BOMB DAMAGE MAPS

West London blues

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THE LORE OF THE LAND

On other occasions the people did convince themselves of intentions to uprise and take back control but apathy and commonsense soon sent them back to work, to daily routines, to shop, to bed. Each day went much as before; is a tradition among inhabitants to do so. Is a blessing and a boon.

On one occasion the car was towed to an unknown garage. Was never recovered or repaired, though always had an MOT, bought round the corner from where he used to live. Win a trip to NYC said the chocolate biscuits wrapper he couldn't afford, Tories out said the wall and the gossip in the pub. But they wouldn't go.

South of the village is an intersection, and storytellers agree that questions must remain unanswered. The book is a magic ritual, maintained to be written by the natives. Sickening is not allowed, of neither the heart or the body. All must be restored by unknown powers and you must show you are available for work.

Traditionally, ghosts are associated with the past, what went before, but others call this idle fiction. Reformation and revolt is often punished and misunderstood by other generations. Condemned, we ride through implications and denial, accused of sorcery. Questions remain unanswered, answers remain unattached. Let the show continue, let bygones be history and history be gone. Let us commence, let us be lovers, let us in or out, just let it drop.
Legends about the city abound.
No son of mine will ever die
by drowning, I own my luck and
each day happens much as before.

It is said tradition only speaks
when spoken to, and speculates
that it ceased and was filled in.
The screams of a woman haunt
this place and the king and all
his army became stones. Which
tree is meant is unclear, as no-one
will own the watch. But all agree
what this is is not said or known.
TOPOGRAPHIES

She made a suit made of maps, made a dress made of maps, papered her kitchen with maps. She was going nowhere but she could dream. And did.

Made a map made of maps, a world to get lost in, a world of impossibilities and broken mountains, roads and streams. When I reach this place I will stop.

Walked in shoes pasted over with maps. Host in her hive, guide to her own inclusive holiday. Made her son’s football into an abstract globe, all ocean and land, and then another. Papered chairs and the table, doors and windows, blinds a squiggle of roads and lanes all leading to her backyard.

The map as an image is a popular form of decoration, thereby showing its qualities as substitute for travels as well as a means of orientation.

Made a map made of maps, all borrowed mountains and hills, blues and greens, red lines, a public house by the stream. She owned no right of way, was no safe passage marked across her land. Imagine being lost everywhere, imagine quitting in the middle of a tour. She paced round her garden then went inside.
WESTWAY

See the scars beside the concrete where houses used to be, people used to be. A horse in a dried-up muddy field, graffiti for company: Where is your god now? a dripping question that can’t be answered.

Painted the scene purple and gold but couldn’t hide the damage. Cars drove faster to get to nowhere quicker than they ever had. A skatepark sprang up and splintered, the gypsies moved on, leaving a scrapyard behind. The tube offers the best view: squint left and imagine a neighbourhood divided by demolition and elevated road. Imagine a riot on your hands, a fire 24 stories tall and next door dying or gone missing.

Where is your god now? He is a row of concrete statues holding up the road, is a horse remembering grassier days, is speculation all, no material evidence. Is working for human rights groups, is plotting the ley lines that gather here, is looking for his name in the phonebook, is probably a prince looking for a princess, is too old to move away now. Is stuck, is buried in the cellar, is underneath the arches, is pouring cold water on all his own ideas. Is forgotten.

Is Saturday morning in the market, the discarded is being repurposed, the freeway connection ignored. Jazz and reggae lubricate damp clothing and stale smoke, everything is cheap or overpriced. There’s nothing I want but it is somewhere to be, something to do, is a diversion from the rest of the week, is a diversion: you must turn left, follow the yellow signs until they stop and you is lost. (Rumours that ghosts are to be seen walking.)
Is years later and nothing has changed although traffic jam above is longer and slower. Is a shopping centre nearby and an encampment of homeless men living in plastic and cardboard. Is a desultory space, curving shapes divide sky and landscape in visually arresting ways. Is private and is public, is glimpsed from the train, is whiplash and shadow, sounds of purpose up above.

Is two chairs and an upturned crate around a fireplace made of stones. Is signs of habitation, desolation, abandonment and discard, is home to no-one anyone knows. There used to be a second burial chamber in a field not far away, used to be a jumble of boulders, was once a church on a hill here, houses where people would eat and sleep. Now is only grim skyline, cold ash, the great round eyes of stray dogs, next day happening much as before.
HIGH RISE

24 floors of incendiary backfire, flames reforming the sky, sirens for miles around, repercussions for years to come. Most local tower blocks are not yet safe, is money to be made elsewhere. Is not a priority, accommodation will be made available as and when.

Life on the never-never is not enough. There is not a dry eye in the house, there is not a floor left habitable, there is nothing to be done. Nature as divine entity is part of our relentless desire to classify, label and burn know. Each person's narrative is still their own, but they own nothing else, live at the edge of negative space and grief, poverty and guilt, with the lingering smell of fire.

Everything is subtly blurred and discarded. Lives taken away in skips, a tower block dressed in green beside the motorway into town. Gawping drivers and old news, a charitable fund and lost neighbours. Other variables are in play, emotions run high, trains run late.

Not an attempt to understand, is sound given shape to words, distant observations from the train ride into town. I live in the suburbs, haven't had time to look into these things or become a misery tourist.

24 floors that could have been saved, 24 floors that are too high for normal habitation. They are building 44 floors nearby: scratch the sky, hope no-one
has vertigo or drops a match. 
Will not be clad with same, 
will meet health and safety 
regulations, will cost more 
than risk and death can justify.

Bomb damage maps show what 
is missing and what is at risk. 
Areas destroyed, areas of fire, 
areas where it is not safe to live. 
But there is nowhere else to go. 
Grief and rage mark anniversary, 
72 people died, you we are doing 
almost nothing. Put your trust 
in anger, in official inquiry, 
in a black sack over there.

A wall and barbed wire fence 
separates towpath from 
an area under the road, 
but local legends are made 
from cultural ragbag, fleeter 
than wind and faster than fire. 
Next time, you should and must 
link up with the neighbours, 
form one massive community.

Council housing blocks around 
the church were adorned with 
green scarves and the nave was 
packed with people wearing 
the same colour, holding up 
pictures of loved ones they lost 
and carrying white roses to lay 
later at the base of the tower.
CATALOGUE

I bought the book because of memory, not because of art. Paintings retain an appearance of speed, spontaneity and freshness, vital satisfactions I depend upon to navigate my past.

Major creative uncertainties are said to have been founded by an otherwise unknown saint, a plucky little survivor in the shadow of the concrete monolith, trying to be heard above traffic's roar.

A fenced off and graffit-strewn area is the most common item of village mythology. Arise and march on to victory or the local on the corner. The official enquiry is still going on.

A ghost used to be seen here, legend has it that he was a wizard or a tramp, maybe the disputed site of a church, a mighty tower reaching to the sun and a road where lorries could race across the aimless landscape beneath. Over two miles of elevated motorway, sliproad crossing the railway, two stubs on the north side built for connection to the planned line of an imaginary route.

Strange creatures inhabit this underworld, bodies buried in the motorway walk the streets and tell stories, sing songs, and a local tradition has grown up. Ask anyone who knows, they'll tell.

Attempts have been made to regenerate once-abandoned land, to brighten up the front cover of the official report. The future requires substantial demolition, but there will be no compensation.
A WINDSCREEN ON TO THE WORLD

The dank chambers of an underground resting place for London’s dead might not look it, but
this flyover was built out of a respect, a way of escaping the unkempt, swampy cemeteries
that were overloaded with bodies from the cholera outbreak. The roads are rarely open to
the public, save for occasional tours. Remember, it’s an arterial route, not an old railway
line.

There are uncorroborated whisperings of a skeleton fully dressed in 1960s finery, with one
of the road’s spurs named after him and some of his weapons. The locals will tell you that.
His ghost can supposedly be seen wandering the tarmac. Other dead dwellers include a
shared love interest and the ghost of an unidentified lady wearing white.

Bottled human foetuses, preserved monkey heads and misshapen skeletons are some of the
creepy specimens collected for ergonomic research – and all are on display here, or will be
when the road re-opens. If deformed bodies and organs don’t scare you, then electric lights,
hydraulic lifts and air conditioning still pulls fans in from around the world. The A40(M) is the
hub of all activity.

Other ghosts have been seen roaming the Western Avenue extension. It might look pleasant
enough, but Westway is a 2.5 mile scar with a horrific history. The elevated section connects
the mutilated body of a society beauty – limbs strewn under the flyover at ground level –
with displays of old surgical equipment, marble heads and dusty documents. The real
attraction here though is two giant murals by an artist, just above a forgotten slip road.
Apparently, he was so pissed off about the planning he painted these faded stories for free.

You might not be able to hear over the sound of traffic, but a little girl has been reported to
weep, slam doors and run along the fast lane, overtaking drivers as they travel. Since the mid
1970s locals have complained about a brilliant orange light emanating from the concrete
freeway system. It is enough to give you chills if you find yourself in the aftermath of punk,
accompanied only by the echoing footsteps of London and the drip-drip-drip of a leaky sky.

What a great collection of semi-deserted open spaces! Abandoned railway land around the
Westway now promotes raw urban ambience but Portobello is lush with vivid greenery
although there is still something unsettling about wandering along overgrown cuttings to
urban development sites rich in graffiti. It’s a little on the haunted side: bleak winter nights
in November, London leaps off the balcony of the modern city to find a temporary home out
beyond Paddington. Westway marked the beginning of the end.
UNDERNEATH

At the end of things, death of course, and underneath the shake of the traffic and leftover violence, racist abuse and things no-one would say out loud written on the wall, offering new perspectives on how to navigate the surface of the city, teaching us what people really think, why they won't look us in the eye. This is not abstraction, is not human perception, is hatred, cultural war. Properties of light do not spill down the steps or ramps, the surveillance cameras are bust. Everything's slightly blurry, exaggerates the visual sensitivity of sore eyes after a full day's work. The city is not blank or flat: paint and pencil, rain and weather, mark and maim, move on to elsewhere. Is all physiological, all contours and edges, more than sum of parts.

Eye always looks for boundaries, you are pushing yours. Where to discover next? What can you say to inflame situation that can be passed off as a joke? Text and image, symbols and signs: make a mark, move on. Violence and passion, desire and fear of everything you're not. Bitten nails, dirty jeans, tattoos on your knuckles and a future you forgot. But is not just clichés like you, is parents, teachers, friends you might think better of. All want us to go home. We shan't. Will stand all night until time comes to the rescue, have no other home but here. Will walk nine times round the open fire, then lay my head on the turf. There are both women and men among us, we are a living company and will be here as long as it takes us to die.

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