LONDON FESTIVAL OF ARCHITECTURE
19 JUNE - 4 JULY 2010
WWW.LFA2010.ORG
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We use our eyes, not “I”s. Unless uttered by one of our interviewees, the nominative singular pronoun has been torpedoed. HUM is a sponge, soaking up stories from unlikely corners of London and squeezing them onto the page.

These stories are in the soil, on the ground and in the clouds – wherever you are. But HUM’s focus is on digging them up from London and Londoners, for London, and Londoners.

In this inaugural edition we meet an author who says London is on the verge of psychic collapse, and we peel back the facade of a block of flats to find out who knows their neighbours. We find a community with a shared disease, isolated by prejudice. We talk stuffed flamingoes, audible walls, and dungeon keeping.

HUM celebrates this month as one of its writers, who had planned to return to her native Scotland, will now make her home in London. In meeting the characters featured in the following pages, she found herself becoming part of the fabric of the city – and liked it.

London is like a vast silent disco, millions of people dancing to their own private tunes. This magazine isn’t meant to stop the music, nor to ask everyone to listen to the same thing. It’s meant to help unplug those headphones and have all the songs playing at once, and to show that the result isn’t cacophonous nonsense, but something multifarious and rich. It is, in short, a great, warm, hum.

Read and listen to more at humlondon.com. If we’ve missed out or mangled anything, write to editorial@humlondon.com.
GUY’S VIEW
Panorama from the 28th floor of Guy’s Hospital, London Bridge

Sylvia Jeffrey, 44, housewife
This estate is like one big family. But so many tall buildings are going up and blocking the sunlight.

Merlin McMillan, 25, doctor
Someone’s tried to mug me twice on this street. I’m just off to view a flat in Marlyebone.

Andreas Lattrtes, 28, stockbroker
I work in Canary Wharf, so this is convenient. There are loads of wine bars and restaurants. I love it.

Paul Nelson, 39, painter decorator
I used to live in a Victorian terrace. There’s so much more space here, better amenities, and more peace.

Elizabeth Davis, 73, pensioner
During the war, I played rounders downstairs in the courtyard. The boys wouldn’t let us play cricket.

Chris Parsons, 50, unemployed
I was born in this flat. When I was growing up I knew everybody. I don’t even know my neighbours anymore.

Laura Christine, 18, student
I’ve not found much for students to do in the year I’ve been here. I preferred it when I lived in Windsor.

Paula Kienert, 46, financial analyst
I know things people passing through wouldn’t. Britain’s first female gladiator was buried round the corner.

Doan Hung, 26, student
We often play football round the corner. We just turn up and join in. I let in too many goals last time.

Maria-Louise Holland, 23, student
I’m from Australia. London life is fast, but I can take it. Everybody says “Hi” to each other. We have great views of Tower Bridge, and you can get anywhere.

Meggy Deane, 30, dental technician
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Mark Toole, 70, retired
My next door neighbour put weed killer down and poisoned all my koi carp. I’d had them for 20 years.

Andrea Lattrtes, 28, stockbroker
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Mick Grimsdale, 60, barman
I’ve worked here 22 years. It’s changed a lot. You don’t get many hospital staff. We hardly get visitors at all.

Debbie Wells, 46, cleaner
The steps where Bill Sykes killed Nancy are just over there. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.

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Matt Randock, 22, medical student
I moved here from a small Yorkshire town. I everybody knows each other. This is lonely for such a busy place.

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After four years, you’d think the pianist Sonja Joubert might have more of a plan. “I just play whatever comes into my head,” the South African says, seconds before taking busking pitch number one at Liverpool Street. And yet, while tonight’s performance is an improvised affair, there is something depressingly efficient about it.

Dressed mutely in a white jacket, violet blouse and black trousers, Joubert opens with There Is Not Like You, a ballad whose creaminess is matched by her own. However, as far as her voice goes, that’s as much as the audience gets. It paves the way for a series of intricate solo pieces, Joubert pitching herself at virtuosity and attaining something respectably close.

She leans back against the huge orange poster before finger flourishes, grins to her right at passengers exiting the eastbound Circle line, to her left at those leaving the westbound. A lady in black watches the third interminable instrumental piece in its entirety. Afterwards, she removes her scarf, tears open a tiny brown wage packet, tips the coins onto her palm and pours them over Joubert’s keyboard case. “Hearing you,” she says, “is one of those things. You think: is that real?”

Joubert is clearly pleased, but the hot wind of approaching trains focuses her. She thanks her admirer and launches into what sounds a bit like Hotel California. Only, where the Eagles wrote one note, she plays 15, and the gnarling erects a barrier between performer and audience. Joubert’s show speaks to her classical training throughout; one mention might have sufficed.

Toward the end of the 30 minutes, a bearded boy in a trucker cap pops out his headphones and watches, smiling. A couple stands by the escalator, their arms wrapped around one another. But the headphones are soon plugged back in, and the couple moves off to cuddle somewhere else. They might have stayed longer had Joubert remembered that, sometimes, less is more. Must not try harder next time.
Tim Bentinck used to wish somebody would fall in the gap. Then he could sneak up behind them, and bellow: “I thought I told you!”

The 57-year-old became the voice of the Piccadilly Line 15 years ago when his agent offered him the chance to record station announcements. “I said: ‘What, like Mind The Gap?’ When they said yes I was amazed. I remember thinking how iconic that announcement was. What with that and The Archers, I could die happy.”

Bentinck is also the voice of David Archer on BBC Radio 4’s longest-running radio drama, The Archers. “People call me David all the time,” he laughs. “David is much more famous than I am.” For years his voice greeted people at every station between King’s Cross and Earl’s Court. He used to listen to himself while travelling on the Tube from his home in Caledonian Street to the Soho recording studio where he worked. It pleased him, like a little secret. His sons, now in their 20s, found it comforting to hear their dad’s voice. “It was as if I was looking out for them,” he says. Gradually, his voice was phased out. “The last place it appeared was on Russell Square. I feel rather upset that I was ditched. I miss me.”

FILLING THE GAP

Photo: Jonathan Dockar-Drysdale

TAKING NOTES

London’s soundtrack at your fingertips

At the beeping of an F, roads are crossed; at the hum of a G, train carriages are cooled. The doors of the Northern line close on a C sharp; the Oyster card reader is a semitone above. The highest note of a police siren’s wail and the bells of St Nicholas Church are two of a kind: A flat – three octaves apart. So engrained are these sounds in the city they are barely noticed; they are the Pavlovian whistles that guide us through towns. Armed with a guitar tuner and an ear for the ordinary, HUM spent a day transcribing background noise.

“Are you still going to Morocco?” – New Cross, 18:39

“Hi, I called you Julian because I thought I forgot his birthday.” – The Strand, 18:40

To upload your own notes and play the modified piano visit humlondon.com
THE SCORE ON THE STREET

District Line
This is Temple

Sainsbury’s Metro, Waterloo
Have you swiped your Nectar card?

Big Ben
All through this hour/Lord, be my guide/And by Thy power/No foot shall slide

“Guess who I saw last night?”
Enjoy art, music, drinks, tours, talks and workshops
Thursdays and Fridays 18.00 – 21.00 Free Admission
www.npg.org.uk | Leicester Square

“No, I just discovered Ebay” – New Cross, 16.40
If someone described a sky it would mean very little to me; I don’t know about colours or fashion. What I get out of walking in London is something quite different. An orchestra of smells, the feel of the breeze on your skin, the sun shining, the sound of the river. The hurt of the city – I get that, even though I don’t see it.

Yesterday, me and my wife walked around Greenwich. We visited a couple of pubs, walked along the river, went to the market and bought a few bits. And I thought: “This is London at its best.” There was the chorizo being fried on the Spanish stall, there were all the different perfumes, the sun creams.

And then there are the sounds. Only yesterday I was thinking of all the different ways English is spoken in London. It’s spoken in all the accents of the world, young voices and old voices, old language, modern language. Even without the sights, there’s still enough here for me.

But walking would have little meaning to me on my own; when I walk I experience it through people I’m with. Not that many people are good at describing – they tend to get sidetracked. What they say and how they say it is important to me. My world enters through their eyes.

It’s the sociability of London that keeps me here, that and the food. If you lived in Bognor Regis there’d probably be one curry house, one Thai restaurant, a couple of Chinese – and they wouldn’t be that good at that. But London? I’ve got Top Table, I can visit humlondon.com to hear Colin read his story!

THE BLIND LEADING

A lifelong Londoner, Colin Palgrave has been blind since birth. He gives us an insight into a world without vision

If someone described a sky it would mean very little to me; I don’t know about colours or fashion. What I get out of walking in London is something quite different. An orchestra of smells, the feel of the breeze on your skin, the sun shining, the sound of the river. The hurt of the city – I get that, even though I don’t see it.

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MAYBE IT’S BECAUSE I’M A ...

Chimney Sweep

“At my workplace, the only thing that exists is the wind,” says Daniel Hodgson, chairman of the Guild of Master Sweeps. His family has been sweeping chimneys since the 19th century. “We get to see everything from above,” he continues. “Looking top-down, London is roofs, chimneys, and architecture. And the city is so much quieter from that height. You can always see the London Eye and the Telecom Towers, from which you get your bearings.”

Madonna, Tony Blair, Sir Leslie Phillips and Mr Motivator have all benefited from Hodgson’s cumbrous broom. He’s also had access to many of Her Majesty’s secret rooftops. “We get to see everything from above,” he continues. “Looking top-down, London is roofs, chimneys, and architecture. And the city is so much quieter from that height. You can always see the London Eye and the Telecom Towers, from which you get your bearings.”

Those who have working chimneys keep them out of choice rather than necessity, Hodgson explains. And because it’s a choice made by celebrities, politicians, and artists, today’s chimney sweep is a man or woman of trust and loyalty.

“Usually, in the flow, you don’t notice much, but a busker tries to capture: a glimpse of those decadent Bright Young Things.”

Burlesque Dancer

Laurie Hagen shares salva and stage space with extreme contortionists, fire-eaters and body-modification artists, fitting, moth-like, around the darker side of London’s nightlife. Born and bred in suburban Belgium, she fell for the bright lights and damp nights of London instantly.

“There’s a huge drama, dance and music scene in London,” she says. “I came here and fell in love with the city, and knew I had to come back – without knowing what I’d do when I got here.”

She has spent more than half her life living and working in the city. Having danced and performed in the West End and worked as a TV and film actress, her focus is now on solo and group burlesque dancing.

Her favourite joint in town is the Soho Revue Bar. She believes its grand drama perfectly fits her glamorous, smoky sensibility, and that it brings to life Evelyn Waugh’s Vile Bodies.

“How the atmosphere is perfect because it takes you back to that 1920s speakeasy era,” she says. “That’s what a burlesque dancer tries to capture: a glimpse of those decadent Bright Young Things.”

Laurie says being onstage is all about letting herself go, flinging the consequences to the wind. “Burlesque is like a giant turd?” asks Fuller. “We were showing round a group of girls, and one disappeared into a corner. We smelt something terrible and traced it back to a huge dump. It was so long,” he laughs.

“Do you remember last year – the giant turd?” asks Fuller. “We were showing round a group of girls, and one disappeared into a corner. We smelt something terrible and traced it back to a huge dump. It was so long,” he laughs.

Busker

Ella Skye has seen the spectrum of city life streaming past. She’s been a six-string busker since moving to London from Manchester six years ago.

“Usually, in the flow, you don’t notice much, but a busker sees it all. You really connect with people, and get a sense of what’s going on above ground. Sometimes people are sad, lonely or drunk. Others might laugh, have an argument, or sit next to you and tell you the story of their life.”

When there’s a nearby exhibition, Skye can tell from all the branded baggage and leaflets underground. If there’s a wedding, all the ladies wait through wearing hairpieces and hats.

Most commuters are sweet, she says, but not all. “Once an angry guy snatched the guitar from me and smashed it to pieces against the wall.”

Dungeon Keeper

Montgomery, 23, is paid to scare people at the London Dungeon, along with his brother Joseph, 19, and friends Sam Fuller, 21, Holly Fisherman-Crook, 20, and Luke Martin, 19. They splash themselves with fake blood and paint bruises over their faces. Operating equipment is their other main role. Scaring people is more fun.

“The highs more than compensate for the lows,” says Skye. “We get to dress up, and are given permission to freak people out all day.”

“Sometimes people punch you,” says Louis Montgomery. “If you jump out at them, they might lash out. Sometimes they just shove you in self defence. Other times they properly punch you. It’s a fight or flight reflex I suppose.”

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“If the biggest and most high-profile doors in the city are to remain open for him, Hodgson says his mouth must remain shut. Conversations are frequently beige, revolving around the chimney itself. They might develop into “Whats for lunch?”

“In the flow, you don’t notice much, but a busker tries to capture: a glimpse of those decadent Bright Young Things.”

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8 May, 2010. Two boys, one aged ten and one eleven, stand in the dock. They have been convicted of the attempted rape of an eight-year-old girl. The presiding judge Mr Justice Saunders admits that the provisions for dealing with child witnesses are “not ideal”. Outside, overlooking an old wall adjacent to Amen Court, a man in an orange hard hat shouts at a woman. He is standing on the roof of the newest extension to the Old Bailey, built in 1972. The breeze that ruffles his hair sweeps through the new leaves in an old lime tree.

10 May, 1941. Seconds before midnight, Nazi bombs destroy the court’s northeast corner. It will be five years before rebuilding work can begin. Two officials are killed, and Court 2 is wrecked. Two days earlier George Johnson Armstrong was convicted of treason by communicating with the German consul in Boston, Massachusetts, before the US joined the war. He would become the first British citizen to be executed under the Treachery Act 1940. His appeal would be dismissed and he would hang at Wandsworth Prison a month later.

6 May 1901. The bell tolls. George Woolfe’s neck is broken. He was sentenced to death for the murder of his girlfriend. It is the last execution at the prison. All the men are transferred to Pentonville and the women to Holloway. Newgate’s 700 years in operation have ended and the building is torn down. Just one section of wall adjacent to Amen Corner now stands. Wrought iron gates enclose the empty site for two years until the rubble is used to piece together a new building – the Central Criminal Court, better known as the Old Bailey.

26 May, 1868. Jeering crowds have gathered outside Newgate prison for England’s final public hanging. The bell tolls as it always does on a Monday morning. The condemned man is Michael Barrett, an Irish nationalist and Fenian Party member. He says he played no part in the Clerkenwell prison bombing. There are shouts of “God save the Queen” as he approaches the gallows and the noose is tightened around his neck. He drops. Prison staff cut him down and dismantle the scaffold. From now on, prisoners will be executed inside the prison walls.

“Aged 141
Aged 72
Aged 32
Aged 0

“Lime tree
On Amen Court, a sapling grows, a prison falls, and the Old Bailey is born

Illustration by Sunni Caro

20
21

“I didn’t laugh at you when your guinea pig died” – Charlton, 2023
In the advert for her new perfume, Britney Spears poses among white bird cages, her smouldering softened by the blue tit perched on her hand. The blue tit is dead.

His name will be unfamiliar, but every Bond Street window dresser, fashion designer and props supplier worth their salt has dealt with Alexis Turner. So has Britney.

Turner was behind the zebra head on Top Gear – which Jeremy Clarkson used to measure the volume of a Ford Fiesta’s boot. He was behind the bear on the red carpet of the Borat film premiere in Leicester Square, the Hogwarts owls, and the tiger-skin rug on which Anthony Hopkins walks in The Wolfman.

“Once a TV ad agency phoned, saying, ‘We need an ant urgently’, and sent a courier round,” he says. “I found one outside, put it in a matchbox, and charged £50. When they were done, they called to say they were sending it back – I told them they could keep it.”

Turner established London Taxidermy 20 years ago. Based in Wandsworth, it is now one of just two taxidermy dealers in the capital. Animals cost between £50 and £1,000 for a week’s hire, depending on the age, condition and type. The most expensive animals are a giant tortoise and a crocodile (worth around £10,000 each).

Turner stands in his studio next to a large pink flamingo, frozen mid-step. “The best taxidermists are those who make the animals look realistic. That one isn’t good,” he says, pointing toward another flamingo atop a cabinet. “See the legs? They’re done unrealistically. This one is better.” The legs are painstakingly painted in different shades of pink.

When they die, the natural hot pink drains out and the legs turn grey.

A menagerie is packed in Tupperware boxes and stacked by the window. In the midst of all these bodies and parts, there is a surprising absence of odour.

“Alex has a wasting-the-day paranoia” – Stratford, 19:38

Turner leans on the open mouth of half a crocodile. “I’ve always been interested in antiques; there were lots at my parent’s house – and stuffed animals. My dad used to shoot stag in his 20s, but he wouldn’t dream of doing it now. In the antiques business you have to have a niche, so I got into dealing natural history.”

Initially, he got the animals cheaply because people were eager to get shot of them. They were unfashionable, but times have changed. “Fashion is driven by interior designers. Fifteen to 20 years ago I never did shop windows. Now I supply to shops on Bond Street. I recently provided a load of stuffed birds, bugs and butterflies for London Fashion Week. The designers told me they had more requests for my things than the clothes!”

Turner’s showroom space is limited, and his wife won’t let him take animals home. There are concessions: fossils, brain coral and swordfish blades, which “look quite sculptural – they’re more interior design pieces. We have four kids so we don’t want dead things everywhere.”

His children, aged between 16 months and 15 years, are used to dead animals, and are, according to Turner, more interested in the studio’s table tennis set than its specimens.

“My kids always wanted a dog,” he says, “but I never allowed them to have one. One day I got a good dog – really realistic. I put it outside the door and waited for them to come home.

“They saw it and their eyes lit up. They started shouting, ‘Yeah, Dad’s got us a dog’. Then I watched as their faces fell when they realised what it was. After that the Christmas list said: ‘Dog (alive)’,” he giggles.

“If I was going to be a collector, I would collect freakish things, curiosities like this,” he says, pointing at the body of two lambs conjoined at the head. A Cyclops-eye stares out from behind a dome of glass. He smiles at it affectionately.

“The animals don’t freak me out,” he says, “but this building is creepy at night.”
“There are no rules in London: whatever you want to do, whoever you want to be, you can,” says Jeremy Langmead, editor of Esquire. London is a city of villages and is known for its heterogeneous style. But it has uniforms. A woman in ripped fishnets and dungarees would be incongruent in Kensington, but unlikely to cause much of a stir in Shoreditch.

So if different areas are so set in their styles, can we really say that there are no rules in London?

Age, wealth, sexuality – there is no limit to what can define a community. In London there exists a vast range of peoples, cultures and religions, with more than 300 languages spoken within its borders. Differences are defined through dress codes. In Camden town there is an incredible mix of styles, from the hippest hippie to the heaviest metal. Dreadlocks, piercings, colourful sleeve-tattoos and outrageous haircuts are so prevalent, they’ve lost what little shock value they once had.

Sloane Square swarms with Kate Middleton dopplegangers, well-manicured fingernails clutching the latest oversized Hermes handbag. While in Hackney, chipped black nail varnish and ripped denim abound.

“Styles are not made in a vacuum”

June Lawlor, ex-director of women’swear, accessories and beauty at House of Fraser, calls Britons a “rebellious bunch”. “We don’t like to be dictated to and therefore have a strong need to look different from our peers. Mods, hippies, punks, goth, new romantics, new wave and no wave have all contributed to global fashion trends – London is the centre for creative minds.”

Conversely, in other global cities such as Milan, Paris and New York, people dress more conventionally, since “conventional” is part of their urban culture. According to designer Eun Jeong, “London fashion has a signature style: more practical than New York, much younger than Paris and with a bit of a fun side.”

All this begs the question: since London’s convention is to be unconventional, is fashion eccentricity truly against the norm?

“Autonomy,” argues French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “promises freedom.” However, even in freedom certain modes of power exist. Although different areas of London exhibit different styles, there are distinct fashion tribes. The struggle to be different is one adopted so widely that rather than variousness, it propagates a uniform of its own.

“Don’t think about it, Carol. It will spoil the rest of your day” – Greenwich, 20:39

“I’ve got my ticket out of this shithole” – Thamesmead, 14:08

They emerge according to social and financial pressures. London’s diverse cultural make-up, rich musical heritage and open mentality create an ideal opportunity for a multiplicity of styles.

“Styles are not made in a vacuum”

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Conversely, in other global cities such as Milan, Paris and New York, people dress more conventionally, since “conventional” is part of their urban culture. According to designer Eun Jeong, “London fashion has a signature style: more practical than New York, much younger than Paris and with a bit of a fun side.”

All this begs the question: since London’s convention is to be unconventional, is fashion eccentricity truly against the norm?

“In London people do not seek the approval of others,” claims McRobbie. They dress for themselves. They might not care what others wear but they certainly care about their appearance. But since one is the strictest judge of oneself, is this self-directed and dictated creative “freedom” of appearance actually liberating?

“Autonomy,” argues French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “promises freedom.” However, even in freedom certain modes of power exist. Although different areas of London exhibit different styles, there are distinct fashion tribes. The struggle to be different is one adopted so widely that rather than variousness, it propagates a uniform of its own.

“Don’t think about it, Carol. It will spoil the rest of your day” – Greenwich, 20:39

“I’ve got my ticket out of this shithole” – Thamesmead, 14:08

They emerge according to social and financial pressures. London’s diverse cultural make-up, rich musical heritage and open mentality create an ideal opportunity for a multiplicity of styles.

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Photographing legs can be risky,” admits Nils Jorgensen, who has worked as a professional news photographer in London for the past 30 years. “People assume you’re doing it for strange purposes.”

The 51-year-old has taken street photographs – unmanipulated, un-staged – since he was a schoolboy in the 70s. But the form is being forced to adapt to an increasingly suspicious city.

“Photos I took 10 years ago, I might not be brave enough to take today,” he says. “I often get asked why I’m taking pictures. It’s one of the difficulties with today’s street photography.

Without targeting particular spaces, he carries his camera wherever he goes, alert to graphic images and beautiful shapes. “If you’re doing something mundane, like shopping, it’s exciting to think you might find images you’re compelled to shoot. You never know what you’re going to see in London.”
“Wurzel, what are you doing down there?” – Nunhead, 17:08

“Get off my eyeshades!” – West Norwood, 17:04
"I thought it was Bent Cross. I thought it was biblical" – Bank, 14:48
NOW

June 2010: scouts stand in Westminster, around the corner from what was the original scout headquarters

“I’m curious to see what they’ve got to say about otters” – Brockley, 01:00
& THEN

June 1910: scouts stand in Westminster, around the corner from what is now a chartered surveyors

“Actually, I needed a strapless bra for the exam” — Michelle, '14 II
"You’ve got to finish your doughnut first, then you can have your sausage roll!" – New Crisis, 02.02

"Walk a mile in another man’s moccasins before you criticise him," goes the Native American saying. Yet in London, a city famous for its diversity, stepping into another’s shoes is a step too far for too many, and empathy’s absence is visible all around. It is the world’s sixth-richest city, yet four out of every 10 of London’s children (around 650,000) live in relative poverty, a number 12 per cent above the national average. While crime levels dropped, Metropolitan Police figures show that last year homophobic, racist and religious hate crimes increased. Levels of wealth inequality in London “have not been seen since the days of a slave-owning elite,” according to Danny Dorling, professor of human geography at Sheffield University.

This isn’t a question of economics alone. Any human with a heart has the resource to assuage some struggle. Obama argues: “We are our brother’s keeper; we are our sister’s keeper . . . we are tied together in a single garment of destiny,” and his beheld holds water regardless of where you live. Where there is empathy, the troubles of the man sleeping in a doorway on Tottenham Court Road are not his alone. The riches of the City CEO are not hers alone. The anger of children in south London gangs is not theirs alone. The rich won’t do anything about inequality until they have it etched on their skin.”

“Cultural diversity holds the most beautiful possibilities for empathy in a city like London. But curiosity about strangers can’t happen spontaneously anymore because everybody’s too busy rushing to work. You need to create the forums and spaces for intercultural understanding." says Krznaric. "The rich won’t do anything about inequality until they have it etched on their skin."
LOOKING AT THE STARS

“We hug the earth — how rarely we mount! Methinks we might elevate ourselves a little more. We might climb a tree, at least. I found my account in climbing a tree once. It was a tall white pine, on the top of a hill; and though I got well pitched, I was well paid for it, for I discovered new mountains in the horizon which I had never seen before — so much more of the earth and the heavens.”

— Henry David Thoreau, Walking

“The building looks like a toy at the top. I usually just look straight ahead or, if it’s dark, at the ground.”
Lucy Miller, 22, hairdresser

“It’s a cool building, we come here every six months but we just walk straight in, it’s a new experience to stand here and look at it properly.”
Tim McCarthy, 38, security

“Of course we look up, what else are roofs for?”
James Knippel, 14, student

“I wouldn’t have looked if you hadn’t been here. This building reminds me of a giant coffee percolator.”
Mack Sheehan, 36, security

“The tops of the buildings are the most interesting part. There’s more history up there than down here.”
Manoela Taris, 17, student

“If we’re visiting London we look, but if we’re back home in Maidstone we don’t, because we know what it looks like. You’d be surprised what’s up there.”
Julie Coster, 42, housewife

“When I go to work I walk fast and look at the floor to make time pass quicker. I’d rather not look upwards!”
Rosie Coster, 19, administrator

“In Italy, where I’m from, we have a strong architectural sense. You need to look always, and from different perspectives. If you can, you should go to the house opposite your own, go to the window and see what your house looks like.”
Claudio Calaoresi, 49, doctor

— Tottenham Court Road, 20:43

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Imagine a park. A solitary person strolls around – let’s call him Ken. Ken represents an electron. Now imagine that a scientist wants to observe the behaviour of this electron. To do so, he or she fires a photon at it – let’s call the photon Boris. The problem is that when Ken spots Boris he alters his behaviour.

In quantum physics, Heisenberg refers to the conundrum as the uncertainty principle. The same applies to behavioural psychology. In order to observe natural behaviour – of people or electrons – it must be without interference or manipulation.

To eschew the problem, HUM went to the streets, watched and listened, observing without being observed, hiding behind trees, pausing at bookstands.

People can get stuck in private bubbles. HUM presssed against them, only popping them once records had been made of actions and words (which is to say permission to publish was sought!). What follows are three tales, observed, sought!). What follows are three tales, observed, and overheard.

Krystina is accustomed to wearing high heels. She strides along the pot-holed pavement, avoiding cracks like a professional. But the long gloves, the tiny black skirt and the perilously deep v-neck top give her away.

She clatters to the cash machine and leans against the wall, surreptitiously adjusting her lacy hold-ups. A van honks. Even though it’s happened several times in the past hour, it still makes her jump.

Krystina stuffs the cash into her dainty handbag, sets off again, pausing at the crossroads. She has taken a wrong turn. She searches for her internal compass. It is nowhere to be found. Is it acceptable to arrive late?

Finally she finds her bearings hidden at the bottom of her handbag: this is the way, not far now. Her heels tap a jazzy rhythm on the pavement: walk straight, click clack, head up, click clack, ignore the stares, click clack.

She reaches the old church. Inside a crowd of people, Krystina stuffs the cash into her dainty handbag, sets off again, pauses at the crossroads. She has taken a wrong turn. She searches for her internal compass. It is nowhere to be found. Is it acceptable to arrive late?

“I want to get a sleeve done here,” says Kim, turning the bare side of her right arm to Simon. “I’m working on the other arm slowly, so it has to be this one.”

It is the first authentic summer’s day. Swans drift across a shimmering Thames. On Kim’s right arm is the blue-inked face of a three-year-old girl smiling. “ROXY” sweeps across her collarbone.

“I want tombstones up here, but marigolds and pretty things near Roxy. I don’t want people to think it’s a memorial picture.”

Last week at Kim and Roxy’s mother-and-baby club, the other mums organised a day out with the toddlers. “They knew exactly how to entertain them. She thinks it is because of her scruffy raven hair, her loud red lips, her tattoos. She wants to surround her daughter with beautiful things. Maybe they should move to a town where nothing ever happens, like where her grandparents live. There, the local newspapers are filled with soft things, like: “Congratulations to Bill, who celebrates his 50th birthday today”. “You couldn’t raise Roxy there,” says Simon. “She’s a bitch,” says Nicol, spitting it out like a cold, hard fact. “She can be whatever she wants,” says Kim. “But I think she’ll be like me.”

“He was waiting for this Japanese girl to come to London and live with him,” says Anna, describing her latest fling. “He put down a deposit on a flat. Then she decided she wasn’t coming. So he lost his deposit, and had to move out within two weeks with a broken heart.”

Anna sips her espresso. “She’s a bitch,” says Nicol, smiling. “She can be whatever she wants,” says Kim. “But I think she’ll be like me.”

The Old Shoreditch Station is alive with chatter and the smell of toasted sandwiches. “So I consoled him,” she giggles. “She’s a bitch,” says Nicol, spitting it out like a cold, hard fact. “The sun rises in the east, the womb is a burrowing marsupial, and the Japanese girl is a bitch. Anna nods, but hardly needs to. Late-afternoon sunlight dances off Nicol’s dark hair as she leans forward, extending her delicate fingers above pastry-flaked plates. Anna is the taller of the pair, with a short black bob and an impish smile. Being photographers, they are more at home behind the lens than in front of it. But together they lose their inhibitions, Anna especially.

“Do you remember how we met?” Nicol wrinckles her nose, laughs. “It’s so annoying when they apologise. This guy I’m seeing is like, ‘You are so beautiful, I have to ask you this thing . . . how was it?’ And I’m like, ‘I don’t know – I’m not an expert; you know?’”
Umbra Sumus ("We are shadows") reads the inscription on the sundial high up on the side of Brick Lane Mosque. It is an appropriate legend – this building has served as a secret-keeper and place of sanctuary for wave after wave of immigrants to London’s East End. It serves as a neat metaphor for the faded nature of both the city, and its people. It provides a snapshot of the area’s history – much as a tree reveals itself through the rings in its trunk.

Constructed in 1743 as a French Protestant church – La Neuve Eglise – 59 Brick Lane was subsequently used as a Methodist chapel, before being converted into the Machzeike Hadass Great Synagogue in 1898. It served the Jewish community up until the Second World War, during which the synagogue was bombed and left derelict. In 1976, the site changed hands again, passed on this time to east London’s Bengalis in the form of the Jamme Masjid mosque.

From behind the Ray-Bans and Red Stripes of Brick Lane, the building’s tough-looking shell reveals little of its past. A newly built minaret – ornate, silver and glistening, more nu rave than ancient Medina – pierces the hot blue sky. The structure itself is brick-like and sturdy, the architecture earnestly and unmistakably Huguenot.

A collection of dark leather sandals and scuffed white trainers rests on the foyer floor. On Friday, during prayers, these shoes are so many they spill out onto Brick Lane. The prayer room is huge and still. Half a dozen men and teenage boys kneel on the thick, blue carpet in silent contemplation. An open mezzanine level looms above. Upstairs, the mosque is cool and quiet. Paint peels off the brick walls and yellow sunlight spills through the lead-rimmed windows.

Motiur Rahman has been worshipping here since he moved from Bangladesh to London in the mid 1970s. “Back then I was a young man and didn’t bother with it too much. You know what it’s like,” he says with a chuckle. “As I got older, I came to recognise the importance of prayer. My faith is a great comfort to me nowadays. The building is as I remember it, structurally at least. Obviously it’s been painted – new doors and so on – but because it’s listed we’re not allowed to change it too much.”
On the top floor of the mosque is a small stone square set into a bright corridor lined with study rooms. It reads: “This plaque has been dedicated to the memory of Deborah Kay, who passed away 17 Tammuz 5683 – 1 July 1923.” It sits next to a small golden clock, its face adorned with a kitsch image of Mecca surrounded by sandy desert and palm trees.

Rabbi Dr Eli Kienwald is chief of the Federation of Synagogues, which owned the building until 1976. The Federation was created as a humanitarian response to the failure of the United Synagogue to welcome destitute Eastern European Jews in the late 19th century, and eventually came to represent and protect them in large numbers. He is unsure as to the identity of Deborah Kay, but says the practice of installing memorial plaques was common in synagogues at the time.

“The synagogue served a large number of shochet – ritual butchers – who were resident in the area,” he says. “They were not rich people, so it seems likely that a wealthier member of the congregation paid for the plaque. That way, the family name would be remembered, so the synagogue and, by extension, the local community would receive some funds.”

During the Second World War, a bomb smashed through the synagogue’s roof. The building was gutted by fire, and fell into desuetude. Pigeons roosted, vagrants slept, and the building was forgotten. In the 1970s, a group of trustees from the Federation visited the site to assess its state. They brought with them a huge set of keys, half of which they had never used.

“While exploring, they came across a trapdoor under the stage – what would have been the base of the Ark of the Covenant,” says the rabbi. “They opened it, and inside was a void. They stepped into this void and found a tremendous amount of silver. It had been hidden there sometime during the war. To this day, that silver remains in a trust for the Federation of Synagogues.”

The mosque was once a synagogue. The synagogue was once a church. The past is set – time marches on. What took place in buildings such as these can never be negated. The intimacies of a space will always exist, will always have happened. Echoes of action resonate through time.

“Spaces exist as layers of experience, relationships or meanings that are rarely visible to the naked eye. Philosopher Michel Foucault emphasises mankind’s ability to simultaneously understand conceived, perceived and inhabited spaces, a concept he describes as “heterotopias”.

“Heterotopias are something like counter-sites: a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found in a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.”

The city and its constituent spaces are heavy with historical resonance. Urbicide, the complete destruction of a city, was used to devastating effect in the Second World War – the firebombing of Dresden, the devastations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and more recently in Sarajevo and Palestine. It is the cleansing of collective memory. It is the abnegation of collective identity, an identity that relies on places such as Brick Lane Mosque, which has provided comfort and sanctuary to generations of worshippers.

A film-set of London could be built in a week. Fill it with people and, to all intents and purposes, it looks and behaves as a city. It has bricks, glass, dust, mortar, people with pulses who walk and watch. But real London – the city of churches-cum-synagogues and synagogues-cum-mosques – that London is a festival of ghosts.
the dark. Visiting friends, taking evening classes or working nights can be impacted by avoiding areas perceived to be dangerous. Autonomy corridors. In many ways, the city is a physical manifestation of archival and sexist, yet deeply held, assumptions about women’s role in society. These assumptions, hard-wired into the brains of many of those who design cities, are subsequently built into steel and brick and, therefore, endure. Planners, architects, surveyors, engineers and city managers – these professions have been dominated by men for many years, and remain so.

But women’s ability to move freely is hindered by more than fear alone. Travelling through the city at any time of the day presents a number of challenges, both physiological and ergonomic. “Women, in general, are smaller than men. I’m just over five feet, and I can’t reach the overhead bars when travelling on the Tube,” says Carty. “This can make travelling, especially in rush hour, quite unpleasant.”

“You can assess the true position of women in society by looking at the toilet queues.” An average office might have 10 urinals, but only four cubicles. This is completely illogical. Space, and the way it’s utilised, should be thought about more carefully. A wise woman once said: “You can assess the true position of women in society by looking at the toilet queues.”

Feminist architects have long criticised the layout of cities. Instead of a central business district surrounded by residential areas, they would like to see a “city of everyday life”: the non-sexist city, a city that can be physical obstacles to sexual liberation. The city creates all kinds of products, fear among them. Research undertaken by Women’s Design Service (WDS), a loose-knit coalition of feminist architects, planners and designers, about the fear of sexual assault affects the way women move through the city.

Volunteer Hannah Carty says: “The statistics are right, men are more likely to be attacked, but the fact is that more men are on the streets after dark. We feel that town planning should be more about making women feel safe and secure. Alleysways, bad lighting and CCTV don’t make women feel safe. CCTV may film an attack, but it doesn’t stop one from taking place.” Cities can be lonely places, everyone can hear you scream, but who will come to your aid?

City structures can be physical obstacles to sexual liberation. In the winter, when the sun sets mid-afternoon, some women choose to stay at home rather than walk the streets alone in the dark. Jobs in care tend to be dominated by women, work that is often part-time. Yet bus routes and train timetables cater for people working nine to five, not those who travel at irregular times.

WDS is currently in the process of establishing the Women’s Design Group, a forum funded by London Councils and run by Green Party councillor and development worker Georgia Wrighton. In 12 London boroughs, groups of women will learn to manage and influence planning and design. Carty thinks it’s a good start: “It’s still a male-dominated industry. You can count the number of well-known female archi- tects on one hand – Zaha Hadid, Kazuyo Sejima and Gae Aulenti, for instance. Cities are designed as a core business-time–residential areas. A mixed use of space would benefit women more. It is a utopian vision, and it’s not going to happen overnight, but in the future we can influence planning with that vision in mind.”

Selah Hennessay, a radio journalist from Dalston, was attacked by a man wielding a baseball bat. She agrees spaces should be well lit and open, but believes it would be of as much benefit to men as to women: “I definitely feel safer when a place is well lit.” She also says: “Wide streets are also important. Maybe if I’d seen someone, I would’ve had a chance of running away. But because my attack was random, that’s what I worry about. After it happened, I made more of an effort to walk with people or catch cabs, but cabs can be expensive and it’s not always possible to walk with someone.”

“I don’t think anyone – male or female – likes walking down creepy, dark alleys. But then I worry about. After it happened, I made more of an effort to walk with people or catch cabs, but cabs can be expensive and it’s not always possible to walk with someone.”

“I don’t think anyone – male or female – likes walking down creepy, dark alleyways. But then I think that’s all-consuming, female fear. It’s pretty natural to find that a bit discon- certing. So yes, I like open, well-lit spaces and people around. Doesn’t everyone?”
Andre Neasmith looks like he’s just woken up. He’s tall and tanned. The house is dark and smells musty. He apologises for the mess – he lives alone. Dusk pushes in through the blinds. There are ice skates hanging over the open curtains, but he hasn’t skated for ages. There are dumbbells in the corner. Andre’s been here for a year and a half and says “Hi” to most people, but doesn’t know anyone well. He doesn’t like the block that much because the walls are so thin – he can’t really entertain people or turn up his music. He grew up in a beach house in South Africa, but left in 1995. He didn’t have to lock everything up all the time. But things have changed since then. He’s been back a few times. He’ll probably stay in London for another five years to save some money. It’s more impersonal here. Computers and mobile phones have made people lose the will to be sociable in person. “Technology changes your personality,” he says. He plans to move to the Caribbean one day. He won’t be able to play ice hockey there, but surfing is more fun anyway.

Patricia Ghata is Lebanese. She has large, liquid brown eyes and her skin glows. She moved to Chiswick at the beginning of May with her husband and their three-year-old son. Her son runs to the door as if on cue and peeks out. He’s too shy to say hello. There are pink stains on his T-shirt from the watermelon he’s been eating. They lived in Dubai before coming here. Patricia’s husband works for a bank and she’s a housewife. Dubai is noisy and crowded – very different to Chiswick. Patricia knows the old couple upstairs, but she doesn’t know anyone else. It’s a shame because sometimes, when she feels lonely, she would love to knock on someone’s door and have a cup of tea with them. In Dubai she never locked her door. She leans on the doorframe while her son shouts from inside. “The people here are very different,” she says. “No one interferes with your business.” She likes Chiswick and hopes to stay here. Her son is on the waiting list for the local school and she hopes he can go to school here. She really hopes so.

You see them leaving for work and switching on bedroom lights in the evening. Through the walls you hear their thuds and flushes, bumps and laughter. But would you stop to speak to your neighbours if you met them on the street? Do you know their names? A national survey published this month by YouGov suggests not. Twice as many people have problems with their neighbours as did in 1982, the survey finds. Half of those polled said they never call round next door. HUM headed to a council estate in Chiswick to find out if modern life has struck neighbourliness from London. Each household has been given a colour. If one knows another, a line connects them. For example, Chris Dyke at number 58 doesn’t know anybody, but Terri and John Dorma, and Elvis Faetic know him.

Terri and John Dorma have been married for 44 years. They’ve lived in Chiswick for 40 years, and in this block of flats for eight. Terri thinks it’s absolutely brilliant here. Everyone gets on with each other, although they’re not in each other’s pockets or anything. When the girl in the house below, Sue, lost her job and was trying to sell her flat, Joyce made her breakfast and Karen helped her with some painting. Sue’s place was a shambling. They know the new tenant – she’s got a toddler. The walls are quite thin. John sits with half an eye on the telly. “You’re giving away all our secrets,” he says.

Terri and John’s house is cream with a raspberry-coloured wall that will match the tiles when John gets round to fixing them. They used to take her to bingo. She had a stroke and died on the balcony – half in, half out. She was there overnight and her body was only noticed the next morning. A robin comes to the living room window every morning. Terri thinks the woman must have been feeding it.

Terri and John were brought up in orphanages across the field from one another in Lewisham, but didn’t meet until they were in their late 20s. “We worked for the same company and played in the company’s table tennis team. His sister was in the bed behind mine at the orphanage,” says Terri.
Robert Noon pushes open the stairwell door with his bike over his shoulder. His face is shiny with sweat. Hot on his heels are his wife, Karen, his five-year-old grandson, Harry, and Hugo, their poodle. They’ve been enjoying the sunshine. Karen hurries up the stairs. She doesn’t smile. Robert props up his bike and stands with his hands on his hips, his shirt unbuttoned at the top, revealing the tip of a black tattoo. He is happy to chat. He likes the flat. He says “Hi” to the South African guy, but doesn’t know his name. Joyce is a gem, and Amy and her mum are very friendly, too. It’s easy to speak to people here. It’s a myth that you can’t speak to people in London. “I don’t have a car because I can cycle everywhere I need to go,” he says. “If I was to move to the country I would be considered an outsider, but people aren’t like that here. I think it depends on who you are: if you view people as potential aggressors then that’s what you’ll get.”

Two black pumps balance on top of a pair of white trainers outside Elvis Fazlil’s front door. More trainers are piled next to them. He opens the door. He’s pale, has a receding hairline and wears low-slung jogging bottoms. He doesn’t speak much English. He leaned casually on the doorframe. He lives here with his mother and sisters. They’re Polish and moved here in 1999. He knows most of his neighbours’ names and says hello to everyone. He likes them all, but he doesn’t like it when Jeremy throws loud parties.

Amy Fernando has dark eyes and has an open, friendly face. “I’ve lived here since I was born, and know lots of people there, but most of them have died. I mostly keep to myself now.” She twirls a strand of her long black hair between her fingers. “It’s a very safe community, she says. Amy moved away for about a year but came back after being made redundant during the recession. She doesn’t mind. She rather likes it here. Her mother, who she lives with, makes dinner for her. She has known her best friend since she was four. He has always lived on the neighbouring estate. That’s another reason to stay.
A misunderstood disease is forging unlikely friendships

Hidden Lives

The silver car pulls up at the lights. Peter Roscrow flicks on the indicator. “So it’s first left, then left again,” he says, looking at Chris Watkeys, who is sitting on the passenger’s seat with a map spread over his knees. A woman pushes a pram across the road and disappears into a corner shop. Watkeys is still wearing his motorbike boots. Around the corner, they pull up outside a block of flats. Watkeys consults a sheet of paper (“Two regular meals and two cold desserts”) and jumps out. He rummages in the boot, looking through a freezer bag full of Tupperware, fishes out four boxes and strides off.

The block of flats is just a few feet away, but he has to be careful. If he is stopped by anyone, he can’t mention the name of the company he works for. To do so would be to jeopardise the charity’s integrity, and the anonymity of the client. With every step he takes, he crosses a great divide between ignorance and understanding.

Watkeys, 32, is a music journalist and Roscrow, 47, works in the City. They are volunteers for The Food Chain, a group of 900 volunteers that delivers prepared meals to men, women and children across London who are chronically sick as a result of HIV-related illnesses. They volunteer one Sunday every month for a kitchen in Hackney, always working in pairs: one driver and one navigator.

“The Food Chain shows you a different side to London,” Watkeys says. “You go about your daily life and you see your group of friends. You don’t really see outside that.” The charity was set up in 1988, when a group of friends came up with the idea of providing a Sunday meal for people with HIV. Today they deliver around 1,000 free meals every weekend to people diagnosed with HIV as well as their carers and family members. Meals are tailored to individual needs, and the menus are designed to encourage people to eat different foods every week. Users are too ill, or feel too self-conscious, to leave the house, often because of the side-effects of their medication.

Roscrow has donated money to the charity for 18 months, and only recently started volunteering. As a young man growing up in Melbourne in the 1980s, many of his friends fell victim to the disease. “It affected my entire generation of friends,” he says. “They were all older than me, gay men. They led a very hedonistic lifestyle. They all died very quickly. I was 23. I spent more time going to funerals than going out. It got to the stage that my work asked why I was taking so much time off.”

That period “took a lot of counselling to get over,” Roscrow says. “It’s such a long time ago now, it feels like another life.” But he still wanted to get involved because he feels HIV doesn’t receive the media attention it used to. “There’s still a huge stigma attached to it. People still think of it as a gay plague.”

A few boroughs away, in Haringey, 40-year-old Charity makes a cup of tea. She is a handsome woman, smiley, and generous with her biscuits. You would never know it to look at her, but she orders meals from The Food Chain. She opted for fresh ingredients that she can cook herself. “You have to take food with some of the medication. Sometimes there are side effects like bloating, so it helps to have a good diet.”

She found out she was HIV positive in 2003. “I was seeing this guy, he was Iranian. At first we used condoms, but after a month we stopped using them. He was always taking pills, but when I asked he said it was for a headache, or sleeping pills. I believed him.”

One day a friend of hers, who was HIV-positive, complained that she couldn’t sleep because of her medication.

“I said: ‘My boyfriend takes sleeping pills, I can ask him.’ So I asked him, but he said he couldn’t remember the name of the pills. I knew where he kept them, so I got them out of the cupboard and phoned my friend. I told her the name and she said: ‘What? Those aren’t sleeping pills, those are for HIV.’ I dropped the phone, I couldn’t speak.”

It took her two weeks to get tested, but she knew she was positive. “The doctors were really good. They gave me pre-counselling, post-counselling. I can say they were perfect. They wanted me to tell my best friend about my diagnosis.”
me to report my boyfriend, but I didn’t want to know anymore. I don’t blame him. It takes two people. We were both stupid enough, that’s what I think. I just forgave him, although I was hurt so badly.”

There are five rooms in Charity’s house, each rented separately. They often cook together (“they like my baking”) but Charity cannot bring herself to tell them about her diagnosis. “People only stay for a few months, so I don’t get close to them. It took me two years to tell my best friend about my diagnosis.”

Across town, in Wimbledon, 29-year-old Janet feeders her baby son. He is 18 months old, and vo- cal. Janet discovered she was HIV positive 10 years ago when, after her first sexual experience, she suffered an allergic reaction to the condom. “When I was diagnosed I wanted to find out where I got it from. I really didn’t know. Then I found out I’d had it from birth. I got it from my mum.”

Janet was brought up in Uganda by her grand- mother. She moved to London when she was six to be with her mum. “My grandmother knew I was HIV positive, but she thought I’d be cured when I went to London. My two aunts died of AIDS. I’ve seen it first-hand, it’s devastating.”

Like Charity, Janet hid her diagnosis from fam- ily and friends. “I thought I was the only person in the world to have HIV,” she says. When she eventually plucked up the courage to tell her two best friends, she was struck a devastating blow. “We were like the three musketeers. One of them – I’d known her since I was little – blanked me. She didn’t do it directly. When I went round to her house, she would leave me with her mum or brother. She would sit in her room talking on the phone. I noticed she was pushing me away. Once when she was eating dinner, I reached over for a packet of biscuits. Her aunt took one and my mother. She moved to London when she was six

“I can only be myself if people know about me”

to her house, she would leave me with her mum or brother. She would sit in her room talking on the phone. I noticed she was pushing me away. Once when she was eating dinner, I reached over for a packet of biscuits. Her aunt took one and my mother.

Janet discovered she was HIV positive 10 years ago. “I interviewed a veiled Somali woman. She said afterwards: ‘I thought you people hated me. I was Jewish and I was looking for a sense of belonging. It was Body and Soul, a charity that offers workshops in nutrition (with chefs and nutritionists from The Food Chain), holistic medicine as well as social gatherings for people diagnosed with HIV, along with their families and carers. “At first, because I was young. I joined the charity’s teen spirit club. Now I’m in the young adults’ group,” she says. “There are four to five people who go each week. We read magazines and talk about our problems. But we are mainly there to have fun. Everyone looks forward to it. We are good friends. We are like sisters.”

Body and Soul assured Janet that she was not alone. “I don’t know whose I’d be if it wasn’t for the group,” she says. “It’s the only place we can be ourselves, where we can really talk about our problems. I’m open about my situation, but I can only be myself if people know about me. When I’m sad I want people to know why I’m sad.”

“People don’t know enough about the disease. They don’t know you can live a normal, healthy life. People are much more comforting to someone who has cancer. HIV is a sexually transmitted disease, but at the end of the day, it brings the same pain.”

Charity also attends weekly meetings at the centre. “I’ve gone there every Tuesday since 2004. I just love it,” she says. She now helps out at the group herself, volunteering for the helpline, outreach and mentor services. “You hear other people’s stories and share your feelings” she says. “The workshops really help me because I feel I can push myself to do new things.”

The stigma that distanced both women from society is also what brings them together. One group is harnessing this feeling of community to tackle prejudice. The Stigma Index employs re- searchers to interview HIV-sufferers across the country to gauge experiences of discrimination suffered by those living with the disease. The Index is part of a global project initiated in 2005 with the help of different organisations including UNAIDS and the Global Network of People Living with AIDS. It started in Africa, and in December 2009, the UK became the first country in Europe to take part. The first phase of interviews involved nearly 900 people across the country in Europe to take part. The first third said they had experienced low self-esteem 

reported feeling ashamed or guilty. Almost two thirds said they had experienced low self-esteem in the last 12 months. Over a third said they had never received pre- or post-test counselling.

Alistair Hudson, project coordinator at the In- dex, says the surprising thing about the project is that people from disparate backgrounds have been united by it. “I’m 42, a single, white, gay man from Scotland. I was diagnosed just under a year ago. I interviewed a veiled Somali woman. She said afterwards: ‘I thought you people hated us.”

Ignorance breeds discrimination, he says. In the context of HIV, this can lead to delayed ac- cess to services, isolation, and low self-esteem. By sharing their experiences, the feeling of com- munity can help boost self-worth.

When asked to choose one action for the future, the top priority identified by the 867 participants was to raise awareness. “We need intelligent messaging about HIV. It’s a chronic illness, not a terminal disease,” Hudson says.

Until HIV-positive people can reveal their diag- nosis without fear of job loss, poor medical treat- ment or rejection by family and friends, many will wish to remain anonymous. In the meantime, they will rely on the services of charities like The Food Chain and Body and Soul for providing basic human needs: nutrition, company, and a sense of belonging.

Back in Hackney, Watkeys returns to the car and scraps the map over his knees. Rosewar checks his mirrors. “I like London, but it can be quite impersonal and anonymous,” he says. “You can be yourself and not worry about being judged. But it’s a bit of a double-edged sword. There are definitely people who get lost.” He starts the engine. “Back up to the main road,” Watkeys says, and the car pulls out onto the street.
Paul Dawson left the army after seeing his best friend shot to death. “It sent me funny in the head,” he says. “I went to serve and protect my country, and then I saw my best mate fuck up in front of my eyes. That was when things started to unravel. I couldn’t trust anyone after that.”

The 26-year-old rejected structured army life, opting instead for the streets of London. He has been there for six months.

People on their way to work walk past him. People on their way to parties walk past him. People from the Mayor of London’s office, who recently wrote a report on the number of homeless in the capital walked past him as they delivered their findings. Just 67 people sleep rough in inner London, they found. (Broadway, a homeless charity, puts the number closer to 5,000.)

Like too many homeless people, Dawson counts drug, alcohol and mental health issues among his problems. But a recent study by scientists at John Hopkins University cites isolation as one of the major contributing factors behind homelessness and its fallout. “Isolation from family, friends, and other support networks” are characteristic of people on the streets, say authors P J Fischer and W R Breakey, along with “frequent contact with correctional agencies; and poor general health.”

Mikey O’Reilly, 33, was abused by family members and then by carers. He also chose solitude, and often the street people stay away from. “I rather liked it, but I didn’t want to be dependent on it anymore. The people who dealt with me were condescending. At a lot of homeless shelters the staff are very green. They don’t understand, and often the street people stay away from them.”

Alex Brown, 43, became homeless after losing his job at a factory when it closed down. He couldn’t find work and was too ashamed to tell his family. When he lost his home he was moved to a hostel. He became lonely, and cut-off, losing his confidence and self-respect.

“I had been in the hostel a few months with no job. I became depressed but I wouldn’t admit it. The doctor kept saying: ‘I think there’s something not right, I think you’re depressed’. I knew I was really unhappy and found it hard to get up and do things but I didn’t accept I was clinically depressed. I’d always been fine before.”

Depression and the unpleasant shelter environment resulted in Brown experimenting with, and then becoming addicted to, drugs. “I had a friend who gave me Methadone,” he says. “I asked for it. I was in touch with my family because I was embarrassed and ashamed of the way my life was. I felt alone and hopeless. I didn’t see any way out.”

Ingrid Wright is the manager of YOU, a charity that helps people to work their way out of homelessness. Along with other services, it runs a hostel with 20 beds, where people can stay until they find permanent accommodation. Fifty per cent of people who come through the hostel doors have been diagnosed with a mental illness.

Wright believes isolation is a common theme among the homeless and that it contributes to mental health issues and drug taking. “Usually, once you’re on the streets, you start drinking or taking drugs to survive,” she says, “but it can be a chicken and egg thing: sometimes the addiction comes first. Most people who drink have an underlying mental health issue, and it’s only once you deal with the drinking or drug problem that the real issues resurface. It’s hard for us to imagine, but once people are living on the streets they often take drugs or drink as a means of self medicating. They can’t afford to be mentally ill because it’s all about survival.”

Gradually, Brown and Mastro both got back on their feet. They now live in a flat for formerly homeless men. They speak to their families, and have friends and partners. Next year Mastro plans to take a masters degree in chemistry. “I have a normal life now,” he says. “People have a lot of preconceptions, but really I’m no different from anyone else.”

Paul and Mikey think they’ll stay alone, together on the street, for the foreseeable future."

It’s easier to ignore them. But this isolation is helping keep the homeless, homeless

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“Doctors don’t listen, they just give you pills”

alone for a really long time and that was very sad and difficult, but I won’t dwell on that. I like to look at the positives. I learnt a lot and I’m self-reliant now, I could survive anywhere. I was an alcoholic for 10 years. I could function on it anymore. The people who dealt with me were condescending. At a lot of homeless shelters the staff are very green. They don’t understand, and often the street people stay away from them.”

Alex soon started smoking heroin, which began a three-year addiction. “I really was depressed by that time,” he says. “I’d given up. I wasn’t in touch with my family because I was embarrassed and ashamed of the way my life was. I felt alone and hopeless. I didn’t see any way out.”

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What makes London distinct from other cities?

All kinds of things, even the way it’s grown up; the recalcitrant nature and bloody-mindedness of London is unique. Here, people chose to stick around very early on, they chose to actually dig in and put in these enormous stone structures and defensive walls. They built cathedrals and churches. They built commercial enterprises – cargoes of the world were pouring in. Because of the Thames, there has been this constant pattern of immigration. I’ve been working with Germans recently who find London amazingly different to Berlin. They’d never encountered such a diverse, multi-voiced culture.

There are also areas of London becoming the same. There is a kind of universal city. Say you’re in Docklands, or some of the new areas, you could be in a part of Amsterdam, or on the outskirts of an American city. There is a kind of generic city incorporated into the organic mass of London. It started at the edge, and now it’s spreading through the middle. Most of it is set into chunks of other stuff, but when they start joining up maybe it will feel very different. At the moment, London holds its quality, no question.

You’ve been walking in London for many years. Can you talk about the city’s smells and sounds?

They provoke memories and enrich experiences. A lot of them are grim and vile and toxic. Walk through the Olympic zone now and you’re aware that the stuff you’re breathing is shredding your lungs. Then you turn some corner and there’s a strip of...
of wild nature, amazing plants along a strip of muddy old river. Then you get another set of smells: the emotive smells of food and even cigarettes. It’s richer in a city than anywhere else, probably better in London than in European cities.

You have been walking in London for almost fifty years. How will it be different for somebody walking 50 years from now?

If people are walking at all it will be incredibly difficult. At the moment there is an emphasis, politically and socially, on encouraging cycling. Bicycle tracks are taking over the canal bank, which would have been a space for people to walk. Certain pathways through places like London Fields have become cycle tracks, and there will be more and more cyclists. If the population continues to expand, so, too, will the necessity for digging up and rebuilding. It’s getting physically harder to walk, and that will become even more extreme. People will walk for exercises in particular areas, but the notion of the urban wanderer will be redundant.

Population growth is so enormous that London is on the point of psychic breakdown, of not being able to cope. Laying out the railways was the first bang. It ripped the city up. London shivered and shuddered, and recovered. Then you had the damage of the Second World War which allowed a rethinking and a re-structuring. It let the Atlantic government lay out London in a more socially coherent way. The Thatcher and New Labour eras have undone all that and blown it wide open, allowing it to be manipulated by market forces entirely. Now it’s become a kind of open, but deranged, collapsing city.

Is the erosion of urban wandering a loss to London?

It’s a major loss because it’s associated with a particular kind of writing, and an accumulation of strange knowledge that has a long tradition. Thinking about what I’m writing, I’ll do the same walk again and again. It frees up my mind to think of the next section. So it becomes a real collaboration with the city. You might notice little details on a particular day that will feed into something you thought you knew. If I hadn’t become an urban writer the prose would have a totally different form, because it adapts to the rhythms of walking; wandering and reading; walking and pausing and quoting. That’s going to become much more difficult. There will be another kind of writing, more suited to the Internet: jumpier, and with a faster consciousness, sampling images and little bits of knowledge. The complex, textured prose I’ve tried to do – it’s not going to be around.

The cover of one of your books features Blake’s pilgrim, stooped under a rucksack, reading as he walks. Can you talk about walking as reading?

The way to explore London’s territory initially was walking, which involved a burden of other people’s knowledge. So the rucksack represents this unread mass of material. Not just fictions, but testaments, documentation, statistics, obliterated council papers, adverts – more than you could manage. A rucksack represents this unread mass of material. Not just fictions, but testaments, documentation, statistics, obliter-ated council papers, adverts – more than you could manage. Working and walking and reading became completely inter-woven.

Walking is a form of reading, in the same way you can read a painting, or landscape. Therefore a journey is a form of turning the city into a film, or a book. I came to Hackney more or less by accident, and found it an underwritten landscape. Places like Whitechapel and the Thames already had powerful narratives. It’s a kind of open, but deranged, collapsing city.

How have you forged a deep connection with the place?

I don’t feel any deep connection with Hackney. It’s ephemeral in the end. Take Islington, it’s deeply associated with J G Ballard’s mythology. Thomas Love Peacock lived there; H G Wells set a section of the War of the Worlds there. But these places didn’t make sense, sampling images and little bits of knowledge. The complex, textured prose I’ve tried to do – it’s not going to be around.

The Olympic regeneration is something you’re talking about a lot just now.

It’s a major disaster, a huge project that’s sweeping away a whole known landscape. Everything the Olympics is giving back, like the public park – it was there already, except you had to look for it. There had been versions very like the Olympics in the 1880s – athletic contests round the back of a pub in Hackney Wick. There were athletic contests in Victoria Park that involved people coming from all over the world to take part. You didn’t need this vast, top-down structure spending billions of pounds to obliterate a landscape. In time, London will absorb it and go around it. But whatever happens, it’s the end of a particular kind of London.

I’m working on a book dealing with the philosophy and con-sequences of the Olympic project. I start at the site and zoom out through the experience of the Olympic park growing, then push out wider through Britain, looking at other buildings and projects that were fiascos – places like Berlin and Athens.

How are malls such as Westfield affecting London?

They are part of the structure of colonisation by global capital-ism. You end up with a blank edifice, selling itself on having multiple generic outlets supposedly representing every kind of culture, but all in one zone, as if the differences mean nothing. It sits with theories like that of the architect Will Alsop, his notion of a “supercity” – in which you can go from Liverpool to Hull along the M62 and it’s all one city, one culture. There is a sense of that happening, and it’s disastrous. If there is any quality, it’s in the local particulars.

How are the city’s disappearances, caused by projects such as the Olympics, felt? They are overwhelmingly powerful, by a lot of people. In compil-ing London: City of Disappearances – which grew enormously as I mentioned it to people – the overall sense of the city was that London was magnificent in the things that had been de-leted and lost. And the virtue of memory was clearly important to the writers involved. London isn’t a new city; it isn’t a city that relishes destruction. Certain people, like J G. Ballard, felt that you could sweep away all the old stuff, that you don’t need it. If there was no back-story, I wouldn’t be here. I feel quite spoilt by the newness of places like Austin, Texas.

What are your favourite parts of the city?

I won’t say, because then they wouldn’t be obscure. The most threatened thing today is obscurity. It’s breaking a crime to not have a story to tell, and so you think everything that’s blank has to have something whacked down on it. To find and hang on to little pieces that are still out of the way is very important. I’d like to hang on to places I don’t visit very often. I’m not hoarding them, but there are so many books that want you to write down your favourite magical, obscure places. It’s a culture of listing, exposing, producing the guidebook. I don’t want to be a part of that.

- visit hackinson.com for an extended version of the Iain Sinclair interview
There are many notorious recluses in the fashion industry. Sidestepping the spotlight, however, is out of the ordinary for a designer with barely a collection under his belt. But that’s exactly what Mason Jung, a Seoul-born designer living in Seven Sisters, has done. The softly-spoken 33-year-old looks beyond what he calls the “homogenised” catwalk – his creations call for different backdrops to be presented and understood. They require more than a first glance, a breezy moment.

A shirt has an extra set of sleeves and morphs into a jacket. The seams of a trouser leg look undone from a distance; close up you discover the row of buttons hidden inside. When the sides are pulled out and buttoned, the trousers change from straight-legged to twisted, exaggerated jodhpurs. The origami-like creations demonstrate Jung’s focus on “new techniques and patterns of construction” along with his sophisticated craftsmanship. They also show how this seemingly reserved designer is not afraid to experiment.

In constant search for a better way to convey his subtle, ambivalent ideas, the Royal College of Art graduate is ready to take it slowly, and experiment. “I want to make clothes that are like me. I don’t want them to flatter me, but instead to be like part of me.”

visit masonjung.com for more information

FORGET FOOTBALL

Breathing new life into disused spaces. This month: a fashion shoot in Surrey Docks football stadium

Photography by Kai Wong

Abandoned, Revisited

SEE U AGAIN

SALE EVERY SUN

Abandoned, Revisited

Models: Ezekiel Morgan and Miranda Read-Wilson. All clothes by Mason Jung. Shoes: stylist’s own
It's difficult to slow down when you work 60-hour weeks. Even in his free time, City accountant Bryan Lynch, 41, relaxes by running marathons. This morning, he's striding through Wimbledon Park. “London is hectic, busy, and cosmopolitan. I don’t really stop,” he says, wiping away the film of sweat from his forehead. “I don’t have time.”

Bryan looks down at Baudelaire, a Victorian stuffed dog. He pauses, takes in the hound's noble chin and moth-eaten ears.

“He’s very quiet, isn’t he?” Bryan takes the lead, and pats his matted muzzle. He surveys the park, the grass peppered with daisies, a gaggle of women exercising, children tugging their parents' sleeves in horror as they spot Baudelaire. The sky is soft and blue. “This is nice,” says Bryan. “I need a nice quiet pet to relax with. Maybe something low maintenance.” He and Baudelaire exchange glances. “I think he likes me.”

Five minutes pass in silence. The exercising women circle the green. A toddler screams. In the distance something furry takes an interest in Baudelaire. Time to go. Bryan gives Baudelaire a final pat and hands the lead back. “I’m not sure if I’m a changed man exactly,” he says. “But it’s nice to have had a moment to contemplate.”

DOG WALKING

Inspired by Baudelaire, the man who spent weeks on one sentence, HUM seeks creative ways to slow the pace of life. This month . . .

DEAD

Photo: Emily Jupp

The Slow Lane
HUM walks in the footsteps of Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway and finds things have changed

The route:

Stuart: Great Ormond Street.
Left down Benedict / Cowley Street.
Right along Great Peter Street, fourth right up Parkin Row, follow on up Abbey Orchard Street. Cross Victoria Street, turn right then next left up Dean Farm Street. Follow Dean Farm Street up until turning left onto Tichfield Street and crossing the road.
Take next right up Dartmouth Street, then next left along Queen Anne’s Gate.
Follow Queen Anne’s Gate to the right, onto Birdcage Walk, across Birdcage Walk and immediately into St James Park.
Follow same path through park, over bridge, up to the exit onto The Mall.
Turn left, Walk along until Green Park. Take first entrance into Green Park (right), called Queen’s Walk.
Follow same path through park, along Ritz, to exit onto Piccadilly.
Turn right onto Piccadilly, follow it to PICRALY – Hatchards Book Shop. Look.
Cross Piccadilly. Old Bond Street is to the left.
If you fancy Penhaligon’s perfumes, it’s the sixth.

Such folks indeed, not to have had pedestrian crossings. The traffic cabs and buses with the changing lights – yet suited boots dart and weave in the gaps; business stops for no little red man.

In people’s eyes, in the eating, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar, the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich man shuffling and swing- ing, brass bands, barrel organs, in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved, Mrs. London, this moment of June.

This moment in June is lovely also. Emerging from Queen Anne Street (her flaming statue speaks for fully of royals past) to see the sole flag flying, it seems the Queen is again at the Palace.

And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a bellowing, a stirring of galingale piquing, tapping of cricket bats. Lord, Ascot, Basingstoke and all the rest of it, wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air… whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslin veils, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their artists woolly dogs for a run.

And nowhere, though it is the height of rush hour, are there ponies, cricket bats, woolly dogs being taken on runs. People are running, of course – Hyde, Hyde – but no dogs. Entertainment enough these days are iPods – and they have leads.

But how strange, on entering the Park, the silence; the humming of the coffee grinding, the heels, the music of horses, the pouched birds waddling…

Gardening books . . . all firmly shut and displayed in the window of London’s oldest surviving bookshop. Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably recover? What image of white dawn in the country, in the Hatchard’s shop window? What was she trying to imagine?

Bond Street fascinated her; Bond Street early in the morning; not a light on; all firmly shut and displayed in the window of London’s oldest surviving bookshop.

Reflexes are a necessity. The crowds flooding the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived…

The entrance to Green Park is tightened by the “improvements we are making” and, approach the road to Piccadilly, the civili- ties of personal space are discarded. Holding back a moment, the royal green expanses is visible once more. As far as serenity in the centre of London goes, this is almost as good as it gets.

If it did matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cause completely all this must go on without her. did she resist it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death did not adhere? But that somehow, in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived…

There were books of Lost London; there was McEvoy’s Solae, Maggie O’Farrell’s latest novel, perhaps not, all firmly shut and displayed in the window of London’s oldest surviving bookshop.

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Tothill Street and crossing the road, over bridge, up to the right along Queen Anne’s Gate. The flowers have gone (overtaken by fashion) but the scent of the perfumers Penhaligon’s lingers. The entrance to Green Park is tightened by the “improvements we are making” and, approach the road to Piccadilly, the civili- ties of personal space are discarded. Holding back a moment, the royal green expanses is visible once more. As far as serenity in the centre of London goes, this is almost as good as it gets.

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Postcards from the Magnificent Seven

London’s population more than doubled in the first half of the 19th century, reaching 2.2 million. The dead had to go somewhere. Churchyards were full. Many bodies were snatched, if buried. In 1832, parliament allowed a circle of private cemeteries to be built around outer London, which resulted in the Magnificent Seven.

An angel with tar for tears. From the gateway a straight road points toward a neat chapel. Walk, run or ride, it beckons. Carrying a hint of pot belly, a man pushes himself to a hundredth press-up. A lemon-yellow rose bush for Metropolitan Anthony of Sorouzh. Knocked from his base, three crosses tilt; damaged, one has become a “1”. Over another is draped a chain. The dead had to go somewhere. And of course there’s a feel for Victorian attitudes to wildlife. Visitors will get a feel for Victorian attitudes toward death. And of course there are famous people buried here. Besides Karl Marx, George Eliot, are famous people buried here”. Besides Karl Marx, George Eliot, Woolf’s dad, dig around and you’ll find centuries of stories layered on stories. Besides Karl Marx, George Eliot, Woolf’s dad, dig around and you’ll find centuries of stories layered on stories.

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A pigeon shits in the rose garden while a squirrel arcs toward a JCB. Fidgety, a finch scuttles from stone to stone. Some were “taken”, most “fell asleep”. Seen: two concrete frogs. Purple flint chips sprinkled on marble tiles. A wicker basket, topped with thick orange ribbon, left for Natalie Maxine McKee. Birdsong, sounds like ringtones. “Happy 50th Birthday Daddy” pinned to a ferny tree. A sandy cat kills a baby bird over Harry Curson Weale. Seen: 11 traffic cones. A silver snake around countless others. A stone piano. High walls lined with oak and cedar, drunk from the natural spring, divide the park, start from west. Above Mary Nichols an angel sleeps. Engraved in gold: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways – the point however is to change it.” Daisies, indifferent, while the father of Communism speaks still. Gravestones glimmer in sunshine. Some are spotless, well manicured. Ivy and thick roots snake around countless others. A stone piano. On a reconnaissance mission, a murder of crows. Samuel Taylor Coleidge. Squidge of laughter spill over from nearby Waterloo Park where a baby and his sister ride into the sky on a swing. High walls lined with oak and cedar, drunk from the natural spring, divide the park, start from west. Above Mary Nichols an angel sleeps.

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London Stone
In the popular revolt of 1450, Jack Cade led a band of 5,000 peasants across Blackheath and towards London Bridge. They stopped at the London Stone, which Cade struck with his sword, declaring himself Lord Mayor. The Stone was the place from which the Romans measured all distances in Britannia. There is a myth that says the Stone’s safety is linked to that of the city itself: “So long as the stone of Brutus is safe, so long shall London flourish.”

Finding it: 111 Cannon Street. The stone sits, partially shielded by an iron grate and decorously carved brickwork, set into a wall along Cannon Street, opposite the station.

Underground bunker
There is a government bunker directly beneath Nelson’s Column, installed in the 1950s in preparation for nuclear war.

Finding it: Go to Trafalgar Square, take the underground passage that leads to Charing Cross (this is closed after 9pm). Go through the metal door on the left hand side of the wall, and down through the telephone exchanges, into the bunker. You’ll probably need to be employed in the telecoms industry to get this far.

Rehabilitation centre
This huge, grade II listed 18th-century townhouse was once a refuge for female ex-cons. It was bought in 1849 in memory of penal reformer Elizabeth Fry - the lady on the back of a fiver. Despite decrepit stairwells and crumbling brickwork, the cellar is a well-preserved working kitchen, with an 18th-century bread oven and copper pots. “It used to have more kitchen equipment,” says Simon White, one of the community of squatters currently residing there, “but a group of heroin addicts lived here before us and sold it all.”

Finding it: Go to Mare Street and look for the house with the blue circular plaque on the wall. Soon the basement will be sealed off and the rooms developed into private flats. Why? Because it costs less than to restore it.

BURLIED TREASURES

“You have to turn the key to the gate that leads to my garden very gently. Extremely gently. If you go too fast it won’t turn. You have to be soft with it.”

Andy Jones, 25, Stoke Newington

“The door to my boyfriend’s garage sometimes doesn’t open. You have to pull the handle super hard. If the door isn’t shut tight, you can’t turn the key.”

Emily Sills, 25, Tulse Hill

“The front door sometimes doesn’t work. You have to move the key in a side-to-side motion, take it out, and then put it back in. If you use brute force it doesn’t work. You have to be gentle.”

Oliver Wall, 26, Camberwell
In studying the skyline, doctored for rebuild, I’ve found it pushes down, like a hand on a ball, keeping bridges locked in-river. I explain my theory to her. "It is the spaces between the crane heads, that gave the city its skyline. Not the buildings themselves, but the promise. The preemption of a blocked horizon."

We’ve been shelling each other’s day-dirty hands for hours, and I am half pantomimed. She’s bricking about space, gestures wildly to gulf. "I think we’re in our reconstructed urbanisation."

Last night we ate in a restaurant with a candle between us. She was trying to feed her fried, speaking about hereditary diseases, touching my feet under the table. "Tell me what I see as good is just miles of empty sky.

She wasn’t listening when I said she couldn’t be happy with nothing. Just pressed her fork into potato while her voice built fences.

– Rachael Allen
A takeaway sign: “greasy fried dreams” / a Christmas hat in a tree / a Jimmy Choo treasure hunt / a micro-tornado of petals / middle-aged superheroes / a Cyclops sheep / a bluebottle painted on a security cabin / office workers climbing their building in their lunch hour / a rainbow in Clacton Pond / a bullet hole in a pub / a 75-year-old man wearing hot-pants / a dog with eyebrows / a five-year-old boy dressed as Doctor Who / Japanese tourists being photographed outside a curtain factory / a man on a night bus reading the Standard with a magnifying glass / Morris dancers celebrating nothing in particular

Nelly the elephant packed her trunk but where did she trundle off to? Email competition@humlondon.com with the correct location to win a year’s subscription.
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