

Mapping
in Bloomsbury

LOCAL

SENSUS

November
2019—20

Two dogs,
two dictaphones
Nine wintry evenings,
15 in-person workshops
One walk
Four journeys
A little further
10 parallel sensations
A black map in hand
A touch of convivial glow
Re-filling the cup
A step forward-roll back
10 Zoom check-ins
A wash of fearful flesh

One year
Treading uncharted land

Setting off

Perspectives by
Leonie, Lizzie, Geoff, Lesley, Colin, Richard

The essence of this architecture is movement
synchronised towards a precise objective.

We observe a fraction of the process, like
hearing the vibration of a single string in an
orchestra of supergiants. We know, but cannot
grasp, that above and below, beyond the limits
of perception or imagination, thousands and
millions of simultaneous transformations
are at work, interlinked like a musical score
by mathematical counterpoint. It has been
described as a symphony in geometry, but
we lack the ears to hear it. (1)

*Stanislaw Lem,
Solaris, 1970, p126.*

Stop

Leonie requests the
stop outside the church
on Cromer Street.

Intersections bring our walk to life and one in particular, between Cromer Street and Argyle Walk, has extra resonance.

For three of us it intersects our pasts and our present. Standing here and sharing memories amongst friends means something. It matters.

For me - I lived on both sides of this significant insignificant divide, the intersection of a narrow alley and a cobbled lane.

I first came here as a teenager filled with butterflies, fear and anticipation, running to my first ever consciousness raising group.

Ten years on here I walk my son to nursery and school. We laugh together, many mornings, remembering how we clambered across the broken tree-strewn streets the morning after the great storm of '87.

Over three decades I moved in all four directions from this crossroads - me, my cat, my son, my love and our grandchildren.

I worked here, built here, danced here and tried every Indian restaurant with my family here. We had fun and frolics. Friends lived here, friends died here.

Then, like those trees battered in the storm, a small part of me is bent by the wind. A tiny blood clot is blown off course and

leaves me stumbling through the rubble of a new brain.

Losing the part of my sight that keeps me grounded, the streets underfoot change overnight. Like those branches strewn across the road I struggle to coordinate my limbs over this strange terrain.

It was all change in this beautiful spot by the bench where we sat holding hands, my love, as we laughed under the tree where my cat sat.

It darkens now: it is my route to the Neurology Hospital.

Life as I knew it swept away.

And then it wasn't.

Our walk, our group, pulls me back together, back home to this place, its memories, its people, to what I loved and where I loved it.

A guided meditation on becoming present

The beauty of doing an exercise in being present is how the experience connects the inner world to the outside world. You will be left feeling truly present to the moment, to your surroundings and to those around you. Begin with either your eyes open or closed, your feet connected to the ground beneath you and take a few moments to breathe consciously. Make sure your body feels comfortable. Begin working with your senses one at a time - notice the sounds around you, name them in your mind as they introduce themselves. This could be traffic sounds, a clock ticking, a heartbeat or voices close by. Keep this focus momentarily and gradually introduce any aromas around you. Earth smells, food cooking, perfume. At the same time notice what you see, is it all darkness, is there a glow from a street light, an object you see or sense, a person close by.

Historic

Atmospheric

Parisian

Stop

Request to stop at the “laundry
smell” by Colin and Lesley on
the corner of Whidborne Street
and Argyle Walk.

I step forward, once, twice, on the pavement that gives little information, but scrolls backwards beneath my feet. Then, in front and on my left, sound. First in little chunks and chinks, then louder with the sparkle and tinkle of glasses. Beneath, the murmur, rising and falling, with each step getting louder. Male and female voices, a shriek, a laugh.

As I draw close, suddenly, a door opens letting out a beery gust, warm air mixing with the cold around my head. Air that's passed over half empty beer mugs, puffed from half eaten bags of crisps, and over damp coats and hair. Cheering and inviting, 'Come on in!'

And then in the doorway, someone calls over their shoulder, 'See you tomorrow Jack! See you in the morning.'

Further back in the room, Jack says something loud and happy; Jill screams with laughter, and Tom raises his voice to make his point. Others fall silent listening. Then George, 'Any one for any more?', 'I'm half empty' comes the reply. I stand still, listening to people I'll never know and who will never know me. I'm reflecting that half empty or half full, either way I bet they want more. As I walk away from this warm, cosy place, I think about those lives, touching and crossing, and feel happy for them. And it feels good to have heard them.

Stop

Approximately a third of
the way around the route
on Tavistock Place.

I'm now stationary, motionless (except for a gentle swaying from side to side) and enjoying this sense of warmth that's holding our stillness together.

I take little notice of any sound or speech, or of the random local activities that lay beyond our shuffling group.

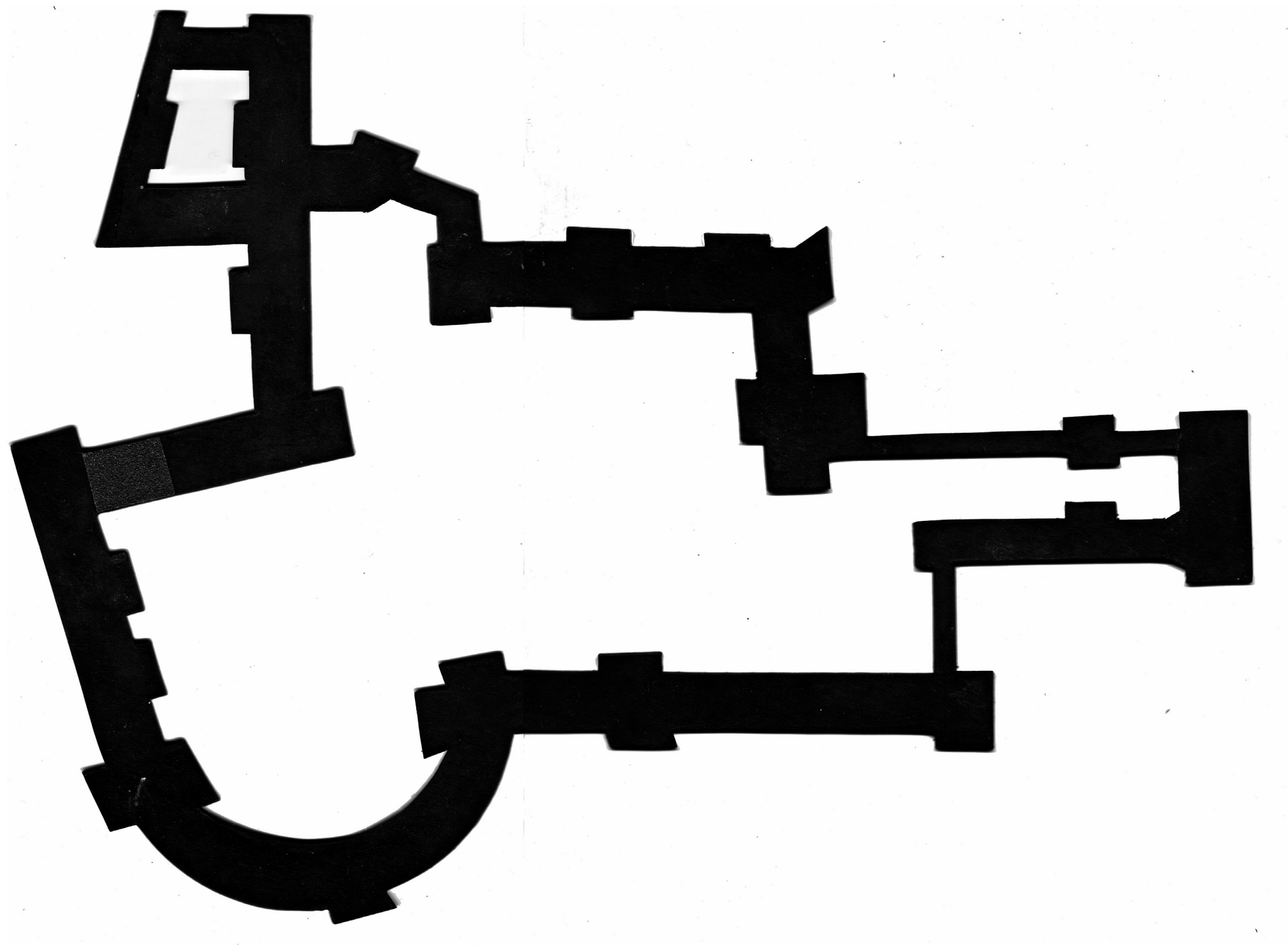
Instead I peer vacantly into a concrete hole at the bottom of a flight of deadly stone stairs (lit only by a dysfunctional, municipal bulb) and guarded by dark, sentinel railings.

We continue to stand and mumble in unison. Then, as my focus returns to street level and away from this no-access (but very public) tomb, I notice Lizzie eating a sandwich on Sandwich Street and my mind returns to a place of simplicity, comfort and order...

Non-Threatening

Convivial

Cobbled



Moving on

Perspectives by

Lizzie, Geoff, Lesley, Colin, Richard, Rikki

*Jorge Luis Borges: Tlon, Uqbar,
Orbis Tertius in Fictions p27, 1956,
c.1998 Calder Publications, London*

The arithmetical system is based on the idea of indefinite numbers. It emphasises the importance of the concepts greater and lesser, which our mathematicians symbolise as \geq and \leq . It states that the operation of counting modifies quantities and changes them from indefinites into definites. The fact that several individuals counting the same quantity arrive at the same result is, say psychologists, an example of the association of ideas or the good use of memory. (2)

Moving On

‘Take it off, mate. She’s gone. Time to move on.’ John’s words.

‘Meet me in the ‘Skinners Arms’, Judd Street, (almost opposite the RNIB) 6pm Friday night.’ Email from Kerry.

As the Tube approaches Kings Cross, he makes up his mind, removing his heavy, plain gold wedding ring, and slipping it carefully into his shoulder bag.

Coming up and out onto the south side of Euston Road, he walks west, until the left turn into Judd Street. A short walk and there is the ‘Skinners Arms’, but he is much too early.

Deciding to work off some of his nervous energy, he walks further down and turns into Cromer Street. Coming to a stop outside a church, he feels as if he has stepped into another place or time; the constant roar of traffic is replaced by the soft, sinuous syncopation of bicycle wheels.

Twilight adds an even more indistinct, monetesque quality to a small open green space before him. In the distance the sound of children playing interwoven with bursts of bird song. Cobbles under his feet, a breath of

bread baking ... This could be Paris.

Bright lights shine ahead, the happy hum of voices – an inviting bar with pavement seating. Better not, he’ll be late.

Finding himself on Argyle Walk, he turns into Whidborne Street, where he is suddenly arrested by the scent of laundry, reminiscent of family, domesticity, home ...

Must move on. Back on to Cromer Street, and then Judd Street. Once again, he is outside the pub. A little further up the road people are leaving the RNIB, and snatches of ‘goodbye’ drift on the air.

He is beginning to feel anxious about finding Kerry in a potentially packed pub, when there she is, right beside him, with a long white cane that matches his own.

Before entering the pub, they clasp their left hands briefly, and he leads the way as, together, they move forward.

Stop

South-eastern corner, at the front of Brunswick Centre, at the end of the eastern walkway.

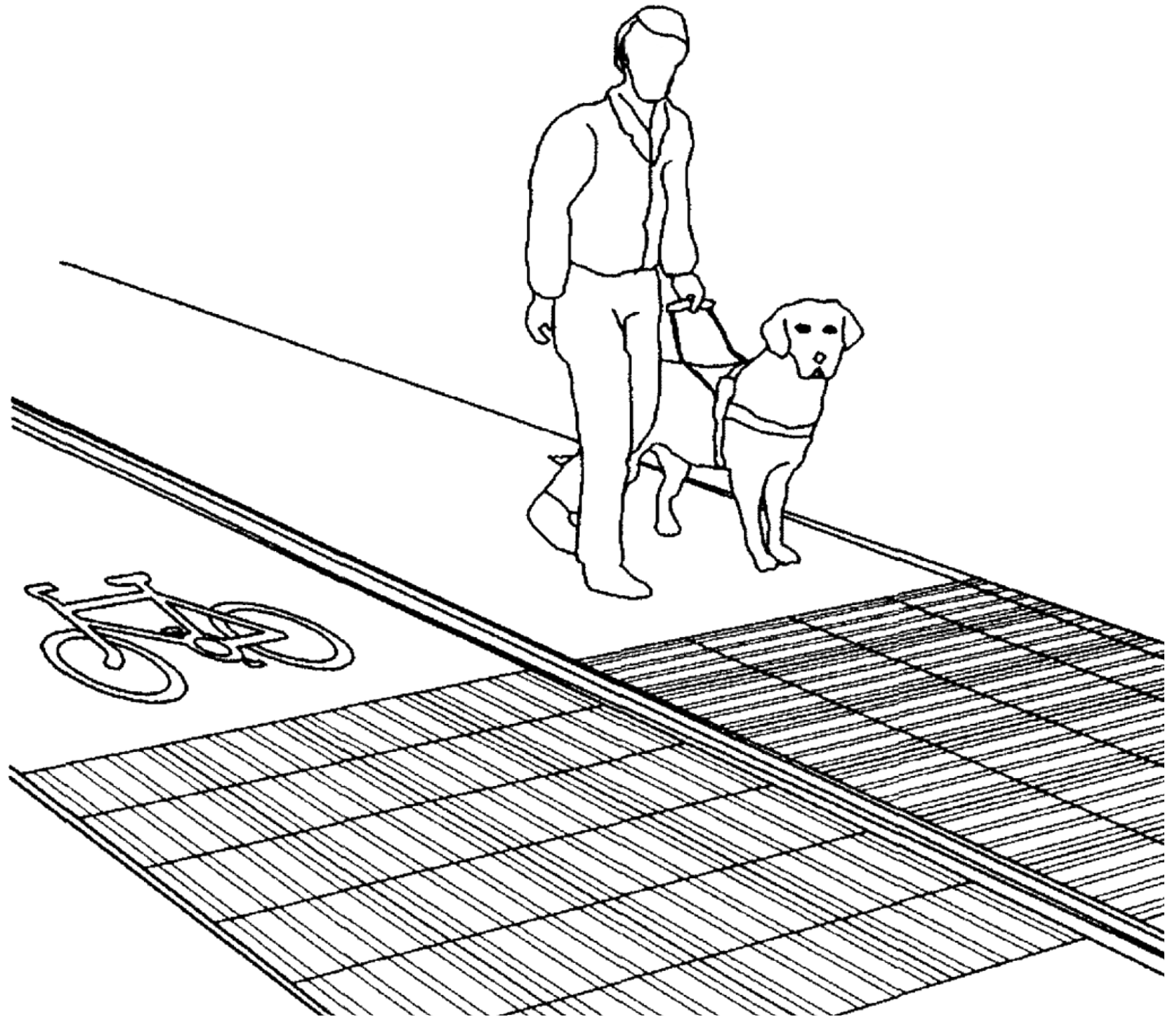
We are sheltered from the breeze, there's an opening to the left, I can tell it's a covered area because of the acoustics of people's voices and feet, no idea about the height of the centre, it could be hugely high or quite low, I can't hear that, no traffic noise, it feels perfectly safe, I don't feel jostled or that my personal space is being invaded, I really like the difference between the acoustic space that we are in, which is quite open, and the closed one which is to the left. Smells of women's perfume - I'm a bit olfactorily challenged, my sense of smell is really weak - but, I'm getting little foody smells there, it's funny how smell comes in waves, even though we're not in a desperately windy area, people move air around just by walking.

Safe yet labyrinthine

Simple yet complex

Stop

North-west end of the central
walkway of The Brunswick
Centre near the covered exit
to the left (west).



Where are the others?
We're on our own
But I'm with my girl so I'm not alone
We're in the right place so that's okay
So we'll carry on walking anyway

Ye--ah
yeah
Ye--ah

Feels like we're treading uncharted land
But I've got my girl, she's holding my hand
Feels like we're treading uncharted land
But I've got my girl, she's holding my hand

Sailing alone

We cross the road to the other side
Then turn right and along we glide
We walk for 50 yards or so
Do I feel afraid? No, no, no

ooo -oo
-oooo yeah

Feels like we're treading uncharted land
But I've got my girl, she's holding my hand
Feels like we're treading uncharted land
But I've got my girl, she's holding my ha-nd

yeah
yeah
yeah
yeah

Then hear my name across the road
And Natanya brings us back to the fold
They were worried a bit, I understand
But my lovely girl, she was holding my hand

Felt like we treaded unchartered land
But I had my girl, she was holding my hand
felt like we trod unchartered land
But I had my girl, she was holding my ha---nd

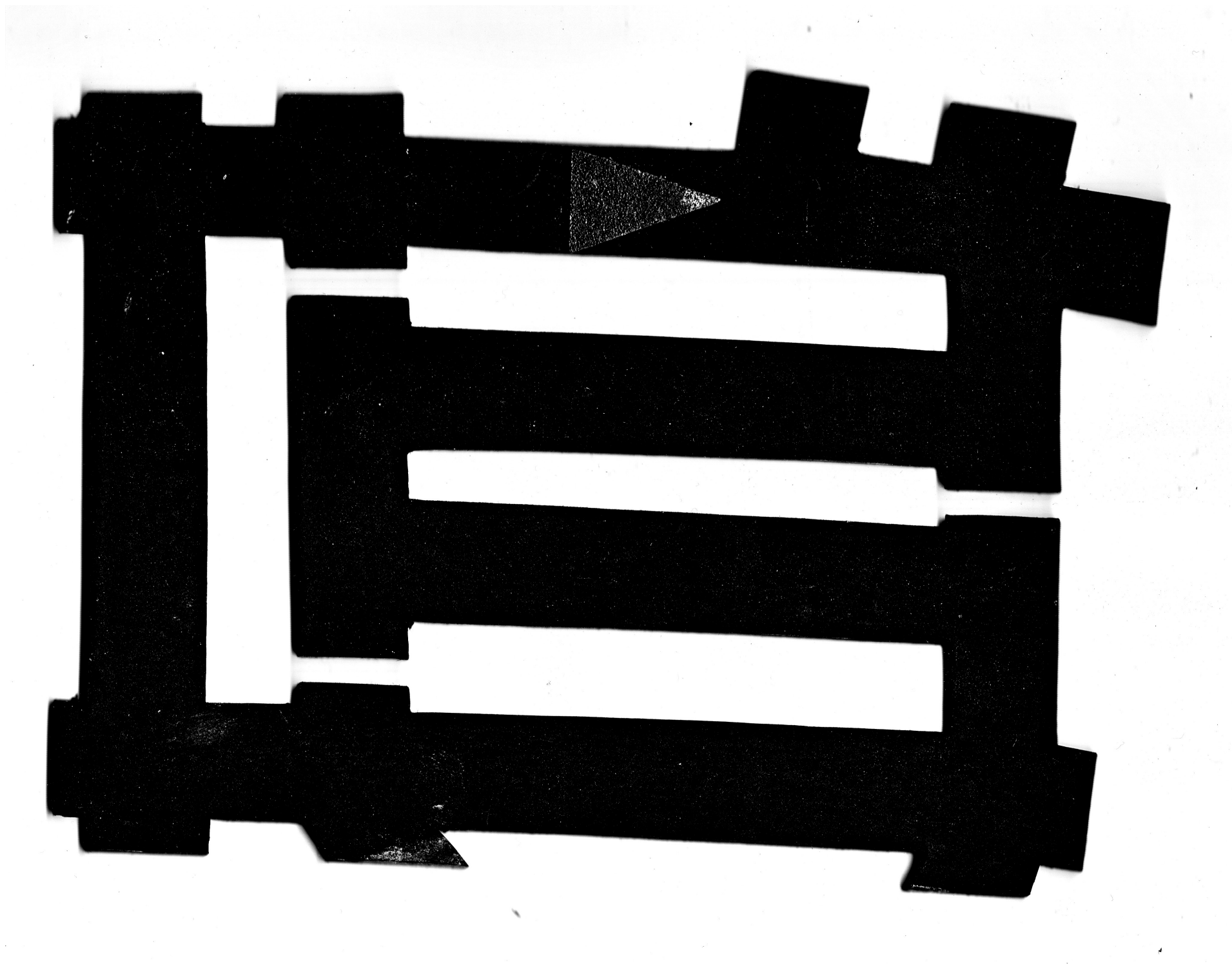
Yea-ea-eah, yeah, yeah
Treading unchartered la--nd
She was holding my hand

o
o
o
yeahh

Black on Black

Cold and dispassionate,
I am an infected gate.
You are fearful flesh.

A map of sandpaper. A bucket of paint.
A changing view. A path mistaken.
A torn man.
A faceless crowd. A trip to nowhere.
A trip to somewhere.
A lighted cigarette. A stick of light. A dark day.
A day that's night. A wrong foot. A slab that
takes me. A flinching muscle. A fall. A mark.
A scar of fate. A new corner. A new
beginning. A coat of arms. A place.



Closing the loop

Perspectives by
Lizzie, Leonie, Richard, Rikki

Find out the date and time of the next full moon. Take up a position where you can watch the full moon rise. Wait until the moon is at its zenith. Look at image 80.

You are looking at an image of the earth taken from the moon. Lift the book to the night sky with the image of the earth facing you. Position the image of the earth so that you can see the moon at the same time. Hold the images of the earth and the moon together and wait...

Image 80 is a colour photograph entitled The Blue Marble. It depicts the view of the Earth as seen by the Apollo 17 crew travelling towards the moon. The image was taken on 7th December 1972. (3)

*Jane Rendell: Site Writing:
The Architecture of Art
Criticism, I.B. Tauris & Co
Ltd, 2010, p246-247.*

Stop

On the southern
edge of “the curve” of
Cartwright Gardens

We walked in Morse code,
Dot Dash Dot Dash Dot Dash,
All stopping and starting,
Pausing and pacing.

Eager in our pauses
We huddle together,
Words our brazier
That banish the biting cold.

But walking from dot to dot,
Moving from our places?
Staying together in paces?
Now that was a different
matter altogether.

Perhaps the algebra of pacing
Is harder than of pausing?
The sum of our dashes
Too difficult to calculate?

“10 walkers + 2 dogs x narrow streets -
uneven paving - steep kerbs x dark night
x rush hour crowds + too many good
conversations = ?”

I am the moon - your crown,
Watching as you wax and wane
Along the urban way
You - mirror of my mood
Whom I see a little girl
Treading through the streets of London.
I see you wrapped in an eiderdown coat,
Your hands encased in a muff of blue
and I raise my beam to guide you
girl of vulnerability...
and when you see my hidden face
I recognise your glance
look of youth
steps of brave
I see you passing by
as though I am your guardian angel
Way beyond the stars.
I know your name
I know your stride
and if you happen to lose your way
the ivory of my glow
Will lead you back and forward till
you find your way to go.

How does
the moon
see me?

Winter Street at Night -
Kings Cross

Under our feet, cold cobbles.
Ahead, a sense of old-fashioned comfort.
In the distance, the buzz of being busy.
Beside us, mystery beckons

Outside, we are stone cold,
Inside a spark of warmth is kindled,
As we walk towards
The welcoming light.

Dogs

Closeness

Steps

Nothing is quite as satisfying as turning a chronic situation into a positive experience; this course has been at the apex of refilling the cup.

I was declared Severely Sight Impaired, in March 2019. My driving licence was seized, I feared losing my job, relationships and the future evaporated. In short, I felt completely f**ked and I make no apology for the terminology.

Then the sun came out.

The urban experience has long been relegated to how often we can check our mobile phones and habitually service our auditory senses with dodgy earphones; isolating ourselves in a misguided quest for individuality at the expense of losing the big, wide world out there.

Losing one's sight is an involuntary isolation and this course has been the can-opener to both the new solitude I was experiencing and the old, which I chose. I've rediscovered how my other senses of smell, hearing and touch may be used to navigate the metropolitan environment with an exhilaration that the clinical visual map was never able to offer. A wonderful journey accompanied by a bunch of clever, funny and intelligent people (plus the odd dog).

Thank-you.

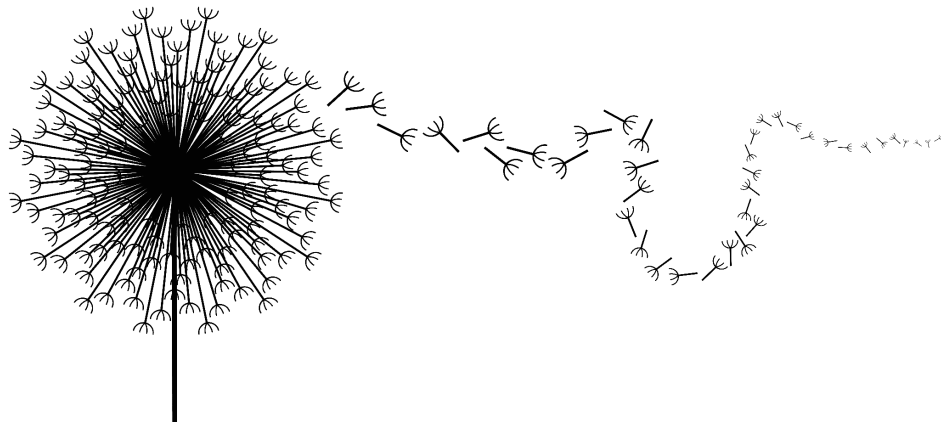
I remember our
cold winter walk
a black map in hand
a petticoat of leaves
the words we spoke.

Sorry I cannot be there
now the sun has awakened
over Bloomsbury
if I could and when I can
I will tread those same
inquisitive steps
but this time in green sandals.

The same streets of London
tapping at wrought iron rails,
now only my own
voice reverberating
through cleaner air.

Sorry I cannot be there
though I go there anyway
to walk beside the stream
of parallel sensations.

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