

Carriage the Cat

Narrator: Gilt Rise scrutinises Sync Street, elbows bent on a crook of Barnacle Bridge. The three have been knocked down, patched up so many times that it is hard to say where the street ends and the tower begins. Many a sleep-torn eye on the platform beneath has rested on one window that seems more in the bridge than the Rise. This particular window is lit like a glow worm. Between the gathered yellow curtains is a line of primroses, lavender, tulips...

Resident 1B: petunias, geraniums, nasturtiums, begonias, ivy, zinnias, African violets. Watered before the moon sinks, watered before the sun rises.

Narrator: A round red teapot sits on the table like a duck.

Resident 1B: They like to see a pretty face.

Narrator: The Resident of 1B polishes the inside window, peering down at a platformer who is peering up, with curiosity, at the nodding begonias and a little grey wiper scrubbing their glassy necks and faces. It rattles the 23:19 like a juggernaut. The tea pot hops like a tossed coin. Its little feet muffle into silence in the flat above, where the Resident of 2B is trying to rid himself of what he considers to be – an albatross slung around his neck.

Resident 2B: That will be the 00:46, in my estimation.

The lover of Resident 2B: I'm sure it's not. If only it weren't for this power cut!

Resident 2B: It's a dreadful, dreadful thing. But we have them all the time here. Just all the time. There was one just yesterday morning. The water went too. But if you get down to the platform, soon you'll see what's going on. And I couldn't ask you to stay here in these conditions. I just couldn't. [The lover of Resident 2B starts to protest.] Have you got your bag?

Narrator: The Resident of 2A is sitting in the shower with Carriage the cat. They are sharing a tin of tuna with a plastic knife.

Resident 2A: One silver spoon for noble Carriage, one nasty knifeful for me.

[The lover of the Resident of 2B passes the shower on the other side of the wall. They are still protesting feebly, as the Resident of 2B closes the door.]

Resident 2A: That lizard in the wall isn't worth half a hair off Carriage's tail.

Narrator: The Resident of 2A is not compassionating for the poor stair-borne lover. They have loathed the Resident of 2B ever since he stole Carriage's heart with anchovies and artichokes. How did Resident 2B know that of all things in the world, artichokes were Carriage's siren-song?

The footsteps on the stairs come to a halt outside the ribbon of worm glow under the door of the Resident of 1B. The heels spin, and the steps continue – back up the stairs.

Resident 1B: Back and forth, up and down. Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square. Make your mind up. Sit down. Grow up. All you can hope for is a bit of peace. When will you learn that there's nothing more? What do you want from him? It won't be what he wants from you.

Narrator: The Resident of 1B is once more in the shadows behind her row of pretty little faces. Invisible to anyone below on the platform, she sinks their poisonous fingers with vengeance into the soil of the flowery beds. Deep, deep, six knuckles deep, the wet mulch rises to her palms.

The footsteps reach the door of the Resident of 2B. And then, on they go, up and up, and up, past the door of 3A, behind which is X, pouring more wine into both glasses. The gentle chinks, like chandelier beads, obscure the lonesome footsteps outside up one side of the wall.

Another load heaves out of the platform, but it is much less juggernautish from all the way up here.

Resident 3A: That's the last train.

Narrator: X. smiles.

Carriage: Two-step, four-step –

Narrator: Carriage springs between his home and the third flight of stairs –

Carriage: anchovies and artichokes –

Narrator: Carriage's tail licks the door of the Resident of 2B with longing, like the loving stroke of a feather –

Carriage: six-step, eight-step, top of the steps – fly!

Narrator: The sprightly thud of Carriage's noble carriage against the glass of the big stair window makes more than one body a momentary statue in Gilt Rise.

Carriage: Tuna in the shower, anchovies for me, plenty more, plenty more fish in the sea.

Narrator: Carriage has reached the little landing right at the top of the building, with the hatch to the roof but no more doors. Carriage likes to curl up on her hackles and stretch out her claws through the rickety posts, out over the deep stairwell. The landing is the throne of the Rise, and up here Carriage can almost fancy herself a sphinx.

Carriage: Tuna in the shower, anchovies for me, plenty more, plenty more fish in the—

[There is the muffled screech of the next train below.]

Narrator: In her very own throne, where no man ever goes, Carriage has found herself facing ten toes! It seems that the lover of the Resident of 2B has cast off their shoes, which landed in the stairwell just as Carriage met the window. Perhaps they both missed the fly.

[Pause. Then another train pulls in. A pause. And it heaves out again. Chinks of glasses.]

Resident 3A: If I froze like this forever, it would be nice.

X: Some say the world will end in fire.

Resident 3A: I favour those who hold with ice.

Resident 3A and X: [at the same time] Oh!

Carriage: [blissfully] Aaah!

Narrator: Carriage is stretching her claws out luxuriously over the deep stairwell.

Carriage: Piccadilly Circus! Leicester Square!

Narrator: Down on the platform, the lover of the Resident 2B is staring at the window, lit up like Christmas morning. Their red eyes drop to a row of pretty faces nodding in the window directly beneath. Without warning, one of the little coloured heads drops from its neck like a marionette, strings cut.

Cowboy Jane, 'A Ballad for the Fiat 600 Two-Door Fastback Sedan'

Dougal Douglas caresses the dashboard of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan.

His 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan is painted white with enamel paint on the exterior and interior of the vehicle.

The Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan looks quite different to the Fiat 600 multipla.

The Fiat 600 multipla is known to be the first MPV.

The Fiat 600 multipla is a compact four-seater two-door multipurpose vehicle.

Dougal Douglas caresses the dashboard of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan.

His 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan has a crème leather interior.

His 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan is small and compact, measuring only three meters and twenty-two centimetres in length.

The Fiat 600 multipla is known to be the first MPV.

The first multipurpose Vehicle.

The first Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan was produced in 1955.

The Fiat 600 multipla is known to be the first MPV.

The first Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan was produced at the very beginning of the Italian economic miracle.

Dougal Douglas caresses the dashboard of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan. He loves how the plastic feels when rubbed underneath his skin. His fingers leaving traces of oil across the surface.

He feels held in the hands of the workers who migrated from across the Italian countryside, settling in Turin to dedicate their lives the building of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan.

The Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan is a two-seater vehicle with hydraulic drum brakes on all four wheels.

Dougal Douglas caresses the smooth creme dashboard of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan, remembering how in 1921 the workers seized Fiats production plants, hoisting the red flag of communism over the oil spills and metal parts and dirty uniforms.

His 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan is painted white with enamel paint on the exterior and interior of the vehicle.

In 1921 the workers seized Fiats production plants, hoisting the red flag of communism over the production line.

His 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan has a crème leather interior.

Dougal Douglas caresses the smooth creme dashboard of his two-door fastback sedan Fiat 600 slowly circling each dial with his index finger.

He gently licks the black gear stick from base to tip.

The Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan is water-cooled with an ample cabin heater.

He grasps the steering wheel of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan feeling the expanded output and assets the Fiat company created.

He can feel how his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan created new jobs at a rate unmatched in the Western world.

His 1960 Fiat included insurance in the purchase price.

He hopes that the workers who built his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan were lectured on art.

He hopes they had a pension scheme.

Dougal Douglas caresses the dashboard of his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan.

He hopes that his 1960 Fiat 600 two-door fastback sedan will live forever.

Dougal Douglas hopes the workers had a burial scheme.

Emma Clarkson

Seven Sisters to Finsbury Park

The end carriage is getting warm from our bodies inside it.
Though it is not as full as its sisters
it still swells and bloats with the same deluge of commuters
It is full of things that make people and things that people make
The purpose of windows in an underground train is unclear to me

Finsbury Park to Highbury & Islington

One by one we fill this long metal drum,
Packed tightly together like sardines
Nothing but a fine film of silky suits and slippery synthetic jackets
in various shades of grey, blue, black and green
splits body from body

Highbury & Islington to Kings Cross St Pancras

Concealed in the bag at my side, are three flat, shallow tins
restraining sardines packed tightly together like people
Only a fine film of sebaceous sauce and scaly skin
In various shades of grey, blue, black and green.
cleaves fish from fish

Kings Cross Saint Pancras to Euston

The Victoria line, running from Walthamstow to Brixton
Is one of only two out of eleven underground train lines
that does not come up for air.
This train has been breathing borrowed breath
Carried down in the mouths of passengers
Since it was put to work twenty-eight years and two days before by birth
Twenty-eight years minus 247 days ago

Euston to Warren Street to Oxford Street

Too many bodies now for this shell to hold
I free the sardines in my bag from their metallic constraints
My desire for them to catalyse the exodus of passengers from this cloister
Hits the carriage before stench and tomato sauce hits nose and floor
Piscean liberation urging our own like Matryoshka dolls forced open by the mutiny
of an identical inferior at their interior

Oxford Street to Victoria

Viscous odour fills the space as oil coated fillets take flight
Wheels set in motion, protesting bodies heave out of the compartment
Change is coming! Our can has been opened!
Change is leaving! New bodies press into the compartment
Counting the new passengers plus the nine anatomically incomplete fish that have
joined us in this circle of hell
I have achieved nothing

Victoria to Brixton

Tears are summoned to the fronts of my eyes.
Their edges strain against the humid air
They cannot fall into the carriage because the carriage is already full
The suited man across from me understands and offers to release them from me
He licks the saline beads from my anaemic waterline.
Dividing frustrations across the central aisle
There is still the same amount of moisture in this carriage as before.

Eve Kunna

He would always wear old denim overalls that he bought from Brixton market. He said those clothes made him feel more like an artist, whatever artists are supposed to wear I'm not sure. But I'd go with him and shop for makeup, old CDs, and nylon tights which I saw as relics of a time gone by. The 70s, 80s or 90s... I was never quite sure where I belonged, but I knew I'd be shaking change out of my coat pockets for weeks to come. When he worked, he'd always tie his long hair back with a rubber band, a workshop precaution that we'd been told a million times and one that unlike him I had always managed to evade. But I always make it known to him I preferred it when he let his hair hang loose across his shoulders.

In the early mornings, there was nothing to do except listen to the broken boiler splutter in the studio next to ours. We'd take a walk across town together. He'd stub his cigarette out against the white walls and put his hand in mine and off we'd go. I'll never forget the way he'd always write on his hands in blue biro, a set of instructions for some artwork he'd never quite finished or the names of books he wanted to borrow from the college library and subsequently leave in a pile on his desk. His hands were calloused, and I could feel the cold metal of the rings on his fingers, the same ones he'd developed fantastic stories behind as though they'd been forged in the caves of dragons or by elven warriors in castles far away. I knew he'd only ordered them from the form on the back of some magazine – the heavy metal and hard rock mags we both liked to read. But I wanted to believe the stories he told me much more.

When we walked, we walked with what felt like a purpose even when we had none. He would spark within me a passion for the possible, anticipating an adventure or a dream of becoming something. We'd make our way towards the park by one of the housing estates. In the winter everything would freeze over, even the mud, and he'd always turn and tell me that I should see it in the spring when everything had bloomed. But secretly I liked the frozen parkland more, the trodden-down barbed wire fence by the railway track that looked out towards a leafless field and the pale

fog that seemed to shimmer in the mornings. I told him that I imagined that field was the divide between the city and the suburbs. We were both searching for something after all – a fixed point of knowing or belonging. My eyes would look for the remains of some ancient hedgerow that would mark a country road. And I imagined if he and I were to step over the divide in the dead of night and then turn ourselves to face backwards we would see the neon lights of the city – illuminating the tower blocks, the skyscrapers, the church spires, and beyond that the lights of all the faraway little suburbs. The unending darkness would make it impossible to tell where the city ended and the suburbs began.

Francesca Considine, 'Uprising'

Welcome to this guided meditation.

I'm Courtenay and I want to thank you for taking these few minutes for yourself, for giving yourself the time to breathe and reframe your experience, as even a short time of intentional reflection can have a really positive impact on the rest of your day.

So, begin by closing your eyes or softening your gaze.

Gently, bring your focus to your breath.

Notice how your lungs and abdomen expand with each breath in, and how your whole body releases when you exhale.

Let's stay here, focused on deeply breathing in and out. One more deep breath in and out.

Now, feel the ground supporting you.

Feel the rhythmic thrum beneath your feet, bring your attention to it.

Let it become more intense, as you feel the tingling vibration in your toes, in the arches of your feet and in your heels.

Feel the soothing sensation slowly climbing up into your ankles and calves, then entering your thighs, hamstrings and glutes, slowly releasing any tension in your hips.

Now, as it makes its way into your lower back and abdomen, feel a sense of calmness taking over your body.

And as your chest expands for another inhale, feel the sensation move up and sink into your shoulders and your neck as you exhale. That's right, feel the tension leave your body, as your shoulders become heavy with relaxation.

Now, slowly let the comforting vibration continue to flow down through your arms, to your hands and fingertips.

Feel the tingle also moving up your neck and the back of your head, gently reaching over to your forehead, your eyes, ears, and cheeks.

Feel your jaw softening and your tongue releasing.

Now that you are fully relaxed, STOP AND SEARCH for a time when you felt subjected to INJUSTICE.

Notice if perhaps you are holding ANGER, FEAR OR SHAME in certain parts of your body.

With kindness and compassion, take a moment to locate those places. FIRE

Breathe deeply into those areas, where these feelings are sitting. BURN

Allow each breath to ease and release them. ANGER, FEAR

Take notice of any triggers that may be surfacing. SHAME

They are natural, so gently welcome them. DESPAIR, HATE

Sit with these feelings and recognise YOUR UPRISING.

Now, let's take a few deeper breaths in and out. One more, in and out.

Slowly, bring your attention back to your body.

Gently wiggle your toes and your fingers.

Thank yourself for being intentional.

And when you're ready, open your eyes and enjoy the rest of the day.

Gwyneth Tambe-Green, '818 SW9'

[The sharp sound of heels.]

[Then, car engines throat clearing one by one by one, the dull sound of other lesser shoes, excuse-me-excuse-me-excuse-me, accusations flying between school kids unmuffle: Atlantic Road bustles. Heels.]

[The sweet tingle of a homemade doorbell: Corner shop.]

[Everything muffles. Heels.]

[Heels, fridge shut, heels, can on counter, five beeps, slide, another beep: Contactless.]

[Heels, heels, corner shop door shuts. Heels, heels. The crack and tssss of a can opening: Pepsi©.]

[Apple© ringtone.]

Kendall: Hey girl.

A girlish exhale, heels.

Kendall: Stop. I am.... I'm meeting the realtor now... yeah... yeah... I'll let you know how it goes. Bye girl.

[A man clears his throat]

Estate agent: Good afternoon, I'm ... I'll be showing you around the Arch today.

Kendall: I'm—

Estate agent: I mean would you look at this, eh?! All back here we've got storage, a loo and a ummm kitchen of sorts. So great cupboard here, loads of space for brooms and cleaning products and things that have nowhere else to go.

Kendall: Is there a trash can for my —

Estate agent: Ah yes, right here, no bin bag. Oops.

[A dripping sound zooms into focus. It dulls out ESTATE AGENT intermittently. Fragments of his speech are distilled into a sharp focus amongst a sea of fuzzy, meandering, nothingness.]

Estate agent: As for the kitchen as you can see we've got some great facilities installed already, great big sink as you see, little compartment for cutlery that's great – I haaaate sinks without – and we've got a great microwave, really matches the umm floor, matching is great oh um actually I'd better check it comes with the place, I'm sure the owner would open to chucking it in there for free for the right buyer oh yes that's what he said. And umm yes we've got some great storage underneath the sink here with some washing up liquid that's greeeeat, so many freebies here, lucky luckyyyy.

Any questions so far, Miss ummm Miss?

[Dull, sharp, dull, sharp, dull, sharp, dull, sharp into an even smaller space. ESTATE AGENT is right in your ear: ASMR.]

Estate agent: So moving onto the toilet, great two piece suite we've got here – this could be a staff loo – great loo, very good, button up top, very Institutional, and look at that basin! Everything you need back here. Door is in need of a lock, but hey who needs a lock? So moving back –

Kendall: I actually, um, need the restroom.

Estate agent: Yes of course, I'll meet you back in the main arch yes? Take your time— Or don't! Hahahahahaha

[Door shuts, with a slight struggle.]

[A stream of piss, quite a long one. It slows into drops. Then droplets.]

[Shuffling around, looking for something.]

Kendall: Damn!

[Groaning noise... Flush.]

[The turn of a creaky tap, a rush of water, another creaking turn ends the rush of water, and another – different – “shake”.]

[Door, footsteps, acoustics. All the sounds pull right back away from your ear again. Sweet relief.]

Estate agent: So if we make our way to the back right here, we've got more loos, these ones have previously been used for customers.

We've got three lovely looking urinals here, well loved. And on the other side here we've got a cubicle for the laadies!

So tell me, what are your plans for the space, what do you think of it?

Kendall: Well I'm so passionate about Tequila, I thought I'd bring it to London. As for the space I'm thinking cool girl, minimalist and sexy.

Hugo Hagger, 'Leroy. Leroy. A Play.'

ACT 1

Narrator: A ruined driftwood door creaks open, waves crash somewhere in the distance, the door creaks closed silencing the noise of waves and bringing into focus the dry, violent snaps of a crackling fire.

Have you come to kill me?

Narrator: No

What have you come for then?

Narrator: The long and short of it.

Beat.

Narrator: The performance was to take place. The performance was to take place in a place during a day. The performance was to take place in a place during a day in a month on a year and was commissioned by a body. The performance was to take place in a specific place during a certain significant day in a month with appropriate weather on a landmark year and was commissioned by a generous and relevant body.

INT: TRAIN.

Ulrich, thirty-six, enters. Sunglasses; future proof. Grey suit jacket; below sunglasses. Salmon coloured shirt; below sunglasses. Polished oxblood loafers; below salmon coloured shirt, below sunglasses. Gold ring on hand on thick pewter belt buckle above undone fly; below sunglasses. Camel coloured chinos; below sunglasses.

That morning Leroy put on his uniform in front of the mirror like he always did and watched the soles of his wife's bare feet reflected there. That morning Leroy thought his wife's feet especially beautiful; they drowsily arched and wrinkled to life, the left moving over its twin like the disorientation of new puppies – all thumbs. It was an angle of her he had seen a thousand times, an angle he never tired of. That morning, unfortunately, Leroy mistook a kind of permanent ink in his wife's bureau for a brand of temporary face paint. Then, now, and forever, Leroy wears two Jamaican flags on his flushed pink cheeks.

Leroy: Ello ello ello-ello ello ello ello ello ello ello ello, ello ello, ello, ello ello ello ello ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello ello ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello ello ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello, ello

Leroy gestures to Ulrich's body and looks at the others as suspects.

One of the men; an envoy, Basil – men are monsters, monsters, monsters – picks up dead Ulrich's book about burn out and reads from its faded pages to Leroy.

Basil: People are a blood vector, Leroy, start here and then end. We are circuitous in terms of that we are.

Basil takes out a small bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag from inside his long trench and offers some to Leroy. Leroy hesitates and then accepts. He takes a swig.

[The fire spits.]

Narrator: Are you following.

Yes.

Narrator: Ok then.

Leroy takes another swig, he takes another swig, and another swig and another swig and another swig. He blinks like a newborn and sways gently backward, putting his weight into his heels before correcting himself upright.

Leroy: *Burps*

The others start chanting, quietly at first, increasing in volume.

Chorus: Leroy. Leroy. Leroy. Leroy.

They get louder. Leroy begins to grin, he loves it, he can barely contain himself. He starts to dance. Leroy is feeling himself!

LEROY! LEROY! LEROY!

Leroy is smiling ear to ear, the flags on his pink cheeks roll into a green smudge around his dimples.

LEROY! LEROY! LEROY!

Leroy begins to cry, he is overwhelmed. A puddle of tears forms around his feet.

A Subway Preacher rolls a small amplifier onto the train and raises a microphone to his lips.

Rory: DO LEVITICUS!

Rory shouts. Rory is homosexual and thinly drawn, his role is this line.

The Subway Preacher holds the mic to his lips. He breathes, ripping the mic with each exhale – innnn and – for what feels like a destiny. When the Subway Preacher speaks, he speaks with a serious and converting economy.

Subway Preacher: ATONE

[The word atone becomes a long enduring digital tone. It ends with a Pop! Which sounds like the loud crackle of a fire.]

A spark flies out from the Subway Preacher's amplifier, and lands in the puddle of tears around Leroy's feet. Leroy is electrocuted, his skeleton skeleton skeleton strobos and then he collapses dead.

The door creaks open, the sound of the ocean washes in.

Narrator: Where are you going?

There is no beauty in this story.

Narrator: Wait, there is beauty coming, there is beauty coming.

The door creaks shut.

ACT ♥♥

INT: STALLED TRAIN, RED SIGNAL AT BRIXTON STATION. VALENTINES DAY, FUNEREAAL ATMOSPHERE.

All performers on the carriage sit in their seats, absorbed by their own thoughts; they look intently in all different directions. The body count stands at two, Ulrich as the base, a steaming Leroy as the ham, awaiting his top.

The platform outside the carriage is lined with Protestors staging a sit-in for a free Palestine. Sowed amongst them, standing, are a dozen or so Boyfriends all clutching the same supermarket flowers –a tableaux so impossibly universal it is difficult to look at for too long. The Protestors shield their eyes.

Leroy's Wife along with Ten Schoolchildren and a Necromancer stand in a circle around Leroy and Ulrich's bodies. Since Leroy's death, at the hands of the Subway

Preacher, Leroy's Wife has found community in magic, she met the Necromancer at a meeting in Victoria. They hit it off.

The red signal goes green, the train begins to move and the action unfreezes.

Leroy's Wife begins to sing, she sings very beautifully. A second voice eventually joins hers in the chorus – it is Leroy's.

Beat.

There was beauty.

Narrator: Yes.

Leroy was brought back to life.

Narrator: Maybe.

And Ulrich?

Narrator: Who? Oh, Ulrich, yes.

What happened next?

Narrator: Nothing.

Nothing?

Narrator: Nothing.

Why?

Narrator: As far as the art world is concerned, I made the cardinal mistake of conceiving a work of public art that the public may have actually liked. Funding was cut. Never happened.

Why have you told me this?

Narrator: I was walking.

Walking?

Narrator: Yeah, I was walking along the beach and I saw this place, so I let myself in and sat down and waited.

Waited for what?

Narrator: An audience.

The narrator pulls off a toe nail that was hanging from his big toe and puts it in his mouth.

I see.

Narrator: Yes I was walking along the beach looking for an audience and I saw this place and sat down and waited for one. And then you came in and the universe just sort of, yes. I mean no, I am not here to kill you.

Hugo Lucian Bou-Assaf

Sometimes I got to the end of a day and wondered if it had actually taken place. Whole weeks disappeared. I bought disappointing loaves of bread and had conversations with the local shop-keepers. I caught a cold and passed it on to someone else. I went out; I stayed in. With the good weather everything changed for the better. Boredom turned to leisure. People with no work were glad once again that they didn't have jobs to go to.

I buy my paper from the same man outside the prince of Wales pub. This morning he asked my name. I told him it was Freddie. 'Now you look like what I'd call a radical intellectual, sir.' Blooming reticent chin - under the shade of tweed, a little road to the lay lines that all life on this high road obeys. Nevertheless, this made my day and, in all likelihood, will make my year.

A few weeks in a late summer, fireworks rosette from the semi-detached gardens we can see from the tower block roof. They are vortexal to find a place to end up sideways with people you do immensely, or will – in a nascent way – care about. One evening of this very nature; I found myself caught short and extended longitudinally – outside of a party on Coldharbour Lane. Lobster grip around a tin of beer. A figure of contempt, back on the wall; looking for anyone – plaited the fog from a late summer evening into the bones of my face.

Earlier today I attended my sign on date at the Lambeth employment centre. I didn't have time to change so wore carpenter's trousers, guilty with white paint - a fix up job advertised on the news agent board. The dole officer smiles forgivingly 'enjoy your weekend' my new income both state given and disposable – gained and implied.

I missed my next two sign on dates, waiting until the swelling on my face went down. The teeth hurt the most, sibilating an alloy like pain all over the machinery of my gob. To wake feverishly, in a stencil of pain – imagining vividly all the throbbing tree roots in my mouth condensing into a metamorphose blob. Imagining even more vividly; catching the blob under my gum with long nails, grown in the weeks of this convalescence – extracting the entity of pain; rolling it between thumb and index finger, celebrating a relieving ecstasy.

Steranko and I met in the battle cruiser. His new cardigan a trophy of war from the sale of a painting. I count through copper nickel coins in my hand pensively – aligning their ridges with those in my finger; until Steranko begrudgingly agrees to accrue the next round.

Carlton was chased for his sovereign jewellery for half the length of Lambeth Road. Panting, he bursts through the foggy glass doors. Two police officers following him inside. It seems his running was peculiar, unsightly; if an attempt was made on his possessions, it'd be his fault for flaunting them supposedly. We can't forget there is a vast network of history and resistance here. We realise in small moments that although we are from families uncelebrated by the great industrial machinery of new world wealth – we are separate.

Mum was a dinner lady. Dad did something with sheet metal. We went grammar and were good enough to go fancy lodgings in the Russel group. Now we're here. Despite what you might read from Marx, and what you might have read from Hegel; about police being the enemies of a proletariat class, they are pleased to see us, Me and Steranko. We are a different more manageable, perceivably less worrisome underclass.

From the roof of our tower block in Brixton, we can see it all. We can see the same thing helicopters can, when they escort conveyors to and from the Brixton courthouse. We're all ants down here to someone. You, eyes flit outside the King George pub, spectre of many lives just a short walk the hospital you were born. Gummy smile, soapy pint in hand, children in the playground across the road – colouring the air with layered screams and laughs. Before the sun is doing goodbyes we buy Styrofoam cups of pineapple juice. You know, from the stalls by the station; thumbing through records, holding the cups at the base of our hands, all bohemian like; gliding through Booker Little, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Art Pepper, Fats Navarro. Crouched by the cheap sleeves. We walk the market afterwards. This is a place of tapestry. Consigned towards oblivion by the sheer velocity of its potential. There are those that found a narrow way through. Stalls for the Nicaraguan solitary campaign, the anti-apartheid group and the El Salvador support group; patches to sell, leaflets to deliver. The green, black and gold flag of the ANC flutters above Brixton Town Hall.

Indra Maria Țincoca

Eyes ablaze, I feel myself watching you (you watch me watch you and me, me.)

Gazing heavenly/heavily over my shoulder. Head forth, push through others. I rush to meet your eyes, for you see,

I've met you in distant times

I sense you (heavy), too heavy, on my shoulders (now), you weigh down my eyes.

You send me down stairs, spinning. On fire, the painting is on fire and I'm spinning, yet your eyes still look over me. Held in burning hands, I will follow you/if you follow me down the stairs

Don't look over me

Follow me down the stairs

In this tunnel are traces of me and you. In this concrete are traces of me and you.

I follow you.

I follow you.

I follow you.

I follow you.

...stay with you ... on you

On fire – sent up the stairs – anointed and held just past your gaze, forever.

I've met you in distant times.

Inez Reeves

The following audio piece is the imagined 'voices' of the items found in the 'Ivory Bangle Lady's' grave. The Ivory Bangle Lady was of North African origin; her grave was found in York. The items in the grave are rare, valuable, and imported objects. Her grave goods indicate that she was amongst the richest inhabitants of the region and enjoyed a high social status – evidence that African people had a place in the upper echelons of Roman society, and that early Britain was more ethnically diverse than history suggests. I have imagined an oral history for each object and given each of them a poetic monologue to claim a history *for* and possession *of* themselves.

We are the blue remains, an ivory bracelet, a jet bangle, a bracelet of blue glass beads, a silver pendant, a bronze pendant, two large blue glass beads with white patterns, a small round glass mirror, a dark blue glass flagon and an inscription on open bone, "soror ave vivas in deo", "hail, sister may you live in God".

I am the open clasping embracing of the ivory bracelet, meeting my balance in the jet closed refrain. Yet even together, we remain *unfinished*. *We are the history of a wrist*.

I am a bracelet of blue glass beads, I am yours to buy, sell, bequeath, or barter. I am a lightheaded fountain – ringing on hands of prayer.

I am a silver pendant; my shaft of weight dimples the centre-point of the collarbone. My core of fire has finally run cold – only an ignescent spit can be extracted from me now.

I am a bronze pendant, my venerable bell rings blue like the bluish charioteer of Delphi – whose horses fled with time, and I too am unbeknownst to whom now carries me. I am the little weight of a raindrop that alters the colour of the earth.

I am two blue glass beads; my blue name comes from cobalt and copper fizzing in my hot jaws – who needs a single sapphire when you can have me in my thousands? I can remain with you, like a hunch or a prayer.

I am a glass mirror, whose utopia is yet untarnished, I know of a light – more ancient than the sun. What do I know of living? I know they say that the phoenix dies by a single ray of dawn, by beating its wings, by flying into the sun. What little death is in the first unearthed ray of dawn? What oblivion can be reached without wings? Which sun would you choose for a grave?

I am a blue flagon – my pour is the length of Eridanus, the river of the sky, I am all undecided flowing. I held water for Thales, the Astrologer who Fell into a Well, who wrote that all things came from water.

I am the inscription of open bone – where faith remains, still manifest, like a little grain in the recess of a pocket being turned. I am the faint breath down your neck whispering, “eschaton” with a laugh. I am the faith of the red flame that remains flickering overnight.

We are the same lingering blue as the pea flower found in Tutankhamun’s tomb, the sheaf of blue flax waiting to be woven, the theological blue of the morning glory, the cornflower spilled on perimeter of a field, the shale seam running through a cliff. We are the contents of a grave, still capable of living.

Isaac Benigson

London's Underground, traversing through the city and its environs, transporting the city's dwellers and visitors. A tangled web of rail and electrified travel. Trains traipsing east to west, and up and down the lines and points of meeting. The governing body of the underground consider *Art in public spaces to 'belong' to those who see it*. Murals can act as indicators of place and time, as sited, sometimes historical and often political visual representations. When using the transportation systems as crowds crush, merge and meet, the spaces we engage with become part of the visual landscape and in turn a language. Rattling into a station, on an overground train, crossing a bridge and seeing a fresco on a brick wall. What is a mural, and if it belongs to the people who see it, can it become something else. These murals are flat visual signifiers, that are only murals when they are seen from the necessary vantage point. Painting on public surfaces is, and was, more than an act of individual expression.

From the 1960s till the end of the 1980s, murals painted on exterior walls became a poised and pointed moment of cultural production. However, the British mural epoch is largely unrecorded and absent from art historical narratives. And in the last 35 years have been greatly neglected. London's murals are connected to the counter-cultural moments post 1968, and the wider happenings and political radicalism of the 60s. Community artists become key players in illustrating the political and social transitions of the later decades of the 20th century - with artists situated in the locations where they painted pushing against a hermetic modernist approach to making and selling art. The cultural policies of the Greater London Council in the 1980s encouraged and funded painted wall murals. And by 1986 London was home to approximately 300 murals, which were often associated with council-led regeneration programmes. The murals enabled narratives of diverse neighbourhood residents to respond to significant issues such as the housing crisis, fear of nuclear war and rising race tensions. Recently

restored, unlike so many other London murals, Brian Barnes and Dale McCrea's striking masterpiece from 1981, is called *Nuclear Dawn*. Painted on the wall of Carlton Mansions in Brixton, it depicts a skeleton draped in the flags of the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union, hurling cruise missiles over London while politicians hide beneath the Houses of Parliament. Painted during the throngs of the Cold War, it reflected the neighbourhood's feeling towards nuclear escalation, and the foreboding image is in essence a call to disarmament. Over the years natural deterioration took place, as well as substantial vandalism leaving the work terribly defaced. However today, the mural has been returned to its original state, and in many ways can resonate with us as wars continue to rage across the globe. IN 1983 a grant of £40,000 was given to a group of artists called the London Muralists for Peace, and within the year, six new murals appeared in London calling for peace and disarmament. A year later, in 1984, the Greater London Authority launched an anti-racism campaign which included the commissioning of artists from Afro-Caribbean and Asian backgrounds. The second mural to be painted as part of this scheme was by Chanti Panchal on the end wall of a community centre building in Shadwell. Today it is one of the last remaining murals commissioned by the GLC on the theme of anti-racism, which presents a picture of the area's diverse community, with the mural acting as a window onto private and public life for residents of Tower Hamlets. It is entitled 'Across the Barrier' and today is emblematic of a social, cultural and political landscape of the 1980s that brought focus onto anti-racism movements and the experiences of racism across British society. In 2022 Art on the Underground presented 'Endurance', a large public commission at Brixton Underground Station – the reproduction of a watercolour by Shanti Panchal. 'Endurance' centres this history of mural making in Lambeth and London, which was the starting point of Art on the Underground's programme at Brixton station.

We can think about murals as an otherwise to the traditional artistic narratives of painting, and supplementary to the construction of identity and place. Yes, well, that's my talk on murals in relation to transport. Interesting, I think? Yes.

Julia Merican, 'Minding the Gaps: A Sonic Essay'

In his last book, the critic, poet, and novelist John Berger wrote:

We tend to associate intimacy with closeness and closeness with a certain sum of shared experiences. Yet every day total strangers, who will never say a single word to one another, can share an intimacy. An intimacy contained in the exchange of a glance, a nod of the head, a smile, a shrug of a shoulder. A closeness which lasts for a second or for the duration of a song being sung and listened to together.¹

I think about this often on the tube, swaying between people in the thrum of the evening commute. What intimacies I might be sharing with the passengers around me, the other bodies being ferried to and from known and strange locations. How we momentarily inhabit public space together.

Our relationship to space is one of both intimacy and immensity, a glittering dance between proximity and distance. It feels philosophical for some reason, somehow worthy of tome-like monographic discourses that play around architectural concepts of air and light, the flows of things and their attendant whimsies. There's a branch of knowledge that contends with the amount of space we feel necessary to set between ourselves and others called proxemics. I think of it as a language that characterises how widely we spread our legs when someone unfamiliar sits next to us. That explains why we like to keep that empty seat in between. That decodes the discomfort of being pressed up against strangers at rush hour.

Proxemics speaks to the gaps we create in relation to physical space, but there are other parameters that hold things together by keeping them apart. Like the excruciating interval between saying goodbye to a lover and meeting

¹ John Berger, *Confabulations*, 107-108.

again, or the grace period between receiving and responding to an email. The interstitial time between boarding a mode of transport, and alighting somewhere entirely different. The ethnographer, Anna Tsing, reminds us that 'we are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others.'² We are all, like Sara Ahmed proposes, shaped by the conditions of our departures and arrivals, the charged intervals between them. 'Think of a sticky object; what it picks up on its surface "shows" where it has travelled and what it has come into contact with,'³ she writes. No one ever steps into the same river twice.

One of my favourite things on social media is [@subwayhands](#), an Instagram account run by the photographer, Hannah La Follete Ryan, devoted to capturing strangers' hands on the New York subway. Her close-up images and videos depict how hands occupy themselves in transit: fingers coiled around metal rails, flower stems, rinds of fruit; pressed against crisp packets, the pages of books or newspapers; threaded through the straps of tote bags, tangled earphones, the hands of others. She gives us palms pressed self-consciously between thighs, against fishnet stockings or bare skin; hands painting nails, anxiously grazing wrists or knuckles, cradling small children; thumbs twiddling, stroking, scrolling. There is something tender and humane about these photographs, how they blot gentle moments of intimacy onto communal, transitional space, speak a parlance that carries both the clamour of the public and the thrum of the personal.

I don't often look at people's hands on the tube, but I have started paying attention to the moments when the gaps that keep everything in orbit close ever so slightly. To catalogue these little tears in the fabric, you might say, such as the collective smile that tremors through the carriage when a tube driver makes a particularly funny or inspired announcement through the speakers, although no one wants to meet eyes. A child standing to give up her seat to someone older, a laughing thirty-something who says don't worry, I'm

² Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p.27.

³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.40.

okay to stand. When someone tall notices a shorter person on tiptoes trying to grab onto those horizontal handrails, and budes up so they can clasp onto a rail within their reach. The serenity of watching two people sharing earphones and drifting in and out of sleep, small smiles wreathing their faces as they zone into a private, shared sound.

How are we changed by these points of encounter? How do we mind and tend to these gaps in our lived experiences, respecting the boundaries that protect us while also delighting in their permeability? 'Every day total strangers, who will never say a single word to one another, can share an intimacy.' In the space of a commute, this intimacy feels contained in our silent gestures. How we budge up, make way, rub shoulders, hold space, collect the dust of other people's days on our sleeves, always slightly changed by every arrival.

Lauren Briggs, 'Randomly Selected'

[Short dial tone]

[Automated voice]

Hello.

You have been invited take part in a survey about the proposed project.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable during this survey at any time, you may simply hang up.

All responses are treated confidentially.

The survey will take approximately 4 minutes to complete.

Please say yes or no after the following statements:

You feel positive about the project's impact

You have been consulted during the early stages of the project

You see the project as community focused

You feel your values are being represented

You actively participate in your area

You enjoy spending time with friends and family

You think crossing the river is a hassle

You would rather they come to you

You have fallen asleep on the tube

You have fallen asleep on the tube standing up

You stand on the right

You will loudly ask people to stand on the right

You have been sick on a night bus

You can remember hopping on and hopping off

You experience change as loss

You wonder if any of this is worth it

You wonder when things will get easier

You enjoy spending time in your local area

You would like them to remember your order

You have a favourite pigeon

You have given foxes names

You only got mugged that one time

You don't know what to think anymore

You worry you are part of the problem

You worry about the algorithm

You wonder why everything looks the same

You are not convinced about shipping containers as venues

You patronise local businesses

You signed the campaign to save Nour Cash and Carry

You have been going there for years

Your neighbour has been going there for decades

You think something can be too popular

You have been on a date to Brixton Market

You know what a scotch bonnet is

You know not to eat a whole one

You know that lady's fingers, okra and bhindi are the same thing

You kept this information to yourself

Your date told you how Electric Avenue got its name

You pretended not to know already

You can't even

You literally died

Your parents were cooler than you

Your parents saw Diana Ross at Brixton Academy

Your parents also saw David Bowie at Brixton Academy and won't stop telling you about it

Your friend's older brother saw Public Enemy at Brixton Academy and you wonder where he is these days

You saw Jurassic 5 at Brixton Academy, twice

You don't go as often anymore

You are always surprised how bright the colours are on the mural at the back

You are not sure about it

You used to hail unlicensed cabs under it

Your friends thought this was a bad idea

Your friends never let you ride alone

You know when it was painted

You know why it was painted

You weren't even born then

You wish they'd taught you that at school

You know things didn't end there

You know now

Thank you for your participation.

You have reached the end of this survey.

Your responses have not been recorded.

Goodbye.

Liz Kirk-Channing, 'Nearly Home'

The Harp is playing throughout. The words in [square brackets] are a description of the sounds between the words.

[Strong, quick plucks in sustained beats]

How can I know a place I have never been?

[More strong, quick, sustained plucking]

My mind trips over itself -

[High soft shimmers]

The trees across the road, the leaves are gone, their music;

[More high soft shimmering]

How do you feel me through the corner of your eye,

[High, quick simultaneous flick]

Who are you to me. A stranger on the street.

[Soft, full plucks]

Who am I to this place?

[Running shimmers upwards]

The light shines full beam on my cheeks as my eyes gaze upwards -

[Fuller running shimmers]

I am wrapped in my winter coat

[Fading, calming shimmers]

I am cold.

[Single, quick beats]

There is a loneliness not knowing a place

[More single, quick beats]

The leaves are gone.

[Even more single, quick beats]

Poetry rolls off the tongue and I'm lost in the sound of my own words,

[Raining shimmers]

Do you feel me?

[Single beats]

Can you feel me, could you, feel me.

[Sustained beats]

Begin with the trees, I whispered to them

[Sequential partnership]

Their inner wisdom:

[Running softness]

Will you share with me?

[Rippling softness]

Mindfully, consciously, unconsciously,

The pedestrian beat.

[Rolling upwards]

You are but a sound.

[Quickening upwards]

Ask the walls –

[Softly quickening upwards]

Paint it out

[Raining, soft plucks]

You may pass judgement on me, and yet I do not care,

[Wooden, regular knocking]

But your judgment may hold weight, your judgment may hold doors, your judgement may lock those doors.

[Increasing rounded ripples]

I am getting to know your life in living.

[Fuller round rippling]

Who begins, even if I wonder through the familiar and become a secret

[Quick, related soft plucks]

This is my ritual.

[Soft partner flicks]

The leaves crunch beneath my feet, I am hungry.

[Soft partner twangs]

Is this your home?

Is this my home?

[Sequential shimmering, heightening, lightening]

Sometimes I feel lost, sometimes I feel like I'm home.

[Running shimmering upwards]

I have never known home, but it moves, shapes and shifts enough on its own.

[Soft, deep, rumbling plucks]

There is enough movement on its own and we must keep coming back.

[Simultaneous, light and low plucks]

To this.

To now.

Keep coming back.

[Sustained low plucks]

Who is loss? Who is shame?

[Further sustained low plucking]

Do they wear a brightly coloured hat?

[Related heightened twang]

Do they know their power and heal or are they ignorant strong babies of non-knowledge.

[A ripple and a spark]

Life is cycling back

[Ripple. Spark.]

Life is re-finding ourselves over and over.

[Upward sparkles]

Healing is allowing this to be a conscious returning.

[Simultaneous, quick sparkles]

Awareness weaved into the journey

[Deep, sustained plucks]

To self-remember again and again.

To come back to our own center

[Shining sparkles]

Back to our sense of self

[Soft ripping upwards to contained light relationship]

- Back home -

Maria Mba

This is where life happens. On the train, 10am, an incidental audience of one. A mother wraps her arms around her son's tired shoulders. He slumps sideways, kicks his leg- one, two, three times then settles. His eyes flash open then close again. Alight here for- I cast my eyes toward the light, white advertisements: the coherent form and function of wealth being more wealth, being white teeth, a full head of hair, a trip to the opera, the gallery, the theatre, the right bag. Next to me are a man and a woman. He places his hands underneath his stomach, fingers spread tenderly like a balloon held in delicate fear of bursting. A premonition of loss. I'm losing my train of thought. My bones melt into the seat underneath me. Faded and grey. The sky this and every morning like light reflected on the wet tarmac in winter.

Mary Bond

...and the thrum of the track and
the gentle sway of the carriage and

I'm heading somewhere and I'm moving through
scenes in the window of this new foreign town
the smell of the man beside me his warmth his breath and
the little girl across the way clutching her doll
her loud laugh as her mum smiles apologetic as
I'm smiling back all moving together

the rush of wind as we round the bend
and suddenly we're out of the underground
wet grass shining in the sun
the little girl coos out the window and
we're passing homes with small gardens and birds flying overhead
all eclipsed by the tunnel
the surge of black earth

I remember the train in New York in the summer
the sun setting over the bridge into
the city skyline aglow or afire with orange light
with beads of sweat running down my brow

now here in Brixton it's cold bundled but
the tube is warm from our bodies and breath and
the familiar old comfort of the touch of a stranger's wool coat
as they stand to exit

the accent is different but the sense the same
the thrum of the truck and the gentle sway of the carriage
as we're on our way and we're heading somewhere

the awkward kind dance of exiting bodies making their way
out of the crowded car my feeling
no matter where I am at home on the
train going somewhere momentum carried
along in some pulsing current through unseen
land the shifting faces and flow of bodies as my hand
grips the bar to the end of the line just to ride it back
again, tracing an origin or a movement the metro
metronome carries me home with the clack
clack of metal wheels on metal track I'm transported
more than figuratively, lights flashing
by rain pouring down the seasons turning over as
the train follows itself again the schedule the doors
which open and close the boys who smoke
cigarettes between cars and I want to hold them say don't fall
but then the risk is part of the fun

I remember my sleepless nights on the subway feeling
lost and riding the train until dawn watching the sun
come up over the Bronx the nurses off their nightshift in
their scrubs or the club kids glittering euphoric meeting
the janitors on the 5am train to prepare the offices for
the business men in wool suits who ride the train with the rest of us
the kids in their uniforms sharing gum and gossip and the
thrum of the track and the gentle sway of the carriage

and the thrum of the track and the gentle sway of the carriage

Mathilde Von Rosen

We are not just stepping into a street, but we are entering a living canvas where fashion speaks louder than words. Every garment has a story. Every fabric holds a memory. The fashion scene and the exploration of style is a tapestry of life where every textile transforms into testimonies. Textiles are not just about what you are wearing, but rather about expressing who you are.

Well, I think the first time when I stepped out of my comfort zone, normally I would wear tighter clothes, so everything was always fitted. And then one day I went to my friend and I had a date and I said, do you mind dressing me? I've never ever worn cargos or anything like that. So one day, he put me in khaki green; I remember it was khaki green baggy chinos with, I think they were one-off high top dunks, khaki and brown collab. And, a limited edition Cortez jacket and that was all camouflaged, and that was the first time I come out of my comfort zone and that fit, it's crazy, it's crazy. My favourite fit, even to this day.

This is a traditional, Libyan waist coat, we, we call it Farmala, it's the Bedouins of North Africa that they wear it, they wear it over the long dress, but for me I'm just combining the style, you know, I'm wearing it over a modern European dress, just to make a difference. But it's very traditionally, it's handmade. It's done through a family that's been in the business for 200 years, maybe, grandfather to son. It's partly to express my identity. It's my roots, you know, something that I'm proud of.

I would say I, I just the type of way to stand out. Because I see a lot of people now, all that a UK and London, they get their fashion, um, they get their fashion inspiration from UK rappers, and London rappers or London celebrities and I don't think they could dress at all I would look more into other countries like Australia. If you look everywhere else everyone else just a little bit differently. So if I just let someone from Australia, for example, and I walk on the streets of London everyone's gonna be looking at me attention is gonna be on me because I'm not just in the same but I look

clean. So I think it just, yeah, I think depending on who you're around or what area you're from, it shows and represents where you're from.

I love traditional clothing, especially in this area. And if you walk down the market here on Saturday, you'd hear no less than 50 languages without exaggeration. I mean, everybody from the world comes in and they are encompassing, you know, there has the Caribbean community living here, the Moroccans up the roads, Portuguese, the Serbians, there's so many, Polish. Um, they've all lived here, they've cohabitated the area peacefully. We get along, it's a community here and we do what we like, you know.

These days people are not smart, they just wear trainers. But back in the day, right, say when I moved there 38 years ago, 39 years ago, you know, you had people wearing fashion and, you know, being in the 70s and 80s, right? Yeah, very, um, fashionable. But the Americans come in and take all the, um, fashion away from England, yeah? It's just trainers and just casual wear.

Now, in this generation, how everyone's dressing now, it was how a lot of people were dressing in the eighties and nineties and how they were wearing a baggy jeans, not so fitted boot cuts. So I like to go and look into old pictures on Google, preferably, or into old, old, old pictures and try make up fits like that.

Fashion can express itself. It's a tool, you know, fashion is a mean. And it can penetrate, I mean, people would, you know, ask questions, you know, where is that coming from? It's, it's an eye opener, you know, it's broadened the horizons of people. And, uh, you know, it's like food, like dance, like music, fashion can bring people together, you know, bring, you know, it's a topic to talk about vis a vis designs, patterns, clothing, stuff like that. In this area specifically, it's quite encouraging. It's all acceptable, it's all permissible as it were. And, uh, you know, people wear what they like. And each country represents itself with its own uniform, with the dancing, with the food, with all kind of activities. It brings people together. You know, people, um, you know, would ask questions, would like to know. It's inquisitiveness, uh, finding out. You know, areas where it comes from buttons,

textiles, you know, tailoring and all that kind of thing. So in a way it is, it is a common factor that brings people together and enjoy talking about and discuss.

Naomi Delorme, 'Swarm City: The Movement of Collective Body'

the sky is grey and I am waiting for 345
Peckham to Brixton
the cars jolt
and crowds of human bodies bounce off one another
shoulder to shoulder like red cells
the protein cups in sticky hands shakes us, pushes us forward
we keep the city moving

the carriers of oxygen from centripetal nervous system, soar along tubes to all parts
of the body from central lungs

spinal cord northbound
branch off peripheral to Peckham
sciatic to Southwark

nutrients of the city we deliver and we take

fight against corruptions
swarm to the wounds like ant colony optimization
dance around a dropped crumb of sugar
collectively complex with sophisticated sign based communication
painted lines direct on bricks and street corners
flashing lights light up darkness
glass strips of tungsten to follow like moths in tunnels
reds danger
whites safety
green go

we inscribe our defence in paint on walls
make paintings that are brave and bold

we champion faces
locating ourselves in places
taking up our spaces
shaping our own topographies

debris of burger wrappings, cigarette butts and plantain wraps little bits of lettuce
strewn

on curbs as effigy of brilliance, of human resilience
acting as axons and dendrite's
communication of place across distance
detects light, odour, taste, pressure, heat

when left to stand blood separates into triptych

plasma

red

white

systems of connective separation

like flashing traffic lights

I think of the red/white roses on the flower market stall

winking alluring

like plasma we're mainly water

our skins the banks of our bodily riverbeds, antibodies, albumin, clotting factors,
enzymes, bubbling hormones, sugars, particles of fat all derived from our marrow

we whittled ourselves into the bones of metropolitan, the deep tissue of the body's
parapets, veins, tubes, arteries, carved with the layers of our thickening histories

the walls warped, wrought wilfully with words, they say nothing so powerfully
the pavements pounded periodically by passer by-ers passer through-ers,
populaces, protestors, presiding, empowering, they say nothing so electrically

tarmac, tarnished by a billion feet, edged with mutinies, bordered by dancing

on the street corner by the bus shelter
outside the cities underworld entrance
there's a man with his stereo standing in the ear canal of Brixton
electronic sonic soundwaves stretch out the air to reach me
temporal bone through incus to vestibular, spun through cochlea
vibrations amplify communication causing ripples
I ride the wave of this cacophony
the whistling of 159 to waterloo
the beeping of the crossing
the screeching of breaks on tire
the large dog barking
and I desire *pause*.

Lull.

the pace and hum to *quieten*

my body cannot take it

my mind is dizzying

trying to tell me something
and headlights blink in my eyes
bruised blueberry eyelids
the sky blinks
to try and mitigate
and I am reminded I'm
just another

lonely specimen
beset by puzzlement of bodily intimacy

the singularity of our existence soaring along
deep physical currents that bind us
one centimetre and a thousand miles apart.

Nicole Moore

'Brixton Revisited'

Brixton looks both familiar and new,
like a foreign country **you** are returning to after many years.
An exile **you** don't even remember.

The buildings are mostly the same.
Morleys is still firm,
though its prices have fluctuated to levels
that exclude rather than include.
Business as usual trumps community development.

The details have changed: the younger generation with smartphones,
directing their rights of passage into their virtual life,
electric bikes and bikes for hire taking up space,
protruding dangerously misplaced.
Cyclists on single speed bikes,
confronted with potholes that bite back.

Gentrification has a presence
with pop-up shops floating, trying,
to fit in somehow.

Reggae rhythms, bass lines and crisp soundscapes,
the one staple that continues to express itself everywhere **you** go.
You can easily relate.

Refreshing black cultural shops flourishing
in their upmarket presentations
and their attractive holistic goods,
their sweet meditative sounds

soothing **your** shopping experience.

Restaurants from every which way,
chain stores spreading their wings
offering light refreshments,
coffee, bubble tea – sometimes free –
encouraging lengthy queues.

The hustle and bustle surrounding the tube hasn't changed;
that **you** know **you** can rely on

you hear police and ambulance sirens
flow as per usual with their fast-paced energy.

The new, exquisite tube header-mural
is mesmerizing,
you stay transfixed on its impact
you absorb it's largeness; Its entirety envelopes a stunning yet glowing earthly look.

The Windrush mural greets **you**
– two front-line pieces with warm tones
– as **you** step into Brixton Village, with its edgy vibe

You need to feel this **yourself**; it's much more of an experience than a sighting.

'Brixton Remembered'

So, what does Brixton mean to **you**?

Especially since **you** have been living here for 30 years.

Why Brixton?

You told me that it was reminiscent of Liverpool, where **you** were born, although **you** mentioned that the diversity of the people here wasn't as mixed back then.

Originally, **you** could say Brixton was perceived as a bit 'ghettoish' following the 1981 uprisings, It's now quite the middle-class enclave It's gone a bit trendy.

Brixton has also become a constant nightlife of drinking and eating, **You** see, it's just bar after bar after restaurant after restaurant **You** know this is for the younger generation, and it's an overpowering new energy an ever-evolving new nation.

Brixton Village is a prime example that has seen the most significant changes to its landscape over the last five years.

The beating heart of Brixton can't be replaced despite the fact that the established multi-cultural and multi-generational community is being lost.

You are concerned that the upmarket shops and offices are displacing the local market traders, and **you** are also concerned that the traditional community of Windrush descendants have been steadily – over the last eight to ten years – driven out of the area, replaced by the so-called young professionals.

Also, **you** used to know who was out there standing on **your** street corner, familiar faces I mean.

Now, that's gone, **You** don't know anyone out there anymore, That's what's scary.

The realisation is that the Brixton **you** knew historically
is gone, the Brixton **you** knew culturally is gone,
And the Brixton **you** know now is a fading memory
which is ever shapeshifting,
ever being reprocessed, reinvented,
in the name of progress, growth, development, and change,
in the name of out with the old, and in with the new.

Renée Eshel, 'There is a Garden'

There is a garden above the roof tops, far away from London where we all go to breathe.

When I say breathe I mean being pretty at seventeen and disfigured at twenty-three. As in girlhood, but trans. As in stealing. As in sacred. As in blooming. As in kissing your best friend and falling asleep and breathing again. When I say breathe I actually mean sleeping next to your friends. As in silicone sleight of hand, hushed lips. As in arched as in bridged as in desperate. As in neighbouring trees in the night reaching for each other, touching once then holding on. As in clasping. As in caught. As in there being someone else there, spectral figure, four fingers and a raised fist. As in hands in all the pies – sticky and sweet. As in kneeling at the knuckles. As in blurriness and the lines twitching. As in a home in bodies for all our friends and their friends and children. As in platonic/non platonic/ repeat platonic again. As in this is how we breathe. When I say breathe I mean as in the children held communally. As in birth then education then radicalisation then again. As in groups for reading. As in groups for speaking. As in groups for aid. As in groups for untangling. As in concepts as in institutions as in relations. As in messiness. As in each having our own names. As in remembering them. As in care for those uncared for. As in a love in whispers. As in taking a breath. As in clasping hands and eating at the altar. As in vandalising the altar. As in a bathroom with a triangle bathtub where we all go to pray instead. As in purple flowers and quilts for every room. As in kind mirrors and cutting hair in our bedrooms. As in squatter's rights. As in yes, it's free to stay – yes bring everyone. But never the thirteenth or the twelfth person you know. As in put down the phone. As in take a breath. As in kill that thought before it's formed. As in rip up that bill. As in be assured, our weekend plans never change. As in we are angry on weekdays and pleased on weekends. As in action. As in a swathe of us walking towards a common. As in planting seeds on the common. As in letting the plot breathe. As in reaping what we sew. As in cooking with the fruits. As in nature for everyone but not regimented. As in tending to allotments. As in not restricted. As in trespass. As in right to roam. As in abolition. As in obsolete. As in freedom to move as in freedom to move as in freedom to move –

– Whereas

Whereas counting pennies. Whereas taking money to the grave. Whereas gripping too tightly. Whereas breathing down the neck, whereas pushing rent up. Whereas holding land in a palm and a card in the other. Whereas mould in corners and faulty leccy and bills charged, and eviction made. Whereas complaints. Whereas moving with the law. Whereas breathing easy when you see a hard hat and baton. Whereas police whereas state whereas legal not moral. Whereas sitting watching waiting checking reporting. Whereas surveillance whereas foot soldiers. Whereas gods whereas masters. Whereas picking up the phone and dialling three numbers. Whereas neck and knees knelt and a want to cease and desist. Whereas deliberate whereas purposeful whereas misunderstanding. Whereas curriculum and followers. Whereas Jesus and disciples. Whereas palpable. Whereas heightened breath. Whereas no more. Whereas at capacity. Whereas heaving. Whereas gagging. Whereas breathless. Whereas jobless. Whereas searching. Whereas dreaming of labour. Whereas imagining within a circle. Whereas no crops burnt. Whereas private property intact. Whereas private property revered. Whereas Save the church! Save the hotel! Save the office! But never save the school! Never save the children! Never save the people! Whereas breathing next to a wife and husband their two kids and their shrine to thatched roofs. Whereas other side of the protest. Whereas empathy in doses. Whereas earwiggling. Whereas ears and mouth and breathing and tasting the neighbours necks. Whereas kicking and punching and meeting other flesh. Whereas no clever anger. Whereas no pleasure no weekend plans no weekday fluids. Whereas no organising. Whereas no action. Whereas no movement. Whereas no movement. Whereas no movement.

As in we all match, in our recklessness and opposition to law. As in sweaty as in pulsing as in gorging as in high as in throbbing. As in kissing and turning kissing and turning kissing and turning. As in inverse.

As in against.

As in forward.

As in forward, as in forward, forward, forward, forward.

Salomé Mercier, 'No Surprises'

I remember almost nothing of my first day here. Glimpses, fragments, sounds and sights cut incomplete. Months later, I still can't see London as a continuous landscape.

I remember the journey from Heathrow to Brixton. Plastic suitcase handles digging into the palms of my hands, palms of my hands pressed to handrails, head resting on the tube doors. I remember it was raining like everyone said it would. I remember getting lost like everyone said I would.

The first thing I laid my eyes on when I walked out of Brixton station were shards of broken glass near the stairs. Everything else was loud and moving too swiftly for my senses to follow and so I stared at the shards all the way up the steps, and I would have liked to stare some more, stop and take the whole place in quietly, shiny things then colourful ones then small ones then loud ones, people then cars then buses then storefronts. But I was somehow in everyone's way, everywhere all at once, and my suitcases too, and so I walked down Coldharbour Lane as fast as I could, not even entirely sure I was headed the right way.

After that day, after the broken glass, everything of Brixton I have seen in passing. I still walk the exact same route every day, past the murals and still landscapes and memorial candles, but I rarely slow down enough to catch more than a handful of words, half a sticker or empty shapes. Walk everywhere, run everywhere, ride trains and tubes and buses, I'm mapping out London in dislocated glimpses, no full stop. I can name where I came from and maybe where I'm going but everything else blurs into lines on half-erased maps, names of stops I never get off at, incomplete images, blanks I cannot fill.

...the small Brockwell Lido square on the tunnel mural, the way the paint flakes off the red piano in Herne Hill, blue birthday balloons by the memorial, that one graffiti no one erased just by Brixton House, the shapes on the wall under Shakespeare Road's bridge, the orange and yellow shades of the one they painted over...

I want to make London into the shape of a home, or the other way around, I want to draw its streets from memory, edge closer and closer to it but the more I stay here, the more I feel like the city will always evade me in parts.

I'm learning to feel okay with it.

I sit at the kitchen table with Sarah, she shows me pictures of every mural around the house on her phone, her husband behind the camera and her, smiling at something else, arms spread wide in a different pose every time. She knows the name of every single stop, and every single place, and every single park, and she says them once and then again, slower, until I can get it right.

I slow down on the way home, drag my eyes along the painted streets on the wall, try to recognise places I've walked by before.

I close my eyes on the tube

Fall asleep to Radiohead and the screeching of the Victoria line

I stop and stand still – only now

Empty windows

Escaping eyes detailing the floor

Moving between places I cannot name

Then I tear through the city to get home faster than everyone else, just like everyone else, my body pressed against everyone else, alone like everyone else, drawing lines from A to B like everyone else, my shoulder against the shoulder of everyone else, standing too close like everyone else, craving closer – like everyone else.

Skye Fitzgerald McShane, 'Out of Time'

[Saxophone fades in, playing nostalgic jazz standards, alongside the bustling sounds of a tube station in the morning.]

The underground dislocates your time: a durational displacement, a temporal twist.

One minute will last for seventeen seconds or several years.

One train will make you inextricably early, the next impossibly late.

Measures stretch and swirl, shrink and spread, balloon within themselves until you resurface, when meaning pops back into unavoidable existence.

History? Memory? Facets of an unknown: there is no time on the tube.

Let me take you someplace, while we're situated so out of step. Somewhere where layers of history clash against and within each other, and render themselves meaningful beyond concealment.

Come with me, out from Brixton Station, at least in our minds.

[Sounds change: saxophone and voice become clearer, more direct, the background coming into focus with sounds of nature.]

Let's walk down long worn streets, on roads where our feet are but a scant footnote of a story much longer than our own.

Until finally we get to Lowood Street, in Shadwell. On the side of a house, above a parapet of slapdash red paint peeks out a woman's face, one eye turned towards us. She wears a neutral expression: you could read a smile in it if you really tried, but the bags under her eyes suggests a draining existence. Her hair is black, her skin is

brown, and her clothes are blue, as is the wall background behind her. Next to her is the top of a grey box, with a white forehead just about visible within it.

What is she thinking? What is she looking at? That red wall, that paint, covers her story. Above her on the wall are context clues: men pointing at something we can no longer see, children playing.

But who is she, really?

Let's give her her story back. She forms part of a mural by Shanti Panchel, an Indian artist, commissioned as part of programme by the Greater London Council's Ethnic Minorities Unit in 1984. A time of heightened social tension, bigotry and state clashes with the working classes and people of colour under Thatcher's Britain, several 'peace' murals appeared around the capital; whose council was in tension itself with central government. This is the only one left in any meaningful form.

In the mural's original form, our woman forms part of a Bengali family unit, watching a caricature-ish Thatcher on TV. A man in a suit points at them from outside, accusatorily: a manifestation of xenophobic suspicion and hate. Above her reality of bigotry, are images of solidarity, peace and unity: children and adults of many races playing together, living together. An ideal within itself.

Those images of harmony remain revealed, but their balance, our woman and her family and their struggle, are covered up. Hassan Vwada sums up the situation of this obfuscation perfectly in his mediation of this mural:

The cultural memory of Britain celebrates, and rightly so, in the incredible diversity and flourishing of cultures that happens across the country – especially in a city like London. But there is often an amnesia regarding the levels of racism that were experienced in England.

In the Soviet Union, if you deigned to become unhelpful to the political machine, you were written out of visual history, removed: proto-photoshopped from existence.

Layers of memory obscured by layers of removal. Trotsky no more; the pockmarks on Stalin's face tuned away. Visual truth untruthed.

This mural, part of a key part of our history, has been hidden from meaning. Perhaps not as intentionally or politically as the Soviets, but still. Time has taken away its true significance for most, apart from those who seek it out.

The covering of history is an act material and mental. Pictures may speak a thousand words, yet those words can be rewritten and rewritten, the die recast as to the story they tell, unless we retain the memory of their meaning.

[Sounds changes again, goes back to original, slightly spaced-out audio alongside station sounds. Saxophone fades back slightly.]

History is not one long story, but a swirling, tidal, chaotic river. It flows, but not always forwards. It turns back on its self, ebbs, overwhelms, changes course. Sometimes parts are harder to see. But we should not forget. Just because something is covered does not mean it is gone. When you resurface once again, remember this.

[Fade out to tube train sounds]

Vava Lotareva, 'Immigration Station'

'I am a passenger and I ride and I ride...' plays in my outdated Apple headphones as I ride the London underground in search of the right station. I don't remember the name of the station and the internet on my phone does not work so I cannot check.

You will have to ask 'How can you not know the name of the station that you have to get off at?!' to this I will respond, with dignity only inherent to those who have spent a whole year of their adult lives mute (a surprisingly vast amount of people), that a mere confusion like this only makes my life in London as an immigrant even more heroic in the eyes of everyone waiting for my triumphant biannual return home.

The stories I tell at home about my life in London are mostly true, seasoned with a hint of embellishment of an innocent adventure to create an effect of success, and, usually, when I tell them I leave out all the unnecessary parts where I face all the misfortunes of an immigrant that allow the bitter disillusionment about the life in London to crawl under my skin and make me mute again for a short period until this disappointment becomes too heavy to carry around and I have to drop it on one of my immigrant friends.

I am yet to have a story that happens on the underground. Obviously, it's embarrassing because the London Underground is the oldest in the world and they know that at home. A story that happens to me on the underground would be a nice souvenir to bring my relatives, but so far I can only share my observations with them, observations don't make a good story if there is no character. Retelling my observations about the London underground to people at home would lead me to make comparisons with the underground at home, and that could create a conflict of interests: the underground at home is grim and the underground says a lot about the state of the country it's in, a conclusion which recently occurred to me when I stopped being mute and was now able to understand what was said around me.

The truth is that the underground was never a good setting for any of my stories. It's the only part of London that reminds me entirely that I'm not back home and will probably never come back to live there again, and can't even call it home anymore, because London has slowly been consuming all the traits of me that are savage and, day by day, replacing them with a polite nod at a stranger and asking 'How are you?' instead of 'Hello!'

and saying 'Sorry!' instead of saying nothing. To put it simply, I wouldn't survive like this at home.

I've now gotten so used to seeing ads on trains that recite poetry instead of an endless parade of posters featuring empty, fat faces of nameless politicians that belong to either the communist party or the ruling one, that when I last saw them I didn't even feel angry. If I'm being fair these posters fit in perfectly with the crowd of the underground at home: people never look up from their feet, only when it's their time to leave the train do they take a brief look around to make sure that nobody is watching them too openly; they never smile and if I smile at them, forced by this innocent habit I got accustomed to in London, the corners of their lips move downwards in response; they never wear anything colourful... I can go on and on about the atrocities of the underground at home but the underground in London feels so happy, so foreign, like watching an American comedy on a DVD felt in my childhood and riding the London underground takes me back many years: I still don't understand a good half of what's happening but at least it's not making me feel like I don't belong here.

The first thing I've noticed about the London Underground is that everyone is different. I haven't seen a single person that looks like the other one. The London Underground seems more interesting than the London Fashion Week – no budget, no dress code and yet I so hilariously get excited about watching people model their outfits for free. When I first arrived here I didn't know what to wear in London and watching people on the underground was the only way I could educate myself on local fashion customs.

I first realised that I could understand English on the underground, because, after a couple of 'Mind the step's, it was hard not to mind it. And I took the step towards unmuting myself in public. No one minded. I studied the ads on trains like, before, I studied English textbooks and found out that British humour does exist, I just had to look for it.

The underground reminds me of me before London but never lets me feel nostalgic. With its more than a century-long life, it only exists here and now for me, when I need to get to a station that I've never heard of before or when I need to get back to a station where I live. It lives its own separate life and I can never make up a triumphant story that happens to me on the underground, because there are no ways that I can penetrate that life and become a part of the London underground without letting go of all the sentiments I hold

towards it after it taught me how to dress, how to read and how to smile at strangers. I'm not a Londoner but the underground has surely tried to make me one. And you don't tell stories like this at home.

I'm at Brixton station now. I've never been here before and I'm certain that this is not the right station but to find the right one I still need to get off here.

Yuna Goda, 'Ramen, Okame, ぴよぴよ'

[An ambient noise of the Brixton station platform enters in the background. A female voice starts to narrate over the noise. There is a slight echoing effect on her voice.]

The voice:

Brixton station, I have a story to tell you. You might already know about everything, but I need to ask questions.

This afternoon, I was wandering around Brixton because someone told me they'd seen a piece of 'Japan' in the market. These days, I'm constantly searching for 'Japan'. No, not because I'm homesick. I somehow feel it calling me, like the pull of a magnet.

The piece was difficult to find. I circled in and out of the station, twice.

I walked past a few Japanese food restaurants during the search. One of them was a ramen bar. I knew it was not the 'Japan' I was after— because I was told that the piece was living on a wall— but still, I decided to pause. The vivid colors inside the bar just happened to catch my eyes.

The walls were covered with posters; featuring images of Japanese films, sports matches, and railways. However, their colors felt foreign to the 'Japan' I remember. Although most of them featured the typical red of the Godzilla logo, Tokyo tower, and May's skirt in My Neighbor Totoro; the sky blue, coral pink, and bright yellow hues flashed into my eyes as strongly as the red. It felt strange, because I can probably find the same posters in a random 居酒屋 in Tokyo. They were surely Japanese.

Soon I realized that the posters share the color palette with the Brixton murals. This was a 'Japan' that Brixton adopted. A collection of Japanese 'Japan's, but curated by Brixton.

I was about to give up searching, so I headed back to Brixton station. Then I spotted a pair of murals. They were just above my head. There I found the 'Japan' I had been looking for. It was an Okame mask.

I was shocked, because this 'Japan' should be 38 years-old. Compared to this, the 'Japan' in the ramen bar looked like a kid! Was there a community of Japanese people in Brixton by the 1980s? And the Okame was born in Brixton, not adopted like the posters in the bar. 'Japan' was already there.

The Okame was half covered by another mask with a thin, curly mustache. Do you know who it is? Did Brixton bring 'Japan' a partner?

If Okame was in the Food painting, I would have been surprised at how close my 'Japan' is to Brixton's. To me, Okame is a symbol of natto. It is no longer an example of Japanese tradition and culture, but a food company logo.

[As the voice pauses, the background noise fades away. Then, another noise transitions in; which is the ambient soundscape of a Japanese train station. The voice starts speaking again, but her voice has no echoing effect on it.]

The voice:

My 'Japan' I remember, is the train station soundscapes. Like the station jingles, the sonic signage, train announcements. Memories of home, ambience, the linguistic downfall. Stillness and order.

None of which I find in a train station in London.

[As the voice pauses, the background noise fades again. Then, very abruptly, the soundscape of the Brixton station cuts in. The voice starts speaking again. Her voice has a slight echoing effect.]

The voice:

Please speak back to me, Brixton station. Speak to me in your language, then I'll try to decipher it. Your murals love telling stories; their words are the colors, the figures, and brush strokes. Your bricks carry a history too. Perhaps the stains and scratches are memorials of anguish, a proof of rebellion. But I'm only a foreigner listening to them. I want a conversation. How could we communicate, in dialogue.

Today I'm asking you questions. Tell me about your 'Japan'— has it changed since 1986? Answer me some day, hopefully soon.

Zen Mendonça-Collins

The streets of Brixton are never silent. Instead they pulse and shriek, with life, with laughter – with music. They say the sound is a dream we dared to dream, a resistance of the people, a community, a culture.

For here bore a man whose chords and riffs and major lifts told us we weren't alone in the universe if we could turn to face the change...

Here the sound of revolution kicked through, punk rock rage interspersed with the rhythms of another world, the message just as clear.

Here beneath a catchy hook we find ourselves on an avenue we would never forget.

And here I stand, before a wall with a face on it that brings to mind only what I am surrounded by – the sound of Brixton.