

## Central Lancashire Online Knowledge (CLOK)

Title	Jade Montserrat's Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758-2018)
Type	Article
URL	<a href="https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/34802/">https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/34802/</a>
DOI	10.15367/kf.v7i1.305
Date	2020
Citation	Rice, Alan (2020) Jade Montserrat's Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758-2018). <i>Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies</i> , 7 (1). pp. 75-87. ISSN 2151-4712
Creators	Rice, Alan

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.  
10.15367/kf.v7i1.305

For information about Research at UCLan please go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLOK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/policies/>

# Jade Montserrat's Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies

*Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments  
Then and Now (1758–2018)*

Alan Rice

*Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the  
underside. It is all history.*

—Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*

**C**lay (2015) is a beautiful, elegiac, and haunting ten-minute film, made with great sensitivity by Caitlin and Andrew Webb-Ellis, that depicts a simple act.<sup>1</sup> A naked Black woman digs with her bare hands in the clay earth of North Yorkshire to the sounds of natural silence interrupted by distant birdsong. She is alone in the landscape, and her isolation seems total. As the performer describes it in her companion piece *Peat Bog*, the experience is constructed as “bleak, remote, unforgiving, unhearing, without union or unity with other bodies.”<sup>2</sup> As she excavates, her body is covered in the wet clay she digs: her hair, her face, her limbs, her buttocks, her stomach, her breasts all become a slimy mess. She immerses herself in the land literally and figuratively. There are close-ups of this process that emphasize the labour involved in dirty work and the bodily efforts required to do the work, referencing a whole history of Black bodies’ physical efforts for little tangible, personal reward: there are long shots, too, of the figure in what is becoming a pit, digging, surrounded by acres of empty land. Her lonely, isolated status in this harsh environment is exacerbated by these shots. As she extracts the wet earth, she piles it so that it resembles the walls of a shelter, almost as though she is dry-stonewalling, a common Yorkshire

---

**Alan Rice** is a professor in English and American studies at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, and codirector of the Institute for Black Atlantic Research (IBAR). He has published *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum, 2003) and *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010). He was a founding member of the Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project (STAMP) in Lancaster, which unveiled the first quayside memorial for victims of the slave trade in Britain; co-curated *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* at the Whitworth Gallery (Manchester) in 2007; and has been a consultant on a variety of documentaries on slavery and its aftermath with the BBC and other broadcasters.

*Kalfou*, Volume 7, Issue 1 (Spring 2020). © 2020 by the Regents of the University of California. ISSN 2151-4712 (print). ISSN 2372-0751 (online). All rights reserved

FEATURE ARTICLES

means of enclosing land. Has she created a burial pit, a shelter, or a wall, or all three? Is she a gravedigger, a craftsperson, or a putative homemaker? She is all three, expressing mourning for Black lives lost through the history of slavery and its aftermath, creating new other lives in alien worlds, and finally making homes; the multiplicity of the film is central to its powerful meaning, in which the artist and performer Jade Montserrat seeks to articulate her claim to this alien British rural space as a Black woman. In this, she consciously dialogises Black histories with the narratives of other groups such as working-class rural labourers, whose work on the land is so often minimised by processes of elision similar to those used against Black presence. Her process illuminates a multi-directional memorialisation that Michael Rothberg has posited as a way of describing the intersections of vernacular memories that are too often bifurcated:

Memories are not owned by groups—nor are groups owned by memories. Rather the borders of memory and identity are jagged: what at first looks like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaption from a history that might seem foreign or distant. Memory’s anachronistic quality—its bringing together of now and then, here and there—is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of old ones.<sup>3</sup>

It is “memory’s anachronistic quality” that Montserrat feeds off in this work: summoning ghosts from the past, from here and now and from there and then, routed across nations and continents, all memorialised in the clay earth of her alien homespace. The elemental nature of the work, getting down and dirty in the very clay earth that in many African and diasporic myths of origin births humanity itself, aligns the work with deep time as well as recent history. Montserrat’s praxis, with its summoning of such deep-time narratives, allies her with an environmentalist poetics and politics as discussed by Tom Griffiths:

“Deep time” and “social history” seem to be the antithesis of one another, each operating on utterly different timescales and subject matter. One conjures up ancient evolutionary history, even a non-human world, while the other suggests the study of modern society. One deals in awesome geological eras, while the other takes its chronological scale from a human lifespan. It is one of the challenges . . . to connect them, to work audaciously across time as well as across race and species.<sup>4</sup>

As well as its relation to such elemental stories and thus its links to “deep time,” the work crucially nuances our understanding of Black British history and of Black Atlantic history through its intersections with local histories and memories, and Montserrat’s praxis in her work echoes Rothberg’s and Griffiths’s theo-

retical ideas on multidirectional memorialisation and environmental politics. Her emotional attachment to and care for local space link her to other artists working with landscape, as Yvonne Reddick describes:

Art that responds to nature nowadays has one foot planted in the local, while the other feels for a foothold in the world that is increasingly marked by migration and global environmental issues. It deepens our connection to the place where we live and sharpens our knowledge of how the environment is wider and wilder than our home turf.<sup>5</sup>

Simultaneously, local and global concerns are figured in Montserrat's art of landscape. She undertakes what I have described elsewhere as a "guerrilla memorialisation" in this Yorkshire clay, intervening in that hitherto designated white rural environment to posit its link to Black lives historically and now.<sup>6</sup> Montserrat's digging, making artwork resembling a grave, is redolent of mourning for those lives lost and forgotten and a reinscription of them in the historical record. In this she could be said to be engaging in a ritual—what Paul Ricoeur has described in his monumental work *Memory, History, Forgetting* as performing an act of memorialisation struck through with the power of burial rites:

Sepulchre, indeed, is not only a place set apart in our cities, the place we call a cemetery and in which we depose the remains of the living who return to dust. It is an act, the act of burying. This gesture is not punctual; it is not limited to the moment of burial. The sepulchre remains because the gesture of burying remains; its path is the very path of mourning that transforms the physical absence of the lost object into an inner presence. The sepulchre as the material place thus becomes the enduring mark of mourning, the memory aid of the act of the sepulchre.<sup>7</sup>

This transformation of "the physical absence of the lost object into an inner presence" is crucial to an understanding of Montserrat's artwork as an act of recovery of Black lives marginalised and forgotten in this landscape; likewise, the act of digging into the earth to construct a grave-like pit is a ritualised guerrilla memorialisation that works against melancholic forgetfulness. She makes a "mark of mourning" for those for whom there had been no previous recognition. The pioneering Black artist Ingrid Pollard had initiated such guerrilla actions in the British countryside in her photographic travelogue *Pastoral Interlude* (1987), where she inserted Black figures in hitherto ostensibly lily-white rural spaces such as the Lake District, representing an "unbelonging" that she captures in a series of portraits of Black men, women, and children posed as tourists. In one image a Black walker is taking a rest, camera on her knees. Pollard's text muses: "It's as if the black experience is only lived within an urban environment.

I thought I liked the Lake District, where I wandered lonely as a black face in a sea of white. A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unease, dread.”<sup>8</sup>

Pollard’s spirited, ironic take on Black exclusion from rural narratives and her guerrilla attempt to reinsert Black presence at the heart of heritage Britain makes space for later radical work, such as Montserrat’s, that talks about the rural as potential homespace in the here and now. Montserrat draws on the inspiration of Pollard’s work, but she has a different relationship to this rural alien land: she has inhabited it for decades. Edouard Glissant has talked about enslaved Africans and their descendants’ relationship to the alien lands they inhabit:

The land of suffering is abandoned. The land is not yet loved. The land is the other’s possession. The poetics of the land cannot then be a poetics of thrift, of patient repossession, of anticipation. It is a poetics of excess, where all is exhausted immediately. . . . [We] expose the landscape to those various kinds of madness that they have put on us.<sup>9</sup>

Exiled from diasporic homelands, Montserrat finds this British landscape, although very familiar, to be problematic, but her reaction is to work through this dilemma of alienation by literally attaching herself to it. Montserrat exposes the land to her madness of frantic digging and naked exuberance as this dreamlike space of bucolic life she has inhabited, this North Yorkshire rural environment, needs this act of slimy reclamation to truly become hers. It is the very locality of the place, its importance to her personally, that enables the power of the art. As Lucy Lippard reminds us, “The intersections of nature, culture, history and ideology form the ground on which we stand—our land, our place, the local. The lure of the local is the pull of the place that operates on all of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies.”<sup>10</sup> This claiming of rural Northern space is vital because of Montserrat’s experience of unbelonging caused by current racism that denies her rights in her present day homespace.

This sense of unbelonging has been expressed by Black British women artists like Pollard, Lubaina Himid, Maud Sulter, Claudette Johnson, and Sonia Boyce in their work and their writing. Johnson expresses it most potently thus:

The experience of near annihilation is the ghost that haunts the lives of [Black] women in Britain daily. The price of our survival has been the loss of a sense of ownership of both land and body. The ownership of our ancestors’ bodies was in the hands of the slave owners. The horrors of slavery and racism have left us with the knowledge that every aspect of our existence is open to abuse. . . . This is reinforced by the experience of a kind of social and cultural invisibility.<sup>11</sup>

It is to counter this “loss of a sense of ownership of both land and body” that Montserrat creates a dynamic performance of her body working its way into ownership of the land she inhabits. Despite her claims to ownership, she is a vagrant, vagabond presence in a landscape owned by aristocratic masters (she filmed *Clay* on land that she has lived on most of her life but that is a private shooting estate). Her status on this land is in a very real sense a promotion of what Katherine McKittrick has called “subaltern or alternative geographic patterns that work alongside and beyond traditional geographies and site a terrain of struggle.”<sup>12</sup> Traditional geographies had never allowed room for nonwhite individuals in this rural space, and it is Montserrat’s guerrilla energy that opens it up to other images and voices. It is not that they were never there; it is more that their presence was never acknowledged, let alone witnessed.

This elision of Black people in the landscape has led some theorists to describe African diasporic historical presence as spectral. Ian Baucom theorises this absence thus:

If the general task of what I am calling the testamentary, melancholy, realist counterdiscourse of modernity is to recover the lost, to acknowledge and take some affective property in the ruinous “past”, continuously, if non-synchronously, present within now being, then the particular task of an interested cosmopolitanism . . . is not merely to make the past present but to render the unseen visible, to bear witness to the truth of what has not been (and cannot have been) witnessed.<sup>13</sup>

Montserrat’s recovery of the lost history of Black presence renders this unseen population visible despite their elision from most historical narratives. She literally “makes the past present” by reinserting the Black body in the frame. She is interested in upturning the legacy of this elision of past Black histories in these Northern environs and the consequent amnesia which creates a vacuum where Black people once lived, walked, and laboured. She wants to give flesh to what have been ghostly, spectral voices and images.

In this context, I would like to promote another role for Montserrat that is symbolic of her quest for meaning and historical companionship for her journey, and that foregrounds diachronic space as well as the synchronic. In her digging, she resembles a vernacular archaeologist, striving to find evidence of historical Black presences in this lonely space. In the text piece which accompanied the video art, Montserrat describes how Black Britons can seem like “aliens dropped into this ancient landscape. Appearances suggest we were not meant to be here. Alienation is magnified by a landscape scarred by borders, a testimony to territorial ownership.”<sup>14</sup> As a vernacular archaeologist, however, Montserrat potentially finds that appearances can be deceptive. Her discovery of homespace in her digging is replicated by a historical record that shows Black

Britons making their home in these climes for centuries before her act of reclamation. The fugitive traces she outlines through her earth-splattered body summon ghosts from the archives that show African immigrants even in the Anglo-Saxon period, hitherto historically conceived as lily-white, so that her nascent and rather crude archaeology is as appropriate as sifting through the written archives. Black presence has been established in Britain since Roman times; however, new DNA evidence shows Anglo-Saxon ear bones exhibiting West African ancestry from burial sites in Britain. The full analysis of these findings will not be released until late 2020, but initial research indicates Yoruba ancestry.<sup>15</sup> Such presences are figured by Montserrat's digging; however, until we have the full analysis of these bones using carbon dating, we should not speculate beyond glorying in new evidence of Black presence in a period that has been an empty book.

The revealing of new histories underpins Glissant's observation about the multiplicity of histories that dialogise majoritarian historical narratives. He describes how "the struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power."<sup>16</sup> By conjuring other Black presences through the choreography of her naked body working in the landscape, Montserrat figures a reworking of the historical record stretching back through those Anglo-Saxons whose African lineage is only just being recovered to the African Aurelian Roman legions who patrolled Hadrian's Wall and were stationed in Cumbria.<sup>17</sup> Later Black presences are important, too. They were particularly impressive in Scotland, where two "More [Moor] Lasses" arrived in 1504 as part of the household of Margaret Stewart, James IV's illegitimate daughter.<sup>18</sup> Such historic Black female figures are obviously important for Montserrat's art of recuperation, but there are scant details about these women's lives. Later records exhibit significant Black agency in eighteenth-century Yorkshire and elsewhere in Northern Britain. On September 9, 1758, the following advertisement appeared in Williamson's *Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register*:

RUN AWAY,

From Dent in Yorkshire, on Monday the 28th of Aug last. THOMAS ANSON, a Negro Man, about five Feet six Inches High, aged 20 Years or upwards, and broad set. Whoever will bring the said Man back to Dent, or give any Information that he may be had again, shall receive a handsome Reward from Mr. Edmund Sill of Dent, or Mr. David Kenyon, Merchant in Liverpool.<sup>19</sup>

On the other side of Yorkshire from Scarborough, miles across the moors, an African slave is here shown to have absconded from his master's home in an

isolated rural part of the county. He would have walked rural Yorkshire, as Montserrat was to do 250 years later, but as a fugitive seeking to escape the shackles of slavery. Most of the slave runaway advertisements in Britain relate to urban locales—London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bristol—so to find a rural escapee is illuminating and shows a fugitive trace that is articulated through Montserrat's clay-splattered performance of Black presence. There are few specific details about Anson in the description here apart from his height and broad-set appearance.

More intriguing is the runaway advert for a Lancashire fugitive from the September 10, 1765, edition of the London-based newspaper *St. James's Chronicle; or, The British Evening Post*:

RUN away from the House of the Rev- Mr. Clarkson, Rector of Heysham, near Lancaster, early in the Morning of Monday the 26th of August last, a Negro Boy, of the Ebo Country, slender made, about five Feet three Inches high, his Left Knee bending inwards, which makes him ha[l]t, a small Lump on his Forehead, with his Country Marks on his Temples; had on, when eloped, a blue Jacket, a grey Waistcoat, and Leather Breeches; he speaks broad Lancashire Dialect. Whoever brings him to his Master at Heysham, or to his Master's Brother, Mr. William Clarkson, Surgeon, in Drury-Lane, Leverpoole, shall be handsomely rewarded, and all Charges paid; but whoever harbours him shall be prosecuted with the utmost Rigour of the Law.<sup>20</sup>

This advertisement shows how natural slavery appeared even to the most pious and Christian of British folk, so that a Lancashire Church of England clergyman saw nothing wrong in owning enslaved Africans. This particular anonymous enslaved African is described as precisely as possible to enhance his chance of recapture. He is an Igbo boy bearing wounds that seem to indicate a life in which he has been abused: he is lame with marks of violence on his head. Also described is scarification ("Country Marks") on his temples that indicates he was brought from Africa, having lived there long enough to take part in local ceremonies. His fugitive wanderings were thought to have taken him towards London (hence the advert in the newspaper), where he presumably hoped to blend into the larger Black population there. This would have been difficult, though, as an intriguing detail describes how he "speaks with a broad Lancashire dialect." This is the earliest known written description of a Black individual speaking the local Lancashire brogue and shows how his English is shaped not by his African background but by his local roots. There are only a few dozen Black individuals in the Lancaster area, but some are already sounding like the locals. The combination of country marks and Lancashire dialect makes this "Negro Boy" an exceptional fugitive, wandering Northern roads, at home in his tongue and



alien in his features. This hybridity and doubleness, at-homeness and foreignness, are crucial to the narrative of African Atlantic and Black British historical experiences that Montserrat opens up through *Clay*. Rooted by his brogue, the boy routes himself to new enfranchised worlds congruent with his free African heritage. His earlier example is mined by Montserrat, whose praxis of rootedness and routedness mirrors that of such historical exemplars.

The vagrant, vagabond nature of slave runaways can be illuminated and exemplified by *Peat Bog* (2015), a companion video performance piece by Montserrat.<sup>21</sup> Running through a landscape of peat bogs, a clothed Montserrat is filmed with lengthy close-ups of her feet in the muddy watercourses, showing her lovingly at home in this boggy landscape and joyfully emancipated.<sup>22</sup> The extended shots of her feet indicate the long distances fugitive feet will need to travel as well as the deep connection of those feet to the North British landscape. This connection is always contingent on diasporic movement, and this routedness is best approached through Glissant's notion of "global errancy," which "leads from periphery to periphery, makes every periphery into a center . . . [and] abolishes the very notion of center and periphery."<sup>23</sup> Montserrat's *Peat Bog* is an exemplary imaginary conception of such errancy as it makes estranged landscape into home and centres Black presence far from the urban landscapes traditional British historical narratives would confine them to. The global errancy is linked to local peripheral spaces, which then become central to newly conceived histories of Black British presence. Glissant describes the construction of these multiple histories as key to the making of a new radical historiography "not saturated with a single history but effervescent with intermingled histories, spread around, rushing to fuse without destroying or reducing each other."<sup>24</sup>

Montserrat's illuminating of multifarious Black historic and deep-time presence through connection to the landscape and bodies in that landscape continues in a remarkable series of watercolours. One painting, *Toes*, seems to summon directly the ghosts of African runaways.<sup>25</sup> On a landscape background of red flowers and leaves, two legs are rooted to the ground, and in an imagined cross-section of each foot are two seemingly ancient African or Eastern sculptured figures.<sup>26</sup> The images suggest that Black British people take with them their African roots and route themselves through the British landscape. Her words surrounding the image describe the realities of dealing with life in this hostile environment: "You'll have to be on your toes to survive these parts." Literally and figuratively, fugitivity is summoned here as the mode that Black people adopt to survive; nimble mobility and improvisatory gestures are essential to making a way through an alien landscape that you continually have to try and make your home. The way to do this, she shows, is to carry within you your ancestry—a non-Western, African worldview encapsulated in art objects that render homespace wherever you are. Glissant's theorising of the legacies of enslavement illustrates why naked bodies are so important to Montserrat's

renderings in her film and her watercolours. They describe the special status of enslavement that conjures severe displacement, mental and physical, and an attendant nakedness that is visceral:

The enslaved African is the “stripped migrant.” He could not bring his tools, the images of his gods, his daily implements, nor could he send news to his neighbours, or hope to bring his family over, or reconstitute his former family in the place of deportation. Naturally the ancestral spirit had not left him, he had not lost the meaning of a former experience. But he will have to fight for centuries in order to recognise its legitimacy.<sup>27</sup>

Montserrat shows how her figure is naked of everything but his ancestral spirit, through the wonderful marking of his past in his fugitive feet. This dynamic rendition of fugitive culture aligns with historical and contemporary forgeries of identities on the move. These films and watercolours are emblematic of the multiplicity of Montserrat's approach to making work that seeks to provoke an audience into acknowledging the reality of historical and contemporary Black presence in the remotest of British landscapes.

More recently, she has brought this praxis live into the gallery space in a series of performance interventions that use her Black body and its drawing talents to create works that graffiti the very walls. *No Need for Clothing* (2017) is a performance drawing installation that involves naked reading from a book of quotations and found words from writers such as Ntozake Shange, Frantz Fanon, and Jamaica Kincaid through watercolours of sentences from these works to a live performance piece where these texts are blown up and drawn in charcoal on the walls over a punishing period of days. This work is performed naked as Montserrat wants the cost of drawing on this history of African Atlantic trauma to be fully transparent:

The body unclothed mark-making durationally directly on the gallery walls, flag[s] up concerns about the body's capacity, vulnerability, safety . . . [w]hilst acknowledging my labour as a cultural worker contained in an asphyxiating framework of cultural control, measuring the value of traumatised labouring bodies, ancestral traumas, for example, in relation to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. . . . The vulnerability that is apparent through the sheer and opposingly defiant act of nakedness troubles our feminisms. Placed naked in the space of the gallery we might become alert to the words and deeds indicated within the text panels charging the material charcoal with the tensions, vulnerabilities and strength demanded by the female naked, labouring body.<sup>28</sup>

Montserrat's linking of words and deeds here echoes consciously the political theorist Hannah Arendt's urgent call for a close alignment between rhetoric and action to forestall the dishonest and game-playing gestural power-politics that are such a feature of the dominant monolingual discourse that seeks to close down debate, in her time and in ours. She describes how

power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.<sup>29</sup>

The intimacy and vulnerability that Montserrat's performance evokes is because of this honest combination of words and performative action. Her explanation for the use of her own naked body as central to the piece acknowledges the troubled history of the "stripped" body that Glissant highlights above and its controversial use here in a gallery. However, she wants this body to illustrate an urgency and a mirroring of her audience, to strip down to the human essentials for a clarity of purpose. As she described it in a conversation with me, her body "untitled . . . magnified the centrality of the lone body in the making of the work, turning the body into a material connected to the ground, to the landscape and inevitably sculptural."<sup>30</sup> Subsequently she describes how "memory work can be located through my political body[,] beginning to reveal understandings of the tragic limitations of GB's [Great Britain's] cultural memory within practice."<sup>31</sup> The naked body here is revelatory of a whole history that is marginalised in the national memory. It brings it back to the foreground. This vulnerable Black body speaks back to the histories of slavery, capitalism, and racism and to specific multidimensional historical moments, as she explains:

So far drawing for up to periods of ten hours on gallery walls with charcoal, material darkness, my body covered in the dirt of the work of it, further calls to mind the north of England's coal mining and cotton mill heritage, and emphasises the labour that generates and is required by a creative practice, by drawing on the links between industrial capitalism and neo-liberal capitalist art economy as well as intergenerational, trans-national and inter-species solidarity movements.<sup>32</sup>

As in *Clay*, her body labouring in the mire illustrates the dirty work that has to be done to excavate hidden histories and the marks such mining makes on the bodies that undertake this work. Exploitative economies are of course transgenerational, and Montserrat also illustrates her contemporary place as a worker in the unequal creative economy and the toll that takes on her as well as the work involved in fighting such global inequities. Working to change them also takes

its toll, and this is acknowledged in her explication here and by the very liberatory texts she graffiti on the walls.

Montserrat also confronts the contemporary vulnerabilities exposed through the continuing degradation of Black and female bodies. As she says, "Responding through drawing as a somatic form of expression, my brown naked body serves to perhaps mourn our collective, invisible, invisibilized, vulnerable, precarious, criminalised, tortured lives in solidarity with movements such as Black Lives Matter and all campaigns against violence."<sup>33</sup> Such mourning is not solitary, however, and the very material Montserrat uses in her work symbolises a sharing that she initiates through her praxis. The charcoal that dirties her body is not a stable material, and over the weeks the installation is viewed on the gallery walls it also contaminates the audience in what Montserrat has called a "contagion":

The drawing material leaves a trace on the audience, so they're implicated. If they've come to see the work they become part of the work quite naturally because the carbon is already in the air, they're going to be absorbing it. . . . The drawing is also located in the choreography of the body around the space, so there are layers of a kind of drawing; some will leave material traces, some will leave traces of memory.<sup>34</sup>

Through *No Need for Clothing* in its iterations in Dundee, Philadelphia, and Liverpool, Montserrat has created a work that refuses to be physically hide-bound by the gallery walls and the geographic limits of that space, initiating a contagion that spreads the meaning of the work physically through the material she uses as a symbol of the memory work that she engenders.

This memory work is central to the art's meaning, mining histories for those narratives that have been lost. The fragmentary texts point to the multifarious modes that have been used to explicate lives lived on the margins, so that graffiti glimpsed from a Philadelphia wall ("Freedom will blossom from the skies of prisms\*\*prisons") is juxtaposed with texts from the written archive and invented juxtapositions ("A contagion of boldness; I made you with love"). The montage of these texts, created with a material which seeps out from the drawing into the world, creates a work whose instability is the point, because as Montserrat says, "What the charcoal does is implicate everyone in that blackness—like the idea of contagion."<sup>35</sup> The charcoal performs a function as a trace that cannot be elided, like the Black history it symbolises. One of the texts she had graffitied on the wall of galleries and made into a watercolour that she called *Hair* is exemplary.<sup>36</sup> It states, "Her hair like histories, flattened, ironed and erased." Montserrat's whole praxis works against this distortion and erasure of Black history. In his discussion of the archive and testimony, Giorgio Agamben posits how what we have left stands in for what is lost, and charcoal and its contagion

is Montserrat's "remnant." Agamben describes how "in the end, the remnant appears as a redemptive machine allowing for the salvation of the very whole whose division and loss it had signified."<sup>37</sup> Montserrat's praxis here, like that in *Clay*, labours and works through a messy physicality that is as much a part of the artwork as the finished piece. Her "redemptive machine" seeks to restore a lost Black history, deals with the horrors of present racial realities, and posits new Black futures through collaborative political actions symbolised by her contagious praxis.

## NOTES

1. Stills from *Clay* can be seen at *Shades of Noir*, "Jade Montserrat—Clay," <https://shadesofnoir.org.uk/jade-montserrat-clay/>, accessed May 1, 2019.
2. Ibid.
3. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 5.
4. Quoted in Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2010), 82.
5. Yvonne Reddick, "Catalogue Essay: A Potter, a Painter and a Poet," in *A Potter, a Painter and a Poet: Paul Tebble, Anne Gilchrist and Elizabeth Burns*, ed. Abi Baross (Preston: UCLAN Press 2017), 19.
6. See Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).
7. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History and Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Bramley and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 366.
8. Ingrid Pollard, *Postcards Home* (London: Autograph, 2004), 20–21.
9. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 160.
10. Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: W. W. Norton), 7.
11. Claudette Johnson, "Issues Surrounding the Representation of the Naked Body of a Woman," *Feminist Art News* 3, no. 8 (n.d.): 12–14, quoted in Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art History since the 1950s* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 145–146.
12. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 7.
13. Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 218.
14. Jade Montserrat, "Burial, the Brontes and Lost Children, a Text and Film Performance at IBAR UCLan Symposium *Lost Children: The Black Atlantic and Northern Britain*, Friday 1st May 2015," October 28, 2016, <https://jademontserrat.com/2016/10/28/burial-the-brontes-and-lost-children-a-text-and-film-performance-at-ibar-uclan-symposium-lost-children-the-black-atlantic-and-northern-britain-friday-1st-may-2015/>.
15. The archaeologist Duncan Sayer is leading this project on Anglo-Saxon remains at the University of Central Lancashire. Conversation with the author, April 1, 2019.
16. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 93.
17. Richard Benjamin and Alan Greaves, "The Archaeology of Black Britain," *Black Presence*, September 26, 2010, <https://blackpresence.co.uk/black-romans/>.
18. Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld, 2017), 17.
19. Williamson's *Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register*, September 9, 1758.

20. *St. James's Chronicle*, September 10, 1765, archived through *Runaway Slaves in Britain*, <https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/database/display/?rid=796>, accessed April 30, 2019.
21. For more information on the piece, see *Shades of Noir*, "Jade Montserrat—Clay."
22. The aesthetic used here is very similar to that summoned by Andrea Arnold's film *Wuthering Heights* (HanWay Films, 2011): a form of rural realism antithetical to the bucolic aesthetic of traditional costume drama.
23. Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 29.
24. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 154.
25. Jade Montserrat, *Toes*, 2017.
26. Montserrat uses Buddha figures as the source for these; my own interpretation is that they resemble ancestral figures that could be African. They are definitely a presence from deep time elsewhere in the British landscape.
27. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 50.
28. Jade Montserrat, unpublished manuscript, 2018, n.p., reprinted with permission.
29. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2018), 200.
30. Conversation with the author, transcribed in Montserrat, unpublished manuscript, n.p., reprinted with permission.
31. Ibid.
32. Montserrat, unpublished manuscript, n.p.
33. Ibid.
34. Jade Montserrat, "Drawing as Contagion," unpublished manuscript, 2018, n.p., reprinted with permission.
35. Ibid.
36. Jade Montserrat, *Hair*, 2017.
37. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 163.