaction. I just knew there’d been a reaction. I did subsequently write about the installa-
tion, shoehorning my experience into a novel that had as its title Another Place (later
altered by my publisher to A Dark Place to Die), and which had themes of identity and
displacement running through the subtext. I didn’t know it then, but writing around and
about Another Place in a commercial milieu was preparing me for a later, analytical ap-
proach, in which Gormley’s work became the creative gateway to an exploration of the
psycho-geography of Liverpool, my home town, focused on a specific aspect of that psycho-geography – slavery – which I came to believe had been largely subsumed within an overbearing micro-nationalism. Earlier in this exegesis, I discussed the locally overweening cultural influence and power of Liverpool’s self-styled ‘Scouse Nation’.

As someone embedded culturally in this multi-layered maze of micronationhood, I found Gormley became for me what Birnbaum describes as a phenomenological “pathfinder” (1996, p.4).

Conceived initially as an installation sited at Cuxhaven, Germany, Another Place reprises many themes explored in earlier work by Gormley: the human’s place in nature, the nature of interior and exterior space, time, place and decay. Another Place carries with it Gormley’s notion that “sculpture is, in essence, a stone stood on end, still and silent, the mark of human presence and action, a sort of witness in time”’ (Caiger-Smith, p7).

I question the notion that retinal response is the only channel of communication in art, and the notion that objects are discrete entities. I want the work to activate the space around it and engender a psycho-physical response, allowing those in its field of influence to be more aware of their bodies and surroundings

(Gormley quoted by Birnbaum, 1996, p.2)

Gormley takes care not to confine his work by tying it too closely to location (although location often plays a deeply significant role in his exterior projects), yet, as with Angel...
of the North (1998) – an artwork difficult to think of separated from its site in north-eastern England – Another Place found its spiritual and intellectual home in Liverpool, a process containing strong echoes of the importance of location in Heidegger’s definition of “space”:

a space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary. [Further] [s]pace is in essence that for which room has been made, that which has been let into its bounds. That for which room is made is always granted and hence is joined, that is gathered, by virtue of a location, that is by such a thing as the bridge. Accordingly, spaces receive their being from locations and not from “space” (Heidegger, 1969)

That relocation from Cuxhaven, in tandem with Gormley’s oft-stated phenomenological approach which encourages/seeks further definition by the observer, was fundamental in fostering the certainty that contained within Another Place were as yet indefinable, yet utterly concrete, ideas about Liverpool and slavery. Here was a practical demonstration of a Heideggerian space being redefined by its location. There is a tangible symbiotic relationship between Another Place and Crosby Beach, which had not existed prior to that space being utilised in this way. Both Another Place and the beach had previously existed, yet their coming together produced a “being” that had not. And this new being, this new space, contained latent power unforeseen by artist or patron. Another Place, the figures, variously covered/uncovered by sand and sea, their surfaces ravaged by rust, crowded by barnacles and draped in urban detritus, are redolent of the latter stages of an

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archaeological dig (perhaps not incidentally, Gormley’s first degree was in Archaeology). So firmly anchored now in this particular place is this installation that it is difficult to believe the iron figures are not totems of some long-forgotten Liverpool tribe—which, in the context of The Last Slave Ship, they are. In Another Place, Gormley, raised in a strict Catholic environment, has made a physical representation of guilt and witness that could not be sited in a more apt environment. On Crosby beach, the iron figures of Another Place contemplate the same waterway which saw 5000 slaving voyages (Rediker, 2000, p.86) begin and end. It is the location which completes this work. In Liverpool, Another Place effortlessly achieves Gormley’s intended activation of the space around it and, in that activation, forces the desired psycho-physical response both to the iron figures and, crucially, to the location. Although there are multiple texts which feed The Last Slave Ship, it is Another Place which contains the creative key to unlocking the subject. Another Place is not only the first of the creative tonal signifiers which underpin The Last Slave Ship, it is by some margin the most bountiful in terms of the variety of exploratory creative pathways it accesses. Teasing out the intellectual threads that connect this infinitely pregnant text (in tandem with those others identified here) to Liverpool’s slaving legacy, is the task of this thesis.

Given Liverpool’s history, any reading of Another Place includes the possibility that these rusting contemplative figures can play a role as witnesses to that history – a revision of Benjamin’s reading of Klee’s Angelus Novus (1920). Here I am confining the definition of “witness” to the idea that Gormley’s installation provides a tangible connection to the Liverpool/slavery nexus: a connection which (unlike Benjamin’s Angelus
Novus) can, through the creative work generated in this research, make a small contribution towards redress. The cold facts around Liverpool and slavery have notably failed to remedy social and racial injustices of the kind outlined by researchers Boyle & Charles (2012) in their damning statistical dissection of the continuing institutionalised invisibility of Liverpool’s black community. Further evidence of this failure of existing forms of “witness” has been detailed in Chapter 1. With this in mind, the connection between Gormley’s artwork, in this place of all places – artwork that has never been expressly linked with slavery, either by the artist or by critics – and the city’s mournful history is both palpable and worthy of investigation. The gnomic, endlessly interpretable title only adds to the certainty that Another Place would not contain the same resonances sited elsewhere. Only in Liverpool does Another Place achieve Heideggerian transcendence through location. Only in Liverpool does Another Place begin to offer a way to express the inexpressible and only in Liverpool does Another Place speak so effectively. Gormley’s work has supplied a template of intent, if not execution. Another Place is not a memorial, it is not an illustration of loss, it is not another concrete representation of slavery as being “then”, but is, emphatically, the key tonal signifier to this thesis.

2.2 Material thinking

The certainty that Another Place contains an as yet unarticulated “something” which can contribute to the dialogue around the Liverpool slave trade was not entirely instinc-
tive. The recognition of that property (within Another Place) was, instead, grounded in decades of Paul Carter’s “material thinking” in which initial reflexive

Figure 15a Ingres Drawing (unaided) and Figure 15b Ingres Drawing (aided).

responses to potential tonal signifiers are examined, and subsequently discarded or retained after filtration through previously successful, ingrained research practice. There are, in practice-led research, opportunities to access texts which lie beyond language. In the process that forms this exegesis, I am compelled to explain concepts that arise from creative non-linguistic sources, the creators of which have often taken care to avoid spelling out a specific meaning. This desire to nail down a “correct” answer to non-linguistic texts can, and often does, result in texts that creak under the dead weight of forcing unfamiliar and half-digested words into the dialogue between art and viewer. The Last Slave Ship makes a conscious effort to focus on non-literary artefacts which require the kind of embedded, reflexive knowledge found in the research of English artist,

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David Hockney. Writing in *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (2001), Hockney outlined his astonishment, and dawning disbelief, at the accuracy and quality of sketches by the artist, Ingres. Hockney, an artist with a vast tranche of high-level experience and achievement behind him, and with a deep understanding of drawing and technique, came to believe that Ingres (and other Old Masters) used *camera obscura* technology to achieve their seemingly effortless results. Hockney then set about proving this hypothesis by a series of experiments. Bolt (2006) defines Hockney’s identification of the question and his subsequent practice-led research investigation as an example of Heidegger’s “handlability”. She notes that:

> his insights demonstrate a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice. This form of tacit knowledge provides a very specific way of understanding the world, one that is grounded in material practice or (to borrow Paul Carter’s term) “material thinking” rather than in conceptual thinking (p.5).

The professional artist/practitioner is accustomed through practice to “material thinking”, and to researching and observing in a non-linear tradition. Hockney’s decades of practice equipped him to make research progress through “handlability.” and in precisely the same way that Hockney knew the difference between drawings produced by Ingres using technological aids and those produced freehand, I “know” that *Another Place* is engaged in a dialogue with Liverpool and slavery. Of course, this assumed knowledge is open to alternate readings, depending upon the background of those reading the texts.

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However, that a multiplicity of equally valid possible interpretations exists is not something that dilutes knowledge produced in this way: that is how tonal signifiers work. Flexibility of response is crucial, as is accrued knowledge. “We know and accept that meaning is contextual and largely created by the audience, but that context has to come from somewhere” (Frost, 2016), and at least part of that somewhere comes from interpretations (of texts) by seasoned practitioners equipped with Bolt’s “very specific sort of knowing”. For tonal signifiers to function, they must have informed interpreters able to speak their language.

In a conversation with art critic E.H. Gombrich (Hutchinson et al, 1995, p.12), Gormley identifies his three-dimensional work as being one way in which we can express “things which cannot be articulated”. In his desire to “start where language ends” (p.12), to communicate not only his own consciousness but that of the viewer, Gormley is reaching for a specifically integrated receptive purpose: “that there is the potential for [the viewer’s] experience to be as intense as mine was and equally subjective” (1995, p19). Gormley talks about his figures as “being, not doing, and they are waiting. They have time, we have consciousness, and they are waiting for the viewer’s thoughts and feelings” (Farndale, 2012). The suggestion that the viewer’s ownership of creative work is as crucial as that of the artist grants permission to use the works as one of the sources from which to produce a new vision, to perform an intervention, or to use Another Place as a component of such an intervention. The Gormley pieces evoke a multitude of place-specific meanings and, of all the meanings and interpretations of those evocations,
the most resonant, and paradoxically the least discussed, is the relationship to Liverpool’s history of slavery.

2.3: Absences

As noted by Benjamin (in Arendt, 1968 p.255), “in every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it.” This particular attempted intervention into the Liverpool slavery narrative takes the form of a novel, The Last Slave Ship, a contemporary narrative of race-hate crime and civil unrest which parallels a campaign of disobedience and sacrifice aboard the final (fictional) slave trading voyage from Liverpool in 1809.

The Last Slave Ship is an artistic exploration of a neglected field. It sets out to be a socially engaged, avowedly polemical intervention into the flawed narrative of Liverpool’s slaving legacy, a legacy rendered mute by immersion in two centuries of a dominant (white) culture of amnesia. The Last Slave Ship is intended to interpose an alteration in the landscape of the social and cultural response to the Liverpool slavery legacy. The intent in The Last Slave Ship is to provoke a cultural memory response which reanimates a forgotten narrative. In other words, the integrity of the art takes precedence over the political content of that art. The Last Slave Ship is first and last an artwork and must be judged on that basis. In her analysis of the ways in which site-specific art conceived and exhibited in wartime Sarajevo both commented on, and shaped response to, cultural memory, Asja Mandic observes that:
In Sarajevo, the use of the ruin as a metaphor for the fate of the city and its citizens opens into a process of cultural memory directed towards a particular location returning to presence, and thereby the unrecognised becomes discovered and recognised, the unrepresentable becomes represented and re-established as meaningful.

(Mandic, 2011, p.732)

One of the aims of The Last Slave Ship has been to take the process outlined by Mandic (of “recognition” and “re-establishment”) and apply it to a Liverpool slaving narrative repositioned as a narrative of ruination. The siting of (the variety of) creative work discussed by Mandic, and produced and exhibited in a (Sarajevo) battleground in an effort to represent the discarded narratives caused by conflict, has clear parallels with Liverpool’s Atlantic slave narrative. In both Sarajevo and Liverpool, what is being discussed is absence: an absence firstly of recognition and then the consequent absence of meaning caused by that very lack of recognition. Identifying this absence as a critical beginning for The Last Slave Ship was an important initial step along the creative pathway. Less clear was how to frame the idea of absence. Gormley again acted for me as a pathfinder with Bed (1981), an early major work which prompted me to consider ways in which absence could be creatively articulated.

BED started as a drawing. I lay on the floor and my wife drew around me. I made this silhouette into a contour map, making an approximation of the volume of my
body divided into two identical halves, mirror images of each other. The piece is roughly the same size as a king-sized double bed. I began a programme of eating that lasted three-and-a-half months, during which I ate my own volume in bread (Gormley, 2015).


As with the human-shaped cavities which constitute the central motif of Bed, this research was prompted by an absence: namely that one aspect of my family racial history was entirely missing. The negative space carved from the ‘mattress’ of 8,640 slices of bread, Bed (1981), is one of the first of many of Gormley’s works which use absence as
a means of expression. The narrative of the art depends for its power on the tension between absence and presence. Like Tracey Emin’s confessional *My Bed* (1998, fig 17), an installation that contains strong echoes of *Bed*, the artist compels us to consider that which is not there. In Emin’s account of the creation of *My Bed*, she recalls returning from the bathroom to see what she had left: “I got up and took a bath and looked at the bed and thought, ‘Christ, I made that’” (Mead, 2015). Intensely personal though *My Bed* is, it is the absence (of the artist) which is the primary source of its wider poetic profundity and power: the shock of the newly seen. Much of Gormley’s work subsequent to *Bed* has a similarly paradoxically tangible absence at its centre quite literally, in the case of the many projects which feature casts made from the artist’s own body.

The lead or iron figures once contained a living, breathing body: for the work to exist, Gormley, a profoundly claustrophobic individual, had to undergo a tortuous process of confinement – bound in plaster, immobile, helpless – before being, eventually, released. This tension between absence (in the completed work) and implied presence (in the construction of that work) is one of the elements which contribute to the timelessness apparent in Gormley’s best output. The invitation to consider that which is not there is fundamentally linked to the structure of *The Last Slave Ship*.

The particular ‘negative space’ which launched *The Last Slave Ship* was the profound cultural silence formed around racial history and politics in Liverpool, a silence that has proven to be stubbornly resistant to liberal shifts in the wider British cultural dialogue on race. Chief among the drivers of this silence is a self-propagated peculiarity of localised identity which “renders the city and its white population beyond the reach of civilizing discourses on racial progress – that is, liberal antiracism – understood to obtain in the rest of contemporary Britain” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p.341-342). I, like most of the white Liverpool population identified by Nassy-Brown, had been immersed in an aggressively defensive culture in which any meaningful dialogue around the deeply flawed, but essentially still intact, paradigm of slavery as a post-colonial history of otherness, remained mired in stasis and institutionalised stolidity blocking dissension from the currently accepted (and utterly inert) Liverpool slave narrative. An intervention is required through pertinent alternative, non-linguistic texts which, while lying determinedly outside language, nevertheless give voice to “things that cannot be articulated,
that are unavailable for discourse, which can be conveyed in a material way, but can
never be given a precise word equivalent for” (Gormley, 1995).

*The Last Slave Ship* is one response to this imperative to reposition the Liverpool racial
history as an ongoing contemporary colonial white narrative, as opposed to the inert
victor’s apologia currently bolted in place: an apologia regarded as largely untouchable
by white scholars and artists, thereby condemning the narrative to exist only as a black
narrative of victimhood rather than a white narrative of genocidal complicity and amne-
sia. Gilroy suggests that at least part of the problem lies precisely here: namely that in
the history of slavery being “somehow assigned to blacks . . . it becomes our special
property rather than part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a
whole” (1993, p.49). Providing an alternative angle of viewing of the slavery story is a
small but crucial step in relocating the wider narrative.
Chapter 3: Intervention

3.1 Tonal signifiers: Temporal Topography

In her opening to *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, Stoler (2013) isolates Derek Walcott’s poem, “Ruins of a Great House”, as the creative key and “clarion call” which unlocked her investigation into the “ruination” left by “imperial formations”. She identifies Walcott’s fiery reluctance to be bound by colonial timeframes, opting instead to position his discussion on slavery as current, not past, as the gateway to her enthusiasm. Stoler’s identification of Walcott’s poem as gateway closely parallels the function of *Another Place* in *The Last Slave Ship*, both in the use of creative artefact/texts as access to a specific process of making, and through the usefulness of those identified texts in connecting points in time. Both these qualities are present in all the tonal signifiers that feed this attempted intervention.

While Walcott’s poem is clear in its polemical intent, the key to *The Last Slave Ship* lies in less obviously related tonal signifiers. These signifiers lie in the nexus between the “material thinking” (discussed above), in which the past experience of the handling of materials becomes embedded research knowledge, and what might be labelled conceptual pattern recognition, which calls on past conceptual thinking to make the connection between a text and the possibilities of using that text. This practice-led approach enables the selection of tonal signifiers that can be trusted as the primary intuitive step in engaging with a project. It should be noted that “intuitive” here does not mean the tonal signifiers are randomly selected. Instead, tonal signifiers “demonstrate the double articulation
between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory” (Bolt, 2006, p.4).

These adjacent, tangential texts have become my own versions of Walcott’s “clarion call,” helping alter the Liverpool slavery narrative from one of denial and amnesia focused on the detritus/ruin artefacts fixed in the past, into one concerned with slavery as the “ongoing nature of imperial process” (Stoler, 2013). Many of the tonal signifiers caught up in the first creative pass through the subject are later discarded, or exiled to the margins, when examined closely for possibilities (by later material thinking). Some, however, survive this filtration system and become embedded as touchstone tonal signifiers, rich in meaning and possibility, allowing the door into the investigation to be opened more easily.

Another Place does not symbolise slavery. It is not an illustration. Gormley dissociates his output from this kind of simplistic linearity as crisply as possible: “I don’t want the work to be symbolic at all” (Gormley in Hutchinson et al, 1995, p.25). What is clear is that Another Place, in tandem with other key texts identified below, is heavy with themes of time and place, and acts as an aesthetic guide to what might be called the “temporal topography” of The Last Slave Ship, a phrase appropriated from Niko Papastergiadis (2010) writing on the possibility of a topographic approach to mapping art:

[the] aim of topography is not to recount stories of previous adventures, it is more
concerned with the tracks and traces that are still visible and portable.

(Papastergiadis 2010 p.12)

Papastergiadis has a number of further variations on what the term means to him, but “temporal topography” resonates profoundly with the idea of explicitly linking locality with time in order to make concrete the desire for historical redemption. It may also be worth defining here what kind of novelistic temporality is being used in *The Last Slave Ship*. Ricouer suggests that narrative fiction

imitates human action, not only in that, before referring to the text, it refers to our own preunderstanding of the meaningful structures of action and of its temporal dimensions but also in that it contributes, beyond the text, to reshaping these structures and dimensions in accordance with the imaginary configuration of the plot. Fiction has the power to “remake” reality and, within the framework of narrative fiction in particular, to remake real praxis to the extent that the text intentionally aims at a horizon of a new reality that we may call a world (Ricouer 2007, p.10)

If we accept that intervention is demanded into the existing Liverpool Atlantic slavery narrative and its consequences, the question becomes one of how? This research project, conscious of the need for practice-led research to use embedded “handlability” skills, is focused around a core creative text which seeks to knit together some of the themes that have emerged during the creative process. As with all practice-based creative research,
content emerges as the process develops, and recursively that content, in turn, informs and alters the project moment by moment. This circular pattern of material thinking, of research emerging from the creation of an artefact or artefacts, has been expressed as “a continual reflection upon that practice and on the resulting informing of that practice” (Candy, 2006, p.4).

The foundation to the creative process (in the case of The Last Slave Ship but also, I would argue, for almost all creative projects) is the identification and acquisition of a number of key tonal signifiers: the first of which here were the Carroll wedding photograph and Gormley’s Another Place. What follows is an analysis of the remaining tonal signifiers and their place in the making of The Last Slave Ship. Each of them contain markers that influence the approach to The Last Slave Ship: there are recurring themes of witnessing; of the fluidity of time; of the possibility of solidifying and embodying time; of our place in events; of helplessness; of testament. There are countless cross-references between the tonal signifiers and between the signifiers and what The Last Slave Ship developed into. What follows below can only be an approximation of the contribution made: the attempt to articulate Gormley’s “things which cannot be articulated” must, at least in some respects, be necessarily doomed. For the tonal signifiers to perform the functions described above, they must remain in part tantalisingly beyond the grasp of total understanding. Meaning, in the context of practice-led research, is not conditional upon dissection. There is an element of trust at work here.
3.2 Rachel Whiteread: House, Ghost

Standing on the threshold of any creative endeavour is a daunting proposition. Among the myriad of potential choices lying ahead, almost all of them could be the “wrong” choices. One of the primary roles tonal signifiers play is in allowing creatives to reduce those errors of judgement by helping foreshadow what the end result of a project might be through observation of how others have successfully achieved their aims. Although I’m a writer in this project, my tonal signifiers in The Last Slave Ship have not been found in literature. This was part deliberate, part instinctive. I came to writing professionally through visual media (namely graphics and illustration) and my creative nerve-

endings are stimulated more readily, particularly at the outset of a project, by non-literary artworks: painting, sculpture, film, sound. Additionally, I was keen not to allow stylistic literary considerations to straightjacket what was intended to be a wide-ranging project. Although slavery plays a significant part in the narrative, I did not want to write a slavery novel – this has already been done, more completely than I ever could by Barry Unsworth in *Sacred Hunger* (1992). I did not want to write a purely historical novel which conjures up a lost world: Patrick O’Brien’s colossal *Aubrey/Maturin* naval series (1969-1999) has rendered this pointless. I did not want to write an experimental novel. I *did*, however, want to create a complex, yet accessible, artwork centred around both the absence of acknowledgement and a very real temporal connection between past and present.

A primary concern in writing *The Last Slave Ship* was how to convey both the passage of time, and the solidity of the connections between moments in time in a single creative work, without becoming mired in expositional gymnastics – an argument that could be levelled at David Mitchell’s novel, *Cloud Atlas* (2004). Whiteread’s monumental, deceptively simple, *House* (1993) is an alternative, concrete realisation of this difficult aim and is an artwork which also played a significant role in granting me aesthetic and intellectual permission to write the ‘impossible’ ending of *The Last Slave Ship*. Specifically, this can seen most clearly on page 330 of the novel at the point where Benz first sees the *Uriel*: “He’s seeing it but the information refuses to permeate.”
The interior volumes of the family house had been solidified, and as the bricks were pulled away, sheer concrete walls imprinted with the idiosyncracies of 100 years of domestic use were revealed. . . . The social spaces that had once been privy to secrets and arguments and love and despair had been petrified, making amateur archaeologists of the onlookers, who could only reconstruct the past uses of each room and stairwell from the tiny fossilised fragments that were left, captured in the concrete like prehistoric mosquitoes in resin

(Mullins, 2004, p.52)

*House* appears to consist of a concrete cast of the interior of a Victorian terraced house, the skin of which has then been stripped away to reveal in (apparently) solid form the negative space contained within. In so doing, *House* offers a haunting evocation of the simultaneous tangibility and ephemeral nature of time. *House* is Papastergiadis’s “temporal topography” made literally concrete. At first glance, *House* appears to be a solid. It is, in reality, a carefully constructed facsimile: a hollow concrete shell, the outer layer of which has been cast directly from a real house. This tension, between apparent solidity and actual construction, is crucial to understanding how cleverly *House* invites the viewer to reflect upon the solidity of the connection between points in time and, by making that connection so emphatically and simply *there*, also forces us to bear mournful witness to the passing of time. This theme is one that Whiteread has returned to again and again, not least in her design for the Vienna *Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial* (2000, fig 19), in which Whiteread’s “empty spaces” make solid an inverted library in which the books remain unreadable, the doors permanently locked.
In the case of *House*, the artist changes the properties of matter by reminding us that what we see as space has shape, contains memory. Whiteread notes that her work contains “the residue of years and years of use” (Chilvers, 2009). Work such as *House* and *Ghost* (2009) – and, in fact, almost all of Whiteread’s output – forces the viewer towards quiet contemplation of this temporal residue. Talking about *Ghost*, in which Whiteread made a concrete cast of the interior space of a small (9ft x 11ft x 10ft) Victorian living room, the artist describes this process as wanting to “mummify the air in the room”. There is in *Ghost* more than a hint of the sarcophagus. Despite the appearance of solidity, *Ghost*, like *House*, is a hollow construct: walls within walls creating an implied
interior. Presented with the monolithic embodiment of emptiness, we are compelled to consider what happened in that space. We are made to see something that had not been visible before. We become proactive with, and affected by, our observation of time. In reflecting on House, I was able to see a possible way to strip away the skin surrounding the narrative I was interested in accessing, in order to reveal something previously hidden from view. It is an oversimplification (since Whiteread’s work as tonal signifiers has allowed me to bring in nuanced references around time, loss, memory and space) but still, at its core, the temporal and physical impossibility of Benz’s rescue by Kweme in The Last Slave Ship began with House.

3.3 Erdem Gunduz: Standing Man (One & Other)

On June the 17th 2013, Erdem Gunduz arrived at Taksim Square in Instanbul during protests against the Erdogan government. Gunduz, a Turkish performer/artist, took up a standing position in front of the Ataturk Cultural Centre and remained motionless there from 6pm on the 17th, until 2am on the 18th of June, attracting in the process a large number of protestors to join him in silent contemplation. As the crowds grew, fuelled by social media, the Standing Man (as the project/protest piece became known) became an effective rallying point for the anti-government protest. Standing Man embodies the concept of contemplation as a tool of resistance. On seeing Standing Man, I had two immediate, if obvious, reactions. Firstly, this was Klee’s Angelus Novus made flesh and, secondly, the piece contained distinct echoes of Gormley’s Another Place.
Like *Another Place*, Gunduz’s project/protest requires a location rich in layered meanings, the passing of time, and the idea of silence as a tool, for it to resonate fully. As with *Another Place* and several other of the tonal signifiers, *Standing Man* suggested several elements that fed directly into *The Last Slave Ship*, the most obvious of which was the concept of bearing witness. However, *Standing Man*, unlike *Another Place*, was also an overtly political act recalling the inventiveness of acts of resistance aboard the slave ships. Standing still, through Gunduz, became an effective form of public protest. In *The Last Slave Ship*, Kweme’s character embarks on a series of subtle yet powerful acts of rebellion which force Salt, the *Uriel*’s captain, to respond. To recall this signifier in the text, there are times when Salt feels Kweme’s silent reproach. Examples of this can be seen on pages 289, 302, and earlier (page 89) when Salt senses he is being
watched by “a solitary fellow on the beach.” While this instance is also connected tonally with Gormley’s iron figures (the beach the one where Another Place is sited), it echoes Kweme’s (and Gunduz’s) unwavering witness. As a tonal signifier, *Standing Man* helped develop the narrative of resistance and I began to look for works that corresponded to *Standing Man* as potential sources of influence. In *One & Other* (2009),

![Standing Man](https://www.artichoke.uk.com/events/one_other/)

Figure 21. *One and Other*, (2009) Antony Gormley, retrieved from http://www.artichoke.uk.com/events/one_other/

Antony Gormley offered the *Fourth Plinth* in Trafalgar Square, London as a (literal) platform for 2400 individuals to occupy in hourly rotation. As with *Standing Man*, here there is further deliberate blurring both of the definition of what constitutes a sculpture, and of the ambiguous role of the artist-as-interlocutor. The intersection between the polemic and the poetic in these works is tangible. Not incidentally, given the context in
which this artwork is being viewed, the plinth in One & Other is surrounded by protective safety netting which unnervingly recalls the suicide netting installed aboard the Liverpool slave ships.

Silent political protest/performance is nothing new. Tank Man (1989) of Tiananmen Square, the anti-lynching Silent Parade (1917) in New York, the Belarus anti-government Silent Protest (2011), Smith and Carlos’ Olympic Black Power Salute (1968), even the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc (1963) protesting the persecution of Buddhists in South Vietnam all, in varying degrees, recognised and harnessed the power contained within silence. This power is something recognised and expanded upon by Kweme in The Last Slave Ship. Her understanding of the disturbing nature of silence, her grasp that communication does not have to be verbal, is crucial to the psychological campaign she wages against Salt. There are reverberative echoes too in the contemporary section of when Benz is urged repeatedly to speak in order to help the investigation (in Chapter Thirteen, pages 60-63), and in the opposing pleas from his peers not to speak. This tension traps Benz in an impossible situation in which not speaking becomes in itself a threat, in exactly the same manner in which Gunduz became a threat to the Erdogan administration.
3.4 Terence Davies: Of Time and the City

With one notable exception, there is no cinema of Liverpool. Despite its pre-eminence as film location of choice in the UK, there are few cinematic artefacts set in, let alone engage with, the city itself. Even Richard Lester moved The Beatles to London. In cinematic terms, Liverpool has instead become a chameleon location backdrop standing in for a fantasy New York (Fantastic Beasts, 2016), Gotham City (The Dark Knight, 2008), Sherlock’s Baker Street (Sherlock Holmes, 2009), the 1920 Paris Olympics (Chariots of Fire, 1981), Harry Potter’s playground (Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, 2010) . . . anywhere, in fact, but here. It is hard not to see echoes in this of the localised preference in choosing fictional narratives over reality. For a city with such cultural heft, with such tang, it is astonishing that Terence Davies is unique in being a filmmaker who places Liverpool at the centre of his stories. The Last Slave Ship is an attempt to re-imagine and revisit a time and place both physically and temporally lost, and to reconcile a desire to both excoriate and redeem. Davies’ Of Time and the City (2008) stands alone in indicating ways in which these kinds of private/public tensions might be articulated and, in the process, harness them in the service of an altered view.

We love the place we hate, then hate the place we love. We leave the place we love, then spend a lifetime trying to regain it… Come closer now and see your dreams.

Come closer now and see mine.

(Davies, 2008)
In a time-scarred voice described by Phillip Bradshaw as “rich and dark and fruity as Dundee Cake laced with mescaline” (2008, para.3), Davies invites us into his deeply personal memoir. This phrase, “come closer”, has been appropriated and incorporated into the novel text of The Last Slave Ship, as a repeated motif (on pages 15, 21, 46, and many other instances through to the final chapter). The precise meaning is deliberately unclear, or, perhaps, deliberately layered. As with Of Time and the City itself, the intention is to create poetry from collage. Of Time and the City is part eulogy for Davies’ lost youth, part celebration of a city that now exists only in the film-maker’s memory. It is an elegiacal collaged film–poem composed entirely of newsreel and documentary.

Figure 22. Of Time and the City, (2008) Terence Davies.
footage interwoven with popular (The Hollies, Elvis Presley, The Beatles) and classical (Mahler, Sibelius, John Tavener) music.

The narration (spoken by Davies throughout) references TS Eliot, Shelley, A E Housman, Christopher Marlowe, James Joyce and Anton Chekhov. Lingering imagery, slow motion, and a concentration on the apparently banal, invites the viewer to look for a deeper meaning that lies below the apparent surface. *Of Time and the City* successfully appropriates public Liverpool social history and re-sites that material firmly in the personal.

Davies has been in this territory several times before. *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) both borrowed heavily from Davies’ upbringing in 1950’s Liverpool and all three “Liverpool” films rely for their power on the force of memory. "What interests me about cinema is that you have that linear narrative but you move in and out of memory. And memory is cyclical: it prompts other memories” (Davies, 2011). Memory and time aren’t linear in Davies’ work; events in the past are no less fresh, no less potent, than the present. And, while his films are bathed in sentiment and melancholia, Davies is clear-eyed about the emotional and physical brutality of remembered events. For Davies, the past is not a foreign country.

*Distant Voices, Still Lives* and *The Long Day Closes* are works of fiction and, although critically acclaimed, Davies struggled to get subsequent projects completed after *The Long Day Closes*. *Of Time and the City* – cheap, quick, and free of outside constraint –
was a child born of frustration: a construct of circumstance and necessity. Forced back
to a more limited palette, Davies sought an alternate view of the past by viewing the
Liverpool of his youth and his emergent sexuality through images ransacked from the
accepted story. His collage of music, image, word and sound is a masterpiece of appro-
priation, a transformation of found material: an artwork far greater than the sum of its
parts.

*Of Time and the City* was not selected as a tonal signifier because of its subject matter.
That is a bonus – the locale and subject adding a layer of resonance – but it is not why
the film has made the cut. What marks out *Of Time and the City* as influential in this
specific project is Davies’ ability to seize existing material and make it his own. In this
spirit *The Last Slave Ship* appropriates evocative elements of Davies’ spoken word nar-
rative. The novel takes from Davies’ the freedom to collage time and image in the ser-
vice of a creative totality in which fragments are stitched together to form a differing
vision. Hillsborough, Heysel, the Toxteth riots, the “new” Liverpool rising on the back
of European investment, the Middle Passage, the invisibility of the Liverpool black
community: these are all public elements. The intention is that, in the same way that
Davies does with newsreel footage, *The Last Slave Ship* makes something new from
what is already out there. At the same time, that something becomes a personal vision:
in this case a realisation of anger (as in the destruction visited upon an amnesiac Liver-
pool – a clear example being the shooting down of a police helicopter, itself emblematic
of the city’s Liver Bird identity, on page 291) and the possibility of redemption (when
Benz is saved, impossibly, by Kweme on page 328 of the novel). By using *Of Time and

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The City as a tonal signifier, the hope is to access some of the elusive transcendence-through-appropriation achieved by Davies.

3.5 Adam Magyar: Stainless

The original video clip of a train arriving at Berlin’s Alexanderplatz U-Bahn station that constitutes Adam Magyar’s (2011) time-sliced video/photography work, Stainless, was originally 12-seconds in duration. Shooting using customised high-speed cameras, Magyar expanded this clip through digital manipulation into 24 minutes of high-definition footage to transform the footage into an “altered state” view of the everyday, which prompts us to re-evaluate our idea of time and movement. Joshua Hammer, writing about Magyar, makes the suggestion that Magyar’s work:

bears echoes of Einstein’s hypothesis that ‘distant simultaneity’ – the idea that two spatially separated events occur at the same time – is not absolute, but depends on the observer’s frame of reference. (2014, para.31)

Magyar’s work engages with two predominant discussions: ideas about the fluidity of time, and, through altering our relationship with time, finding the beauty within the banal. As with Rachel Whiteread, Magyar invites us to discover the poetry of time by working with imagery and ideas that focus on the potency of (near) silence and (relative) stillness. Stainless demonstrates how elastic time can be, dissolving our certainties...
in the hypnotic poetry of the moment. There’s a trippy coolness about Magyar’s work that stands in contrast to the determinedly humanistic Gormley, Whiteread, Gunduz and Davies. Yet this aesthetic distance allows us to restate and reconsider some observations about human existence – “we are all one”– that, handled with more sentiment, might blur into the anodyne. Magyar’s subjects, in their marginal movements, their unblinking stares, become tinged with dread: a sense of foreboding runs through Stainless, its soundtrack of slowed-down train noise redolent of avant-

Figure 23. Stainless, (2011), Adam Magyar. Screen grab: Einstein’s Camera

garde electronic composition. Those random subjects are simultaneously witnessed and witness. They are “in a moment”, quite literally, their image captured for a fleeting slice of time and then expanded for detailed examination. Magyar’s commuters are mostly static: the only real exception is the comparatively jarring movement of a young girl weaving, running, along the platform. Her relative speed not only provides a vertiginous

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lurch as we realise how small an amount of time Stainless occupies by demonstrating how immobile is everyone else, but also through revealing how much beauty and poetry is lost in every split-second. These are usually forgotten fragments, microscopic movements slowed to the point of rediscovery, re-examination. Magyar’s power is one of reclamation and he re-presents these fragments as an invitation to us to consider our place, not just in space, but in time. The banal, Magyar declares, is only labelled as such because we haven’t been looking with the right eyes. His role, and the role Stainless plays as tonal signifier for The Last Slave Ship, is to grant a kind of permission (by highlighting how fragile is our grasp of time) to play with time, most notably in the climactic scenes. This is not without inherent problems. Articulating ideas around the poetry within the banal can skate perilously close to pretension. But that doesn’t render efforts in that direction futile. Far from it. If we are to engage with any discussion of ‘the poetic within the prosaic’ then we must be brave enough to risk sounding portentous. Like Davies, Magyar asks us to “come closer and see your dreams”. Unlike Davies, Magyar does not invite us to consider his dreams: Magyar’s vision is far less personal than that of Davies, but in that area of the creative Venn diagram in which they intersect, both produce powerful arguments in which, contained within the apparently mundane, larger truths lie concealed. In specific, prosaic terms, the Magyar influence can be found most baldly articulated in the slow motion death of Caldoni in which he experiences one “last, eternal, blissfully transcendent moment”, his “anguish extinguished in a single instant of absolute, perfect, clarity” (pg293).
In *The Last Slave Ship*, this motif re-occurs; it’s purpose is to reinforce the central thesis that time is perception. Look at this more clearly: consider this from another angle. As with *Stainless*, those moments in *The Last Slave Ship* slowly build (or, at least, this is the intention) the idea that Kweme’s and Benz’s narratives run in parallel. *Stainless* allowed me to reconsider the artistic approach to time in a less linear fashion, and to see time as a construct open to re-examination. It gave me freedom in *The Last Slave Ship* to make the jarring leap from what (until the conclusion) is a narrative seemingly anchored in what we regard as acceptable temporal “reality”, and the portrayal of that reality.

3.6 Tokihiro Sato: *Breath-graph no.21.*

Tokihiro Sato’s open shutter light paintings (such as *Breath-graph no.21*, 1988) follow the (unseen) artist’s movements across an environment, leaving behind an ethereal “light map”. Sato’s use of long exposure to paint with light is nothing new: photographer/artists such as Man Ray, Gjon Mili, Frank and Lillian Galbraith, Picasso, Matisse, Jack Delano, Eric Staller and others have been experimenting in this way since Etienne-Jules Marey and Georges Demeny created the *Station Physiologique* in 1882. Some, like the Galbraiths and Marey/Demeny, produced their light paintings as by-products of research into movement while others (Picasso, Man Ray, Matisse) simply saw the technique as a pleasingly ephemeral fad. In the work of Mili and Delano, light paintings emerged from their practice in photographic journalism. In the 1970’s artists...
such as Eric Staller and Dean Chamberlain began to conflate light painting and conceptual performance art ideas, and it is from this environment that Sato emerged. What, perhaps, differentiates Sato from the majority of other light artists is that his intention is not primarily decorative. Instead, Sato “uses the lights to show traces of his movements and the time and space where he existed” (Ono, 1999, my italics). In this temporal tracking, Sato leaves behind multiple wavering streaks of light – ghosts – which, trapped in his colossal silver gelatin prints, become solid, real. Clearly, in this respect, Sato is working in similar territory to Rachel Whiteread – indeed, Sato drifted into pho-

tography as a medium via sculpture – although it is fair to say that Sato remains more concerned with the aesthetic than does Whiteread. Sato is “the most recent inheritor” of the Japanese “tradition of preference for indirect light and shadowed spaces in the arts in Japan” (Fouser, 2015). Whiteread is the more rigorous artist, the one more concerned with the reading of the artwork than with the aesthetic impact, but dismissing Sato as a traditional crowd-pleaser is to miss the profundity of his light ghosts. Defining exactly the role as tonal signifiers that Sato’s photographs play in the construction of The Last Slave Ship is difficult, partly because of the nebulous nature of the art. Perhaps it is felt most keenly in those sequences that take place on board The Uriel during Kweme’s campaign of resistance and psychological “warfare” where the connections between Sato’s ghosts and the ghosts (apparently) summoned by Kweme are explicit. Reducing it to this, however, does not tell the full story. The Last Slave Ship is ghost-populated: a narrative drenched in traces of the past intruding into the present. As a representative of imagery and creative process which seeks to realise this, Sato’s work is perfect.
Chapter 4: Angels

4.1 Angelus Novus Revisited

This final chapter moves away from the identification of singular artefacts and discusses how the idea of angels became a vital component of the creative armoury brought to bear on *The Last Slave Ship*. Angels predate Judaism, Christianity and Islam and have their genesis in the “messenger spirits” (Rees, 2013) of shamanistic and pagan tribes as far afield as Asia and the Americas. A vast literature, theological and secular, details the multiplicity of roles assigned to angels. Angels are warriors: the Archangel Michael, depicted in Buonamico Buffalmacco’s frieze in Pisa’s Campo Santo (c. 1315–1336), is shown as a muscular warrior wielding a sword. Angels see all: in *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes Uriel as “the sharpest sighted spirit of all in Heaven” (Milton, p24).


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Angels are representatives of order: \textit{Ma`at}, an early Egyptian ‘angel’ (depicted as a winged messenger), and his/her cross-theology descendants, \textit{Nabu} and \textit{Uriel}, represent “the spirit of Truth and the principle of harmony or order” (Rees, 2013, p.16). Angels are survivors finding ways to exist in the secular age: from George Bailey’s avuncular guardian angel Clarence in Capra’s \textit{It’s a Wonderful Life} (1946) to Banksy’s flack-jacket-wearing angels (2003) and policemen sprouting wings. Angels are to be feared:

![Wings of Desire](image)


Rilke, who saw angels as terrifying (Snow, 2001, p.), also believed them to be both agents of (his own) immortality and guarantors of a glorious future.
But common to all manifestations has been one overarching central idea: that for angels to be defined as angels they must act as communicators between one realm and another. Angels are devices we have created to link space and time, and to explain the inexplicable. “The angel is now here, now there, with no time-interval between” said Aquinas (English, 2015, p.?) and it is this aspect of angels in particular that is pertinent to The Last Slave Ship.

In Wings of Desire (1989), Wim Wenders’ cinematic essay on pre-unification Berlin, angels look over the citizens, stand guardian, observe. Cassiel, one of Wenders’ angel protagonists who observe details in the lives of the decayed city’s population, articulates their “mission” as being “to assemble, testify [to], preserve” reality. The most evocative frame of Wings of Desire shows Bruno Ganz’s angel, Damiel (complete with wings), standing motionless on the very corner of a high building overlooking the city. The shot is closely echoed in Gormley’s Event Horizon (fig. 27, 2006) which featured 31 figures perched on the edges of London buildings. The marginally bowed head, the arms hanging loose, the sense of loss, of witness and of melancholy suffuse both. It is not such a leap from Event Horizon and Wings of Desire to make a case that the iron figures of Another Place are angels. Gormley, when developing the work that would lead to the Angel of the North, re-iterated angels as being “the idea of a mediator between one level of existence and another” (1995, p. 25). Of use to me in the creation of The Last Slave Ship was Gormley’s focus on a specific role played by angels: our realities depend on our perspective but through angels (or the idea of angels) there is the possibility of finding a way towards understanding another level of existence: the past. Benjamin, a
profound influence on Gormley, shares this idea of angels: of an impassioned but impotent observer angel being continually forced by the storm of “progress” to look back in horror at past catastrophes. For Benjamin the past is still with us: it is “one level of existence” and the present is another. Where Benjamin differs profoundly from Gormley is that his angel is emphatically a helpless observer. While containing distinct elements of regret and impotence, Gormley’s *Angel of the North* stands in stark counterpoint to Benjamin’s reading of Klee’s *Angelus Novus*. *Angel of the North*, “a transitional object between the industrial and information ages” (Gormley, 2009),

Figure 27. *Event Horizon*, Antony Gormley (2006). Image: Alamy SP.
simultaneously bears mournful witness to a (largely) lost past: the heavy industry of North East England; and, with wings canted forward a deliberately embracing five degrees, carries the suggestion of optimism for an uncertain future. Perhaps as counterbalance to this hint of hope – or, at least, consolation – while working on the project that would become *Angel of the North*, it is significant that Gormley also produced “the most helpless thing I have ever made” (Gormley, 2008). *Critical Mass II* (1995) consists of sixty life-size lead body forms (similar to the iron figures in *Another Place*) lying, crouching or suspended. Although since exhibited elsewhere, the work was conceived as a site-specific piece for a decaying former tram depot in Vienna.

Gormley consciously evoked Benjamin and the *Angelus Novus* when he described *Critical Mass II* as “a monument for something we hope will never happen” (Tillet, 2008).

*Critical Mass II* could be said to be the concrete representation of what Klee’s

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*[Image: antonygormley.com]*

Angelus Novus can see: the human debris piled in confusion, forgotten, discarded. Martin Caiger-Smith links Critical Mass II with Joseph Beuys’s The End of the Twentieth Century (1983-5) and, in Beuys’s sour commentary on the “fate of the individual in an over-determinist society of mass manipulation” (Caiger-Smith, 2010, p.83), it is easy to see why. Visual art is a conduit through which ideas about potential alternative discourses can be channelled. In Angel of the North, or Wings of Desire, their use is immediate and apparent, but contained within other tonal signifiers, both key and tangential, are ideas about angels that suggest pertinent angles of investigation. All echo

Figure 29. Joseph Beuys The End of the Twentieth Century (1983-5). Image: Tate Gallery, London
Another Place in its themes of witness, silence, and the importance of time; all play a fundamental role in establishing thematic content, suggesting narrative routes to explore, and as reminder of the task at hand – namely, the different ways in which it is possible to articulate the connection between past and present. Often these ideas revolve around the minutiae of everyday life – light traces on a stairwell, the smallest movements of Berlin commuters, faded municipal newsreel footage – but which, through being held up for closer examination in a different milieu, become raised to a kind of transcendent level in much the same way that the angels in Wings of Desire elevate the mundane details of everyday Berliners into a subject worthy of the divine.

Complex texts such as the tonal signifier ‘angels’ indicated above – conceptually rich, and demanding engagement in the articulation of ideas beyond language – are not plucked from thin air. Rather, they require a rigour of selection by instinct honed through practice: something remarkably similar to the “steadiness and clarity of mind” that Rees (2013) identified as a necessity for hearing angelic communiques. They are tangible waymarkers on the road between the polemic and the poetic, signposting the possibility of being able to “liberate the language imprisoned in a work” (Benjamin, p. 202). By allowing ourselves to access the powerful iconography contained within the various manifestations of angels (and by not restricting identification of angels to historic manifestations), we may not be as helpless in the face of history as Benjamin’s Angelus Novus suggests. By broadening the definition of angels to include artefacts not defined as such by their creators, yet replete with angelic power, it is possible for those artefacts to act as tonal signifiers (to enable viewers to connect past with present), and to help restore the possibility of a meaningful dialogue with an arrested history. Angels,
unable to act themselves, first remind us of past horror and then compel us, through re-
membering, to engage with that past in such a way as to alter the present narrative:

something close to what Daniel Poirion (1999) indicated when he wrote that “the art of
memory as defined by the theoreticians of eloquence must . . . come into play before the
art of writing” (p.37) and then demonstrated that theoretical eloquence himself in sug-
gest ing that “the miracle of literary writing is that it provides the empty skulls of the
past with the content of their thoughts” (p.34). Throughout the creative core text of The
Last Slave Ship, the aim has been to continue this alchemic process, to become the An-
gelus Novus made solid, to be part of a place-specific discussion that inverts Benjamin’s
premise of angelic helplessness. Another Place, like all the tonal signifiers outlined
here, serves as a reminder of the need for vigilance by insisting on bearing witness to
the ongoing marginalization of the city’s ‘invisible’ black community. Texts that act as
conduits to the past help us to more clearly hear Rees’ “angelic communiques” (2013).
In Liverpool, that communique invites us to consider that by sheltering behind a self-
serving defensive identity which locates civic memory on slavery (and contemporary
cultural responsibility for the memory of genocide) in the desiccated aridity of an insti-
tutionalised post-colonial narrative, Liverpool continues to act as an agent of ruination,
locked into a “brutally localised, excruciatingly white” (Nassy-Brown, 2000, p.341) cir-
cularity of denial. If there is to be a meaningful intervention into this decay, it is through
paying close attention to tonal signifiers, to listen for “angelic communiques” which
contain the possibility of redemption.

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Martin Ed Chatterton
4.2 Hearing the silence

Another crucial aspect in approaching research using tonal signifiers is the importance of remaining alert to the possibility of aesthetic and intellectual osmosis between disparate source material: for new angles of approach hidden from view. Listening for these connections, being aware of their potential value in making fresh approaches to entrenched positions, is something that arises naturally from research founded on practice.

Redemption seems, therefore, to be linked to the moment of illumination, which suddenly and unexpectedly gives us the capacity to hear the silence – to tune into the unarticulated and to hear what is in history deprived of words. Redemption starts by redeeming history from deafness. (Felman, 1999, p.211)

The task of a fully competent critical practice is not to make a whisper audible, nor to complete what the text leaves unsaid, but to produce a new knowledge of the text: one that explains the ideological necessity of its silences, its absences, its structuring incompleteness – the staging of that which it cannot speak. (Macherey, 1978, p. 119)

Rachel Spence, writing in the Financial Times, notes that after (literally) crawling her way through Gormley’s immense Model (2012), she found “a young attendant . . . reading Walter Benjamin’s Illuminations” (2012, para.11). Spence also observed that Model contains within it a “history of silence” (para.10), inevitably resonating when considering Another Place as witness. In the evocative silences of Benjamin, and the “un-
sayable” ideas contained in Gormley, what is omitted is every bit as important as what is included. Like Sato’s photographically preserved light traces, these silences and unarticulated ideas, exist as ghosts. In Sato’s work, what is not there (yet the traces of which can be clearly seen in the images) is the essence of the work itself. The concept of evocative silence is explored further in Shoshana Felman’s essay, *Benjamin’s Silence*, where she confines herself to analysis of “that element in Benjamin’s language and writing that, specifically, decisively remains beyond communication” (1999, p.201). She enlarges on this by quoting Benjamin:

> In all language and linguistic creations, there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated . . . It is the task of the translator to release in his [sic] own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work. (1999, p.202)

Benjamin, suggests Felman (1999, p.205), proposed that the skewed nature of conventional history has made it “impossible to tell a story”, when he states “it is as if something that seemed inalienable to us . . . were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences” (Benjamin, 1969, p.83). While Benjamin links this storytelling loss explicitly to the end of World War 1, the idea has equal merit when applied to other monstrous events, not least the Atlantic Slave Trade. In *The Storyteller*, Benjamin also makes the point that once WW1 ended, all that remained as witness was the “tiny, fragile human body” (1969, p.84). This sense that the human body is witness to atrocity is emphatically present in *Another Place*. In *The Storyteller* Benjamin also assigns authority to the
dead: “Death is the sanction of everything the storyteller has to tell” (1969, p.94). While Benjamin speaks to the importance and relevance of silences evoked linguistically, and Gormley addresses the same subject through the prism of meaning assigned to three-dimensional art, the overlap is clear. The past can only ever be a construct of our own limitations and a product of our narrow understanding of time: history only considered complete when seen from a single, limited, perspective. The matter and DNA of the past, and victims of past atrocity, are still with us and, indeed, “the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (Einstein, as cited in Dyson, 198, p.187). Benjamin also flirts with this idea of fluidity in time when Michael Lowy suggests that “what interests Benjamin is not ‘religion’ as such but the explosive force of the theological – messianism and the remembrance of past victims – against historical conformism” (2011, p 135). If the existing story of the Atlantic Slave Trade is written by the victors (the white population) then it is a given that, no matter how well-intentioned, the remembrance and reporting of this narrative will, in turn, be fatally flawed. Felman (1999, p. 210) notes that from a perspective of “victory”, the voice of the official history is “deafening”, suggesting that an effective counterpoint to cacophony might be silence. In this silence (or an interpretation of what silence here might mean), there is a way to describe the history of Liverpool’s involvement: one that accesses the unsayable and uses non-linguistic texts to more accurately convey the reality of both what happened and what is happening to contemporary Liverpool. The question then becomes one of how can silence be used as an effective tool in the articulation of historic reality and contemporary affect.
Chapter 5: Conclusion – The Intelligence of Materials

The tenuous notion of “sense” being a requirement of art is key to understanding the methodological paradox at play in searching for academic expression of the inexpressible. Development of The Last Slave Ship through the immersive nature of practice-led research was always going to be fraught with methodological tensions, especially since the aim of The Last Slave Ship was to create something different to what had gone before, to create an intervention into an uneasy narrative.

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, re-figuring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.

(Bhabha, 1994, p.10)

Bill Ashcroft calls the “borderline work”, identified above by Homi K Bhabha, an arena in which a “radically transformed sense of the relation between memory and future” (Ashcroft, 2014, p.07) is explored. This, in essence, is where The Last Slave Ship is sited, or, more accurately, where The Last Slave Ship hopes to be sited. “No full stops!” was the response by Stuart Hall when asked about the possibility of bringing narratives of displacement to an end (Hall, 1995, p.62), and this research is one small attempt to continue the Liverpool slavery displacement narrative and look at how that narrative can change. The Last Slave Ship is, ultimately, utopian. In the envisaging of a
completion of the circle, in which The Uriel slave ship appears through the smoke in a riot-torn contemporary Liverpool to rescue the drowning Benz, there is a suggestion of possibility, of re-staging the Liverpool slavery narrative as emphatically present in a city caught up in a culture of denial. The utopian ideal here is one of reconnection and redemption. Ashcroft found echoes of utopianism in the Caribbean limbo dance which, he suggests, “re-enacts the crossing of the Middle Passage in a continual reminder of memory, survival and cultural resurrection” (Ashcroft, 2014, p.12). The dancer “survives” an almost impossible movement and lives on.

The performance of memory is a constant reminder of a future horizon, a ‘return’ that performs each time the ‘rising’ of the slave body into a future marked not only by survival but also by renewal, hybridity, and hope. (Ashcroft, 2014, p.14)

These future horizons lie in a region most effectively accessed through practice-led research. The Last Slave Ship re-iterates the trauma at the heart of the Liverpool slavery narrative, but offers an alternative path forward by allowing the consideration of the possibility of reconnection with the past. The reappearance of the Uriel in contemporary Liverpool is designed to jolt. Nothing in the novel building to that point suggests this is where the story arc will end. The Last Slave Ship brings, as literally as possible, Liverpool’s slaving past into the heart of the present.

At the outset of this research the question was asked if, through the use of tonal signifiers, a fresh discourse could be accessed which concerned itself with Liverpool’s dessi-
inated slaving legacy. Any assessment of success or failure must concern itself with the outcome of the “material thinking” which produced *The Last Slave Ship*, and it is that aspect of the process which seems to me to be the most worthy of analysis. This research has been centred in a practice-led exploration of the themes uncovered in the course of the project, with the implied supposition being that new angles of attack could be found using this approach. Bolt attributes intelligence to materials: an intelligence best interpreted through the very handling of those materials. In other words, it is through practice informed by accrued and ingrained knowledge that the power contained within material can be developed.

Words may allow us to articulate and communicate the realisations that happen through material thinking, but as a mode of thought, material thinking involves a particular responsiveness to or conjunction with the intelligence of materials and processes in practice. Material thinking is the logic of practice. (Bolt, 2006, p.5).

Where this responsiveness of material thinking is at its most pregnant with possibility, most transformative for me is in the areas surrounding the use of what I call tonal signifiers as access points. Tonal signifiers often communicate in a way that lies beyond language – they mean something concrete, but that concrete “something” may not (and often does not) lend itself to precise articulation. Tonal signifiers are an example of “the intelligence of materials” in precisely the same way Hockney’s drawings were during his investigation. They generate “realizations that emerge out of the chaos of...
practice” (Bolt, 2004) with a crucial element of that realization being the chaos. During this research process, one of the most profound of these “realizations” was in identifying a sometimes startling circularity between the different materials identified as tonal signifiers and theoretical texts. At certain points, these two types of text reverberated between one another in ways that could not be preconceived, or arrived at via a purely theoretical approach. And it was not simply that these texts were reverberating between one another: in the most fruitful cases there emerged an enlargement of ideas and creative potential.

A potent example of this was the research that began with Benjamin’s *Angelus Novus* as primary building block in the initial underlying theoretical construction of *The Last Slave Ship*. Buck-Morss contrasted the *Angelus Novus* against a proposed design for the Porte Maillot (Paris) in 1931. “[T]he winning composition (by Bigot) was a gigantic winged sculpture, an angel of victory’ (1991, p.93). The accompanying image of Bigot’s proposal could have been part of Gormley’s preparation for the *Angel of the North* – may, in fact, have been. In a short time, angels (in the context of this thesis) were everywhere. *Another Place* led to Benjamin which, in turn led to the *Angelus Novus* which led to the *Angel of the North* which led back to *Another Place*. It is impossible to convey the precise theoretical meaning of this circularity in the confines of this exegesis. I can only show how, for me, submerged absolutely in the process of writing *The Last Slave Ship, Another Place* transformed almost all standing figures into observing angels.
I hesitate to record what became the final tonal signifier of this research, but to not do so would be to betray the process I am engaged with, a process that reached its apotheosis when, in June 2015, I witnessed a suicide from the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, England. So firmly had the notion of Gormley’s figures as angels etched itself into my creative consciousness, that the tragic individual glimpsed in silhouette poised on the edge of oblivion – Gormley’s *Event Horizon* made sickening reality – not only evoked the expected feelings of human empathy, but what can only be reluctantly described as a sort of sickening vindication. Leaving aside the pure horror of witnessing this event, there was an element within me that felt that, through this research, I fully understood the suicide’s choice of time (silhouetted against the setting sun at the end of a perfect English summer’s day), posture (identical to *Event Horizon*’s rooftop figures) and place (the Isembard Kingdom Brunel-designed bridge an icon of the Industrial Revolution) as being truly poetic, as creatively *correct*. My reaction simultaneously repulsed and fascinated me – and, in the details of that suicide’s tragedy are likely to be wide of his personal reality – but the force of the realisation that this was emphatically a component of the creative process at work in *The Last Slave Ship* could not be denied. There was something absolutely present in that moment which completed the circle of thinking around angels and witness. As with Hockney’s discoveries concerning the Old Masters drawings, it was ingrained, material thinking which prompted that flash of vertiginous knowledge when confronted by the man on the bridge. He (and it was a ‘he’ I discovered later) demonstrated how powerfully iconic one still figure can be. Traffic halted, the bridge closed, emergency services engaged, all witnesses forced to consider their own mortality, to reconsider the meaning of that
perfect evening. The potency of these images, both created and “found” could not be ignored. As Kweme finds during her campaign of resistance and psychological terror on board the _Uriel_, the impact of death is heightened by the theatre of that death. Richard Drew’s _Falling Man_ (fig.27) image demonstrates the expansion of meaning when the artistic meets the grotesque. Drew’s image has become one of the most evocative images of 9/11. The reason is that it marries art to the horror of reality. There are many other images of suicides from September 11, but it is _Falling Man_ which has become iconic. In death, the anonymous central figure is transformed into something bigger than the individual. It is our collective material thinking which enables this process: as children of the information age we are already attuned to tonal signifiers.
Negotiating this philosophical methodological minefield has been made less treacherous by striving to maintain a clear view of the role of Antony Gormley as Birnbaum’s phenomenological “pathfinder” (1996, p.4). As the research meandered in and out of discussions concerning (amongst other subjects) the history around the Atlantic Slave Trade, themes of memory/amnesia, social and racial politics, policy, culture and identity, it has been Gormley who has been the constant still centre around which this exploration has orbited. Another Place began this theoretical probing and it is to Another Place that the research returns. The long answer I should give to the question posed at the beginning of this research would be in the form of my creative text. The honest answer is that to find a truly powerful, alternative narrative – one which speaks to the legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Liverpool and forces the viewer to reconsider the existing narrative – I would suggest standing on Crosby Beach at dusk and looking at Another Place. This transcendent work tells the story of Liverpool’s relationship to its poisoned past far more eloquently than my thesis could ever hope to.
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*Martin Ed Chatterton*


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*Martin Ed Chatterton*


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*Martin Ed Chatterton*


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Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.


*PhD Exegesis: The Last Slave Ship* 

*Martin Ed Chatterton*


University Press.


