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The Edge of Creation

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The Edge & Liminality

Liverpool is on the edge, its born from the edge and retains a distinctive edgy disposition. Liverpool's edge opens onto the Atlantic a characteristic which drove the city's exponential growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as gateway to the New World. The city has a distinctively Northern "vitality, sheer staggering vitality" [01] a characteristic it shares with other Northern cities, such as Manchester, Sheffield and Hull. These cities are where the heavy industrialisation was concentrated and consequently all were adversely affected by the de-industrialisation of the United Kingdom.

The docks were Liverpool's economic 'raison d'etre' they were also integral to its cultural character providing an exchange of strangers and the strange as unique events in a folded 'fecund' of cultural creativity. This is a distinctive characteristic of edge territories; the edge holds in or out encouraging overlapping and subsequent interaction. The closure of the docks and the subsequent exodus of heavy industries in the 60s left seven linear miles of redundant docklands. Liverpool's edge redundancy removed 'event' as that difference generated from repetition. The city needed to transform to adapt however the extent of the redundant dockland was vast and so inextricably linked to the cities existence that it constituted an inconceivable endeavour. The change required was so vast that the city went into a double decade transitional state that can best be explained as a 'liminal defensive reaction'.



Figure 1– The edge; Liverpool's docklands fourteen miles of (mainly redundant) dockland edge stretched over six linear miles

This liminal state is a kind of transition which is marked by rites in three phases, separation, margin and aggregation. [02] Separation is the symbolic marking of detachment from an earlier fixed point of social structure or cultural condition. There follows an intervening liminal period as a state of in-betweenness, characterised by ambiguity, uncertainty and hope, one is no longer a part of the old order and not yet a part of the new. In the third phase the passage is consummated in a celebration of acceptance. These rites of passage can be shown to relate to any distinct change of social state associated with a tribe and in this case the city was the tribe. Liverpool became a marginal territory in the late 60s 70s and early 80s, an annexed social and political territory clearly expressed through national politics and media opinion of the period. Liverpool's inhabitants had a physical but not a social reality relative to the remainder of the country. They were the "unclear and the unclean regarded as polluting to those who have never been inoculated against them" [03]. This annexed liminal state can become self-referential. "The self, sets itself within a hall of mirrors; it mistakes its reflection for the world, sees its own reflections endlessly, talks endlessly to itself, and, not surprisingly, finds continual verification of itself and its world view". [04]

This liminal in-between state whilst preferentially dismissive of external context retains the potential for creativity in which "all possibilities exist" [05] The initial liminal period in Liverpool was very creative giving birth to the 'beat' and the Beatles who became an international phenomena. The Mersey Beat was a unique sound created from a conflicting situation of separation, attrition and new world inter-connectivity. Other artists to emerge from the Cavern were Gerry & the Pacemakers, Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas, the Four Most, the Swinging Blue Genes the Searchers and Cilla Black. These Liverpool artists dominated the British pop scene for almost a decade. The Sixties also saw the emergence of a new class of people in metropolitan areas with careers in music, advertising, film and media. These lifestyles emerged as part of the transition from production to reproduction, information, communication and knowledge processing started to predominate. In effect the world became increasingly available as an instantaneous promiscuity of all things that also meant 'all histories collide at once' [05].

The swinging sixties in Liverpool could be considered a last gasp before innumerable economic forces came to bare. There was a mass exodus of industry, corporations and technical businesses in the late 60s. Liverpool's population halved between 1951 and 1986, and unemployment remained high at twice the national average. When social conditions are such that opportunities of self-worth disappear practices that engender other forms of self-worth emerge. These practices tend to be fluid as serial migration journeys through venues of hybrid creativity developing "scapes as deeply perspectival constructs for 'the building blocks of imagined worlds'". [06] The populace in this attrition became 'alternatively creative', art and culture were abundant within the city's dilapidating grandeur it was just either not paid or seriously underpaid consequently did not provide any economically sustainable employment.

The city became a separated state as an island of self-referential creative artists. A survey conducted by the Liverpool Echo in early 1980's discovered over a thousand bands in the city. Being part of a band was an escape from the boredom of the dole, it was seen as the only way out of the current situation. The cities post-apocalyptic industrial landscape hosted an ever-shifting constellation of venues. These venues ran down the hill from Hope Street into the centre of the city forming a 'venue' promenade to what were considered the venue centres that defined musical eras in the city. The Cavern was associated with the Mersey Beat of the 60s. Erics with its punk and post punk scene of the late 70s and early 80s. Few artists and musicians successfully escaped the attrition, rather their endeavours created a constant intensity of creative events throughout the city. Although these events did not develop any verifiable content they did amend the contemporary contextual situation by developing a discontinuity.

The city's edge once a threshold to world exchange became an end not an end as in destination but a dead end as in going nowhere. Business and Industry deserted the city as did the population. Between 1971 and 1981 Liverpool's population fell by 100,000. Liverpool's edge redundancy removed 'event' as repetition and consequent difference i.e. 'the unique'. This led to the only event possible for a socially, economically and event deprived underclass 'Riot'. The Toxteth riots erupted in early July of 1981. Tension through inequality, unemployment and underprivileged status led to nine days of riots. Subsequent reports recognised the social depravation origins of the riots and the Conservative government of the day appointed Michael Heseltine, as 'Minister for Merseyside' to set up the Merseyside Task Force, as the origins of Liverpool Vision who were to be effective in a series of initiatives to revive the fortunes of the city.

A series of Fortunate Events

What followed were what could be termed a series of 'fortunate events', though not all such events successfully influenced change in the city's infrastructure rather they became part of a rebranding of the city through event-mental activities.

Negatives can be positives-- The depravity and separation of the city from the nation became one of the fortunate events, The post war bomb damaged city was not flattened and rebuilt as many others were rather it was stitched together as best possible leaving the holes as car parks. The wholesale cleaning of the cities buildings in the 70s revealed a rich historic legacy.

Greening the city-- The Garden festival was initiated by Michael Heseltine in 1984 to try and revitalise tourism to Liverpool it was very popular partially successful with over 3 million visitors. However it was dwarfed by another weekend event the tall ships race which drew in hundreds of thousands of visitors on each side of the Mersey on both days to see a maritime spectacular as the ships sailed into and out of the Mersey. The Garden festival despite its success in drawing outsiders into the city did not materially change the city and the site meant to be a legacy park following the event simply fell into disrepair.

City Art Attack-- One of the most distinctive 'fortunate events' was the decision of 'The Tate' art gallery to locate in Liverpool. The Tate London wanted to develop itself as a 'brand' generating a constellation of Tate galleries around the United Kingdom. They chose Liverpool as a pilot scheme, the first of these galleries outside London. In 1981 Stirling Wilford were commissioned to carry out the design and the Tate Liverpool opened in 1988 in a refurbished corner of the Listed Albert Dock originally by Jessey Hartley. This had a two-fold influence on the cities reinvigoration policies. Primarily it consolidated a trend towards conservation and refurbishment of the existing fabric rather than one of demolish and newbuild. Secondly it developed a trend towards art as a central cultural theme of the city especially the generation of the Biennial took art into the city's streets as a popular cultural event from 1998 onwards. The Biennial was established by James Moores (with Jane Rankin Read, Lewis Biggs and Bryan Biggs). The Biennial runs in parallel with the John Moore's painting prize the most prestigious painting prize in the UK still held at the Walker Art Gallery Liverpool.

The Biennial as event draws in half a million visitors over a ten week period and is the largest contemporary international art event in the UK.



Figure 2– The Tate Liverpool; Refurbished corner of the Albert dock originally by Jessy Hartley refurbished by Stirling Wilford

New edges-- Occasionally policy changes can amend social edges in terms of perceived status. Under the further and higher education act of 1992 thirty-eight former polytechnics became fully-fledged universities in England, Wales and Scotland, these were termed the new Universities. It soon became evident that the new Universities were the main exponents of making University education available to all and where the institutions which grew more rapidly over the next decade. Whereas the name change should make little difference it soon became clear that the increased status for the students in the city conferred much more confidence related to their aspirations at college and beyond. The transient population formerly associated with the docks had returned with the transient University student population. A new edge had formed, what had been an exchange of goods became an exchange of skills and knowledge. Today there are approximately seventy thousand students in Liverpool linked to four universities. Liverpool developed rapidly as a University city with a massive vibrant youth population and culture associated with music dance and art.

Problem? what a potential-- In 1992 a bar called Baa Bar opened up in a converted warehouse. The first continental style bar in Liverpool it was the venture of a young developer called Tom Bloxham who had approached Jonathan Falkingham of Shed to design the refurbishment. The aesthetic was one of modernity occupying an existing stripped back and accentuated historic shell creating a tension between the two yielding a particularly temporal effect heightened by the 'acrow' props retained as integral to the façade. Baa Bar was the anti-thesis of the 'dark pubs' that surrounded it, this was where the trendy set hung out and best of all you could buy tapas, unheard of in Liverpool previously. Drinks flowed in one direction and finance flowed in the other it was boasted that a Friday night alone paid all the expenses associated with running the Bar through the week. In retrospect this was the turn around, a tiny project but a new order of things, it didn't oppose the existing order of things rather it invited you into a new order of 'can do' confident, enthusiastic, enjoyment. In a city with so much waste, the attitude was no longer 'what a problem!' rather 'what a potential!'

Urban space for change-- Urban Splash is a development company founded in 1993 by Tom Bloxham and Jonathan Falkingham. Their association with the Baa Bar found an alliance in terms of their mutual aims for urban living and mixed use development. Splash' developed an area close to the Baa Bar producing something uniquely different to the other developers of this period. They made urban space developing a small urban square, with a series of bars, basement clubs and urban living units along one side of the square completed in 1995. This urban space rapidly became the centre of the bar clubbing culture and the surrounding area known as Rope Walks was increasingly becoming a popular cultural hub. Concert Square is historically seen as the initiation of the revitalisation of this area at that time Liverpool's creative quarter and Urban Splash are now considered one of the UK's most innovative developers.



Figure 3– Concert Square in Liverpool's Rope walks area an urban space developed by Urban Splash a centre for initiating the clubbing scene

Dance Trance Market-- Cream emerged in 1994 also in the Ropewalks area, its just around the corner from Baa Bar, and Concert Square. Initiated as a weekly house music night at 'Nation' it rapidly became the biggest club night in Liverpool.

Cream ran like this for about a decade attracting close to three thousand people every week with revellers arriving (often in bikinis) from all over the United Kingdom to be part of a mass dance fest. Cream was not just a dance night rather it became a way of life during this period. Cream's success is now a global brand. It moved to Ibiza in 1995 and continues to host one of the biggest dance nights there at Amnesia. Cream as an international company has produced a series of dance albums and introduced Cream-fields in 1998 which has become one of the largest international dance festivals. Cream currently organises over one hundred events each year on the international scene in Spain, Czech Republic, Romania, Poland, Russia, Chile, Brazil, Australia and Argentina and has a line up that includes some of the best known DJs in the world.

European Links

Liverpool secured Objective one finances in 1994 however the finances finally secured through this status were less than had been expected? The city council was in turmoil during this period and several resigned over what was termed mismanagement of the funds. The 700 million was rapidly soaked up through improvement projects along the docklands edge though there were areas of substantial benefit such as improving John Lennon Airport, refurbishing of Speke airport, the public space of the Metropolitan Cathedral the refurbishment of St Georges Hall. However there was obviously a learning curve associated with where to 'aim' the finances such that they effectively catalysed other investments. Most importantly 2.5 million of funds was set aside for a bid for the city of Culture for 2008. Liverpool had decided that it was going for it, in a never say die attitude it went for city of culture and for World Heritage status using similar bidding information edited for each specific bid. Further EU funds between 2000 and 2014 total nearly 2 billion pounds. [08]

Doing the Double-- The most influential event to date in its transformation of the city's social psychology has been the winning of the EU capital of culture in 2003. Tessa Jowell made the announcement to scenes of jubilation from the back of the room, Liverpool had not expected to win and they were ecstatic. "Ms Jowell said the competition to choose the city had been 'fantastic' and all the bids had been of the highest standard..." [09] As the decision was announced live on TV, fireworks and streamers erupted at the Empire Theatre, where Liverpool's bid team had gathered to hear the announcement. After wild cheering and applause, Sir Bob Scott, who led the Liverpool bid, said: "For the first time for too long, Liverpool will represent Great Britain and we will be the voice of Great Britain in 2008, when hopefully Liverpool will be the greatest capital of culture that has ever been seen." [09] In fact Liverpool did the double with the city waterfront appointed as cultural World Heritage Site in 2004 being just an obvious addition. Liverpool's dockland, industrial, heritage was cited as the reasoning for its inscription by UNESCO. These appointments of acceptance provided a strong incentive to external investment for the city's invited bids of interest to redevelop the city centre around what was known as Chavasse Park or the Paradise Street Project. The city was on a role and the necessity to deliver was imminent and surprisingly wholeheartedly anticipated by the entire city.

Being the Best-- Grosvenor developments were eventually selected from a list of over forty interested proposals. Grosvenor were to be granted a two hundred and fifty year lease on the forty two acre site in return for a one billion pound investment from Grosvenor and their investment partners. Grosvenor were then in a position of having four years to design, build, promote and let the proposed development. Grosvenor came up with six core aims for the development. Make new Rules, 'Involve Everyone, Love the City, Think Big, Create More, Be the Best'[10]. These core values aiming to generate a quality diverse complex matrix that integrated with the city as the best in retail experience and consequently the name 'Liverpool One' was chosen to reinforce that this was number one, the one everyone wants to be in. Local was emphasised throughout, this was for Liverpool and of Liverpool.

Industrial solidarity and topographic flow-- Grosvenor invited 'Pelli Clark Pelli' to collaborate on the master-planning and with BDP developed a huge spiral feature that opened out to a view of the Albert dock. A feature parkland hill aided the topographic level changes and resolved some of the parking problems. Not quite Barcelona but learning from them and contextualising the ideas. The aim of the project was a multifarious complexity that felt human in terms of scale and composition that was so integrated into the remaining matrix of the city that it felt like a continuation of the city. Formal diversity and material solidity were distinctive aesthetic aims reproducing the diversity of Liverpool and reflecting its distinctive northern industrial solidity. Five zones were aimed at in order to promote this diversity reflecting key landscape features such as Hill, Valley, Square, Street, Arcade. Twenty six Architects were selected competitively and assigned variably complex tasks. Although retail and entertainment dominate the lower levels of the site which have been developed to flow topographically between levels, the ground becoming the first floors and more. The site is really a multi-use site containing 234,000sq metres of floor space consisting of retail, restaurants, hotels, accommodation, leisure and car parking. [11]



Figure 4– The valley in Liverpool One a one billion pound multifunctional development that stitched the city centre together

Sunbathing and skating-- Liverpool One may have ridden in on the coat-tails of the city of culture it is however the largest legacy of this 'event'. There was some concern over the viability of forty-two acres of retail in the centre of Liverpool one of the poorest cities in the country. A concern heightened as the world economies crashed, a year prior to the city of culture and the, much publicised opening, of the largest retail development in Europe. As 'Kunzman' stated "Each story of regeneration begins with poetry and ends with real estate" [12] Liverpool One was opened in phases on 29 May 2008 and 1 October 2008, during Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture, to a 100,00 footfall in each of the first days.

Revitalised & Reinvigorated

Liverpool today is a revitalised and reinvigorated city based on a strategy of popular cultural tourism. Even the insertion of Liverpool One a billion pound investment that has stitched the city centre back together and re-linked this to the edge is based on popular cultural entertainment in the form of retail therapy. The city was however slow to realise the pull of popular cultural tourism as a method of revitalising the city. It was really only with the 2003 bid for the 2008 'city of culture' that the city fully realised the potential of popular cultural tourism as a musical pilgrimage centred around the popularity of the Beatles There's the Beatles story, tours of the city to sites such as Penny Lane, Strawberry Fields gates as part of the Magical Mystery Tour. The Cavern Club (rebuilt) hosts an annual week long Beatles event in August and the city organises celebrations on Beatle anniversaries.

Other historic musical successes have unfortunately been dwarfed by the emphasis on the popularity of the Beatles. Billy Fury, Jerry and the Pacemakers, Cilla Black, Elvis Costello, Franki goes to Hollywood, Echo and the Bunnymen, The Lightening Seeds, The La's, The Farm, The Zutons etc. which constitute a rich musical heritage have essentially been overwhelmed. Music and its promotion is still very much alive within the city's cultural consciousness. Cream has continued as a popular venue returning to the city for three or four events each year (though Nation is due for Demolition soon) whilst their festival Creamfield's has become a yearly summer event nearby in Cheshire. There's the Liverpool International Music Festival with around seven hundred performances around the city over a two-week period and Liverpool Sound City which hosts over three hundred artists in twenty-five city centre venues.

Liverpool has become a city with some event gravitas. The city has invariably been a centre of popular culture it has two cathedrals, two premier league football teams, two major art galleries and music has 'of course' always been central in this popular culture mix. The city's ethnic mix also meant that there was always some cultural celebration such as the Brouhaha Carnival, Chinese New Year, Africa Oye, Halloween Lantern Show, Mathew Street festival, The Grand National. In a sense all of this initiated what has been termed the 'festivalisation' of the city in the new millennium which has been a major factor in the boosting of civic pride and the attraction of 'creatives' back to the city

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