

Key

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Occasional Sights –

a London guidebook of missed opportunities
and things that aren't always there

Anna Best

edited in collaboration with

Neil Chapman

The
Photographers'
Gallery



I have made a plan to spend a certain amount of time walking around not knowing exactly where I'm going to go.

Walking by yourself in a city means you start to notice any conversations or exchanges, and eventually the journey to an unknown place feels the same as the encounter with a stranger. Compared with staying indoors even failed encounters have a certain sparkle.

Recently someone asked me if I am promoting the idea that people talk to strangers more. N said I should have answered - "Yes!" - but I just said something about being more connected to the world around me and claiming an active part in public space.

I came across *Wanderlust—A History of Walking* while on a walk through the centre of town. I decided to buy the hardback copy even though I knew how heavy my backpack would become and walking without a bag of any sort is definitely ideal.

'Streets are the space left open between buildings... In great cities, spaces as well as places are designed and built: walking, witnessing, being in public, are as much part of the design and purpose as is being inside to eat, sleep, make shoes or love or music. The word citizen has to do with cities, and the ideal city is organized around citizenship—around participation in public life...'

'The fight for free space—for wilderness and public space—must be accompanied by a fight for free time to spend wandering in that space...'(1)

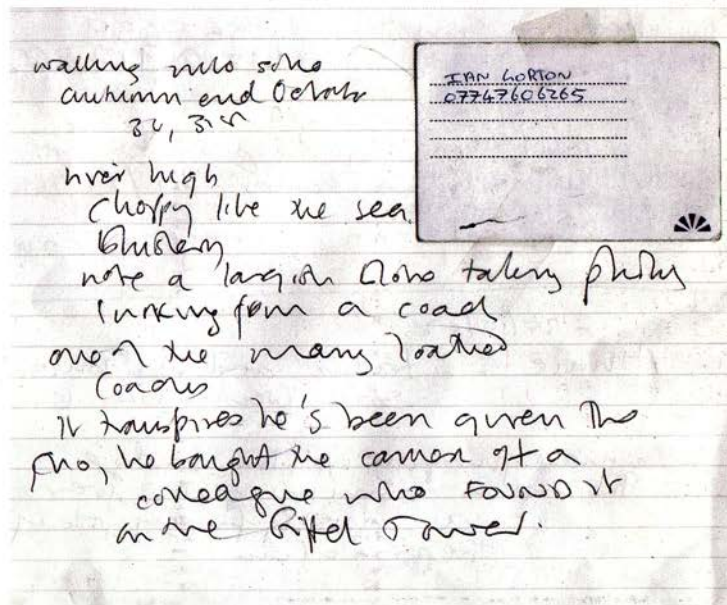
1 *Wanderlust—A History of Walking*.

Rebecca Solnit, Verso, 2001.

Albert Embankment

A coach driver, in the usual line of illegally parked coaches on Albert Embankment, is practising his guitar behind the steering wheel. He is very absorbed. I am too shy to talk to him.

Some time before this, in the same place, I had talked to someone who was photographing the Tate on the other side of the river. He told me that his friend had found the camera on the Eiffel Tower in Paris. He was trying to learn how to use it without an instruction manual. As I left he said - "You've given me something to do now."



Sylvia is an artist from New York. She works by walking the streets in a specific location, taking rolls and rolls of film over a period of time. In her darkroom at home,

weeks later, she develops the film. And it is at this point, she told me, that she begins to see what she has seen.

Since many of the journeys I take involve walking east along Albert Embankment it was inevitable that I developed a particular discernment for this spot. A strange state of mind would occur - having rushed from the flat, desperate to get outdoors, I would be in a breathless and relieved state by the time I reached Albert Embankment.

I speculate on how a camera functions in the same way as a dog, becoming a talking point between complete strangers. I start to see a strong relationship between a dog's eyes, a dog's black nose and a microphone or the lens barrel of a camera.

In this instance Sylvia has taken a picture of something I have seen on several occasions - a politician being interviewed on the Albert



Embankment, just east of Lambeth Bridge. Journalists like to use the Houses of Parliament as a backdrop, which lends an air of theatricality to both the news and, when you encounter the newsmakers with their production teams, the city itself.

I met John C one dark and stormy night on the edge of Hyde Park. He told me he carries a camera with him all the time in his taxi and told me about the potato stall (overleaf).

Thinking of the potato stall makes you wonder just what the difference is between occasional and often. A taxi driver must have almost the opposite kind of experience of London to the one-off visitor.

The potato stall appears late at night and is located on the south side of the river, just west of the fire services headquarters and on the other side of the road from MI6.

The stall is more like a tent. Last time I went there, to get a cup of tea with a friend, it had a red and white striped canopy. You cannot miss it as it's surrounded by London taxis. You can get a cup of tea there after midnight.

The pavement on the other side of the road by the river is relatively new. A puddle about ten metres long and two metres wide used to collect there. This phenomenon went on for months after the paving stones had been laid. One night in the heart of winter I cycled past and saw the full moon reflected in the puddle. However, lazily, I couldn't summon up the energy to go back with a camera, hoping to myself that the next night would be same. Not only was it cloudy the next night but the following week they

cleaned the drains.

Further east along the South Bank by Jubilee Hall, the building that used to be home to the Greater London Council and now houses a McDonalds and a hotel, among other things, and just by the queues for the London Eye, there is a blocked drain in the new paving where such a large pool forms when it rains hard that no one can pass by. The people who work in the nearby building have to try and sweep the puddle away.



10_11

Cycling past the railway arches parallel to Albert Embankment.

At night. A short scene. A dancing couple all dressed up in a tunnel under the railway. They made a sudden graceful twirl in the middle of the road under the light, and then headed off through the tunnel into the darkness.

Aldwych

One afternoon I had just walked across Waterloo Bridge when I noticed there were some tropical-looking plants with huge pink ribbons tied round them, as if dressed up and ready to go to a big event. There were two doormen, also dressed up in two-tone grey tailcoats, standing on the steps of One Aldwych, who said - "No, we never see anything." One of them added as an afterthought - "My brother takes lots of photos though."

I recalled this incident with the plants and men in grey suits recently, when walking across some gardens in Pimlico. The exit to which I was heading was partly blocked by two huge and marvellous snowballs. A security guard was rolling one of them out of the way and I managed to pass through the gate.

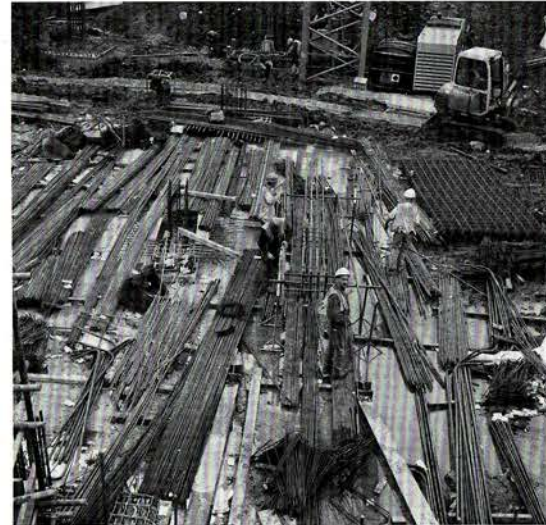
The process of looking at things, and remembering things, indeed of never forgetting them, is perpetually interesting to me. I wonder if I remember things I have not been able to photograph more clearly than the things I have? I notice as I start to carry a camera when I go outside, how it begins providing me with the comfortable identity of 'amateur photographer'. I find I now have an easy excuse to be voyeuristic, instead of taking the considerable trouble of being really curious.

Angel

This is a privileged moment - to see all the construction materials laid out, like cooking ingredients on a table top (right). It makes me think of Patrick Keiller, maker of *London*(1) and *The Dilapidated Dwelling*(2), in which he proposes with great clarity that the building industry in Britain is holding the country to ransom. *London* consists almost entirely of static camera shots and a voiceover. One image I remember very clearly, because I had also taken a photograph of it, is of a telegraph pole in Vauxhall Grove. It has a huge number of wires radiating from it. It's a celebration of telephone lines.

¹ *London*, written, directed and photographed by Patrick Keiller, narrated by Paul Schofield; a Konnick/British Film Institute Production in association with Channel 4, 1993. ² *The Dilapidated Dwelling*, written, filmed and directed by Patrick Keiller, narrated by Tilda Swinton; produced by Keith Griffiths and John Wyver. An Illuminations production for Channel 4, 2001.

Justine is a photographer with an impressive portfolio. This photograph, although taken at the Angel, could be anywhere. In this instance the builder has definitely noticed the photographer. Justine must have poked the lens of the camera through one of those viewing holes you get in construction site fences.



All the men who work on the roads and pavements, I have not approached one of them - why? Is this because they are always busy and are such a usual sight?

I tend to encounter people who are in some way halted, stopped, paused, in 'wait' mode for some reason or another.

Barnsbury Wood

Andrea D proposed this sight of a *Secret Garden*-like place called Barnsbury Wood on Crescent Street which is almost always closed, even though meant for public

use. She had found the gate open on this occasion, like the page of a book.

"If you are coming from north or east London, take the Silverlink to the Caledonian Road & Barnsbury station. As you exit the platform, take the left side exit rather than walk down the alleyway to Caledonian Road. You'll come out onto Crescent Street which takes you straight to the woods, heading towards the spire of St. Anne's Church. Sniff the doughnuts from the hidden bakery as you go, before first crossing Offord Road and then Huntingdon Street. The gate will be found on the left where several houses were knocked down to create public access..."



Barnes

This is the Bolan Tree - the ever-evolving shrine of Marc Bolan, a rock star who died in a car crash sometime in the late seventies. Although it does

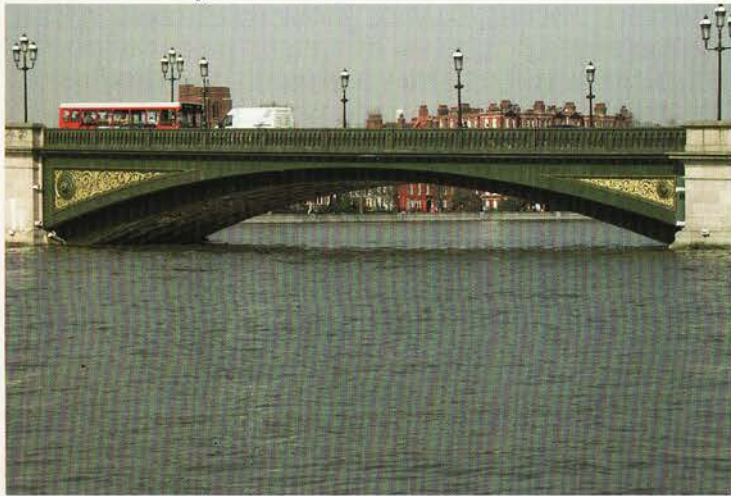
include a stone statue, it is mostly made up of ephemera: ribbons, flowers, photocopies, notes and messages.

It is on the side of a narrow and curving road called Queens Ride (B306).

See also [Tower Hill](#) and [www.marc-bolan.org](#)



Battersea Bridge



Somewhere west of Battersea Bridge I came across a woman painting by the side of the river. I looked at the medium-sized oil painting on an easel for a while. It depicted a view of the north side of the river, in broad yellow, brown, green and pale blue brushstrokes. The painting she was working on looked like she had gone to the Royal Academy or the Slade. I talked to her and gave her my card and she gave me hers. I noticed it was a **full moon high tide.**

Go to Battersea Bridge, cross to the south side and on the right are some steps. They are opposite a small gate that leads into Battersea Park. Take these steps down to the river. The river path here is encroached on by large new luxury apartments. If you walk for a while you come across a church that has a poster outside reading something like 'CCTV AND GOD OPERATING IN THIS AREA.'

Meanderings and walks, going out for a bit. A walk mirrors a journey into one's own head in many ways. You go out to walk and be isolated, to feel the outside of your being measured up against the outside world. Outside, unlike in your flat or home - where your skin starts to blend with the stuff in the room, the pictures on the walls, the letters on your desk and where everything is claustrophobically there because of you - anything might happen.

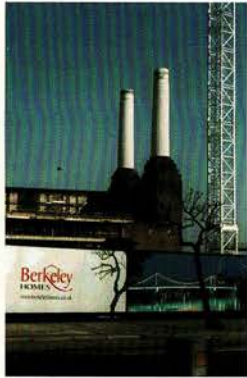
How to manufacture accidents? How to have a chance encounter? Probably lots of historical equivalents like flâneurism. The rise of the tour and the guide, where did these notions of accompaniment come from? I walk accompanied by a map or a guide and it is entirely different from if I walk without. Without a guide my mind truly wanders, but only in the grooves and troughs it already contains. I like the part of a walk where you decide to go down a new path or untrodden place. And the bit of thinking which is like that, and the encounter in the street which is like that.

Battersea

The imposing, almost mounstrous, disused structure - one of the most powerful symbols of London and the largest brick building in Europe - a testimony of a bygone age, of something almost unmovable, untouchable, everlasting...even though it's clear that the building has been suffering from the erosion of time when you look at the bricks that seem to be gradually falling in ruins... The cripple tree next to it also reminds of time cruelly going by and the ephemeral nature of all things.

That the pictures here are so similar, although by different people - both feature the power station and a billboard - is quite accidental.

Albertine initially contacted me by email and then a long period of silence followed. After several months she sent me this photo. What is this photo of?



I was immediately confused about what it was meant to be of. It seemed to be full of contradictions. In her email she speaks about the railway line and the trains passing between Waterloo and Clapham Junction ('[London's busiest railway station](#)'). But to me, this train line, and the photo, has a persistent air of emptiness and inactivity. London's overground rail network is often overlooked. Unlike the Tube, it's not promoted actively by the tourist industry as an entity in itself, but only in relation to its destinations. See [Euston](#).

Billboards, a prominent element of the cityscape, fill the city with words and information which then compete for the inhabitants' attention relentlessly... with the un-corporate flyers, photocopied posters and DIY stickers such as those seen on a kebab shop window in [Camden](#).

Billboards hide and decorate building sites. I imagine them perching like vultures on the about-to-be-demolished, more often than not signalling uncontrolled change. Billboards serve to divert the passerby from the present situation. They manipulate desire and lure the traveller from their path. On the contrary the reflections of sunlight, the banal play of light reflected off one surface and projected onto another, are just there.



On this particular late winter afternoon I was leaving [New Covent Garden Market](#) via the vehicle entrance on Nine Elms Lane and noticed that the sun had subversively made the billboard into a projection screen.

Certain examples of sun reflections do recur though (such as the [NatWest Tower](#)) and because they are recurring become identifiable with a particular place. The glare in the windows of the sixties office buildings in North Lambeth can be viewed on a clear day at sunset from [Westminster Bridge](#).



March



It had been the sort of morning when my isolationist habits were in full swing. When feeling like this I'd persuade myself to go outdoors regardless. I went to a nearby park, Battersea Park. The thought of wandering in happy uncertainty seemed far away. All day I wanted to speak to one of the many 'mums-with-kids' who populate the open spaces there. I was not quite able to approach anyone though. The presence of the children seemed to form a fence around the mothers. There is what I start to visualise as a fence of absorption around the mother as if, by default, she cannot be open or absent-minded enough to notice something she isn't looking for. I wonder if she feels held prisoner by the boundary of her consciousness as I do today?

Later, to get over my vague sense of disappointment at being so shy I did stop to speak to a man taking a photograph. He was by the western gate of the park. He had a very large camera and tripod and looked like a professional. He was bending down over the camera as if there was a mechanical problem. I tried to speak with him but he was trying to ignore me.

February

Dates appear like an outcropping of structure.



As I cycled slowly towards home I thought about this man merging with his camera. He had been trying so hard to avoid me that I started to imagine he was hidden by a black blanket. I talked with N about whether this merging of people and things(1) is the same with mothers and pushchairs. N spoke about the different ways men and women relate to things, to objects - that with men there is a relationship between a person and an object, and with women it is more like two subjects, both person and object are subjects.(2) Thoreau writes- 'How womankind who are confined to the house still more than men, stand it, I do not know.' (3)

¹ Whitechapel ² See writings by Luce Irigaray ³ *Walking*, Henry David Thoreau, 1862, available in three parts at <http://eserver.org/thoreau/walking.html>

In the dark,
a green electric
car turned
noiselessly –
almost unnoticed
– into Westbourne
Terrace and
drove north.

Saw a price tag on a loaf of bread for £19.35p.
An expensive and tasty loaf of bread. (Four slices for
80p.)



Elizabeth Street is located in the area just west of
Victoria.

In my pursuit of the chance encounter and
conversation, I nevertheless find myself caught in
familiar grooves and habits of conditioned behaviour.
The first thing I find is that it's a hundred times easier
to approach men. This disturbs and supprises me.
I decide to have a closer look at those who populate
the street.

There are less women than men on the streets. Women seem to dawdle less, they are less relaxed out in public, they do not occupy outside space in the way men do, they sit less in parks reading the papers. Women are more circumspect, they are more vulnerable. The dynamic between men and women in the street, and in public space generally, is formed by a long tradition of inequality. I am reminded each time I hear a - "Cheer up, it might never happen!" - or a - "Lucky saddle!" - if you are on a bike (try Cable Street, E1 on a Saturday night) and naively astonished by how these rituals linger on! There is a whole phrasebook's worth of uninvited comments. They produce an all-encompassing defence mechanism in some cases - I notice a personal fog surrounding me and clouding out the possibility of encounter.(1)

Peter Ackroyd reports that 'in the middle of the nineteenth century there came a vogue for "night walks": sketches or essays in which the solitary pedestrian made his way across the dark city, marking significant moments and scenes in a journey of unknown destination.'(2)

I like the sound of that but find I am unable, except when in a particularly confident mood, to wander around in the city in the dark. Not comfortable to follow in the footsteps of Charles Dickens who famously spent all night walking the streets. Not able to get into 'the spirit of noctambulism' (*Le Temps Retrouvé*, Marcel Proust). Some women I spoke to over my many months of wandering expressed a great surprise and unexpected admiration at my going out and about alone in the day, let alone in the night.

¹ Artist Hilary Lloyd made a work called *E1*. (with IMPRINT in 1993)

which documented all the uninvited comments she had received over a period of time spent in that area (right). ² *London: The Biography*, Peter Ackroyd, Sinclair-Stevenson, 2001. Used by permission of Random House Group Ltd.

4/5/93 5-40p.m.

"What are you doing?"

"Sorry?"

"Do you live round here?"

"Yes," I replied.

He beckoned me over with his walking stick.

"Don't you like friendship?" he asked.

"Well yes."

"Well, when shall we meet?"

"Uh?"

"Look, where are you going now?"

"To meet someone."

"Ah, yes...When will you be back, what time?"

"Maybe not at all."

"Ok, I'll see you here later."

Bethnal Green

Via a mutual friend, Barby had given me some photos of a group of Mods who gather in Bethnal Green on Sundays. Soon after being introduced to each other, I bumped into her at a bus stop on the Clapham Road. Sometimes I am delighted by how a social scene can throw a cloak of trustability around all those within it. Other times, contradictorily, it can sicken me.

Anyway, ages later, I was at home trying to edit the material I had gathered. I was stuck on this very sentence about Barby's contribution of the Mods in Bethnal Green. I was defeated and couldn't think of anything to write at all. I went out. I had a lunch date in Mile End and there, by chance, I met Barby again. She was having lunch with her sister Deborah, who then told me a story about a squirrel - "I was working at Wormwood Scrubs with recruitment interviews for new prison officers - I'm an actor - and we were all walking down the stairs on the way home and I noticed a squirrel out of the window - eating a Mars bar! The squirrel took the wrapper off and held the Mars bar in its paws, like a nut, and started to nibble away at it. It was amazing! We were all, me and the prison officers, transfixed for at least 10 minutes."



26_27

From: Jonathan Greenbank <[REDACTED]>
To: <annabest@photonet.org.uk>
Date: Tuesday, September 10, 2002 22:23
Subject: occasional sights

Anna

I picked up a postcard of yours in a gallery and was enthralled in your idea. I really hope it all goes well, it is the sort of thing that excites me every day. I have just graduated from liverpool art school and keep sketchbooks which record interesting things I find or see.

I have been working in London for the summer at Buckingham Palace (lots of scope for ideas there) and so would love to be as involved as possible in your exhibition and book. I am willing to submit anecdotes, illustrations, whatever!

Here are some of my recent occasional sights.....

- A group of French schoolgirls doing the Birdy song on Victoria Station
- Many passport photographs
- A black man with a snake around his neck wearing nothing but shorts
- A coffee stain which looked like a cat
- Baby mice on a railing
- Tourists filming teapots in a window/ a leaflet

I have many more ideas and would be more happy to discuss them with you in the future.

Good luck

Jonathan Greenbank

Blackfriars Bridge

When Jonathan emailed me in mid-September, he had just finished working at Buckingham Palace and was due to go home, up North. I was away at the time, staying with my mother, and I was in a despondent mood about the work ahead.



His email message felt like a long metal crowbar opening a boarded-up window. It cheered me up. He later sent me several drawings, from Blackfriars (right), Bromley and from Covent Garden - 'a coffee stain that formed the shape of a cat.'

Overleaf is a photograph near Blackfriars Bridge given to me by Patrick(1). I met him for the first time on New Year's Day. The Thames was smooth like a sheet of glass, it was like Joseph Conrad's words - '...the measureless expanse lay sparkling...' - that moment when the tide is resting between going upstream and draining back out to sea. Andrea C, who I was walking with, saw Patrick paddling under Vauxhall Bridge in a yellow canoe (I found out later it is a kayak). We crossed over the road, hoping to come across him on Vauxhall Beach. Then we saw him leaving the water with his yellow boat on his shoulder and ran to say hello.

I met up again with Patrick and N on a Sunday morning back on Vauxhall Beach. I walked down the slipway onto the stones and saw N standing at the far end of the beach. Patrick appeared from under the bridge in his yellow kayak. We helped him put it on the roof of his car and went for coffee in the Madeira Café.

1 He showed us a lot of photographs he's taken of things seen from his kayak and on marches in the City. Since meeting Patrick I have discovered various places in London where you can kayak including the Ealing Canoe Club, Westminster Boating Base in Pimlico and the Tower Hamlets Canoe Club in Shadwell Basin.

⑥ BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE

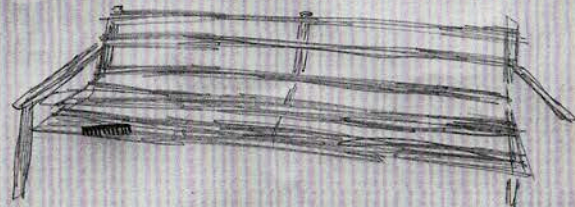
A LADIES' HANDBAG. I OPEN IT UP TO LOOK FOR I.P.
AND IT'S FULL OF SYRINGES....



THEN I GO ON TO THE PLATFORM, AND SEE
TWO COMBS PLACED LOVINGLY ON TWO
SEPARATE BENCHES.



(ELSEWHERE, TWO MEN
MIGHT BE CRYING)





Blackheath

Itinerary by bicycle. Near the Cutty Sark in Greenwich it is possible to get onto what is known as the Thames Path. Turn to the east and follow this path by bike or on foot. Within the hour you will take in the Tunnel Refineries, the Millennium Dome and, if you're fast, the Thames Barrier. You can return the same way, or along parallel inland roads, back to Greenwich. Then go up the hill towards the Observatory. If you carry on past this point you climb a little bit more and reach the plateau of Blackheath.



On a windy Sunday the kite flyers might be there... I approached Big Stu, who was flying a kite that looked like a sleeping bag or jellyfish attached to a four-wheeled cart. He told us about the sight of a person flying a kite so strong that it lifts them off the ground. (1) (Recalled a dream about flying a kite which was in fact a man wearing an overcoat and a trilby. How does the unconscious draw us through the city and provide rocks onto which the things we notice attach themselves, like barnacles?)

Later I read in one of the many texts given to me by Stefan - 'We are told that the Greenwich Observatory is built on a well used by one of the first astronomers as a simple form of telescope for observing the sky in daylight.' And that the Blackheath plateau is recent.

'It is only within the last few years that the numerous barrows both in the park and on Blackheath have been levelled.' (2)

N also heard that Blackheath was a burial site for bubonic plague victims. When we talked about the value we give to historical facts, contradictions appeared in what I had assumed was unassailable. Rupert, who has lived round there all his life, wanted to show me the underground cellars but they caved in last year, just before we went up to have a look.

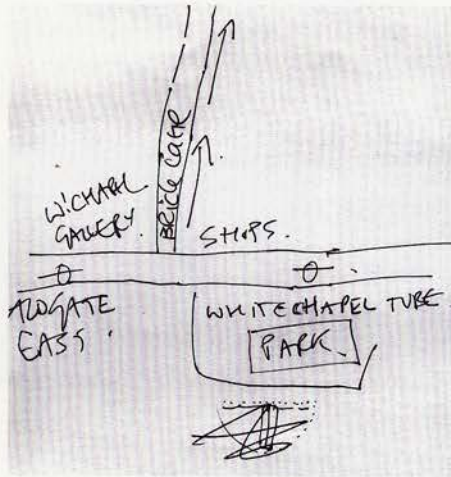
1 For more

pictures see www.kitefanatics.co.uk and contact Richard Chipperfield. 2 *Prehistoric London: its mounds and circles*, E.O.Gordon, Covenant Publishing Co. Limited, 1946 (4th edition revised).



Brick Lane

Ikoli was carrying a mop and bucket along Brick Lane and he talked about the **nail bomb** that smashed both the windows he had just washed the day before. One was a Jewish shop and one a Muslim shop. He said - "That's how life is, that's how time is, that's how the city is - ephemeral."



Cleo gave me these pictures. She says - "It is in a small yard off Brick Lane but that it doesn't seem to be named on the map." See Vauxhall Spring Gardens.



British Museum

The British Museum is on Great Russell Street and Bev, who gave me this picture of a reflection also gave me directions -

"Go to Tottenham Court Road tube - you can also get buses 19, 38, 55, 25, 8, 7 - there are probably more, as it's central."

The reflection is in the Great Court, which surrounds the Reading Room of the British Museum Library, which used to be the British Library. She says - "It's a bit like a doughnut when you go in, it's circular, the whole shape invites you to walk around the outside looking upwards..."



Brixton

A local guide.(1)

The Pegasus/Brixton Walk
* Start at Bettina's House on Leander Road.
Turn left into Tulse Hill Estate and cross Tulse Hill into Brockwell Park * Walk to the Children's Playground * Walk up the hill to Bowling Green and Tennis Courts * Stop at the Cafe, then down the hill to the derelict Lodge
* Cross Norwood Road, left into Rosendale Road, right along Gurnsey Grove, left into Croxted Road
* Right into Turney Road, Right onto Burbage Road first left down track to Herne Hill Sports Ground
* Back onto Burbage Road, left into Stradella Road
* Half Moon Lane * Cross over Herne Hill Junction * To Brockwell Park and back up the hill to the cafe



An extract from another guide - this one to the area around Bear Gardens in London Bridge. It's a guide to drawings in the environment.(2)



1 'Pegasus Walk' by Bettina Wilhelm and Caroline Jupp, 1999, part of 52 - a year of weekly collaborations between family, friends, artists and Caroline Jupp. I remember she gave me the results in a modified pizza box which is impossible to put on a book shelf. 2 Drawn by Amy Plant, for 'Drawing on Space' at f.a.projects, 2002.



The 'gold leaf graffiti', as it came to be known to me, was described by the person who did it as – "an embellishment rather than graffiti". It had been mentioned to me by Angelique, a woman from South Africa who was working in a beauty parlour in Victoria. She told me that someone she vaguely knew had made something with gold leaf at the back of the Ritzy. Intrigued, I was eventually able to meet this person – Bridget Hugo.⁽¹⁾ Bridget invited me for a coffee in her place around the corner and we talked at length. She talked a lot about doing interventions into the streetscape and about doing something other than the manifesto-type statements of the graffiti artist Banksy. As I left I was thinking about the relationship between vandalism and community murals, and that the gold leaf has survived because it is so unnoticeable.

¹ www.art-tube.com

A nice cold beer and other nice things.
A man walking up Brixton High Street
Carrying a small plant in his right hand.

A brother and a sister riding the same bike.

A black woman wearing a red velvet dress.

[In the park: I try to throw a paper ball in a rubbish bin and miss it. When I lean over to pick the paper up, I spill the beer I am holding in my other hand all over my clothes and my notebook.]

[In the park: I buy Richard a biscuit in the shape of a baby chicken – pollito.]

An artist friend, Ana Laura, gave me this piece of writing one day after I'd told her about what I was doing. She had been telling me about her thoughts on the miraculous in the everyday and how for some time she had taken particular activities or ideas and pursued them over a period of a year.

Things seen, then forgotten, like *Thoughts unsaid, then forgotten* by Bas Jan Ader in 1973. Things of a physical nature seem to be easier to remember than things seen. The beer being spilled is a bodily experience and it may have served the same purpose as pinching yourself on the arm, not unlike underlining a word on a page.

③ BROMLEY STATION PLATFORM 2

A MAN WITH NOTHING BUT A PAIR OF SHORTS ON,
WALKED PAST ME. HE HAD A PYTHON AROUND
HIS NECK.



Camberwell New Road

I find that visiting N's place becomes a way of perusing Camberwell New Road, because we live at different ends of it.

N tells a good story about a cracker - "Somewhere, I have a photograph of a cracker exploding. The two halves can be seen and from each side of the break, smoke and bits of debris are caught in flight at the moment of the explosion... Only on one occasion did the fraction of a second during which the shutter of the camera was open manage to correspond with the 'crack' of the cracker."

a
What do you think of these 'travellers'?

n
I'm tending to be quite drawn to the images which I can't immediately grasp. I want to know the story.

a
The story is simply that I was taking a photograph and one of them happened to look round at the exact moment at which I took that photograph.

n
Why did you take the photo? And then did you have to communicate with them?

a
You should do but I didn't this time. I took the photo because they all looked like they were looking for a taxi, it was unusual, to see a load of tourists on Camberwell New Road, going south, carrying all their bags.

n
Were they tourists?

a
Well maybe they'd just got off a plane from playing football abroad? They might not be tourists I suppose...

n
So you don't know what they were doing, and that's part of the interest.

a
Yes, for me yes.

n
So you just took a photo of them and went off...

a
I didn't talk to them...



Richard Wentworth(1) gave a talk around this time and mentioned how it annoyed his walking companions when he stopped to take a photograph in the street. The photographer is suddenly becoming involved in another subject and abandons his friend for a while.

a
I can't help thinking how un-abandoning it is really because most photographs don't serve to strike up a

1 N told me he had mentioned Richard Wentworth to Nicola, an art student, asking if she'd seen his work, or suggesting that she should look at his work. Her face fell, and she said - "Oh no, the artist who ruined my life!" Nicola talked about her experience of seeing anomalous things in the street and feeling that these had much to do with her work. She regarded these incidents as hers in some fundamental way. In a curious way, Richard Wentworth's project seemed to rob her of them.

new relationship. It's more like saying to your friend - hold on a minute, I just want to close my eyes and think about something for a bit. The photographs I am making are artefacts from a process of making contact with people, of trying to encounter people. And they start to express how difficult that obviously is.

n
If the act of taking a photograph is an invitation to start speaking then, here, if he'd turned round and said - "Why did you take that picture?" - it would have turned into something completely different.

Another time when I met up with Sissu at Shoreditch Fire Station and we were taking photos of a fireman's boots, a fire engine drew up and all the fire fighters of Blue Watch got out of their fire truck and, precisely because we had a camera, stood in a row and posed for us. So you never know, if you just have a camera in your hand anything can happen...

n
Where's that photo then?

a
I don't know, maybe it's under 's' for Shoreditch.

How did the same stretch of road that spawned the citrus fruits on the railings also give us such an urgent graffiti to prospective homebuyers?

From Oval tube station on the Northern Line take a bus south towards Camberwell Green, a no.36 or a no.185

will do. The railings are on the right about halfway down and the graffiti was on the left but has long been replaced by a housing development.



Adam, who sent me the Smart car photo, said he had been very encouraged to continue taking pictures like this knowing that I was also doing so. Over the phone he told me about a bus stop on Tower Bridge Road which had been misspelt on the tarmac road surface **BUS STOB**. He said he had cycled over it day after day, on the way to work, always promising himself to bring his camera with him. And then, one day, it had gone.

A similar thing happened to me with the orange on the railings. I saw a whole series of citrus fruits on them, but when eventually I returned with a camera, they'd disappeared.



After that I wanted to set up the scene by going and buying some oranges and lemons. Adam said the same, he had had a strong desire to reinstate this oddity that he had so enjoyed. A missed bus of an opportunity.



Camden Town

like Knightsbridge, is a part of London rarely visited by those not spending money. Knightsbridge is famed for its wealth, and the super-expensive department store Harrods. Thinking of how glass windows divide space so successfully, I stood outside one of Harrods' glass entrances and tried handing flyers to shoppers as they were crossing from outside to inside. I think about this invisible line as an internal change of tack - from 'being on a crowded street' to 'entering a department store'. It seemed an appropriate place to hand out flyers, but proved to be, as I had half-suspected, a completely unproductive form of encounter.



n
The plate glass window is a more familiar division of inside and outside space and here is noticeable by the impact it has suffered. What does the sticker say?

a
Perhaps it is important not to know. I read somewhere(1) that London is a city in constant discourse with itself.

n
What makes you curious enough to read any little sticker, they cover the street furniture of London?...perhaps the same thing that might induce you to actually read a flyer when someone manages to give you one - a bit of unplanned spare time.

a
Is this a contemporary version of Baudelaire's(2) 'fatal and passionate curiosity' - a distorted saturation with signs or the consequence of too much flâneurism?

n
Windows are not usually smashed. It's too obviously unusual. But there is a story. you do wonder who smashed it. You imagine the baseball bat. It's a kebab house. It's so banal.

a
I like to think of the sticker as a too-small plaster on a wounded bit of flesh. And I like to think about the cold draught...

n
Consider the angry passenger who broke a London Underground ticket office window at Canary Wharf...

1 *Imagined Londons*, Pamela K. Gilbert (ed), State University of New York Press, 2002. 2 *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Walking along the towpath, I came across John Parry fishing in Regent's Canal. He recalled seeing something unusual in Camden Town -

a dog inside a car, sitting on the driver's seat with its paws on the steering wheel.

To get to the ticket office of Canary Wharf (right) - follow left along the side of the quay. Pass the synchronised station clocks on your left and arrive at the curved entrance of the underground station. Descend the escalators. At the entrance ticket barriers the curved window of the ticket office is on your left.



John W seems to love this area and knows it like the back of his hand. He took N and I on a tour one Sunday morning and later sent me directions...

Looking across from West India Quay DLR station, you see a lime green footbridge spanning the quay. Descend the station stairs and walk past the moored tug boat, SS Robin. Step onto the bridge and notice, looking over both sides as you cross, the supporting pontoon floats...



'As I walked north along what was left of River Drive I saw a monument in the middle of the river - it was a pumping derrick with a long pipe attached to it. The pipe was supported in part by a long set of pontoons.'

(1) When you throw a coin in the water it's an event. Throwing a coin is very short-lived, momentary. It is a conversation with the place, like throwing a rhetorical statement into a discussion. Throwing a coin into the water is unspontaneous, ritualistic and highly personal. It is making a wish, as opposed to contributing, and is a limited mode of exchange.(2)

...continue to the Cabot Square central fountain. Cross, turn left and walk towards a red post box. At this, turn right, walk past the post office and stop at the bottom of the slight slope. In front, the new World Trade Centre building. It has no recognised thirteenth floor.

¹ 'A Tour of the Monuments of the Passaic, New Jersey' (1967) in Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam (ed), University of California Press, 1996 ² There is a phenomenon of throwing pound coins at the bus in Newington Green.



From: Clair Montier <[REDACTED]>
To: "annabest@photonet.org.uk" <annabest@photonet.org.uk>
Date: Monday, November 18, 2002 13:21
Subject: Occasional Sight

Dear Anna,

I don't know if you are still working on this project or whether this is the sort of thing you are after but I did see a strange sight on Saturday evening;

I came out of an estate in Chalk Farm and onto Chalk Farm Road, outside the curry house a squad car had pulled up and there was a police man and woman standing on the pavement and looking at the ground. I wondered what they were looking at and as we drew closer I could see it was a black gun, like the ones James Bond had in the eighties. I was really shocked even though it was possibly a fake. The 2 police people looked like they didn't know what to do, shuffling sheepishly from one foot to another.

Anyway good luck with the project.

Best Wishes

Clair

Friday



I was walking around Chelsea, just wandering about thinking I might speak to someone, having a look at the place with the attitude that I had to come to Chelsea as it's not a place I normally go, ever...

I introduced myself to a man painting an address on

54_55

a massive cream-painted stucco facade. He was working for the construction company who had scaffolding all over the buildings around Eaton Square. It was a very large-scale outdoor decorating job...and he was having to paint in a very delicate way within a space of a few centimetres. His activity reminded me of when you find a ladybird on your arm and experience a sudden vertiginous change of scale.

N remarked - "Situations enfold each other." When I asked the painter if he had seen anything he said - "Oh I don't get time for things like that." - and later added - "You always have time to look around you, you don't always have time to muster your consciousness."

Saturday

Three jackets seen while cycling from the river up Oakley Street towards Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. There are few underground stations in this area, but there are a remarkable number of hospitals.



Chiswick

During my unexpected morning on the Port of London Authority (PLA) Harbour Service launch, we passed by Chiswick Mall. I noticed it was flooded. Soon after, I went below deck to see the crew and asked about the pile of Polaroid photos on the desk. They said - "Oh, it's just photos we take of unusual things we see, like a tree being dragged up the river or branches fallen over the tow path." They mentioned a sunken boat... cormorants...herons... They do this every day. They take the photos officially as records of the out-of-the-ordinary, the errors of daily life. In the same way a Clerk of Works records existing faults in a building before work commences. These are things I hardly ever see but they see all the time. Visitors point at things they have never seen before, not knowing that they are always there. Visiting is history-less. When a friend visited me from Caracas, we walked around looking at the city I had known all my life through his eyes. After that I adopted the strategy of having tourist eyes in my own city, of being on holiday in familiar territory, of wandering, encountering and getting lost a couple of days each week. That evening N said that even though a lot of people have said - "no" - or - "sorry" - they've then produced incredible stories, like the crew of the PLA Harbour Service launch on the river at Teddington.



There are several PLA driftwood boats that you see now and again on the Thames, moored midstream and waiting for driftwood. Martin suggested one to me. I met Martin in a very roundabout way and the way he made his proposal was also convoluted. The process took almost the entire year... It started on the tourist souvenir stall at the top of the steps of Westminster Bridge.



PARK



a
Could you say that protest is concerned with opening up what is closed and closing down what is open?

n
It's like the waterspout (above left), it's about literally changing the shape and structure of things - smashing open, turning on, closing down, boarding up...

a
Boarding up covers up the object for repairs, after accidental damage or in order to prevent it. During the Mayday protests plywood turned advertently into a marking system. You saw that these were the potential targets which otherwise you might not have been aware of.

n
This is like an installation. By the state. It marks out the links with places like the Bank of England or McDonalds, and military heroes.

a
There's something naked and vulnerable about a sculpture of a hero after the plywood's come off.



n
Suddenly naked like the stalker!
Streakers reveal themselves to protest...

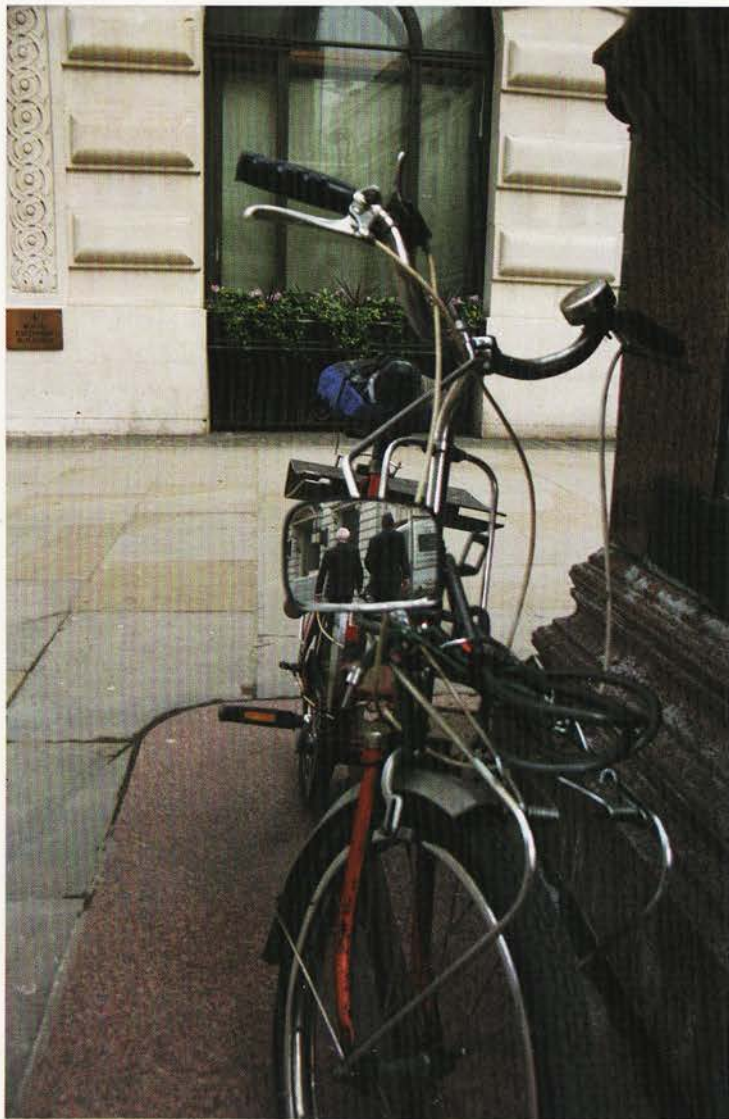
a
Maybe there's a connection between this covering up and clothing and the feeling of knowing what you are doing compared to when you are lost.

n
Maybe being lost has the same political potential as a streak. Demonstrating and wandering are connected.

a
But to demonstrate implies an enemy whereas wandering assumes safety.

Above left and far left '18' are photos taken in 1999 by Patrick, the man with the kayak.
<http://bak.spc.org/h18/site/>. Above right 'Mayday' was taken by J two years later, in 2001.
<http://diy.spc.org/ourmayday/>, <http://uk.indymedia.org>





Clapham Common



I was under the impression for a long time that this picture was of Hyde Park, as I made a mistake in noting down the location the first time round. Months later, Tessa, who gave me the picture, called to tell me she was going to the USA where her children were living, and I found out where it was. N and I talked briefly about it -

n

It looks like the desert...

a

With trees! It would be nice if the runner wasn't there.

n

That's the thing, he's right in the middle, maybe you have to remove him! Because you look at it, and he is dominating the middle of the frame.

a

And you think, he's a jogger and he's the subject of the picture. The occasional thing is the dry brown grass, evidence of a rarely seen hot summer. Unlike most images in the centre of the frame, the runner is not the subject of the photograph.

n

Take him out and put him down in the bottom right hand corner of the page, you could put him



right on the edge of the frame...or keep him in a little square where you can see where he has come from...

a
How do you do it?

n
Use the stamp tool.

That same evening I read some Surrealist poetry which I found in a sheaf of papers in N's filing cabinet, while he was looking for some material about the Situationists. In one poem was the line – 'Courageous like a stamp'.(1)



(2)

¹ *Sport Articles*, Philippe Soupault, www.alb-neckar-schwarzwald.de/surrealism/surrealism.html

² There is an image of a fox's tail which is a video still and I have wondered is this cheating? One frame taken from a clip of video. Maybe the video is a Hoover and the still frame a special particle of dust found by chance when going through the gathered material. It is in Denmark Hill.

Clerkenwell

These are bin bags.



One morning, get up for work as you always do. Follow exactly the same preparatory routines as you would on any other work day. Have a shower; pick out some clothes, something that makes you feel good, which nonetheless corresponds to your usual uniform. Above all, breakfast well. Eat a meal prepared as if it were to be your last. Once satiated and rested, leave home taking nothing more with you than you would on any other day. Proceed to the station or bus stop or wherever you begin your journey. Then, without drawing attention to yourself, remaining calm and professional, get on to the wrong train. Head off in a completely different direction. If an agreeable opportunity presents itself, change trains; take a bus, whatever, just keep going. Continue moving for as long as you wish, hours, days, weeks, months ... but do not look back; embrace travelling for its own sake. Whenever you arrive in a town or region which is completely unfamiliar to you, stay awhile. Rent a room. Most importantly, do not use the phone. All is before you from this moment on...

(1)

Thoreau in his essay 'Walking' writes – '...but the saunterer in the good sense is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea.'

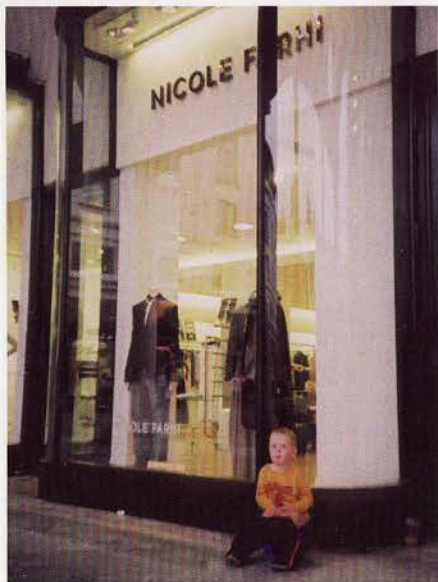
¹ 'Travelling Without Moving', Adam Scrivener in *Inventory – losing finding collecting*, 1997, vol. 2, no. 3, www.fiercesociology.org



Covent Garden

④ THE COFFEE STAIN

AFTER A MEAL AT PIZZA EXPRESS (COVENT GARDEN,
I SPILT SOME COFFEE ON
MY JUMPER AND IT
FORMED A SILHOUETTE
OF A CAT.



David and I first met at the London Connection, which is a resource centre for young homeless people. It is just by Trafalgar Square. He told me about this performer in Covent Garden whom he very much admired. I have to admit I was a bit alarmed as I have long had an antipathy towards licensed and costumed street entertainers (all except The Clockwork

Guardsmen who I met by the River Lea just after he'd fallen off his bicycle). I'd always felt pressurised to be entertained. Illegal busking is somehow less oppressive.



What should I say to David about this picture then? Can I say I don't like it? Whether I did or not stopped really mattering as I realised that the task I'd set myself was ill-conceived. As a piece of research, it has no consistent criteria. In fact there isn't much of a basis to it at all and in the face of the millions of directions I could go in I sometimes feel it's hopeless. Most people I ask about it look bewildered and ask me what I'm talking about. Or just talk about something completely different like Lenny Borg (below) who first suggested an enormous wasp's nest he found in his attic, and then wrote -

Thanks Anna!

What about a hedgehog in the garden?

Denmark Hill



Tower Hill



Oxford Street



Deptford

And yet it was precisely these gaps in my system, this blurring of criteria, that blossomed into an ongoing conversation with several people, including David and someone called Roxy.

At first she talked quite a lot about a peacock living behind the large corrugated iron fence of a local scrapyard in Deptford.

Time went by and she never did take a picture of it and seemed to grow disinclined to do so. Finally, just before going to New York for a few months, she sent me the picture (overleaf). It was difficult at first for me to make out what it was. I had to ask her. It's home-made seating for the London Marathon - a couple of car seats placed on top of a bus shelter.



It reminded me of a time when I had been abroad and came by Tube from Heathrow to Tower Hill, where I was living at the time. I had a huge backpack with me. When I surfaced from the station I was astonished to find myself completely trapped in hundreds and hundreds of people. The London Marathon was happening. I was unable to cross the road and it was extremely hot. I spoke with a policeman. Eventually I was forced to board another train and go on to the next station.

All that year people kept suggesting or lending me guidebooks, and I kept buying them to get a bit more information, which never really helped. It was as if I might get lost without one.

Andrea D, who had helped with setting up the database, loaned me a guidebook(1) from a series which describes itself as – ‘guides for people who already know their way round the city. Superior experts in their fields write for London lovers, visitors or residents who’ve seen it all and still can’t get enough.’ Guidebooks have changed in the last century from just pointing out things to see, to suggesting things to do,

activities to become involved in. Now the sight itself is not enough. Action, adventure and entertainment are in demand. Everywhere. Roxy(2) lent me *A Wanderer in London*(3).

¹ *Museums and Galleries of London*, Abigail Willis, Metro Publications, 2001.

² *Mayfair* ³ *A Wanderer in London*, E.V. Lucas, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1913 (14th edition).

THE more I wander about London the less wanderable in, for a stranger, does it seem to be. We who live in it and necessarily must pass through one street in order to get to another are not troubled by squalor and monotony; but what can the traveller make of it who comes to London bent upon seeing interesting things? What can he make of the wealthy deserts of Bayswater? of the grimy Vauxhall Bridge Road? of the respectable aridity of the Cromwell Road, which goes on for ever? of the grey monotony of Gower Street? What can he make of the hundreds of square miles of the East End? And what, most of all, of the interminable districts of small houses which his train will bi-sect on every line by which he can re-enter London after one of his excursions to the country? Nothing. He will not try twice.

2 17



a Dimitri has noticed a woman in a yellow hat in front of the lemons on display in such a way that the hat becomes a lemon.

n
When I was growing up there was a tree by the toll booth on the Tay Road Bridge which had, and still has, plastic lemons tied all over it. Someone ties their Jif lemons on to the tree. It's right by the toll booth. It's one of those things that makes you laugh when you go by, a tree covered in plastic lemons.

a
It's a piece of art.

n
Yes, but it's the kind of vision that gets into your mind and when you remember it it's like a little anomaly and you think - "Oh yeah, the lemons on the tree."

a
And it floods your head.

n
It makes you laugh, it's kind of enlivening in some way.

a
Enlivening, that's a good word - it is enlivening, what's great about it is it's enlivening in real life and it's enlivening in a story form. Would it be enlivening as a photograph I wonder...

n
It quickens the mind.

a
Does it?

n
Well that's the Kantian idea, his definition, his conclusion about what beauty does to you is that it quickens your mind like oiling a machine, it makes it go faster...

a
Sunsets, lemons on trees - are there alternative points of view about what beauty does to you?

n
Yeah there are, other people have talked about it, but I'm not sure whether it's the 'sublime' or 'beauty'. I think in Kant it is beauty, I'm sure other people write about it in different ways, that's what I remember from my philosophy class. It struck me as being quite true, if you think about what art is doing there are lots of cases where you can say that that's what you aim for - to make people's minds work better, to oil them.

Colette writes - "The "found" nature of the sublime in experience was, however, noted by Baudelaire and Benjamin on their walks... The sublime is not something that we can seek to find, or make happen. Simply, it is perhaps a consequence of the world we live in and the way in which we perceive it. Hence, it is unsurprising that the notion of the sublime is now employed with such egalitarian inconsistency that its Kantian inflexion no longer casts even a shadow over its contemporary applications.' She continues - 'Looking about hungrily for visual and textual clues, our attempt to grasp a sense of perspective or bearings seems thwarted; alien buildings tower above us, streets of cryptic inscriptions forebode, the clattering cacophony of jarring sounds(1) and babble of foreign tongues threatens to overwhelm. With a deliciously quick dawning of realisation, oddly coupled with an anxious fear for our safety, we realise we are lost. Perhaps if only figuratively speaking.'(2)

¹ Colette summons up the often unconsciously-felt sonic aspects of the city, of which many can be found on the CD *Your Favourite London Sounds* compiled by Peter Cusack and distributed by the London Musicians Collective. ² 'Kant: Walking the Talk' by Colette Meacher, 2002. coletteameacher@yahoo.co.uk

Dulwich

N and I drove about, trying to see if it is possible to wander by car. It is very productive but far more isolated than walking - you rarely meet other drivers and it's difficult to pause. I did however manage to get a photograph just as these road workers deftly twisted the signs from STOP-red to GO-green like swizzle sticks in tall drinks. I was struck, on looking later at the photo, by the two green signs which together read 'GO GO' (my mind drifted to an exotic holiday destination). N then commented how it looked as if the road worker was being lifted off the ground, just touching the pavement with the toes of his boots. Maybe the sign was in fact a balloon.

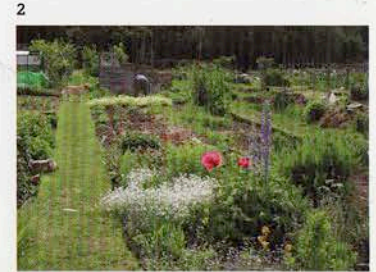


We drove on and came across a side road leading to the Tent Show. Intrigued, we followed the winding and idyllic leafy lane and paid it a visit. There N met his

friend Paul Claydon, who is one of the members of Inventory(1) and had just bought a tent. Then we made our way to the allotments(2) where we have been digging up potatoes.



1 www.fiercesociology.org/inventory



2

East Finchley





ANDREW
GIBBS

Elephant and Castle

Chris sent me the photograph of 'Andrew Gibbs' taken by his friend Neil Bowden. He sent a letter accompanying it which is reproduced in part (far right). And he enclosed a pamphlet and map (below) which are available from infoshop, 56a Crampton St, SE17.



NINE THINGS THAT AREN'T THERE

a manoeuvre around The Elephant & Castle

You are wrong to try and pass through from, say, the nice end of London Rd across to the traffic island (the Faraday monument - a very large silver box) and then across to the beginning of the Old Kent Rd. Despite that seemingly correct assumption of directions, you would be completely wrong.

Crossing the place called the Elephant & Castle, a locale just South of The Thames in London Town, is the right way to go about things. This is because there is no other way to pass through the area. Not least because the six off-sprouts of major roads that spike off of The Elephant are ready to spin your head in a very demonic fashion. Not because most of the ways through it are actually under the ground and lead one not to the intended destination but to a parallel destination completely somewhere else. Neither is it any other complicated excuse or reason. And the Elephant is complicated. Rather it is that the place itself, for over 2000 years or onwards, has been a meeting point of travellers, persons, escapes and maybe me and you, and demands random behaviour, stop 'n' start motion and a Kwik savouring of the terrain. There is much to miss here and you have already missed much. I also suggest that just passing through would be rude.

Postcards
volume 1 - Winter 2001

signwriting student undertaking practice, *and* tagging? And, of course, was it Andrew Gibbs whodunnit? In a recent update, the council has finally undertaken to remove the name from the wall but only succeeded in leaving a ghost version of the name, as it is still spectrally visible. A beautiful mystery! I enclose a Xerox copy of my photo of the original work.

• Finally, in a similar line of work, at the other side of the churchyard stands a ruined building that decays slowly, bit by bit, each year. It's a fabulous Victorian two storey building complete with fancy stonework and lovely architectural additions. Suffering from many fires from dossers and junkies, who lit fires directly on the floorboards, the place was eventually boarded up. The boarding up, covering the side windows, was then painted black leaving perfect blackboards down the side of Churchyard Row. In 2000, a slow series of colourful chalk quotations was put up over the period of one week. I noticed these with much delight as I cycled past many times that week. Quotes ranged from Georges Bataille to Italo Calvino. It was obvious that two hands had been in operation as the quotes were in different writing. Funnily enough, the chalk markings are still there, and slowly but beautifully being covered over with other more spraypaint heavy tags and graffiti. I suspect the idea was for the chalked quotes to be removed fairly fast be rain and damp but, aha! if this was the case, the decay backfired on these literary-minded enthusiasts as some of the quotes are still perfectly readable!

PS. Someone told that Churchyard Row stands along a leyline from across the river but I'm not so bothered about that.

These, then are my offerings from this particular ancient land. It remains one of my favourite places in London to pass through.

Best wishes for *Occasional Sights*. It sounds great.

love

Embankment

Susan, who works at London Connection, told me about seeing a very smart high-flying businesswoman zooming past on a scooter outside Embankment station. The photos (overleaf) are the result of an attempted 're-enactment' which didn't work out.

This failure put me off the planned re-enactment of a Page Three girl doing a photoshoot on Waterloo Bridge. I had even enlisted someone called Christina to act as a topless model.



Another time, also near Embankment, I approached a woman sitting on a bench next to the Queen Mary. She had a large quantity of plastic bags around her. I asked her if I could ask her something and she replied - "I don't want company and I don't want to speak to anybody." It was a sobering reply. I suppose the words that come out of my mouth are very repetitive, and very limited. All too often conversation feels like an over-familiar place. Only now and again does it lead off into the backwoods of the unknown or the uncertain. I asked myself, should I frame the question differently each and every time I speak to someone? Maybe I should be going up to people and saying - "I need you, I need you to help me."

Euston

John W, who is often at Euston Station, told me that from the train to Birmingham a gnome can be seen through a parting in the branches of a large tree.

If you're moving a thing can appear more 'occasional' than it really is. Speed changes time and offers us the illusion of ephemerality. On the other hand memory makes the briefest of sights permanent.

Editors' Note: On 3 November 1994, Ray Johnson, in response to questions from Kristine Stiles about the blank spaces and unfinished sentences in this text, said, "I don't know." When pressed further, Johnson again responded, "I don't know." After a long silence, Johnson said, "Why don't you put in 'I don't know'?" Johnson's responses are particularly poignant in light of his suicide on 13 January 1995.

The next time a railroad train is seen going its way along the track, look quickly at the sides of the box cars because a moticos may be there. Whether the train is standing still or speeding past you, a moticos Don't try to catch up with it. It wants to go its way. But have your camera ready to snap its picture. It likes those moments of being inside the box. When your film is printed and the moticos is finally seen, it will not be seen, unless you paste the photograph of the moticos on the side of a box car so someone can see the moticos or take its picture. It may appear in your daily newspaper. Someone may put it there. Cut it out. Save it. Treasure it. Make sure it is in a box or between the pages of a book for your grandchildren to find and enjoy.

The moticos is not only seen on railroad trains, but on I really isn't necessary to see the moticos or know where it is because I have seen them. Perhaps I might point them out to you. The best way is to go about your business not thinking about silly moticos because when you begin seeking them, describing what they are or where they are going is So just make sure you wake up from sleeping and go your way and go to sleep when you will. The moticos does that too and does not worry about you. Perhaps you are the moticos. Destroy this. Paste the ashes on the side of your automobile and if anyone asks you why you have ashes pasted on the side of your car, tell them.

Or write the word *moticos* on the top of your automobile. It loves moving and rain water. Not so many people will wonder what it means. There will be no questions, hence no need for answers. And if you have an automobile, drive to pleasant places because

Have you seen a moticos lately? Perhaps you have. They are everywhere. As I write this I wish someone were here to point one out to me because I know they exist.

¹ 'What is a Moticos?', Ray Johnson, 1954, in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, edited by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, University of California Press, ©1996, The Regents of the University of California.

Farringdon Road

a
Has anyone told me a total lie?

n
They might have done.

a
Why not? They should have...

n
Telling you they saw an amazing thing...

a
Yes absolutely, yes it is a perfect invitation to make something up!

n
The GO GO man in Dulwich with the sign that could be a balloon, that is almost a good lie, imagine if someone had contacted you and said - "I saw a man floating into the air today."

a
But it has really happened, the people flying at the end of their kites in Blackheath, it looks like magic but it's true!

n
A magician is like a liar, always inviting you to consider the unreality of what you think you see.

a
Like Aladin at the Serpentine, who took me to stare at the murky green lake in order that we see the carp lair. I am completely uncertain if this is a tale or a true story.

n
It's like the situation with the rat I saw in Haggerston, I'm not sure if I remember it correctly or not. I have, in time, and the re-telling of the story, lost confidence in the fact.



n
I cannot help asking why this photo is here?

a
It was suggested by Rachel, it is inside a shop on Farringdon Road. It's a magician with Rachel's two boys, which only seems relevant in relation to talking about trickery and lying and fabrication, whether done directly through the telling of stories and also in terms of faking something or doing a re-enactment or digital manipulation.

n
The Chinese whispers of communication!

Fulham

a
It was November the 5th, a mild but grey afternoon. At the end of Ranelagh Gardens is Hurlingham Park. This turned out to be inaccessible. It's a private club that you have to be a member of. It seems to me that there should be an indication of what is not accessible on maps of London. I suppose that is what guidebooks are for. Don't go to Hurlingham Park.

n
How do you become a member?



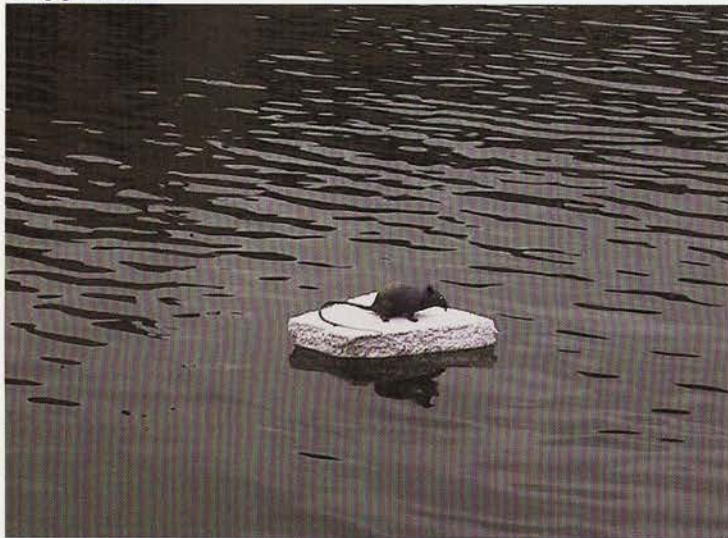
Greenwich

N asked me – “Did the laser beam kill the hare?” – to which I answered with a quote – “If Newton thought, said Austerlitz, pointing through the window and down to the curve of the water around the Isle of Dogs glistening in the last of the daylight, if Newton really thought that time was a river like the Thames, then where is its source and into what sea does it finally flow? Every river, as we know, must have banks on both sides, so where, seen in those terms, where are the banks of time? What would be this river’s qualities, qualities perhaps corresponding to those of water, which is fluid, rather heavy and translucent?”(1)

1 Austerlitz, W.G. Sebald, translated by Anthea Bell, © the Estate of W.G. Sebald, 2001. Translation © Anthea Bell, 2001. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

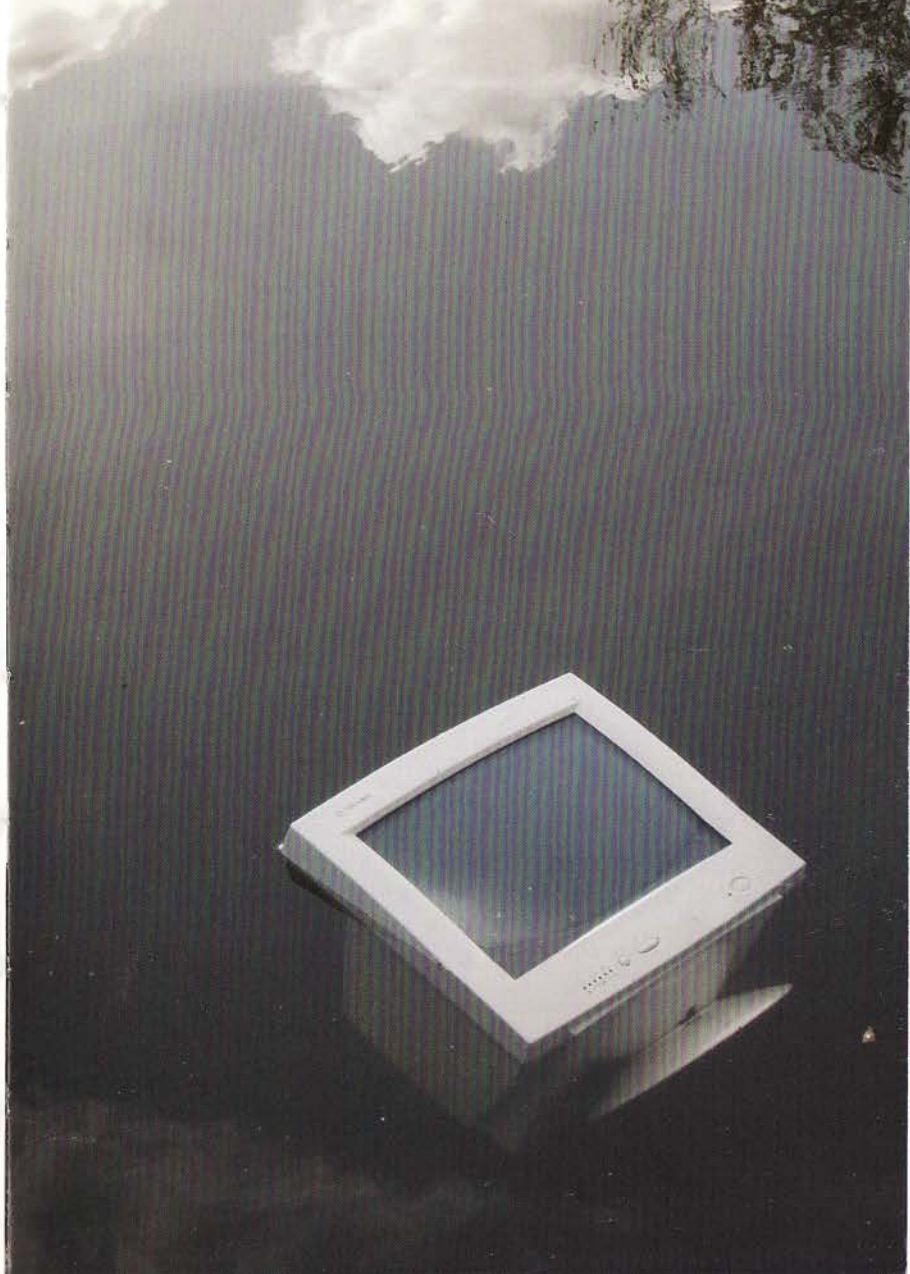






N speaks about the rat - "It's something I have thought about for years, and occasionally remembered that I'd seen that thing and thought to myself - yeah, one time I saw a rat floating down the canal on a piece of polystyrene and I'd quite often mention it as an anecdote to people - 'I once saw a rat floating down the canal...' and it would always get a laugh.

There was always a doubt, all the time, about whether I actually saw it or not, whether I kind of made it up to myself, or whether I imagined it. When I start to think that way I sincerely cannot be sure, and I certainly can't now that I'm talking about it...but, no...I do remember it! And I remember it very clearly, because the rat looked at me, the rat looked round as it floated by, as if to say - 'What are you going to do about it?'"

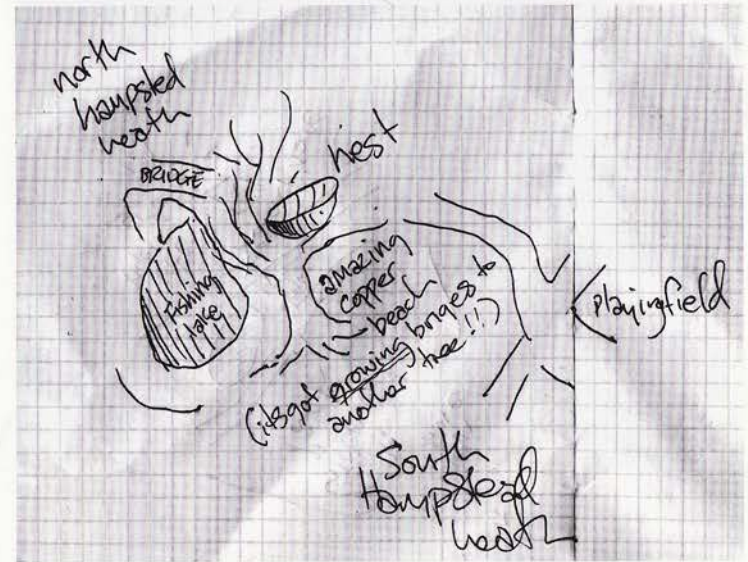


“The traffic bollard in the centre of the roundabout where Swain’s Lane meets Highgate Road and West Hill was a square pillar, not very robust. One day it was uprooted by a double decker bus which took up lots of concrete as well.”

Mr Cornwell, sitting on a bench on a sloping path on the Heath, came up with a story, one that is very localised, very specific and peripheral. The main character is a bollard(1). He also made reference to a street in E12, and that aspect of his story introduced the particular dimension of London life which takes place solely in the pages of the *Mini Atlas London*.



© Collins Bartholemew Ltd 2003
1 see Judith Dean's *Bollards*, 2000, in King's Cross. A map of the bollard locations can be found on the corner of Loxham and Cromer streets.



'You approached my wife and I on Parliament Hill a couple of weeks ago while we were taking photographs of the London skyline. I have looked through thousands of negatives and slides but cannot find any suitable material taken in the London area.

As we said at the time we specialise in nature photography taken mainly in Arctic Scandinavia and therefore we feel that the majority of our material is inappropriate for your publication.

We know a picture is worth a thousand words, but I couldn't help thinking of the following nursery rhyme...and maybe you might like to consider it:-

Now, if we had any photographs illustrating any of the above, we would have gladly sent them to you.'

I saw a fishpond all on fire.
I saw a house bow to a
squire. I saw a parson
twelve feet high. I saw a
cottage near the sky.
I saw a balloon made of
lead. I saw a coffin drop
down dead. I saw two
sparrows run a race. I saw
two horses making lace.
I saw a girl just like a cat.
I saw a kitten wear a hat.
I saw a man who saw
these too. And said though
strange they all were true.

Highbury

Karin sends an email in which she describes taking a picture of a young woman on the Tube holding a life-size cut-out of James Dean wrapped in clear plastic. The woman said that she was working in a video rental shop and they were clearing out stuff. James Dean, her hero, had been spared the dustbin.



Just as time is running out, Colette sends an email, also about the Tube - '...the sight...by which I have been most struck in London, and which almost haunts me, is of a schoolgirl I saw on a packed tube-train in uniform, who was simply walking quickly on the spot as the Tube shunted between stations, without holding onto an arm-rail, and whilst being jostled by other passengers... It was almost obsessive movement, made all the more compelling for me to watch given that she was very pretty, almost beautiful, and by the

fact that nobody else had noticed her manic humdrum attempt to keep moving, keep balanced without falling over - a perfect poetry, although disturbing. I often see her image in my mind when I am travelling on the Tube now.'

Homerton



Bev produced these two photos the first time I met up with her. She didn't tell me much about them so I did a bit of research on the Internet. I like the tenuous link between Pearlies, Hampstead Heath and teeth. I found a website, which later seemed to have disappeared, where I found the following quote -

'I went into the bathroom to wash my Boat Race. After having a Butcher's Hook at my Loaf of Bread in the mirror, I brushed my Barnet Fair and my Hampstead Heath and decided that I needed to have a Dig in the Grave.'(1)

Another person wearing a place was a homeless man in a photo Jonathan Goldberg sent me. He was foraging in a dustbin on Oxford Street wearing a tourist T-shirt that said - 'LONDON LONDON LONDON'

1 www.pearlies.co.uk



Hoxton

Spot The Ball!

You are invited to play a version of a traditional game - Spot The Ball - on your own or with a friend.

1

Take out a pin or compass and mark the spot where you guess the ball is, pushing the point through to the following page.

2

Turn the page to see if you have been successful.

Andrea C, who had been staying in London, phoned me when he got back to Milan to tell me he had seen a man playing tennis with his dog the day before. He told me the directions to the place over the phone -

"Pass the Macbeth pub on Hoxton Street on your right and keep walking up the street till you come to a roundabout with a funny weird sculpture on it. Cross the road and go left. The tennis courts are on your right."



N tells me - "The Situationists had four different techniques, 'détournement', 'dérive', 'unitary urbanism' and something else...for the making of situations.

'Détournement' involved the deflection of objects, ideas, behaviours, and the like from their accepted usage and their reassignment to entirely new purposes. 'Dérive' consisted in leisurely walking in diverse settings in ways that allowed the atmosphere of each place to seep into the stroller's mind.



The first procedure was meant to help people grow detached from their habitual cultural context, the other to make them aware that each ambience triggered a different emotional response. Together they were to induce individuals to reject their alienating environment and build an integrating one in its place."⁽¹⁾

¹ For further reading *What is Situationism? A Reader*, Stuart Home (ed), AK Press, 1996



Hyde Park

I say - "There used to be drinking fountains everywhere when I was young." Which was in about 1975. N reminds me that there is some doubt over whether this is a drinking fountain or a bird bath. A public place without any shops is an anomaly these days. Paradoxically, or perhaps not that paradoxically, it is now possible to buy water in most shops. Water often costs about £1.50 for a small bottle. A tiny proportion of these bottles get recycled by economic default - filled over and over again from a variety of sources - taps in pubs and cafés, taps at work, taps in other people's kitchens.

Jessops on New Oxford Street is a good place to get a plastic cupful of water. You can also buy cameras and photographic accessories and get films developed.



N and I are discussing taxonomies and how to order the material you have in front of you from one day to the next, from one moment to the other.

a
I find that tenuous links are starting to plague me, that I make increasingly dubious connections between things.

n
Libby Purves is a radio presenter who uses such leaps of the imagination to link a whole series of unconnected but consecutive programmes together.

a
Alphabetical order is random and arbitrary. It is so unfair that it's deemed the least biased and most objective way of ordering information. (I decide to use it.)

n
With a book you can always start at the back in revolt

and interrupt the prevailing order. (While leafing through some pictures we are suddenly faced with a carpet of buttercups.)



Although they were photographed in Hyde Park, this location is irrelevant. They could be anywhere, in any pastoral setting. Maybe we need to adopt an entirely new classification and abandon the notion of alphabetically-ordered places?

a
Ughh?

n
The recurring flowers and sunsets are a growing cluster of clichéd ephemerality. It is because these flowers and sunsets



are not about seeing the city in a different way, not about the periphery. They are things that make you content and pleased in a dubious, anesthetising sort of way. It could be a matter of opinion, whether most people like sunset photographs(1) or whether they do not, whether there is any such thing as 'most people', whether that is simply not how we think about things or whether that way of thinking is what is wrong with authority and the making of policies.

1 Vauxhall Bridge

Imperial War Museum

September/October 2002. Passing by, saw an encampment, stopped, went to see what was happening. The man _____ who talked to us when we approached had left his flat in High Barnet to live in the tent.

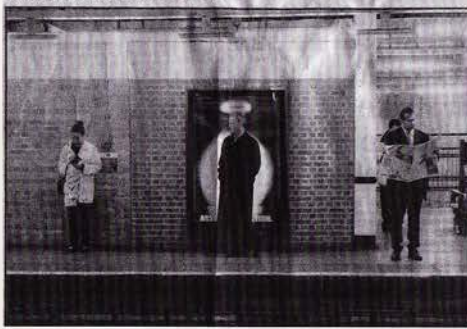


Kensington



I cut this picture of the 'angel' out of the newspaper (overpage) and after some delay had a look at the website www.in-public.com. There seems to be a whole genre or tradition of this street photography. We also came across the image of a businessman with a stressball and the statement – 'My street photography friends say that if you are patient enough the street will always deliver, eventually you will turn a corner and the street will reveal something wonderful to you.'

PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY: STREET LIFE #2



These are both pictures of a hybrid person. I like to think of them as contemporary centaurs – part human and part commodity.

I found this strictly by chance when I walked down onto the platform at High St. Kensington, and which only existed for a moment until the Circle Line arrived

and my subject got on to his train, and a second later I got on to mine going in the opposite direction, an instant never to be repeated.'



The street is being Photoshopped, like the pages of every newspaper, being edited and mediated – a digitally-altered public space.



Locals on Clapham Common in London appear unperturbed by a horse from 'The Spirit of the Horse Show', which opens tonight



From: jacky spears <[REDACTED]>
To: <annabest@photonet.org.uk>
Date: Monday, June 3, 2002 6:27 am
Subject: alternative london guidebook

Hi Anna,

On Saturday I read an article about your project next to the irresistible photo of a rat floating down a canal on a piece of polystyrene (hope it's now living 'happily ever after'....!)

Only the day before, approaching the V & A museum from its nearest South Kensington tube exit - I found myself wishing I'd taken my camera...

A happy tramp was comfortably lying - sitting up - covered by blankets - and surrounded by pigeons - close to and almost perched on him - and on the surrounding walls of the V & A. It was a marvellous sight, so I thought I should let you know in case you felt like going to capture him (if indeed he's still there - but somehow he seemed quite settled!)

He was to the far left of the main entrance.

Anyway, good luck with the project!

Best wishes,

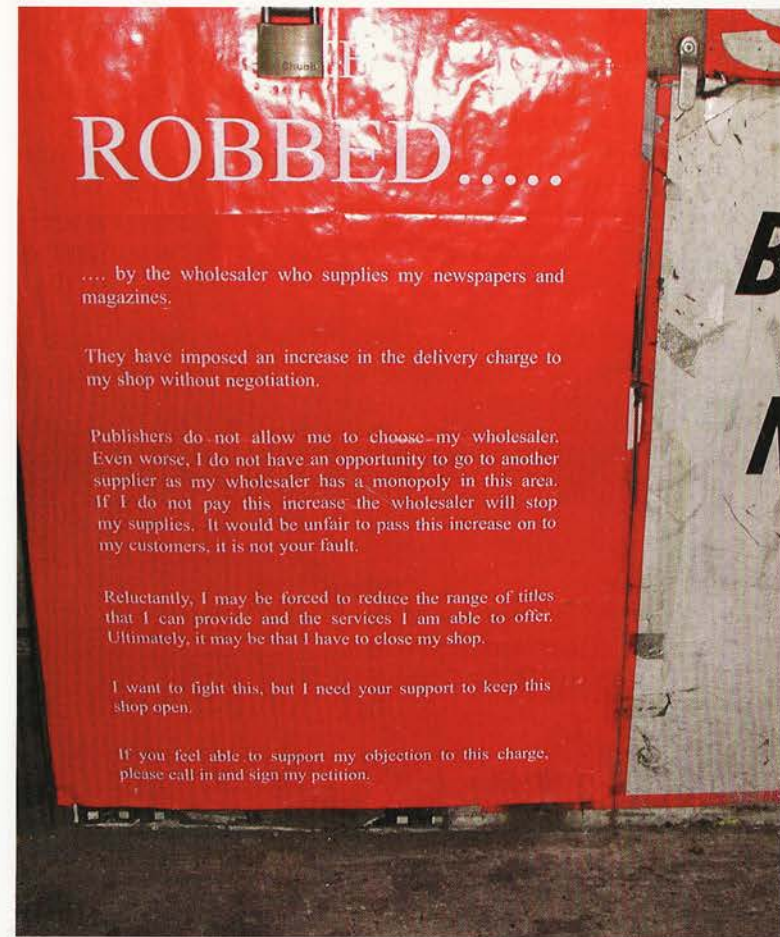
Jacky Spears

Kensal Town

A long walk from Vauxhall Station to Kensal Town via Hyde Park and the Regent's Canal, arriving in the dark. On the Harrow Road, by a small bridge that crosses the canal, there is a newsagents (right) next to a Caribbean takeaway which makes excellent food.

I recalled a conversation with a friend and artist called Mary Evans. She'd invited me to an event in Kensal Town. A few months before we'd had a cup of tea together in Camberwell and she had spluttered in fury while telling me about the 'Year of Cultural Diversity'. We talked about government policy, New Labour and public funding and I took some notes. The Government apply policy like gloss paint on cracked situations. Artists get employed as decorators and no one is happy. We discussed mapping, and the notion of becoming an authority on a certain subject or having a complete knowledge. Mapping is seductive. Lay down a grid and fill it in; be definite and definitive. Be superimposing. Discovering and creating types, taxonomies of apparent order - how easy it would be to have a quota, a list to be fulfilled.

Who are all the people who people the streets everyday anyway? Dog walkers, police, firemen, tourists, bus/coach drivers, rough sleepers, politicians, mothers with toddlers, map sellers, kids in groups, people carrying plastic bags, prostitutes, writers, photographers, artists, labourers digging holes, surveyors...



This led to talking about how you only identify with what you already know, how inescapable your own identity is and how difficult it is to speak to someone you have a preconception about, and how knowing how they might react informs how you approach them in the first place. I came away thinking that having eyes, like all good things, seems to contain a paradox at its heart - with the ability to see, you think you know what you are looking at.

On the way back, somewhere on the Bayswater Road, I collapsed in a state of exhaustion and don't remember how I arrived home.

Can all this be an experiment for how I might alter the course of my life, how I might feel less alone as I travel through my city, by spending hours in a state of happy uncertainty, putting myself in different places, not just literally but also by speaking to people I don't know, by encouraging encounters to flourish and trying to claim the space outdoors - streets, parks, paths and benches - as my own?

Many months later I met someone on the train. We sat next to one another and he talked about Buckminster Fuller. He later sent me an email - "Strategic Questions" is an ongoing project to develop 40 projects in response to 40 questions written by R. Buckminster Fuller. Each project is an artwork or a combination of artworks that are developed in relation to 40 different publication scenarios. Each project tackles one question and is placed into an existing magazine, journal or book, or a publication is developed in response to a specific site and context.' He then added - '...it sounds like an exciting chance to infiltrate your own book project...' and I immediately thought how, unwittingly, my current research addressed question 5. 'What are experiments?'(1)

1 'Strategic Questions', curated by Gavin Wade. 'It is my assumption that the following forty questions must be definitively answered before we may realistically discuss our respective philosophies and grand strategies. 1. What do we mean by universe? 2. Has man a function in the universe? 3. What is thinking? 4. What are experiences? 5. What are experiments? 6. What is subjective? 7. What is objective? 8. What is apprehension? 9. What is comprehension? 10. What is positive? Why? 11. What is negative? Why? 12. What is physical? 13. What is metaphysical? 14. What is synergy? 15. What is energy? 16. What is brain? 17. What is intellect? 18. What is science? 19. What is a system? 20. What is consciousness? 21. What is subconsciousness? 22. What is teleology? 23. What is automation? 24. What is a tool? 25. What is industry? 26. What is animate? 27. What is inanimate? 28. What are metabolics? 29. What is wealth? 30. What is intuition? 31. What are aesthetics? 32. What is harmonic? 33. What is prosaic? 34. What are the senses? 35. What is mathematics? 36. What is structure? 37. What is differentiation? 38. What is integration? 39. What is integrity? 40. What is truth?' These strategic questions were written by R. Buckminster Fuller as part of a statement to a leading figure in the world building industry. The statement is called 'Design Strategy' (1966) and was published in Fuller's *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity*, 1969.

Kentish Town

Andreas tells me about the forest corridor and waits a year for the next opportunity – “Temporary forest corridor. The picket line. Two in one.”



December



King's Cross

Bev has been taking photographs of this area for a long time and has recorded the process of regeneration - eviction, demolition and what she describes as - "unbelievably sudden change" - in Battlebridge Road, Culcross Buildings, the gasometers and the station.



After talking to Bev I was inspired to stand in front of a boarded-up window. It took a while before I became bored. I found myself considering the present and the future of the person who may have spent time behind that window. And the view that may have etched itself onto their absent-minded glances out of that window.



"The song is over but the melody lingers on".

Personal histories are erased every time demolition occurs. Erosion and naturally occurring re-growth are considered the height of abjection by the construction industry. In this way, the city becomes less human. Time is ripped from its moorings and you go shopping.

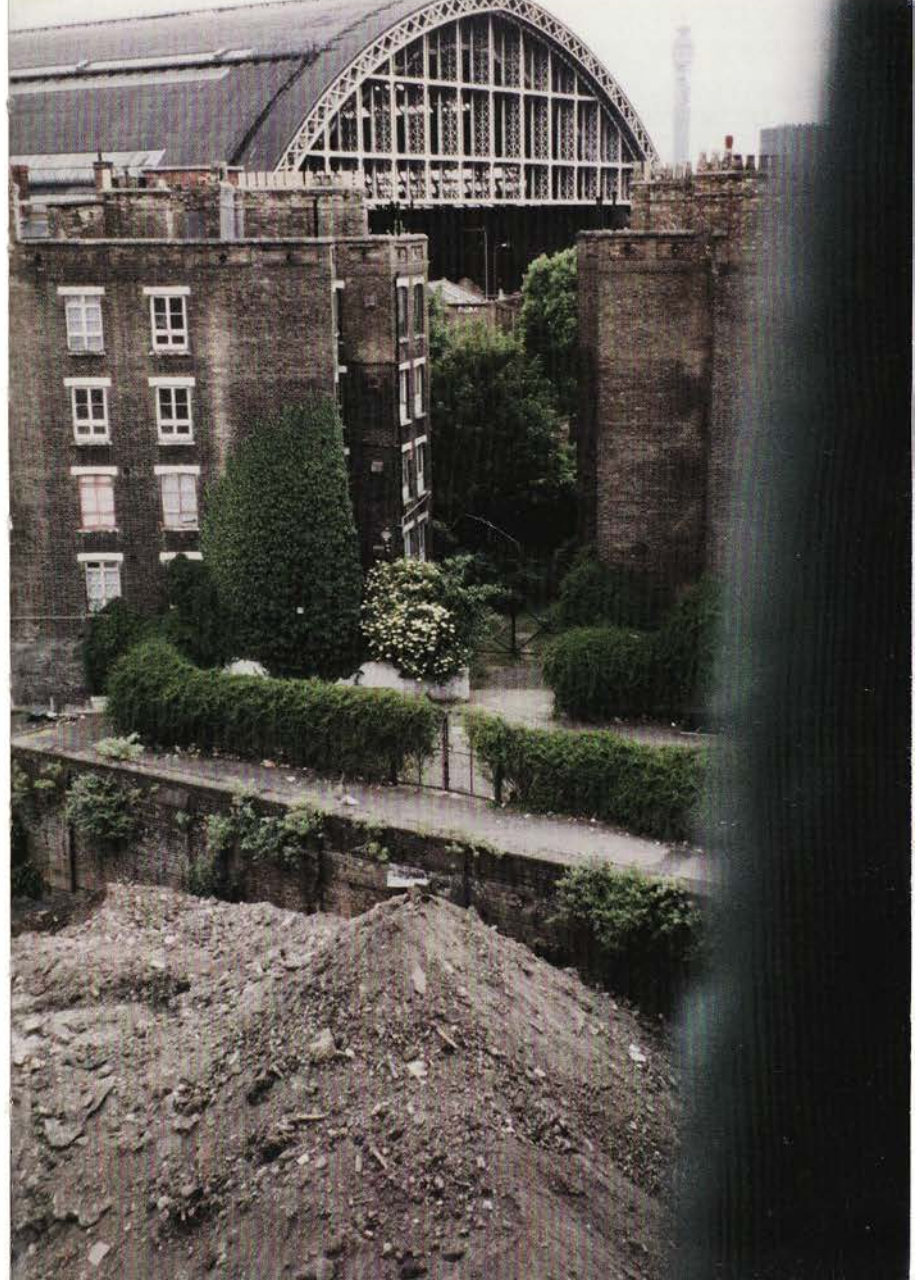


I met Peter while he was parked up on Hyde Park Corner. Peter is a taxi driver. That afternoon I was with Roxy doing research about the goat of Hamilton Terrace. When I got back in touch with Peter he referred to her as - 'the goat lady'. He lent me a copy of a handmade guide called 'The Circle Tour' by a fellow taxi driver called Maurice Arkus.(1) (overleaf)

I rang him a few days later and he talked about all the views he had seen while working - views that have all changed and either no longer exist, or only existed for a short while because of construction and demolition. I had a sense of the vertigo he might feel on seeing a suddenly altered horizon: as if he met a friend one day and then the next day they had lost a limb. Of how this dramatic change - a sudden open sky where before there were buildings - might produce a traumatic effect on the beholder. The kind of vertigo you get when you are swimming too far from the shore and realise that not only can you no longer touch the bottom, but that you have no idea how much water is below you.

Peter hasn't got photos of any of these views and, although he did urge me to go to the local papers for some, I actually came across one of the pictures (right) that Bev had taken of King's Cross which almost perfectly fits his description on the telephone that day.

1 To go on 'The Circle Tour' ring: 07956 200 133



Turn right, Aldwych, immediately left Catherine Street.

On our right is the **Theatre Royal**, first built in 1663. Between 1665 and 1666 it was closed because of the Great Plague and the Great Fire. In 1716 there was an attempt on the life of George II and again in 1800 upon the life George III.

Turn left into Russell Street and right into Bow Street.

Bow Street gets its name from the bend in the street.

On our left is the **Royal Opera House**. Opened in 1732 and was the most luxurious ever built in London. During the 1st World War it was used as a government store and during the 2nd World War as a dance hall.

Go forward Endell Street and turn left into Shelton Street.

This area which is known as **Covent Garden** was once part of Westminster Abbey and was part of the Convent. The area was mostly pastureland. The market came into existence round about the 17th century. There was a Royal Charter granted for the right to hold a market for flowers and fruit. Due to the area getting extremely congested a new site was required. In 1974 the market moved to Nine Elms (South London). Many buildings have been converted into smaller specialist units; there is a covered market, Transport Museum and large selection of restaurants.

Turn left into Upper St Martins Lane and right into Cranbourne Street.

Directly in front of us is **Leicester Square**. In the Middle Ages this land also used to belong to the Abbey and Convent of St Peter's, Westminster Abbey. Nowadays, it has been closed to traffic.

Knightsbridge

I am in Knightsbridge and it is grim. I am not enlivened by my environment, nor by the crowds of fur-clad beings. My thoughts are directed towards bereavement by a sign I come across in an alleyway. This sign is taped to a roller shutter that is pulled down on a photography shop. I start to equate the rattle of the shutter coming down with a last breath, and the lens cap on a camera with the covering up at the moment of death. And I see the shutter as a black patch over a malfunctioning eye.



I am overwhelmed by the way so many people I have approached said - "Sorry."

"Sorry, I never see anything."

"Sorry love, I don't have time."

"Sorry, not now."

"Sorry..."

Is it a very British thing? Saying sorry is a way of stopping a situation from evolving, it's a euphemism

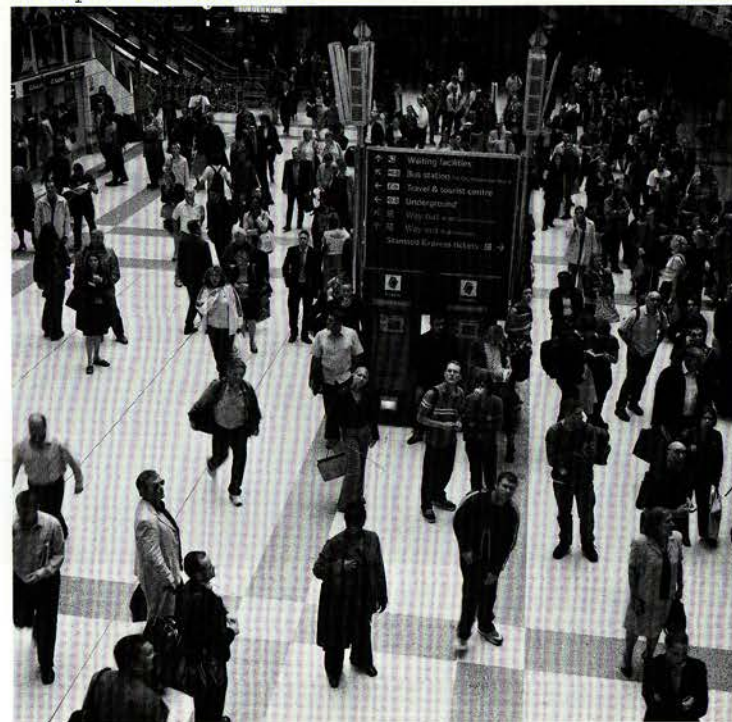
for - "STOP - I'm not going any further. I haven't got time. We're not going to talk. I don't want to know." It's an imperative that doesn't just mean sorry, in fact it doesn't mean sorry at all, it means - "No!" - and - "Fuck you!"

Sorry is a word that becomes meaningless when you look at it for any length of time. Maybe in this case because of its size or just how bizarre it is when you look hard at the letters. Robert Smithson talks about this in his essay 'A Sedimentation of the Mind' - how when you look at a word hard you see fissures appearing in it. He talks about it cracking up like the ground in the desert...

When I met up with Justine in Clerkenwell it was a very wet evening. I had cycled through the rush hour and my head was filled with red brake lights and rainwater. Justine showed me a whole load of pictures of far away people and places. I felt sure that the rainy dark world we currently occupied would never be in her portfolio. She showed me a photo of London Bridge Station when it was completely empty. It was strange because just the other day I'd met another professional photographer called Lenard Smith, who showed me a photo of an empty bus stop on Waterloo Bridge.

I realised that if you stand just north of this bus stop you can see stalactites hanging icicle-like from the concrete of the South Bank Centre. N suggested to me that 'Empty Sites of Public Transport' might be a photography course at art college.

Liverpool Street Station



London Bridge

n
I remember you talking about the woman on the bike, she was a model...

a
I think a pop singer. She was astride a motorbike and revealing herself quite a lot, which I didn't even notice till suddenly the woman in red rushed up to me and said - "No, no, don't take those photos - look!" I told her that I had no such intention! It was around 2am and



I was looking at the whole scene to take a picture and that was the context...

n

It's a weird blurry picture and you can't tell what's going on – that looks like a priest, it looks like she's got a beard!

a

That's the woman wearing a red outfit...I like the fact that the photoshoot is making use of existing lighting, the inset underground lights from a club (under the bike). They are using the underbelly of London Bridge.

n

The fact that she is a pop star leads to a conundrum that doesn't add up. Maybe someone has seen that image of the pop star on an album cover they bought, or a concert



flyposter... That would be a nice full circle. If she's well known it could be everywhere.

a

It could be a nice coincidence, shame I didn't get her name.

Get onto the Thames Southbank from Tower Bridge going west... Take a right off Tower Bridge Road and then another right into the coach park (which may have transformed into something else by now) and there's a small gate on the left, which in fact is almost hidden, and at night is particularly hard to find, unless you know it. It takes you into a wide open area. Leave the GLA (Greater London Authority) building behind you on your left, and you reach the river. Go past HMS Belfast and then go left down a little alley to go under London Bridge.



1. date?
2. time?
3. location of rainbow end/s?
4. viewer location?
5. duration?
6. weather conditions?



"I was cycling home when I saw an ambulance go rushing past me. I continued cycling, turned a corner and found the ambulance parked by the side of the road. Inside sat the driver - brushing his teeth!"



n
Seeing a Royal is the same as seeing any famous person or celebrity.

a
What is it like?

n
Who have you seen?

1

2

3

4

5

Millennium Bridge



An art student called Tessa sent these video stills, taken from Tate Modern, during the period when the 'wobbly' bridge was closed down. She noticed people sneaking in through the hording and crossing the bridge regardless. Everyone watched from the gallery as the police came and slowly cleared the area.

The straw bales hanging from the Millennium Bridge⁽¹⁾ prompted me to tell N a tale of how years ago, at night, I had stolen one that was hanging from Waterloo Bridge. I had replaced it with a bottle of beer and been delighted not to know why that bale (a vacuum-wrapped hay bale for pet rabbits) was hanging there. Last year in true art gallery style Tate Modern erected a sign near the straw bales, undoubtedly there to stifle the wonderment of passers-by, explaining their historical evolution and significance.

N commented that this is really not at all unlike the interpretive signs seen inside the gallery.

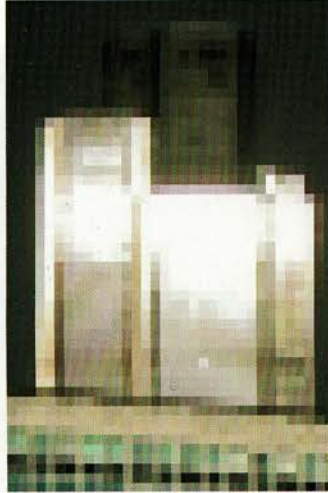
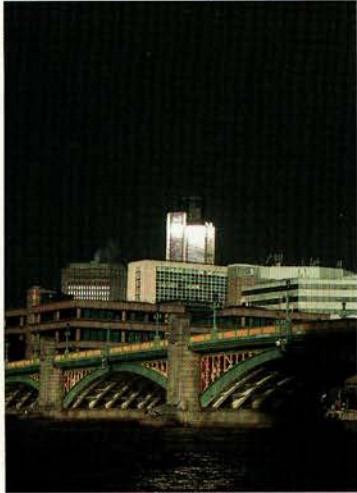
¹ *PLA Pleasure User's Guide*, in the section on 'Visual Signals, Temporary Works', states 'A bundle of straw or a white light hanging from the arch of a bridge indicates that the arch has restricted headroom.'



'Despite the troubled histories of the Millennium Dome and the Millennium Bridge, these projects taken together have already produced the first substantial re-evaluation of London's built form as a spectacle for the tourist, destabilising the central understandings of London presented in its guidebooks.'⁽²⁾ They go on to speak about how London is identified for the tourist by its incoherence rather than its cultural diversity. How it is now standard to present London to the visitor as chaotic, fragmentary, contradictory and postmodern, even embracing the tone of ambivalence with which most Londoners will speak about the city.⁽³⁾

² From an essay by David Gilbert and Fiona Henderson, 'London and the Tourist Imagination' in a book called *Imagined Londons* that I came across in Stanfords on Long Acre in Covent Garden. It's on the shelf given over entirely to the subject of London. ³ Under the sub-heading 'Fragmenting London: Post-Imperial Stories in the Tourist City'.

NatWest Tower (Bear Gardens?)



As we talk N introduces the notion of a conspiracy of situations. What is the location of the photograph on the left? We think about the rainbow in London Fields and that childish conjecture over the location of the ends of a rainbow – where is the pot of gold? Is the location the view or the place where the photo has been taken from – or where the thing has been seen from?

N goes on – “It’s about the weird contingency of seeing things, it’s about being in the right place at the right time to see the thing, rather than going there...”

We think about co-ordinates and wonder how they work. We are not navigators or cartographers. We speculate that places can be plotted with three co-ordinates. In the three-dimensional world, yes, but on a map you only need two points, I guess.

This is also mentioned by Simon Pope in his work *London Walking*(1) – ‘We get back onto the Commercial Road, using the glare of the sun in the NatWest Tower to keep us on our westward track.’

¹ *London Walking – a handbook for survival*, Simon Pope, Ellipsis/Chrysalis, 2000.

New Covent Garden Market

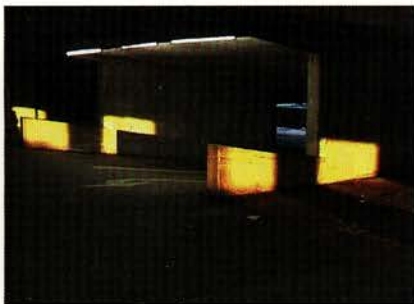
“We looked skywards and, lo! a pale ray of sunshine crept out of the greyness, stole half-way down to earth and then grew timid.”(2)

² ‘Kangaroos in King’s Land: Being the Adventure of Four Australian Girls in England’, Mary Marlowe, in *The Metropole as Antipodes: Australian Women in London and Constructing National Identity*, A. Woollocott from *Imagined Londons*, Pamela K. Gilbert (ed), State University of New York Press, 2002.

N and I talk until we are blue in the face about these extended patches of evening sun in a car-park and how the photo’s sweetness makes it so banal.

Why and what makes them deserving of being photographed? What effect did they have on the photographer, why this obsession with the beautiful? Perhaps because there is so little light in London, you notice it. You notice the glare of sun on glass because it hardly ever happens. You hardly ever get bright shafts of sun or really black shadows and that makes it extraordinary.

Rays of sunlight, stars twinkling, moonbeams, moonlight, comets. Light is biologically, theologically and philosophically linked to the acts of looking and seeing. All indicating the occasional sight of divine presence. Mainstream culture is full of these images, one corporate example being the Texaco star.



'Alberto Simon invited us for a drive in the country because it was the first sunny day in about 700 years. Brought back more mushrooms (ink-caps and puffballs), which we had picked.'(1)

1 Jimmie Durham's final entry in his booklet, *Nature in the City - a Diary*, 2001, published in conjunction with 4FREE at BuroFriedrich, Berlin.

Nine Elms

The billboard is about Cardboard City. It's in front of the Cold Store, which is now demolished, and when Cardboard City in Waterloo got demolished, many of the homeless people living there moved into Vauxhall. Now, where the Cold Store used to be, there's a private development known as St. George's; a gross complex of private luxury apartments.



Rachel talks to me about what's happening - "London seems to be so busy evolving, and so concerned with how it represents itself. There's been an abundance of newness - an extreme gentrification that spells the end of geographically defined communities. Former industrial sites made over as cafés, clubs, galleries - all animating not only the guidebooks but the endless public discourse which takes place amongst Londoners." ...When I went round to her place she took a lot of images out of her archive and, as she lives so close by, I found it interesting to locate her trajectories through London and compare them with mine, also to see how someone else has collected the experience of walking down the street. She is always with two children and I am always on my own. We both spend a lot of time around Westminster, SW1, Buckingham Palace, and on Albert Embankment. We couldn't figure out why though and I assume that for us it's simply because these places are on the way to somewhere else.

Newington Green *Every story needs a listener. B. Bending*

"Frustrated/waiting customers throwing pound coins at overfull/passing no.73 bus."

This summons up the double-decker bus image; that weird anarchy at bus stops when it's busy, especially when there's a Tube strike or whatever, when lots of people are waiting and everyone tries to get on at once, and if you've been there for an hour you won't necessarily get on the bus...

It's an odd thing to do because of the connotations with luck and fortune... It's literally throwing a coin at your own misfortune. There's a magic to it, as if throwing a coin at the bus would genuinely put a spell on it. It's a curse!

The route of the no. 73 bus is a perfect way to take in many of the sights mentioned in this guide. Get on at Victoria Station (nest p 199), and it goes up to Hyde Park Corner (goat p 156), then to Marble Arch, and along the whole of Oxford St (human fox p 150), and up Tottenham Ct. Road (Centrepoint p 186), towards Euston (gnome p 82). Then it goes up Pentonville Road to Angel (building site p 13), along Upper St and Essex Road, over Balls Pond Road through Newington Green (coins p 137), to Stoke Newington. Then past Clissold Park (bandstand p 181), and then right and all the way along to Stamford Hill.

Old Street

Bev mailed me this picture weeks after the Jubilee and I was entertained to note the Queen(1) depicted, not on a metal coin, but on a Punk fairy cake(2) in icing sugar –



'It was a street stall on Jubilee day, on the south side of Old St just past the junction with Gt Eastern St. There is a bit of empty land there between Old St and Rivington St. The space is normally a car park, but it was void of cars for that day! It's at the back of the Foundry.'

1The Mall

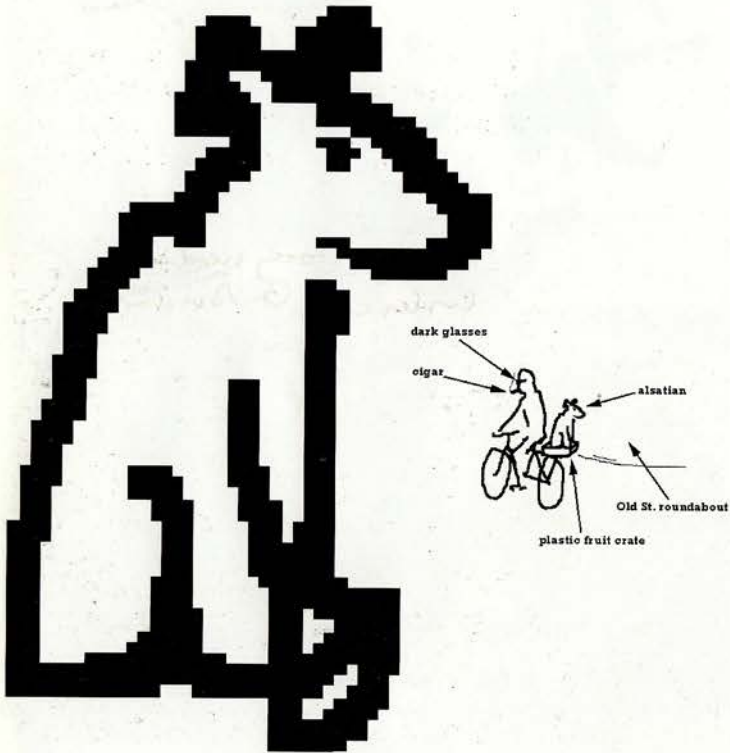
2 In *The Squatters' Handbook*, (11th edition) you will find all the advice you will ever need - 'Squatting...can provide space for important social, cultural and community projects.'

'Squat now while stocks last!'



My friend Simon sent me an email with this drawing attached. A while later we met up in Hoxton to play tennis. I remember it well because it had been a gorgeous sunset...On the way to go home he said - "I saw this thing today, I don't know if it's relevant, it's on my digital camera."

I thought it was fantastic. He showed me a picture of a computer monitor floating face up in the canal, as an afterthought. The nonchalance of it, as if he had almost forgotten, made it perfect.



Oval

On the misleadingly named South Lambeth Estate between Meadow Road and Carroun Road near Oval there are some buildings named after places in Dorset, like Wareham and Lulworth. If you happen to know the original places you may have a sensation of suddenly slipping to another place.

A bit like the tomato patch itself, which has incongruously arrived here. N told me that tomatoes can ripen on windowsills, and are the only fruit that can ripen when no longer connected to the plant. Someone has used this bit of land to do their own thing.

Public space is dispossessed: citizens aren't allowed to use it. The frustrations of occupying the city - which is a series of contradictory fictions - burst forth in acts of vandalism, burning bins in the local play area and, on the other hand, in random acts of nurturing, in spontaneous vegetable allotments.





It is autumn. It is a normal day.
 The tree is full of orange-red berries.
 It is full of gorging pigeons.
 They swoop in and out of the tree in a flock.
 They sit in the branches.
 I once saw a flick-book of a seagull yawning.(1)
 These pigeons feasting had the same effect.

'Prepare beds and plant up garlic, Japanese onion sets, broad beans like Aquadulce Claudia, peas like Feltham First - plant sweet peas in pots outside - dig all available ground and leave exposed to frost or - cover with mulch of manure, leaf mould or heavy carpet to discourage weed growth and nutrient leeching - make a sturdy container for weeds - vegetable waste manure and cut grass to make into compost - prune fruit bushes and raspberry canes - plant fruit bushes and trees between now and February - order seeds for next year.'(2)

1 *Yawning Gull on Harbour*, Suky Best, 2003. 2 'Tips for autumn and winter', The Camberwell and District Allotment Society.

The day after the storm is like the morning after the night when it snows, with the rare feeling of waking up in a different world.

Wind. Trying to walk, essaying across the bridge. It was windy enough to blow you away. Noisy, unlike snow, which is muffling and quiet.

What do you do if you see a broken tree?

How do you report it and to whom? Who takes responsibility for broken trees?

Before



After



The answers to these questions are not simple. I rang the tree officer at my local council, Ian Allan, who was very informative about laws, rules, procedures to do with the Council but also about trees and what types could be planted, eg. no more horse-chestnuts by schools or hawthorne on clay soil. And birches being good where people complain of having the light cut out by too-big leaves, although birch bark is thin and vulnerable to vandalism. People break trees, because they are drunk, because the tree is in the way when they park their car, because they can. The street is "the most hostile environment to put tree into." You cannot just go and plant a tree on the street, you need to register with the Highways Department to dig a hole, even to put a spade into the ground...and finally in answer to my question - "What do you do if you see a broken tree?" - he referred me to Chris Colwell, Principal Arboricultural Officer of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea who advised - "Members of

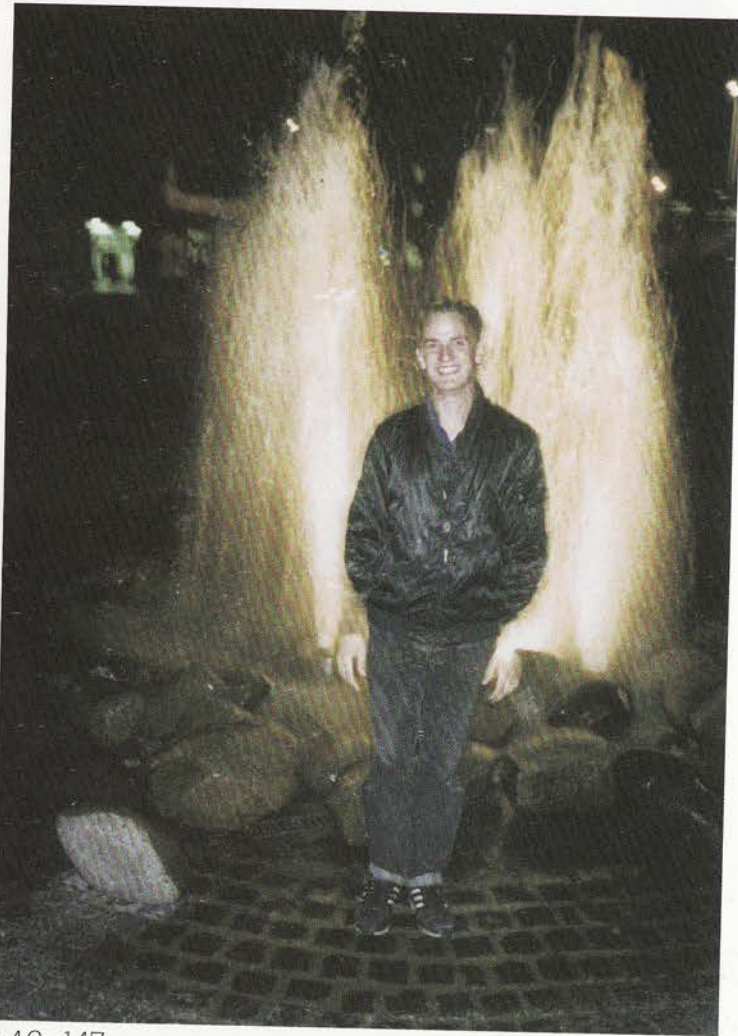
144_145

the public who find fallen trees or branches should report the matter to their local council's Tree Officer."



The Secret Meaning of the OVAL FOUNTAIN

Stefan told me he has been working for some time on an idea for a guidebook which would plot the historical revolutionary sites of London. He sent me a text about the fountain opposite Oval tube -



146_147

1. For those of us who regularly travel from Oval tube, the fountain in the triangular traffic island opposite the Underground entrance has been a source of both delight and despondency. Despite the deadly mixture of vandalism and design problems that have continually taken it out of service, the Lambeth Parks Department persisted at trying to solve these problems and getting the thing spouting again, until some time in 2001. Since then it has not spouted again because, it is said, of the enormous water bill.

2. When it was working at full blast, with an evening sun making rainbows through the spray, it was an inspiring sight. Even when it could only manage a knee-high gush it brightened my passage to work or greeted me on my return with the metaphor of pure water springing from the earth. Set against the endless traffic fuming past this junction, it was a poignant symbol of hope.

Whilst spending some unemployed afternoons in the early Nineties in the Minet Archive I found out that this triangle of land, which was once Kennington Little Common, was for years the site of the public gallows. It is perhaps now hard to imagine how the spectacle of public execution must have affected our ancestors. But I have only to imagine my son coming home from Henry Fawcett Junior School and seeing someone, perhaps a parent of someone at school who had in the desperation of poverty stolen a sheep or silk handkerchief, being hung from the neck until dead and then left to rot.

3. Historians have tended to treat public executions as an entertainment but the effect could only have been brutalising. Pepys wasn't bothered if his servants went to church but made sure they saw the public hangings.

The ritual was after all meant to terrorise the population into submissive acquiescence.

4. Perhaps the most famous executions at this spot happened on Wednesday July 30th 1746. Nine men of the Manchester Regiment, part of the failed Jacobite Rebellion, had been tried for high treason and were sentenced to the most horrific means of execution. They were to be hung, drawn and quartered on a specially erected stage.

5. We can imagine the effect such an event might have had on the local population then, by imagining ourselves in such a situation now. The people around here are still relatively poor and at the most deprived end of the system. This bloody execution would have shocked but the defiance of the condemned may also have inspired. Is it better to die in revolt rather than live a life of humiliated abjection? Some might say so. Others, then as now, would avoid the question with the mind-numbing effect of drink or drugs. Others would turn to offers of miraculous salvation. The adjacent Common saw massive meetings to hear itinerant preachers such as John Wesley and the site was also the South London "Speakers Corner".

6. It is said that people would shout - "Remember the Jacobites!" - at the occupants of passing carriages or as a rallying cry in later riots or revolts. Later in the century, lower class Londoners who supported the ideas of the French Revolution of 1789 were dubbed British Jacobins. It is feasible that the parents of those same Jacobins of the 1790s, some of whom were organised in radical groups such as The London Corresponding Society, would have witnessed the Jacobite executions or at least the flurry of anecdote and gossip that would have emanated from them.

And would have told the story to their children. This was the time in which Tom Paine wrote *The Rights of Man* (1791). It was a period of revolt which preceded the later Luddites and the rise of Chartism in the early 19th century.

7. After I had gained this historical perspective the fountain took on new meanings. It seemed apparent that on a poetic level the fountain, with its dish-shaped base and austere surrounds, was attempting to purify the blood-soaked ground. To wash away the accumulated hurts of our public unconscious, which resides inexplicably matted into the fabric of our surroundings.

8. It may seem fantastic that public executions that happened more than 200 years ago could somehow affect the atmosphere of our present environment, but when we see how old antagonisms can erupt after generations in Bosnia or Rwanda it might seem more feasible. Without a cultural mechanism to heal the old hurts they lie there in our collective memory, the fabric of our lives, and fester.

9. What is really so extraordinary is that there is literally no sign of this history on the site. The lack of markers suggests a repression of memory, and whilst the past is repressed there can be no healing of these collective hurts from the past.'

by Stefan Szczelkun



'All utopias are depressing because they leave no room for chance, for difference, for the "miscellaneous". Everything has been set in order and order reigns. Behind every utopia there is always some great taxonomic design: a place for each thing and each thing in its place.'(1)

1 From a chapter entitled 'Think/Classify', in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, Georges Perec, translated by John Sturrock. © John Sturrock, 1997. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

About three months into the process of wandering around I wrote to N –

I've been attempting to keep records. But have not achieved that at all. I have been lazy and mindless at times. Every day I have been entirely dictated to by my moods and by the weather. Rain has sent me home. Intermittent introversion has limited me to mere observation of the scenery. Somewhere should be a beginning, or a structure – a plan?

I made a list of all the places in London I could remember. I wrote them down. It took me about 10 minutes –

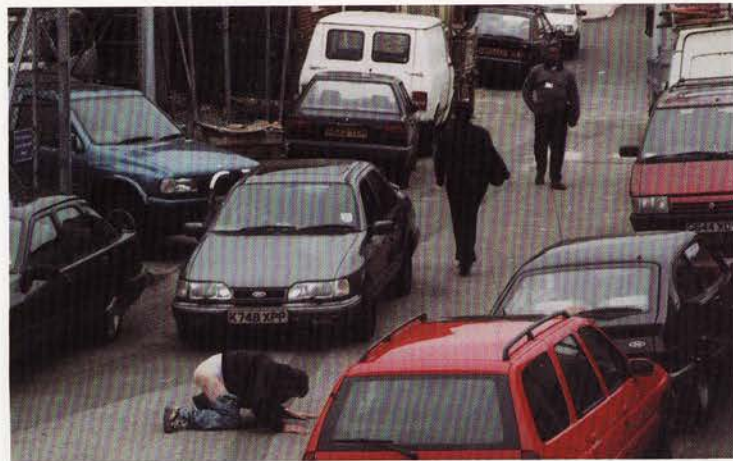
Shepherd's Bush, Kensington, Kilburn, Hampstead, Stoke Newington, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Wapping, Bermondsey, Borough, Greenwich, Deptford, New Cross, Peckham, Brockwell Park, Brixton, Clapham, Battersea, Hammersmith, Chelsea, Hyde Park, Marble Arch, Baker Street, Camden, Euston, Holloway, Islington, Highbury, Haggerston, Hoxton, Spitalfields, The City, London Bridge, Southwark, Elephant and Castle, Camberwell, Kennington, Vauxhall, Victoria, Soho, Covent Garden, Clerkenwell, Waterloo, Westminster.

What connects John, the cab driver, with the Oval fountain, the evangelical pick-up truck, the goat at Hyde Park Corner, the miraculous vision in Willesden, the rat on the canal, the carp in the Serpentine, Trafalgar Square's kissers? Something to do with some kind of necessity. Which is what? Why is that happening there, then? Sometimes you see an answer, sometimes not.

Peckham

Directions for the following site (overleaf) were given by Steve over the telephone –

"Get the no.36 bus from either _____ or the Oval to Lewisham, get off at Queen's Road Station (or from London Bridge to Victoria), Peckham, once you get out the station, cross the road, you're walking towards Camberwell, getting out the station and throw a right, not towards Brockley, but towards Camberwell, get on the same side as the buses going to Victoria, get on that side, Queen's Road, and take the first left near the Fiat car showroom, it's either Fiat or Peugeot, corner of Burchell Road, go down to the end of that road and then throw a right hand and you're in Woods Road, stay on the right hand side of the street, and then you see a school coming towards you, you walk up about 250 metres, you see the school building, John Donne School, the school keeper's house, it's really avant garde, standing on the corner of Colmore Mews and Woods Road and it's right there on that corner _____ stand outside the staff entrance, you're on the south side looking north towards Peckham and the Old Kent Road."



Piccadilly

This tale is a complicated one, and I wonder if it's worth re-telling.

Roxy had this book (*A Wanderer in London*) which she seemed to be using as a guidebook to London, even though the book was completely out of date, its pages were yellow and the place we were looking for - Hamilton Terrace - no longer existed.

Roxy talks about London as if it's a theatre show or a museum packed with curiosities, scenarios and 'tableaux vivants'. She mentions stories folded and layered. One on top of the other. A whole pile of cushions with tassles of stories.

We met there on a grey but mild Sunday afternoon and found only Hamilton Mews. We crossed through the traffic to the grass in the middle of the Hyde Park Corner roundabout and imagined the goat there. We imagined it tethered and keeping the grass short. It would be fine, the grass was very green.

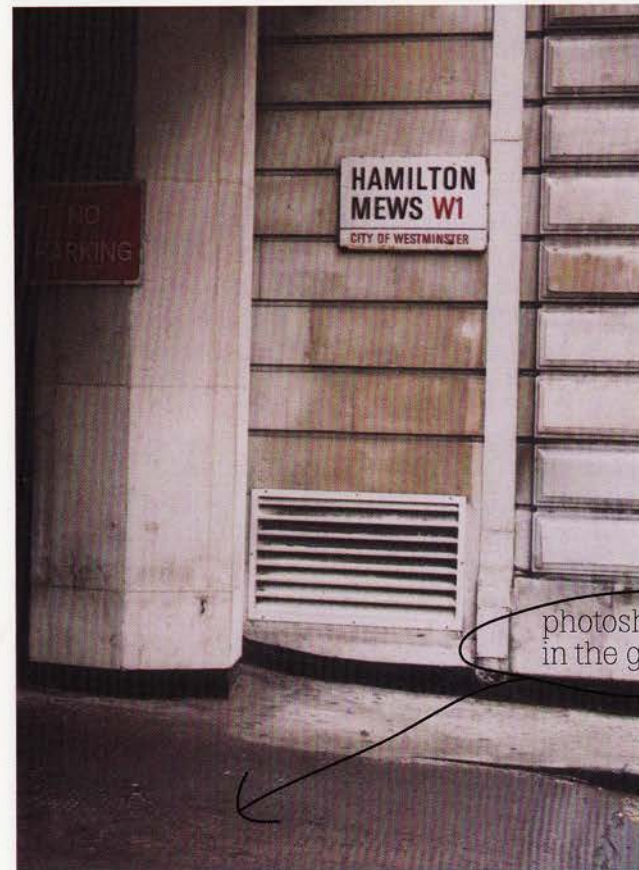
Roxy suggested making a photograph of the goat here, which would mean bringing a goat in a cab. I went to Vauxhall City Farm with this proposition but the animals

with a resting place for their burdens while they recovered breath. The time has gone by for its use, no one in these parts now bearing anything on the shoulder, omnibuses being so many and so cheap; but the platform remains as a monument to pretty thoughtfulness.

When I first came to London, Piccadilly still had its goat. I remember meeting it on the pavement one day in 1892, opposite Hamilton Terrace, and wondering how it got there and why the people, usually so curious about the unusual, were taking so little notice of such a phenomenon.

were all suffering from foot and mouth. Weeks went by and the quarantine finished. I did return, but the wind had gone out of my sails. I just hung around watching a big black rabbit breathing.

The last conversation I had down there was near the manure heap where a volunteer showed me a large scar, from dropping an angle grinder on his calf - a rare sight.



Pimlico

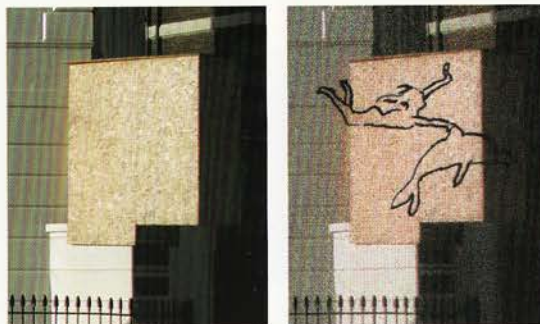


I met Tessa because she was shouting to her companion - "Look, look!" - at a buddleia bush (growing out of a crack in the brickwork in Victoria) with such enthusiasm that I felt not only included in her orbit but impelled to join in. It's always difficult to know what to say when you first open your mouth to speak to someone you don't know. I have remained speechless, silenced in the face of the effort to think up a new or original line. Maybe clichés are useful, they oil the wheels of communication between strangers - "I couldn't help overhearing you..."

Tessa and I started a conversation and she told me first about the series of panoramic snapshots she had taken of the pollarded trees behind Tate Britain in John Islip Street.

You can get there on the no.88 bus.

Back at the front of the gallery I saw this box. Knowing what is underneath makes the plywood box quite charming, as if someone finally could bear the sculpture no longer and went and covered it up at night.



Putney

My conversation with Tessa evolved into a visit to her flat off Acre Lane. We spent several hours looking through not only most of the photos she had ever taken, but drawings and paintings as well. It was a dark, winter evening and she told me many stories. I remember her telling me about her father who was a well-known civic sculptor and carved the relief in Coram's Fields near the British Museum. The gate to the park has a sign - 'parents allowed only if accompanied by children' - or something like that.

That evening she also showed me a panoramic photo she'd taken of two police cars stuck in the mud on the bank of the Thames while cruising up the river from east to west.





Purple Man(1)

On New Year's Day he turned out to be a woman and only speaking Spanish. In St. Martin's Lane not long ago a man wore purple trousers and a mauve jumper. A runner kitted out in a light purple shell suit jogging up towards the toll gate in Dulwich.

In any collecting or archiving, the moment you lose count, or lose hold of the facts of a phenomenon, continuing the collecting becomes pointless. Doubts collect, clouds collect. There is an uncertainty about whether to carry on, but it is also impossible to stop. Having lost count, the memory blurs, you pursue the project knowing full well that you occupy a rickety structure.

¹ 'Violet-purple, red-purple or crimson', Anna Best, in *Hong Kong*, Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, 1997.

22:50 picture **14:** Jamestown Harbour and picture **15:** Sixth purple man. Lodz, Poland.
01:08 picture **16:** The Sanctuary and picture **17:** Seventh purple man. Channel 4, UK.
01:13 picture **18:** Breezer's Court and picture **19:** Eighth purple man. Tel Aviv, Israel.
01:44 pictures **20:** AZ map, **21:** Ninth purple man, **22:** Tenth purple man, **23:** Eleventh purple man and **24:** Twelfth purple man, London.
01:50 *
02:19 pictures: **25:** Welcome Friends, **26:** Local Friends, **27:** Chinatown (Limehouse), **28:** Old Friends, **29:** Oriental Express.

Royal Festival Hall



I had an imaginary argument with Sissu about the Royal Festival Hall's status as an interior or exterior space - whether it's a public space, to what degree it's connected to the street. Perhaps it's more public than the street, which seems to be lined with corporate sponsored benches. There was also much discussion about whether the building really is due to be refurbished and whether they will keep the carpets and ladies toilets. Sissu says - "You can spend hours, minutes, maybe nights there without being asked to leave if you are not consuming. People seem to be happy there. They say it's a relief from the narrowness of the city streets...the view is spectacular. Try the fifth floor..."

The idea "is that of the artist working as an interruptive device, a jolt, in present societal systems. Art has always been that, in a way, but John Latham, and his APG group in London, among others, are trying to deal with it more directly.'¹

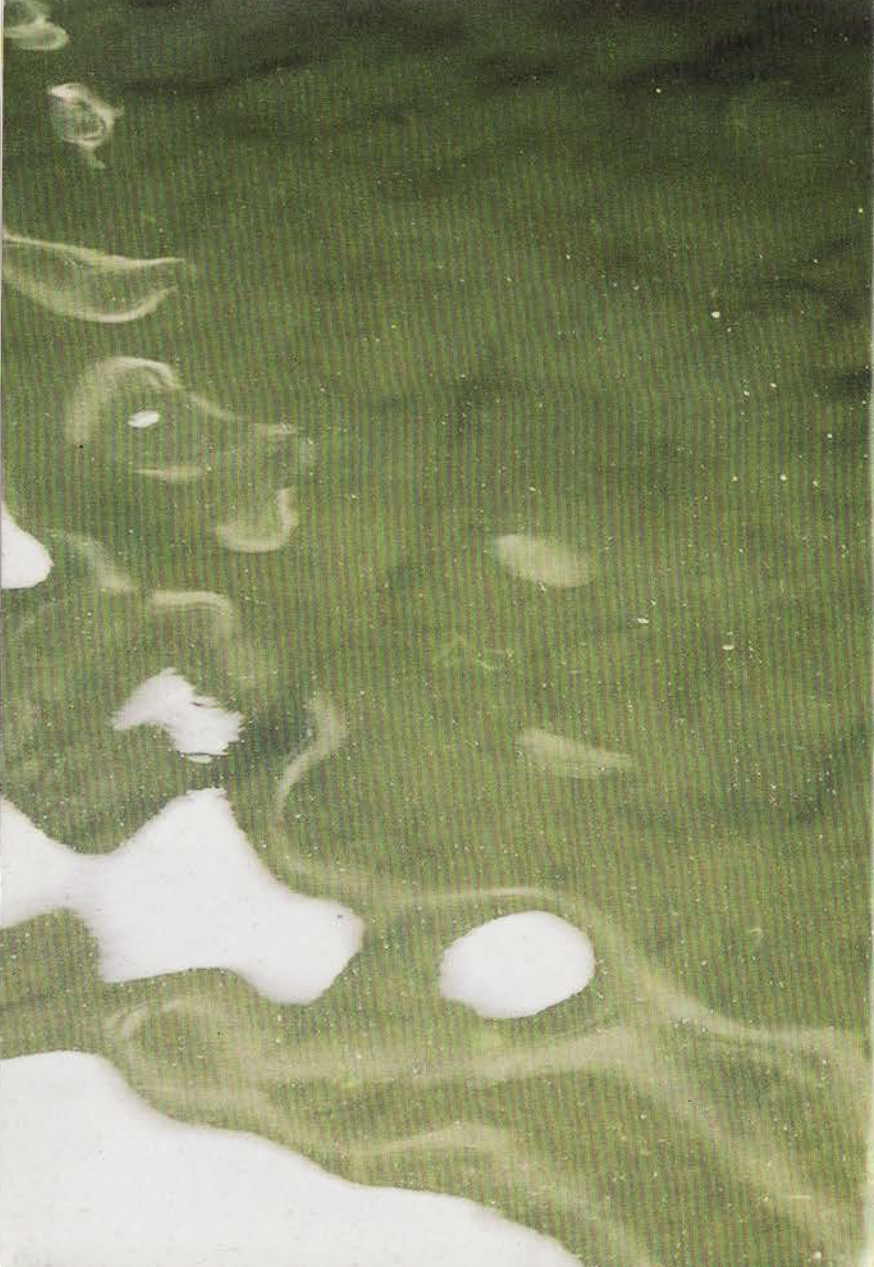
¹ Lucy Lippard interview with Ursula Mayer in 'Political Aspects', in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), Blackwell, 1992.



...head for the south bank of the Serpentine lake; walk up and down it for a while; look absently into the water. Maybe try the same from the north side; sigh a few times and pretend not to be looking. Then be very, very patient. Wait and wait and wait...



carp lair

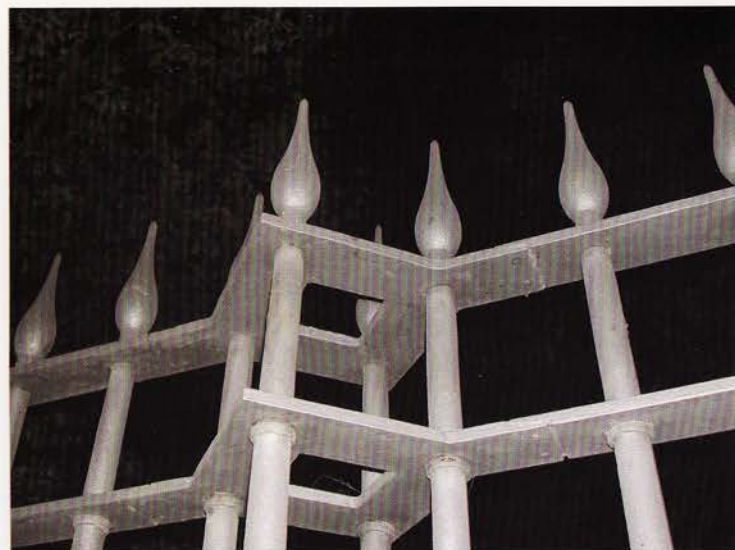


Shoreditch

N and I have not spoken about these things for a while and I show him some recent contributions to the pile of collected images - the first is a picture of empty beer bottles outside the South London Gallery, from Eve Chan, which we have seen countless times. The second is a picture from someone called Irene, whom I have not yet met. N is ranting this evening. Maybe he went out too late last night... He is talking fast - "But it is not a peripheral thing. It has been put there to be seen. The person who took the photograph has come across the event in the city and she has done exactly what she is being manipulated to do - which is to notice it and go - 'Ooooh, look at that there.' There is a complicity between the looker and the thing that they look at and the relationship between producer and consumer. This is not dragging you out of your normal looking-consciousness. Something has to pull you out of the usual and catch your eye and draw your attention."



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Shoreditch Fire Station (Blue Watch)



Soho

I notice these radiating ties after going to a talk by Richard Wentworth at The Photographers' Gallery. N comments that they are nice things.

I really like cable ties. They are very neat.

a
They get left behind a lot.

n
Well they're good as you can only use them once, once you've put one end through the other you can't get it back again.

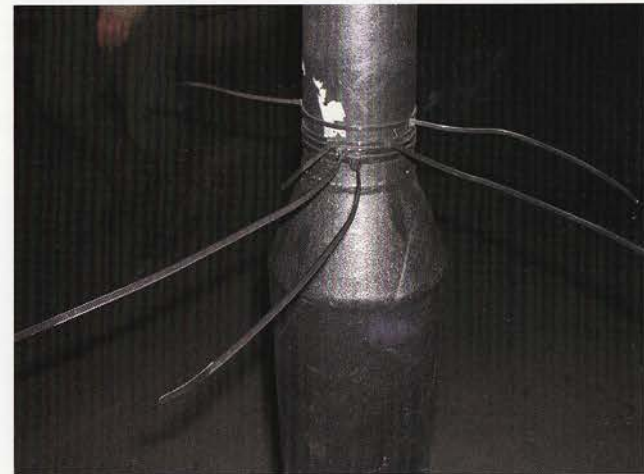
a
It's like a fish hook.

n
You have to use them once and cut them off.

a
What are they doing round a lamppost?

n
It looks like a decoration.

a
I think there's been lots of posters and someone's been standing by the lamppost fiddling and has pulled them into a radial pattern. There's another lamppost better than this one in Rivington Street in Hoxton.



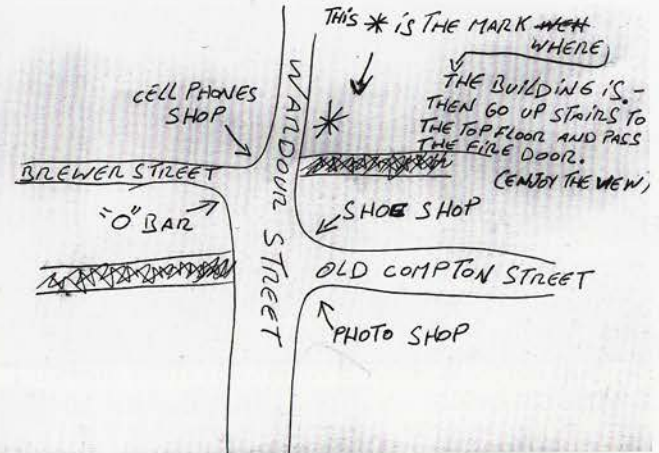
This sight of the rooftops is noteworthy for its quality as an occasionally-seen view. If you have ever worked in such a building, or delivered documents or sandwiches, you know there is usually a desk on the ground floor and some form of receptionist waiting to find out who you are.



David has often contacted me to see how I am getting on. He has kept me updated about what he is doing, and I have had a sense of his progress. David seems curious and patient as a gatecrasher of the inaccessible, peeling away the boundary of private space. His calls always seemed to come at times when I felt myself drowning in data, in things like first names and incorrect phone numbers, mislaid digital files and unlabelled envelopes full of other people's photographs.

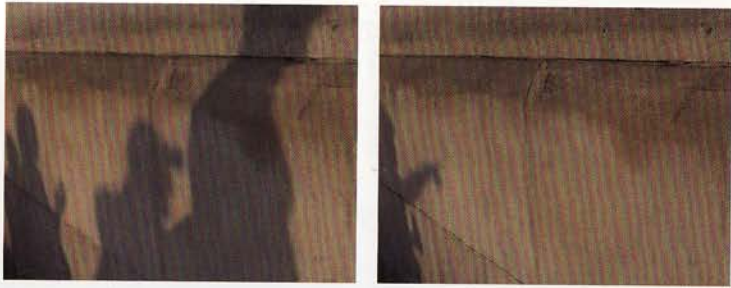
N said - "You need someone to tell your stories to" - which is very true. A witness is vital to a process which could otherwise vanish into thin air one night while you slept. Certainly other artists or writers or travellers' endeavours are the ones that shape your own. Seeing

and perceiving what they are trying to do, modifying the approach, contradicting it...trying to find a niche of significance.



South Bank





How can you photograph what isn't there, and how can you guide someone to what is not always there?

I was cycling home and wondering what the queue was for. Hundreds and hundreds of people were in a line along the South Bank from Waterloo to Lambeth Bridge. I had asked someone what they were queuing for just a minute before and they'd looked at me as if I was from another planet. It was the queue for the Queen Mother's funeral. A queue is the opposite of a protest or a march.

I then spotted these shadows (above and previous page) on the fold-out screen of a video camera. Maria was noticeably pointing the camera in the opposite direction to what everyone else was looking at.



This puddle gathers on the paving just outside Jubilee Hall and the London Eye.

Soon after it had been published, I found a book called *LONDON - Bread and Circuses* by Jonathan Glancey.(1)

He compares current New Labour London with Ancient Rome; a bloated failing power attempting to buy off its citizens with new buildings and cheap entertainment while public services such as transport, education and health are falling apart.

He urges - 'If you're passive or fatalistic, the London of corporate enterprise and ambitious politicians who serve the interest of business over and above civility will roll over you.'



Patrick(2) took this picture from his kayak of the London Eye at an early stage of construction. For several weeks after that it was stuck at a diagonal angle, neither up nor down.

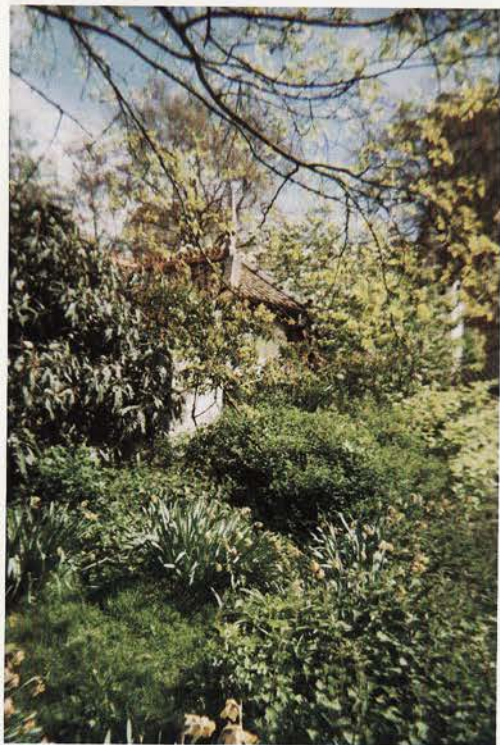
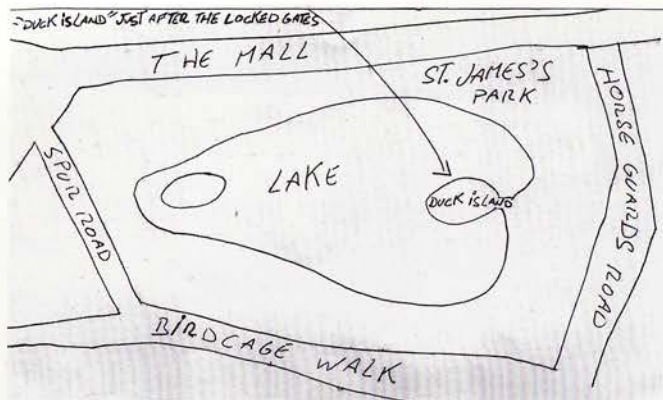
1 Jonathan Glancey is architecture and design correspondent for the Guardian. *LONDON - Bread and Circuses* is published by Verso, London, 2001. 2 He recently told me he'd conducted a solo peace protest on the river outside Parliament before the outbreak of war.



South Lambeth Road



e beautifully crafted planet Earth. Yo



176_177

St. Martin's Lane



J told me about this patch of wall, as she passes it every day. She pointed out that, most unusually, this wall was free of the layers of flyposters it normally displayed. Months later she mentioned that unhappily it was now coated in a viscous bumpy paint.



Stoke Newington

Mauro's picture (below) brought to mind some English translation work I had helped with about an artist friend called Gábor Ósz. Gábor builds camera obscuras, and talks in detail about the comparison between a room, any living room, and the inside chamber of a normal camera. He is obsessed with the conflation of outside and inside that happens at the moment a photographic image is recorded on the light-sensitive material. He describes the window as a clumsy and impractical shutter which we open and close daily. He speaks of - *'...feeling ourselves becoming participants in the outside world, maybe shouting down to someone on the street, or closed and sitting in the warmth, looking through the glass at the rain beating down, but hearing nothing.'*

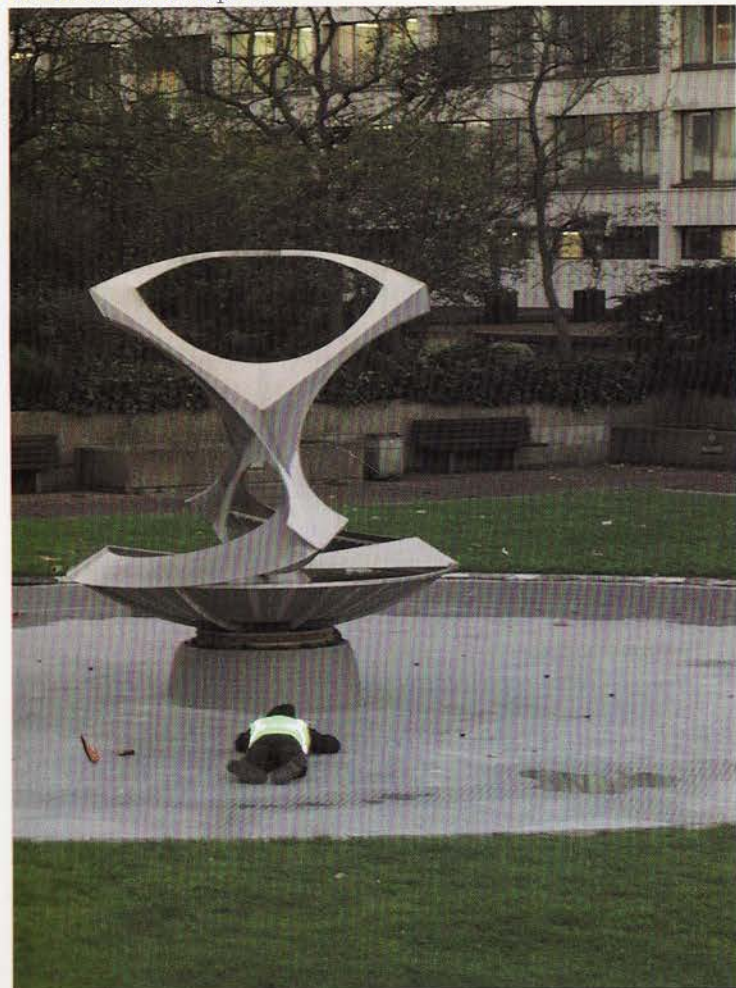


Some people use their eyes, and also mentally appropriate what they see and imagine how it could be made into something.

21–22 June

Overnight whitewash of the proscenium arch bandstand in Clissold Park by Myles Stawman, with photographs by Elisabeth Scheder-Bieschin.





Teddington



Thames

I spent some time trying to locate the position of the UEFA Cup (something to do with a football championship) which was photographed by the Port of London Authority crew on the river. (above right) I started looking at printed images of the Thames. I found engravings(1) of similar turrets at both Cannon Street Station and, in a PLA brochure, the Tower of London, but not the location of the football cup.

184_185



1



image reproduced courtesy of the
Port of London Authority

The Mall



On Jubilee Day I was elsewhere when Concorde flew across the sky. Taken by surprise I asked a woman nearby who had been taking a photo if she might send me a copy. She agreed and gave me her address. It turned out she was from a place called Woodbine Loop in Topping, Western Australia.



Tower Hill



TOWER Hill

balloons tie



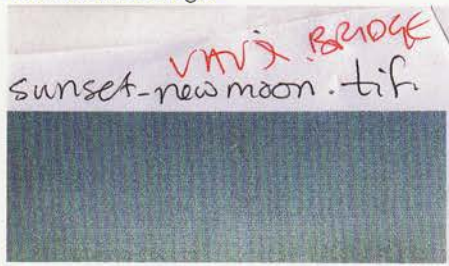
Apart from the red that saturates both these images, especially when printed out at home on a cheap printer (above right), it is striking how evocative both pictures are. They tell of something fatal. Balloons, usually signifying a nearby children's party, are on this major traffic junction more like the flowers that get tied round lampposts after a car accident. This fox certainly got hit by a car. I imagine cars running after me like a pack of hounds next time I am cycling round a roundabout. I also like to imagine that the ghost of this fox has travelled to Denmark Hill where the other fox resides. The nearest pub is called The Fox on the Hill.



Trafalgar Square



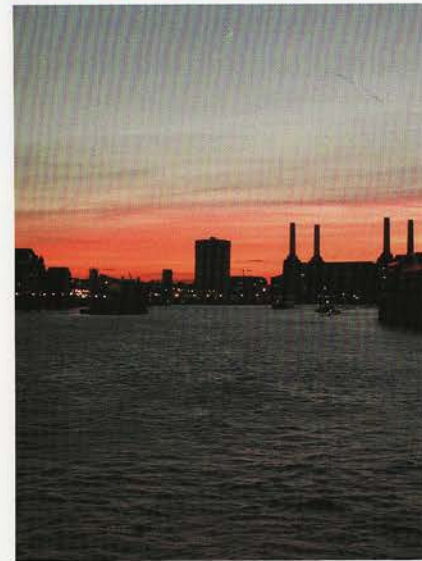




Can you get into it? Can you feel yourself there? Will you, next time you see a sunset, think about how difficult it is to 'capture' something beautiful like this (the new moon, the full moon, skies and sunsets)? Think of how people say things when they show pictures like this - "You can't really imagine it - you just had to be there." I cannot stop myself from photographing sunsets even though the photos always fail. That's what's so interesting - the way a photograph of a sunset shows photography to be so useless a mode of communication - is it any better than a pie chart?

The tradition of Romantic rapture over sunsets is a long one. In 'Walking' by Thoreau the very final paragraphs are all about a sunset. Incidentally his philosophy bears more than a passing resemblance to Anarchist theory. 'We had a remarkable sunset last November... I was walking in a meadow, the source of a small brook, when the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold grey day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon... It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before... When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen

again, but that it would happen forever and ever an infinite number of evenings... The sun sets on some retired meadow, where no house is visible, with all the glory and splendour it lavishes on cities, and perchance, as it has never set before, where there is but a solitary marsh hawk to have his wings gilded by it... We walked in so pure and bright a light, gilding the withered grass and leaves, so softly and serenely bright - I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it... The sun on our backs seemed like a gentle herdsman, driving us home at evening.'



There is a photograph by Bas Jan Ader titled *Farewell To Faraway Friends* (1971). It's an image of him silhouetted against a sunset. He is on the shore and the sea is gold. I like it very much as it sits well between romanticism and irony, success and failure.

Vauxhall Spring Gardens

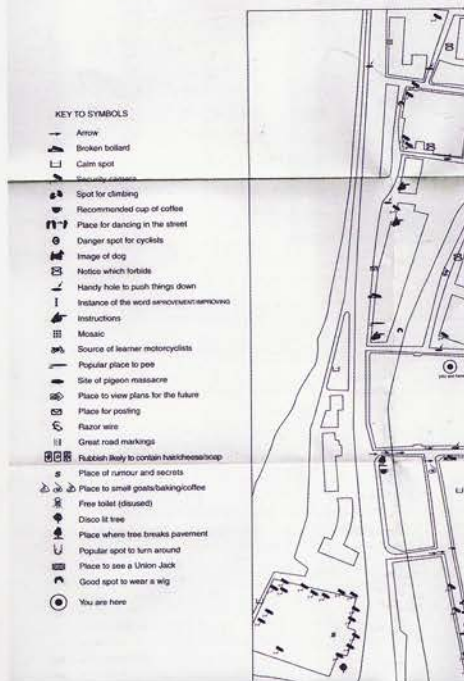


I saw a man in the National Gallery and I noticed that his shoes were caked in mud. He noticed me looking at his shoes and looked back at me with an expression of horror and dejection. The mud spoke of an unspeakable story.

Manure is the link, in these images (left). One picture explains the other. At Vauxhall City Farm it is possible to obtain free, good quality manure.

Vauxhall tube.

Local Information Guide sp



Cleo Broda made a 'Local Information Guide' for Spring Gardens in Vauxhall in 1999. This is a section from her map.



n
'Your majesty I did not know my government allowed wickedness on your messenger please unleash your wrath?'

a
The man who drives this evangelical car - I think his name might be PA Foster, having just found the scrap of paper with his contact details, it looks like the one I remember losing - when I asked him how come he doesn't get pulled over all the time, he told me he's able to drive around unfettered by the authorities because he has a deal. He reinstates knocked-over traffic-island bollards, in the middle of the night. He tidies up the roads.

n
He's got a job?

a
I don't know if it's an official or unofficial arrangement. He talked about Saturday night being particularly busy.

n
I wonder if it's true? It's like the guy who collects glasses in the pub...

a
That's something you do when you feel a sense of ownership about a place, wanting to help clear up... How do people occupy the streets, public space - it's often to with a form of protest, or a maverick occupation - the man outside Parliament, Brian, this evangelical car, the peace camp outside the Imperial War Museum... Occupancy is so different from passing through. Anywhere can start to feel more like home if you stop there. It's like if you stand in the street for too long, longer than usual, and not waiting for a bus or anything, you start to have such a different feeling, about what that space is. Normally you are walking on the way, it's such a transit zone, but when you stop, something else happens...

n
That's what I was talking about in the Pedestrians Association(1) talk at the Curzon Cinema, the whole business of walking and then stopping to pick something up and the minute you do that you are in a weirdly different relationship to what's around you, because you are not a pedestrian anymore, you are not walking. You have revealed yourself in a way.(2)

a
Yes...also, loitering and lurking are offences. You're not meant to hang about. If you do, you immediately come under suspicion, get moved on by the police, and your image will be more than a blur on a surveillance camera. The streets are meant to be thoroughfares, they are designed primarily for speed of movement, presumably all in the name of commerce.

n
How do you position yourself against this flow?

1 Now called 'Living Streets': www.livingstreets.org.uk

2 See *Walking is the glue* at <http://freespace.virgin.net/neil.ch/obstaclesposter.html>

Victoria



I noticed the poster on the billboard below the buddleia bush. The billboard arrived, like a vulture, as the demolition, which follows the buddleia bush, starts to proceed. What is this 'Miracles, Healing, Faith' poster doing in Victoria? It advertises a place far on the other side of London in Essex. It seems to be an error.



Nest at the junction of Vauxhall Bridge Road and Warwick Way where there is a Biguns Ribs steak house, a post office, a photocopy shop, a cheese shop, a health food shop, a fish shop, a charity shop, a bicycle shop, a tailor, a baker and a Snappy Snaps.



One evening walking along Rochester Row towards the swimming pool, I noticed a pool of blood. There were streaks as if something or someone had been dragged or had dragged themselves away... This sinister image seems uncannily to go with the ice cream van I came across the following day, because of the dark side of ice-cream vans, the wars over territory. I imagined a pool of blood and an accidentally dropped ice cream...



This is a completely un-marked and un-decorated ice cream van, no stickers, logos, transfers, lettering, hand-painted scenes, nothing. There is a reason for this, I found out from Vittorio of Mitcham. This van is awaiting repairs to a dent in the bodywork so the decoration has been delayed.

When checking the actual location of the street (in an old Nicholson's *Mini Atlas London*), I saw that Westminster Children's Hospital was nearby.

Victoria & Albert Museum

Rachel, who gave me the image below, told me it was a fashion shoot in the V&A.



Cardboard Boxes

It's not easy to find -

it's on the first floor, you come through the main entrance through the Japanese Section and then turn right and locate a set of stairs which would take you up towards the tapestry area and you come to a long corridor which has a left-hand turn off it into another corridor. This corridor runs through the Cast Rooms. Through small windows on the left you see Michelangelo's 'David' as a cast and on the right 'Trajan's Column' as a cast. This walkway splits the two cast rooms and this is the corridor that has the cardboard boxes in it.





Waterloo Bridge

N and I have arranged to meet on the bridge. In fact I notice him before getting there. He is on the other side of a pelican crossing. He is whistling. The picture on the preceding pages makes us think about peripheries, and catching sight of things out of the corner of your eye.

Most photographs have the subject at the centre, not unlike the typical way you walk around the world. If you're always looking at the thing in the middle of the frame, metaphorically speaking, then you don't see what you're not looking for, the thing that is not the subject of your day.

The photo on the preceding pages is from Waterloo Bridge. There's often a man flying a kite with a fishing rod. You only see a tiny flash of silver in the sky.

n
You only look at a thing really closely when it demands it of you, and if it doesn't present all its information to you straight away.

a
When I took the picture the kite flyer said - "I don't want any pictures of me." I said - "I don't want to photograph you." I pointed the camera at the sky, on wide angle, and took a picture. He was almost rude and I wondered what he is doing on the most busy and central bridge in London if he doesn't want to talk with anyone on the street?

n
But perhaps that is precisely why. It's a way of finding anonymity, of having some privacy precisely by getting into the most busy thoroughfare, which is a

perfect place for solitude because you have company but no one speaks to you...

Then, you could do as I did -
continue north towards the Aldwych and pause by the cycle lane where it crosses a pavement and where there is an Evening Standard seller. You get a good view of the bridge from here.

I spoke to the Evening Standard seller working there that day. He had a gold front tooth and some gaps where I imagined there would have been gold teeth under different circumstances (a gold tooth can cost around £350), and he told me -

"I've seen plenty of things...
I've seen plenty of rats,
and page three girls
modelling on Waterloo
Bridge when there's
nobody around."

Waterloo Station

I took an overground train from Richmond into Waterloo. Earlier that morning I had been on a boat going west down the river. It had been a day shaped like a pair of tweezers. It also had a distinctly cinematic feel about it. I'd not been aware, till I alighted on the

platform, that it was Poppy Day. This 'photo-shoot' was part of a campaign to make Poppy Day relevant to a new generation. The evening before I'd seen a British Legion publicity campaign on the television. There was a young girl, the daughter of a 1991 Gulf War serviceman, in tears in front of the cameras. It made me think how photography is potentially traumatic for its subject.



Later I discussed the event with N... And he looked at the image with an ambiguous expression on his face...

The photographer in the foreground looks like a bag, or a monkey!... This image is here because the other images, like the Whitehall monument, make it relevant... things get noticed because, by some weird coincidence, you are seeing something again. Maybe noticing is a form of recognition?

Westminster Bridge

On October the 26th 2001 I walked up the steps onto Westminster Bridge from the Embankment and started to speak to the people working on the souvenir stall there. Annie said - "No, I never see anything..." She was interrupted by someone else suggesting a fog -

"The way the rain comes up the river, you can see it coming, a misty foggy sky approaching."

"I saw someone
jump off
Westminster
Bridge."

Annie's story stuck in my head, not least because I saw someone almost drown in the Thames some years ago. A huge crowd leaning over the river wall attracted my attention and I looked over to see someone sinking. Two people dived in and saved his life.

Anyway, I called Martin at the PLA for me. I was requesting permission to re-enact Annie's story. From what I recall of J's account, he said that although it wasn't impossible it was extremely inadvisable and would be very expensive financially and in terms of time. It would involve seeking permission from more than 4 authorities, including the local councils on each side of the bridge - Westminster and Lambeth. It would be necessary to inform the police. It would cause a severe reaction because people would think it was real. It might cause copycat actions. It might appear in the media and it would be bad press. It would also be hazardous to river traffic.

Westminster



Mauro, who took this picture, told me that this policeman is wearing a gold cloak made for the Queen Mother's funeral.

I first met Mr Robin Mason (overleaf) in 1998 (wearing the gold outfit) and then again in 2002 (wearing a silver cape and hat and with a purple soft toy). Both times he spoke about the Queen, Saudi Arabia, a company called Lapsville Oil, and an offshore island for the nation's fuel supplies. He can occasionally be seen at the end of the day 5pm outside Parliament.



212_213

What is this sign all about? Who is this man and what is his protest?



When I received this picture from Adam, someone I still have not met, it soon became clear I had to go and talk to the person who was holding the sign. Adam told me that the character in this picture is actually a friend of Brian's, standing in for him for a while. Brian has been occupying this place and protesting for more than 600 days. Adam told me that he (Adam) has taken 3000 photos in 4 months and that for him photography is a form of therapy. Anyway, at 1.30am one night in December I stopped here on my way home and I asked Brian what he was doing. He started to speak and he was a fire roaring at me with facts and passion, all the right facts and passions. I can't recount them here. Go and talk to him, if he's still there... When we met it was freezing, literally. He had a cup of tea. "All kids are my kids" - he said.

I went back some days later to take more photos of the situation and he gave me his address. People send letters of support from all over the world for his peace campaign.(1)

1 Brian Haw, Central Island, Parliament Square, London, SW1.



The Queen - "You almost missed her" - N said.



214_215

Whitehall



A cab driver told someone and they told me -

"It's some sort of procession, with only 6 or 7 people...happens once a year and they all end up on Whitehall in the Banqueting Hall. They're in costume and they're commemorating some dead king or queen."

The cab driver had heard it on the radio, people were ringing in and saying they had seen it. The more indirect a story becomes, the more doubtful and the more likely it is to either falter into a bad joke, or embellish itself through repetition into a new existence, like spin.

Monuments, like photographs, are instruction booklets on how to remember. Like manuals and recipes, they can be a bit oppresssive. N reminded me that the commissioners of monuments always have to choose one from a number of different proposals.

Continuing with this analogy you can imagine this guide as a warehouse strewn with monuments, a vast space piled high with things - models of monuments,

proposals and plans for monuments - all different but all designed to honour the same thing.

At Whitechapel Art Gallery the security guard told us a story about a man entering with a rubber plant and that for a split second he had seen him across the gallery and it had looked as if he had a rubber plant instead of a head. Some weeks later I noticed a man carrying a rubber plant, as if it was a baby. There are a large number of women standing around at bus stops with Tesco bags for feet.

(1)

1 Great magazine

Willesden

would have served as the final location here but for the fact that communication broke down between myself and the person who sighted something there, Sister Marie. I discovered the picture in the book *Supernatural Visions of the Madonna 1981 - 1991*. A few years ago at Easter, Sister Marie sent me a portfolio of pages taken from the book, including a section describing a miraculous event near the _____ church in Willesden. The image in question was described by N as follows -

"It looks like a cave with a brickwork background - the doorway - but it is not a steel bridge or walkway, it's almost industrial. Then there's some lens flare that obliterates most of the picture and has a white-light form above it. It's actually a little shrine, it's not a doorway, it's in a church but there's some other odd thing in the top left corner - strange little white sparks or highlights on something. And in the bottom right is something which I previously thought was a trestle but it's more probably a pew or an altar or something, except there are things that look a little like stocks, which is a bit disturbing and in the top right it looks like it has been distorted. In the centre top it looks like there are buildings and like it might be outside."

Hampstead Heath

Hampstead

Tufnell Park

Kentish Town

Willesden

Chalk Farm

Camden Town

Euston
King's Cross

Kensal Town

Gower Street
Tottenham Court Road
British Museum

Bayswater

Oxford Street

Covent Garden

St. Martin's Lane

Piccadilly

Soho

Mayfair

Trafalgar Square

Hyde Park

Whitehall

Serpentine

The Mall

Kensington

Knightsbridge

St. James Park

Victoria & Albert
Museum

Belgravia
Victoria
Westminster
Bridge
Pimlico

Chelsea

Teddington Chiswick

Vauxhall

Battersea
Bridge
Battersea
New
Covent Garden
Market

Barnes

Fulham

Putney

Clapham Common

Stoke Newington

Newington Green

Homerton

Highbury

Barnsbury Wood

London Fields
Hackney
Haggerston

Angel

Hoxton
Columbia Road
Shoreditch Bethnal Green

Old Street

Clerkenwell
Farringdon

Brick Lane
Liverpool Street Station

St. Pauls

City

Tower Hill

Embankment Blackfriars

NatWest Tower

Canary Wharf

Waterloo
Royal Festival Hall (Bear Gardens)
London Bridge

Rotherhithe

South Bank
St. Thomas' Hospital

Imperial War Museum
Elephant and Castle

Albert Embankment

Nine Elms
South Lambeth Road

Deptford

Greenwich

Fentiman
Road Oval

Camberwell New Road

Peckham

Blackheath

Stockwell

Brixton

Denmark Hill

Lordship Lane

Dulwich

Bromley

Occasional Sights – a London guidebook of missed opportunities and things that aren't always there

Anna Best

Part of the 'Occasional Sights' project. Contributions to this guide were collected between October 2001 and October 2002.

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Editors
Anna Best and Neil Chapman
Project Organiser
Janice McLaren
Design Concept
Anna Best
Design
Spin
Print
Editoriale Bortolazzi-Stein
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The Photographers' Gallery
5 and 8 Great Newport Street
London WC2H 7HY
Telephone
+44 (0) 20 7831 1772
Fax
+44 (0) 20 7836 9704
Email
info@photonet.org.uk
www.photonet.org.uk

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