

Moore, D. (1981). Rialto...a part of my past. *The Liverpool Echo* (Weekend Echo), July 11/12.

This was a poem forming part of a letter to the Liverpool Echo after the riots in 1981:

Rialto ... a part of my past

I'm an expatriate from Toxteth. I left Liverpool In 1960. Seeing the events of the past few days on TV and in the Press has affected me greatly. Things which were comfortably held in trust in my memory have been destroyed, yet the frustrations which are being voiced now are also part of my memories from so long ago. I've written it down - as a poem. David Moore, Heaton Moor, Stockport.

They've burned down the poor old Rialto,
The place where, just after the war,
With me mam and me dad and the seat tipped up,
I seen me first film. I was four.

They're looting the heart from me memories,
Along Upper Parliament Street,
Of a youth that was spent in Liverpool eight,
Til the planners came it was neat,

I remember them building the drive-in bank,
The first in the country they said,
We had no car. We had no cash,
We all had a good laugh instead.

I remember the fire in the Harrison's house,
When petrol was thrown down the hall,
I remember the cosh me dad carried around,
Being hard helped you cope with it all.

I remember the trams on the boulevard,
Rattling down from the park,
And the way the driver would curse us
For shoving bricks in the rails for a lark.

I remember the joy when I got out of it,
To make me own way through me life,
And I pity the ones what got left behind,
With all of the pain and the strife.

I remember when I went home one day,
Taking me kids for a treat,
But they'd pulled down our homes to throw up new slums,
They'd even abolished our street.

I don't really blame them in Toxteth,
They've got their backs to the wall,
But to burn down the poor old Rialto.
God: Is nothing sacred at all?

This was printed in the Weekend Echo for July 11/12, 1981.

Unknown to me, the poem next appeared in print in 2008 in a chapter included in this book:

Hetherington, K. & Cronin, A. (eds.) (2008). *Consuming the entrepreneurial city: image, memory, spectacle*. New York: Routledge.

The full citation is:

McIver, G. (2008). Liverpool's Rialto. A ghost in the city of culture. In: *Consuming the entrepreneurial city: image, memory, spectacle*, (Hetherington, K. & Cronin, A., eds). New York: Routledge.

The relevant extract reads as follows:

Liverpool's Rialto A Ghost in the City of Culture

GLEN McIVER

Introduction: Contradictory Spaces

This chapter sets out to think critically about attempts to remodel and recast city spaces with the type of widescale public-private initiative which has become a characteristic feature of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century urban redevelopment. In Liverpool this initiative is hinged around the assumption of the city's role as European City of Culture in 2008. The perspective I adopt has been informed by a consideration of one of those anomalous spaces, those derelict and abandoned, or semi-abandoned, sites which have come to be seen as modern "ruins" and which seem to "blight the landscape" of the contemporary city. The particular "ruin" ... is the Rialto cinema...

...Heathcote has remarked that boarded-up cinemas in places we do not even know can conjure up a strong sense of "nostalgia".

"Often we feel nostalgia for cinemas that were never even part of our lives" (Heathcote, 2001).

Perhaps what Heathcote is feeling is not a nostalgia for a particular past, it is a "nostalgia" for a future that, along with Khun's correspondents, we never really had. For the residents of the semi-ruined dockhands areas of Liverpool this sense of abandonment and dissatisfaction was intensified by a more general and profound sense of exclusion and decay.

It's important to note that there is something that is both complex and ambivalent going on here. In her important study *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon comments that it is the haunted space which allows us to recover a profound sense of the complexity of experience. It allows us to recover a sense of the "complex personhood" of others, and of "the shape and force of lost hands"; the "lost hands" are those of the generality of people whose lives and experiences are so often written out of history (Gordon, 1997: 3-6). These experiences include both hope and disappointment, they include bitterness and regret. There is a complex mix of aspiration and desire, of reflection and experience.

It is one of the characteristics of "contradictory space" that even in its ruined state a building like the Rialto conveys, if only in memory, elements of its former attraction. Peoples' mixed feelings about the site were epitomized by a letter which appeared in the Liverpool Echo on the weekend of July 11-12, 1981, the weekend immediately following the riots. This "star" letter was an item sent in by David Moore of Stockport, "an expatriate from Toxteth" The piece was introduced by a short comment from the author: "I left Liverpool in 1960. Seeing the events of the past few days on TV and in the Press has affected me greatly. Things which were comfortably held in trust in my memory have been destroyed, yet the frustrations which are being voiced now are also part of my memories from so long ago. I have written it down-as a poem"

Under the bold heading "Rialto ... a part of my past" the poem begins:

They've burned down the poor old Rialto,
The place where, just after the war,
With me mam and me dad and the seat tipped up,
I seen me first film. I was four.

They're looting the heart from me memories,
Along Upper Parliament Street...

It continues:

I remember the trams on the boulevard,
Rattling down from the park,
And the way the driver would curse us
For shoving bricks in the rails for a lark.

I remember the joy when I got out of it,
To make me own way through me life,
And I pity the ones what got left behind,
With all of the pain and the strife.

I remember when I went home one day,
Taking me kids for a treat,
But they'd pulled down our homes to throw up new slums,
They'd even abolished our street.

I don't really blame them in Toxteth,
They've got their backs to the wall,
But to burn down the poor old Rialto.
God: Is nothing sacred at all?

Although on the surface it may look like it, this is not really a poem of simple nostalgia. For this author the destruction of the building equates to the destruction of a site of memory. The writer expresses a sympathy for the anger of the residents of Toxteth, whom he has "left behind" in their "ruined" area. There is a sense of guilt here perhaps, as well as a sense of loss. The tension in the piece is caused by the conflict between this sense of sympathy for the rioters and the sense of dismay caused by the destruction of this particular building. Although it is linked with childhood memories this is not simply a poem about a lost childhood; the loss of the Rialto represents a greater loss - the loss of a "sacred" site.

Perhaps this is why if you were to visit Toxteth today and to head for the location that once held the cinema you will find another "Rialto" constructed in its place. The uncomfortable void left by the building was eventually filled with a replacement Rialto, which apes some elements of the style and structure of the previous building with its prominent dome. This new Rialto is a multi-agency center. Police, Social Services, housing officers, and community groups all share the same building. Clearly there was a sense that "rebuilding the Rialto" was making some kind of gesture towards the future; that reconfiguring the building would help, somehow, to reconfigure the local community. However, there is a telling contrast between this "Neighbourhood Management Centre" and the former building - the cinema, dance hall, and cafe, with its "twelve luxury shops." The new Rialto makes a very different "offer" to the local community. However "user friendly" it might seem, for me there is something quite bleak about it. There is something particularly poignant about the former building's promise of a more open and better future now that the building itself has disappeared...