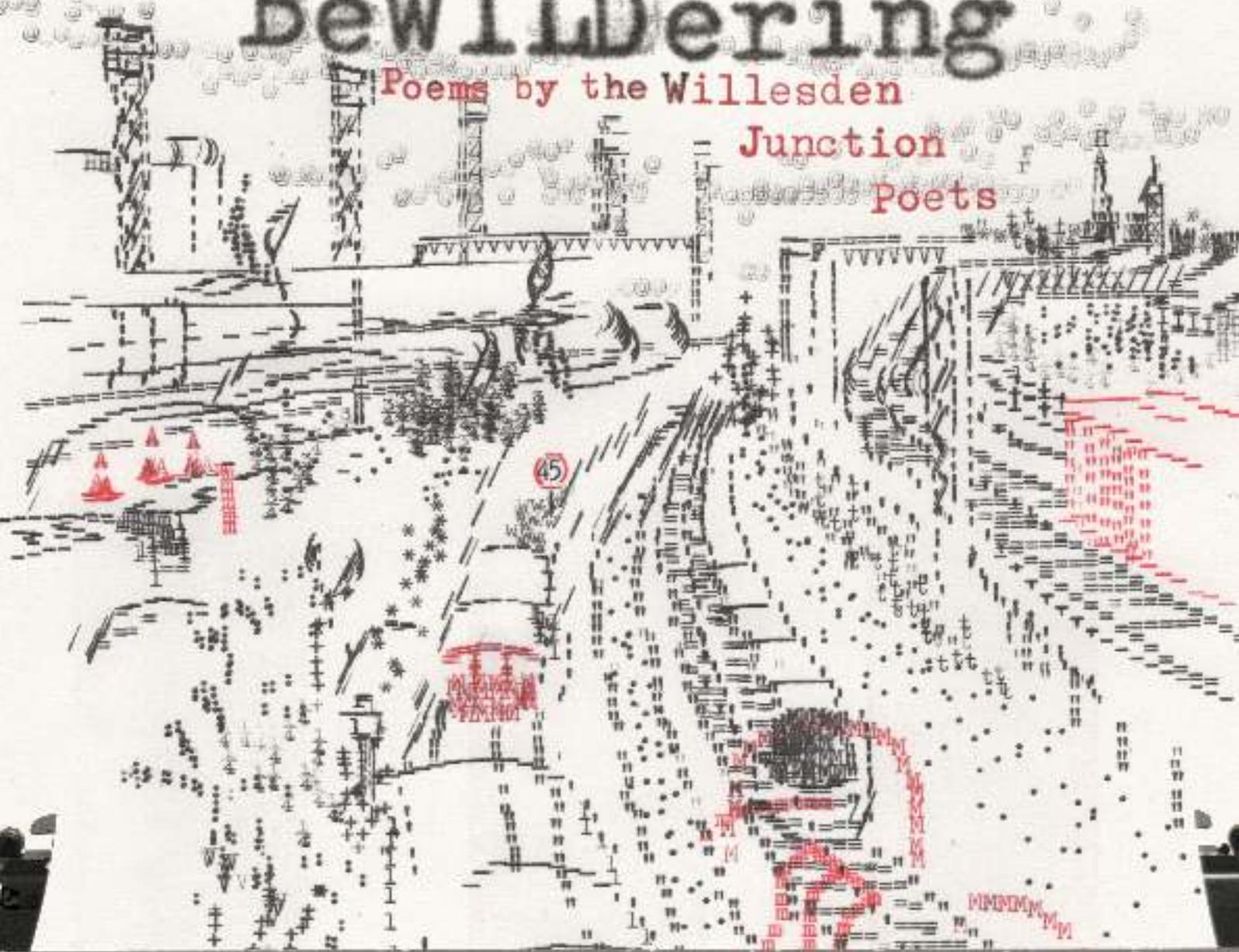


BewILDering

Poems by the Willesden

Junction

Poets



Illustrations by "Keira" Rathbone

BeWILDering

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*Something happens when you see
Willesden Junction stretching out in front of you.*

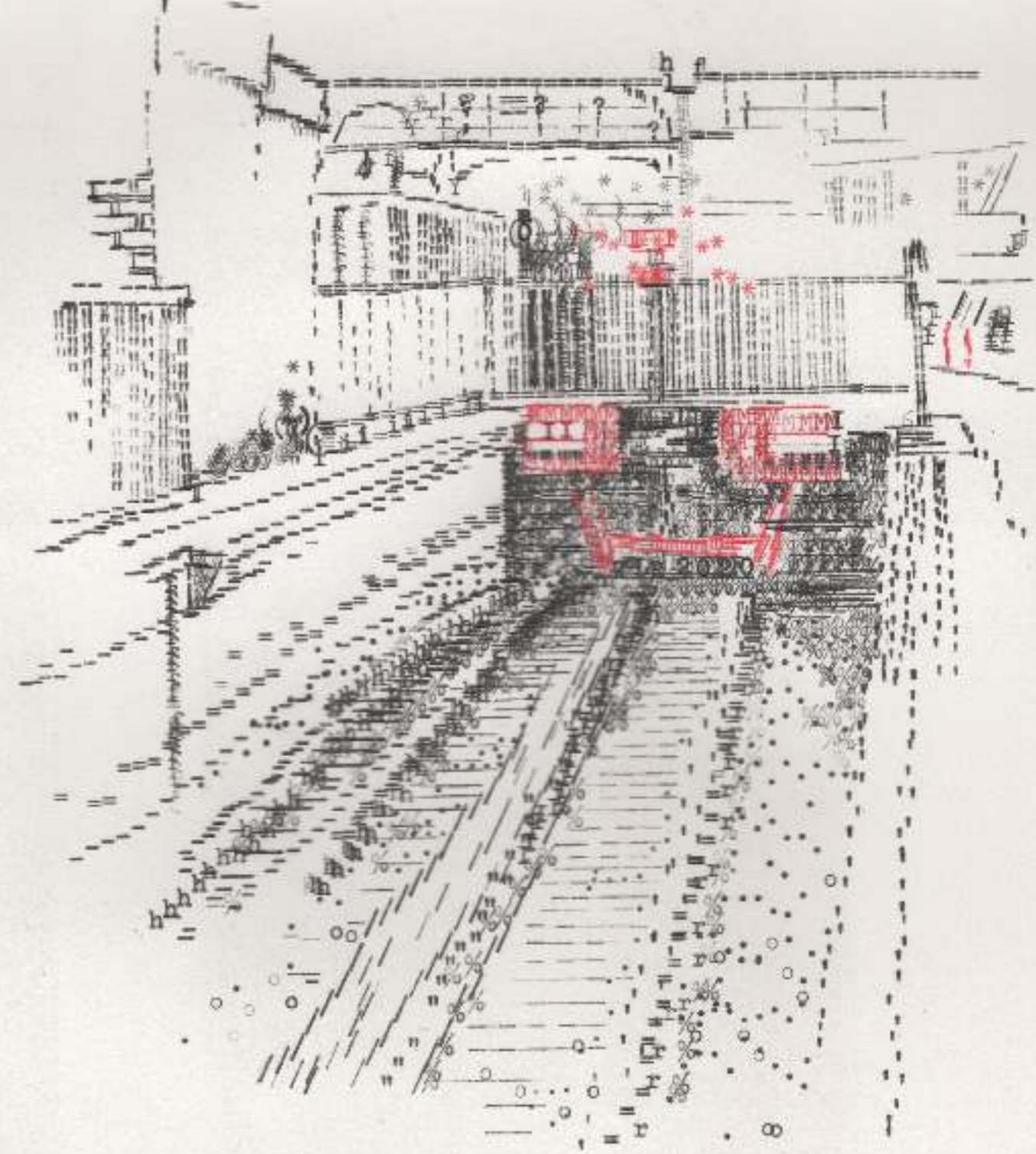
Artist Leon Kossoff who painted and drew here many times during the 60s and 70s.

*Lines joining, separating, receding, the colour of
the stringy ribs of a cut stick of rhubarb placed side-by-side spreading
to the horizon where they stewed.*

Critic John Berger who visited WJ in the 1950s on his way to teach art in Richmond.

*The station was very complex with two sets of
high-level platforms which were quite separate from each other.
With its labyrinth of entrances and passages, the station was given the
nickname Bewildering Junction or The Wilderness.*

disusedstations.org.uk on the early years of the station in the late 1800s.



PREFACE

My relationship with Willesden Junction changed in 2011 when I made *Dance Willesden Junction* – a film where a group of us danced wearing red in different locations within the station – and asked the question – can the bleak be beautiful? We discovered that this industrial location could indeed be ecstatic when we interacted with it in movement.

When I heard that Brent had won the bid to become the London Borough of Culture 2020, I immediately imagined exploring the crannies and nooks of Willesden Junction in more depth through words and art. Through poems and typics as it turned out. And creating a book, which would be filled with our discoveries. This station holds and hides so much.

Willesden Junction doesn't have a great reputation. Women are scared of the long wire walkway and often avoid it. There are rats. There is rubbish. But it is also under-appreciated – it is a powerful place of connection, there is the underground, the overland, the main lines, the freight trains, the slow trains, the fast trains. Then the tunnels, bridges, tracks, wild flowers, curious objects and the staff.

Willesden Junction Station – it opened in 1866 – is the reason that Harlesden burgeoned forth. And changed from farmland with a village and several pubs.

I heard in November 2019, that I had been awarded a grant by Brent 2020 Culture Fund and by January 2020, I started to gather poets in. They came through an article in the Kilburn Times, through FB groups and word of mouth. I met them for tea and we talked poems and WJ. Iman Hamid, Ian McLachlan, Nick Moss, Dwight Okeke, Andrea Queens, Karen Rydings, Sue Saunders, Elizabeth Uter and me – what a great group we are.

I'd also heard about typewriter artist, Keira Rathbone who makes images with the keys of old typewriters. It's a mysterious, compelling process. I am delighted with her accompanying typictions. Our visits to the station contained their own wonderment. We peered over high walls and were dazzled by the enormity of these horizons and felt the throbbing heart of WJ which happens to be round the back near a dank tunnel and a narrow steel bridge! An intersection of rails, trains and fences. Not to mention the howling wind and the water pump.

Our aim as poets was to unravel, re-frame and celebrate Willesden Junction through all of our very different perspectives. During the last four months – of course Covid 19 intervened – we wandered with our eyes deliberately innocent, we observed the detritus but we also uncovered and fell in love with unlikely gems.

We paid a night visit in drizzly March which felt like being in an Edward Hopper painting; we were accompanied by *Disappearing Worm Wood* director, Tereza Stehlikova who sees this landscape as an enchanted land; we had a revealing walk with botanist, John Wells where we identified forty different sorts of plants including the bristly ox tongue and mugwort; railway expert Ian Bull confused us with all sorts of architectural information as well as a quote from William Morris warning his daughter about the deliberate arrangement of the station to cause the missing of trains; and finally local resident, Michael Woods startled us with his knowledge of freight trains and their contents.

Here are nine of our poems. We have written many more.

Rose Rouse July 2020

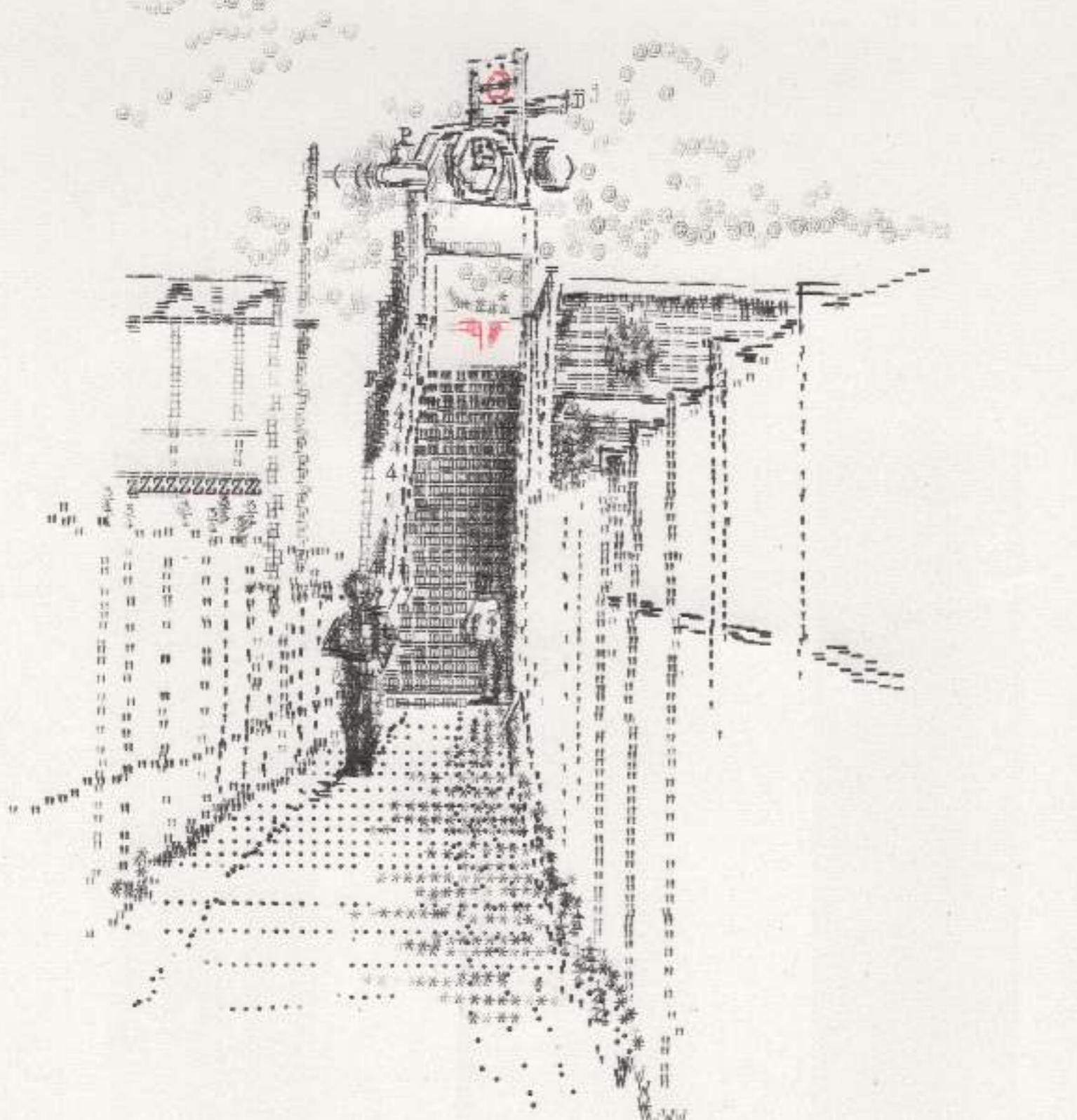
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How Many Feet?

My feet are held back on the track-like turf of a 266,
this bus my starting block as the doors swish open.
I'm up and out without whistle or bell,
racing to the Willesden Junction Station.
So many steps dancing, and twirling with more feet
falling to the tune of a gritty walkway that leads to
regions of transition, zones of convergence.
I swipe the oyster to open and close
a world of barriers in a landscape of transit.
Always in a hurry to reach before the quarter,
if I miss this, the next arrives fifteen minutes on,
bringing me to a place of late, wherever I need to be.

So many people like waters meeting,
on a tide of tubes opening and closing.
Commuters – dozy wasps – once vocal now
confused in the stiff Spring air, one, two, three
are losing their way as options branch before them.
The salt white platform is ground under walkers' heels,
a song of London feet that in a lifetime have paced
an age without end, the scuff marks on my shoes whisper,
'Five and a half miles of interchange.'
Every hour a winter for the lonely, drifting souls
who travel the line to do a day's work in
an on-the-go city that never dreams, can never sleep.

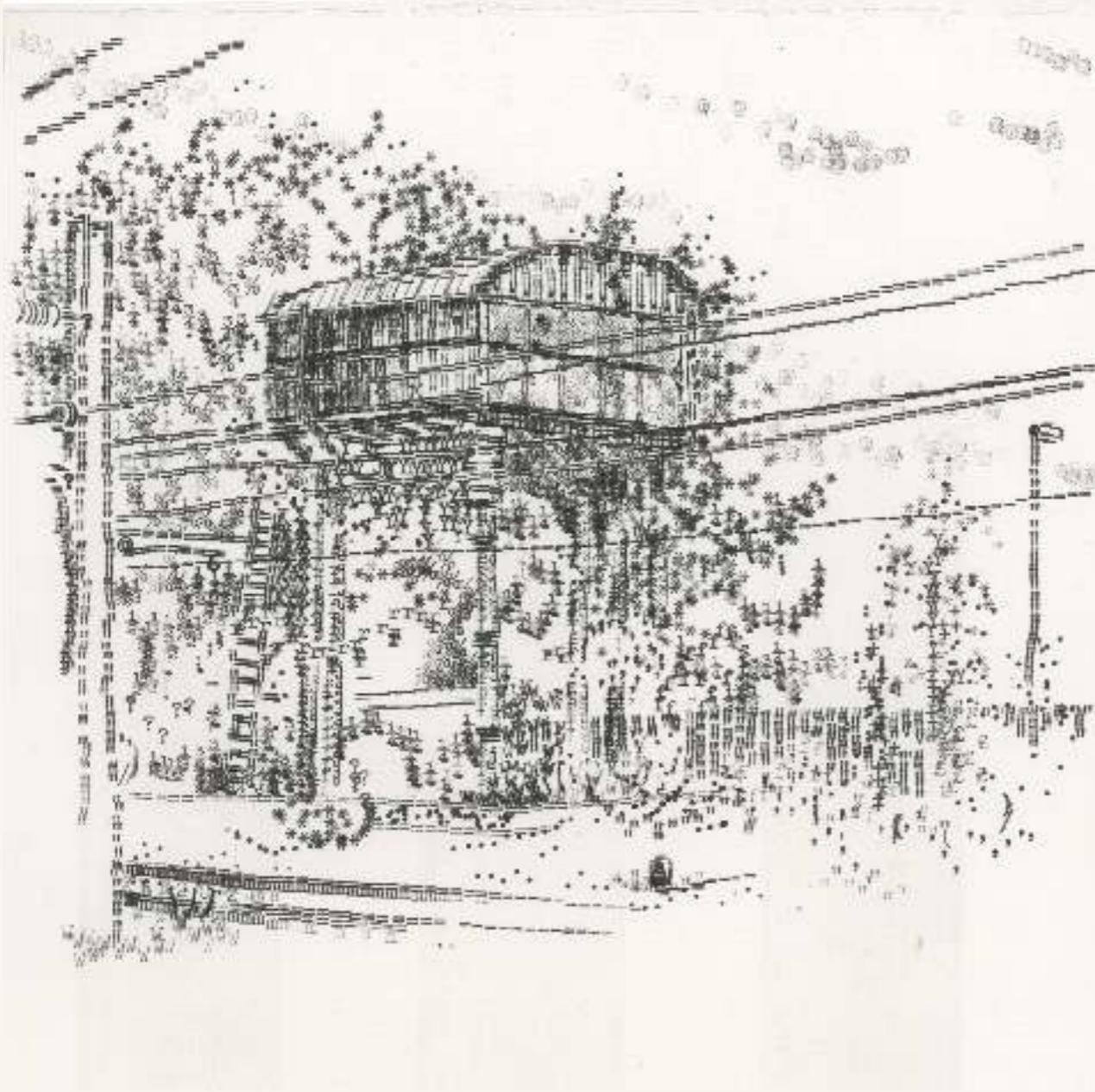


The Building on Stilts

With your knobby steel joints,
you are an alien,
up in the air –
above the red brick transformer building,
below the derelict arts and crafts wonder,
near the Harrow Road exit.

You lurch forward,
past Nichola begging and lost in a book,
along the wire walkway from hell,
past piles of gritty ballast,
loomy grey towers nearby,
stop; stupefied by the wild cherry trees.

That creamy, ethereal blossom,
you breathe in their prunus perfume,
a bounty from the railway gods.
Your cladded upper body
is where water was once stored,
before becoming steam.





SUE SAUNDERS

Closely Observed Pigeons

The pigeons of Willesden Junction Station
Fill me with a strange elation –
Like that now-dishonoured man,
I can't fly, but believe I can.

As with the ravens at the Tower,
Were they to leave, we'd rue the hour –
All the great good luck of North West Ten
Might nevermore return again...

Wembley would crumble, the Welsh Harp flood,
And Kensal Green run red with blood!
Praise be unto these peaceful pigeons,
Who rub along without religions –

It seems to me they co-exist
Practically purely Communist.
So what makes them flock, and anoint with unction
This particular railway junction?

Is it the crumbs from old Puccino's?
The answer is that nobody knows.
Boarding the great 220 bus,
I'm simply glad that they chose us.

Should anybody wonder why,
You could say I identify –
They symbolise what I would be –
Not very rich, but really free.

STOP

Don't matter if it's the Love Train, the Zion train, a downbound train
 a lonesome train, or the last train to Skaville
 someone still had to lay these rails
 someone still has to walk these lines and fix these tracks.

Men and women from Spanish Town, Coleraine and Krakow
 checking points, clearing rainfall dross
 and trackside scree.

In orange hi-vis, watchful teams
 shadow the steps of those
 from Malahide, Gateshead and Mo'Bay
 who dug out cuttings, laid down ballast,
 gave sweat and skin and working years,
 hauled sleepers and slabs
 to carry the weight of our dreams
 of speed of escape,
 and carved out the juncture
 between our heres and theres
 our goodbyes and new beginnings.

Grafting, digging, welding,
 from Freightliner yards
 through to Euston, Kew and Stratford.
 Guards, ticket sellers, engineers
 platform staff and signallers.
 All guarantors of momentum
 and of safety over profit,
 whose work that
 keeps the wheels on track
 can also
 make them
 stop.

Legend

Legend has it
 if you jump
 two feet
 onto a train at Willesden Junction Station
 all will be revealed.

You will dissolve
 through the floor,
 where ancient foxes dance to reggae-samba,
 while drinking Guinness from goblets made of scrap metal.

Metal only found at the bottom of the canal,
 so deep down that the water is blue and pockets of air allow birds to birth new songs
 from melodies of future migration.

Fable whispers –
 You will never return the same.
 After climbing the stairs to nowhere adorned in spiked skirts,
 return by pirate ship and parachute,
 run down the belly of the wind above florescent graffiti, arcs and angles.

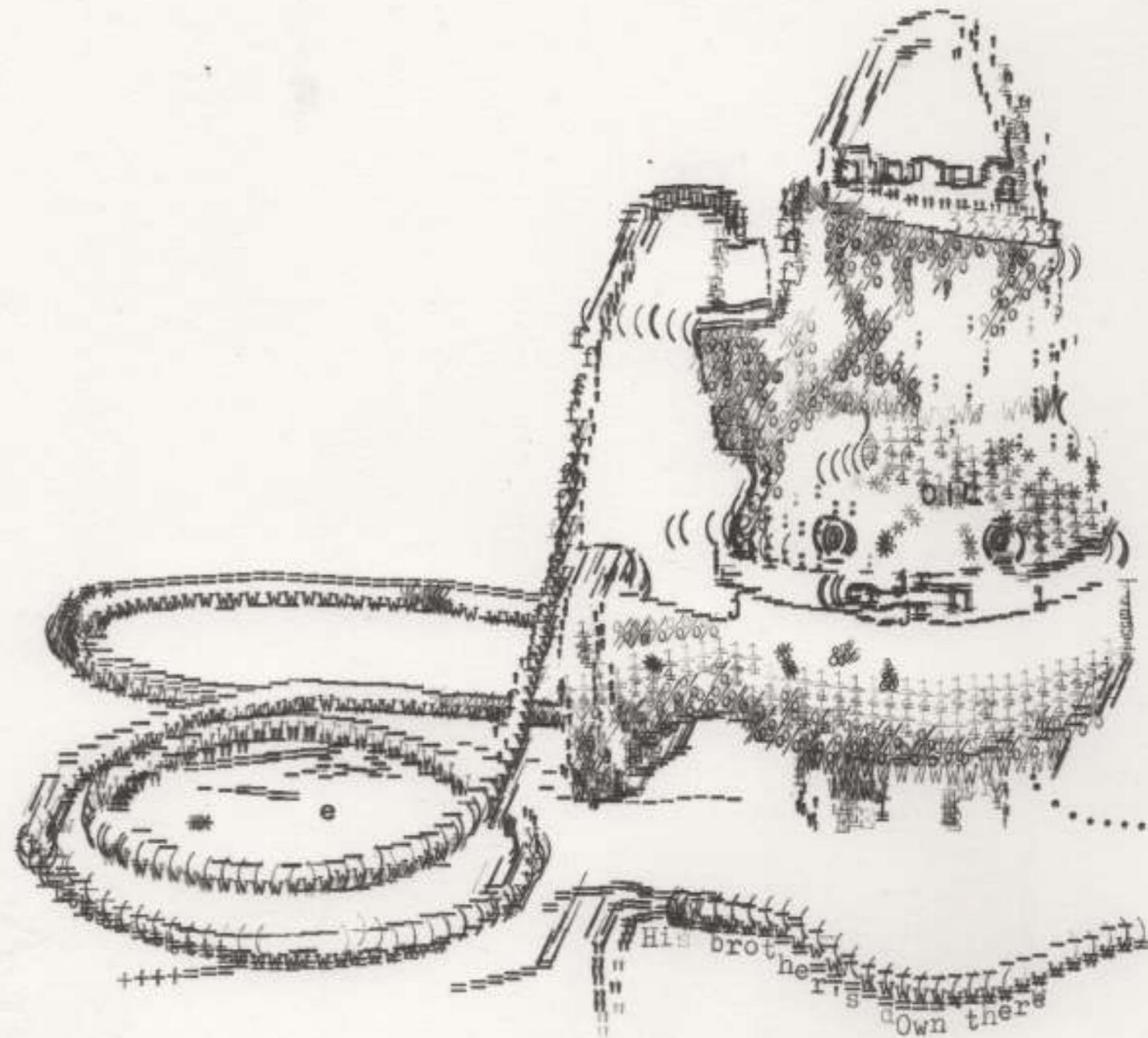
You land
 somewhere between your deepest fear and your lightest joy,
 kneel on platform 5 as these memories depart like mythical dreams.

One west bound,
 one north.

Keira Turns out he does belong here there (as we speculated suspected and speculated) ~~ax~~ and he has a 'brother' 'down there'. Not a word said about the majestic pipe with her ~~hey~~ 'come hither' stairway and mildly decorated lid. Not even a mention of her. Why.

Rose Yes we need to know ~~what~~ about this forbidden ~~relationship~~ relationship. They are made for each other.

We asked a man who turned out to be a train driver and he told us about the function of this strange metal object ~~that~~ that looks as though it belongs at the bottom of the sea...



The Time Before the Last Time

The time before the last time I see my mother she is robust
 not an old lady who has been travelling all day
 who has walked from her remote Spanish home to the airport bus
 travelled alone
 checked in
 waited
 boarded
 waited
 taken off
 snacked to pass the time
 read a bit of her book
 tensed a little during a bumpy landing
 in November grey Gatwick – North Terminal

Two trains later I meet her at Willesden Junction Station
 watch her from my car
 as she strides along the walkway
 her suitcase rolling behind
 struggling to keep up with her
 she is rushing to see me
 unaware that I can already see her from below
 both of us anticipating our few days together

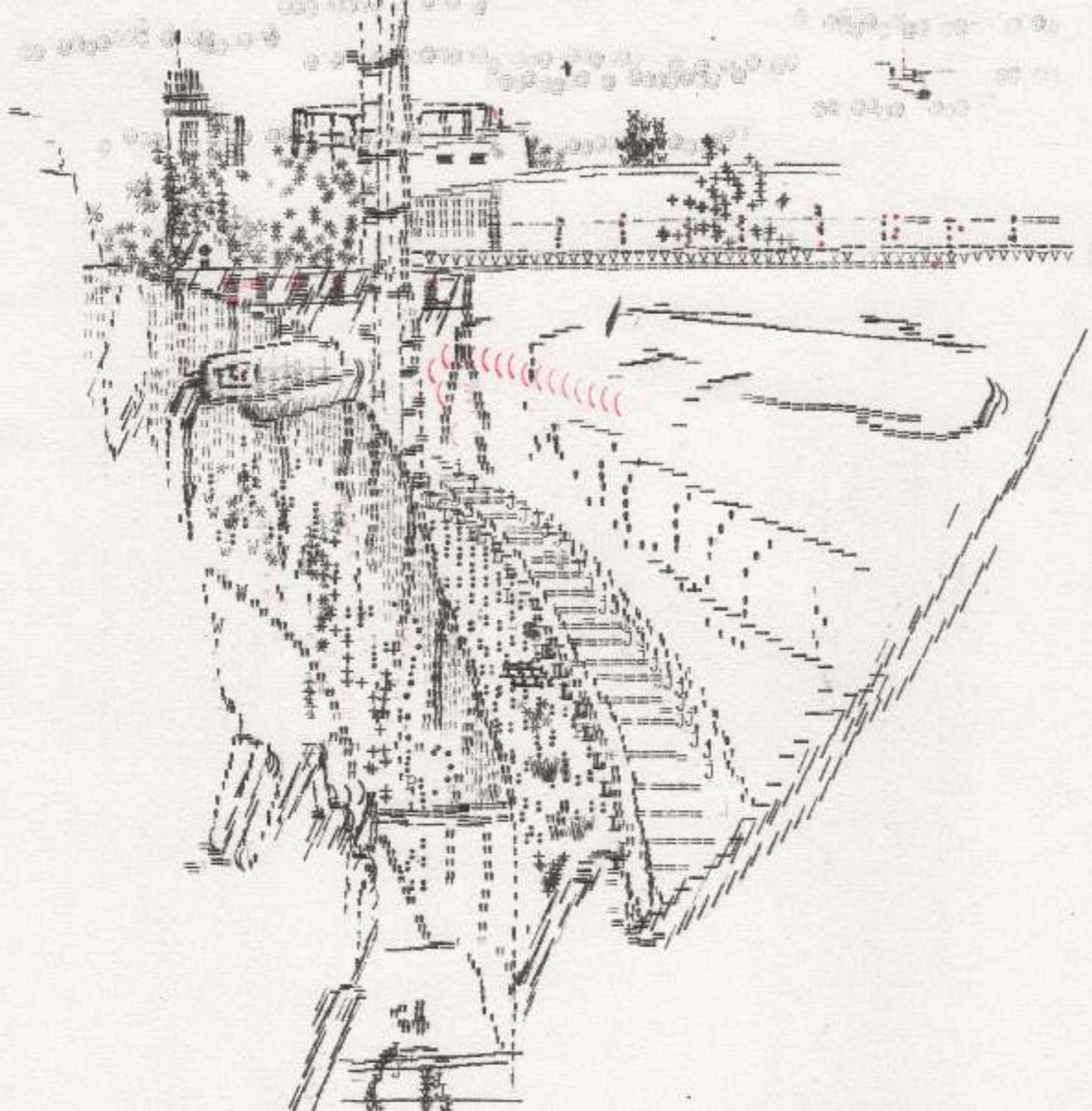
my vibrant mother – living.

On Platform 4

Beautifully, the platform welcomes every soul, it includes the one chasing tomorrow and the one who doesn't know how to handle his morning. It includes the one who knows his path and the one whose home location is not yet known. It includes the one who appreciates the very little and the one who is seeking to gain more.

The truth resides in one particular place,
 the place that has contributed to my educational journey.
 Spending time on platform 4 before departing to my seminar and lectures was strengthening and has made me search for more.

When I had time, I would walk beside the Grand Union Canal,
 I would walk for peace and inspiration,
 &
 at the end find surprises beyond expectations.
 Some shade, swans, small boats, rain and sun, all make up
 the station.



DWIGHT OKEKE

The Junction

The junction

Where worlds collide just to the side of centre stage
Where stage left isn't for the performer
Where nothing is performed

The junction

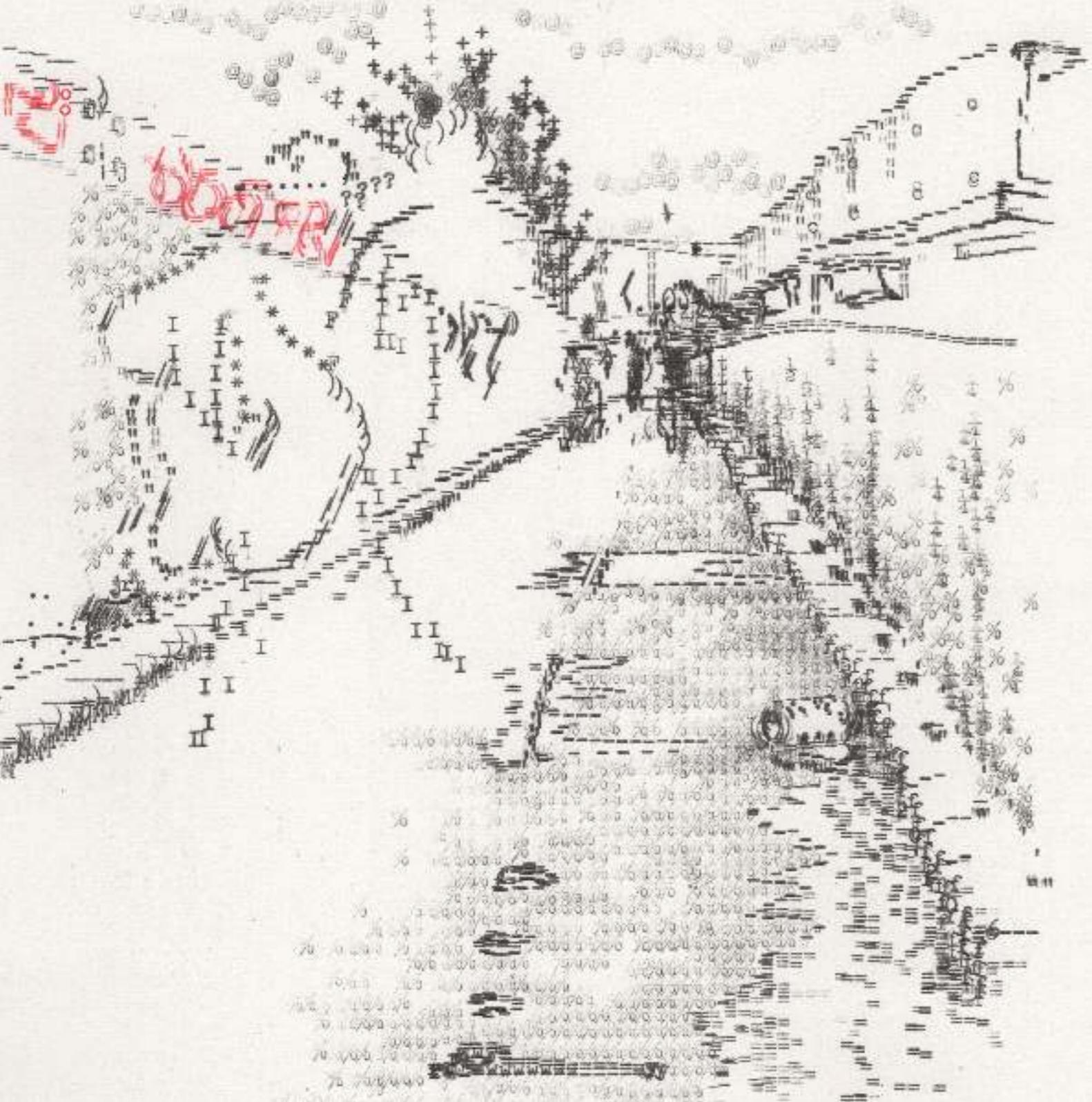
Juxtaposition in the first place, I'm sure this intersection thinks of itself in the third person
When it ponders its river boats and its industry
Trains track the flight patterns of a species obsessed with all concepts of itself

The junction

Where there's a platform to get you anywhere, and another to get you nowhere at all
A place that is nothing at all
Uncharted, not on maps
No cranes erecting new flats
It's a hard one to ponder
A junction for two roads, five platforms and a river,
A stream of dreams not dreamt yet
Perfectly still, the ink before its quill

The junction

Nine parts platform and three quarters magic
The junction



IAN MCLACHLAN

Changeling

Down the jailed path,
down the passage by the train tracks,
drizzle, the buzz of power lines,
the lone red lights of cranes
and the blue lights
that helmet streetlamps,
and the white searchlights
on the stripped horizon.

Down the purgatorial path
weeds twitch, a dumped Corona can,
cover your head with a cap,
a black cat slinks by the tracks,
snub-nosed and pointed ears,
cover your head with a cap or
they'll shear off your curly locks
and file down your –

Under the white searchlights
capped with garland, a crown
of leaves and berries, spring
concrete steps, a hunched
commuter looks up,
unshod
you caper on the platform,
the chill glint of horns.



Iman Hamid

Iman Hamid is the author of two poetry books Tears and Tea and Tune of the Heart. She is the founder of Enhance Online where she helps guide other aspiring writers to become established writers. In 2018 she won Pride of Brent Award for her role in helping Syrian refugees through Brent Community Law Centre.



Ian McLachlan

Ian McLachlan has had more than fifty poems published in journals, magazines and anthologies. His pamphlet Confronting the Danger of Art was exhibited in the Treasures Gallery at The British Library. Last year he featured at Extinction Rebellion's North London Uprising Festival and Tanthem's La Nuit de l'Art. Instagram/Twitter: @ianjmlachlan



Andrea Queens

Andrea Queens' poetry often works live in a spoken word format and theatre settings. Andrea has performed and written for various arts companies and artists internationally including poetry organisation Apples and Snakes, Gerrard Martin Dance, Uchenna Dance, and her own theatre productions. Andrea is also the founder and executive director of AQ Arts London who provide and champion performing arts, culture and wellbeing in West London.



Dwight Okeke

Just-Ori is a rhythm poet from Northwest-London currently living south of the Thames. For the most part, he writes about trauma, his mental health and his love life. He almost entirely only writes about himself – it's rare for him to speak on something that doesn't directly concern him. If he speaks it, he's lived it. He's performed all over London: at open mic nights, galleries, the Barbican etc.



Elizabeth Uter

Elizabeth won the 2018 Poem for Slough Competition. She's taught poetry workshops for Farrago Poetry, read her work at the Queen's Park Literary Festival, 2019 and from the end of August 2020 will present 'The Word Warrior Radio Show,' fortnightly on Chalkhill Community Radio (CCR): <http://www.chalkhillcommunityradio.com/radio-station/>. She is published in Bollocks To Brexit Poetry Anthology, Reach and Sarasvati Poetry Magazines.



Rose Rouse

Rose Rouse is an editor, poet and journalist. Her pamphlet Tantric Goddess was published by Eyewear in 2017. The book Wild Land which contains ten of her poems and is illustrated by ten paintings by her partner, Asanga Judge, came out in 2019. She founded the Willesden Junction Poets.



Sue Saunders

Sue Saunders loves taking trains as long as nobody tries to hurry her. Feeling strongly that it is the journey, not the getting there, that matters, she has spent most of her life writing a rather long children's novel, and is now happily using the remainder to finish the illustrations.



Karen Rydings

Karen Rydings is a middle-aged woman – slave to the NHS and her four adult children. She has lived for decades in NW London. She has been writing poetry for about 15 years, and gets so much pleasure from the network of poets she has met along the way.



Nick Moss

Nick Moss is an ex-prisoner who began writing poetry as a way of mapping his experiences in jail. He won a Koestler award for his chapbook *The Skeleton Choir Singing*, as well as a May Turnbull Scholarship. His first collection will be published by Smokestack Books in 2021.



Keira Rathbone

London-based artist Keira Rathbone has created unique typewriter art since 2003. She moves the paper around the platen whilst fluidly selecting and tapping characters with a choice and sensitivity that reflects the subject she is observing. Keira is just as interested in catching the fleeting sights as the more permanent elements of the landscape. The characters fight for their place on the paper, a cacophony of characters describe a scene.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks so much to the London Borough of Culture Brent 2020 team who have been warm, supportive and friendly throughout this process. Special thanks to Caren Owen, Titania Altius, Dhiyandra Natalegawa and Lois Stonock.

Thanks to the eight poets for their commitment and unfailing enthusiasm. During lockdown, we had monthly Zoom sessions where we put our poems under a critical microscope. Thanks for all your willingness and kindness.

Thanks to poet, Ian McLachlan for casting his eye over the final contents.

Thanks to the staff at Willesden Junction for their passionate responses to our sudden appearances at the station declaring that we were poets.

Thanks finally to my son, Marlon Rouse Tavares for filming our peripatetic performance.

