

# THE STREET



**DOTT.SSA SAINSBURY**

# **COURSE SUMMARY**

## **1. STREET ART AND GRAFFITI**

History, aims, techniques, important figures, relationship with mainstream art and advertising,

Describing and discussing images.

**Task: describing an image seen in the street**

## **2. INTERVIEWING ARTISTS**

Reading example interviews

New York in 1970's

Acting out interviews

**Task: writing or recording an interview**

## **3. SUBVERTISING AND CONCEPTUAL TEXT-BASED MAINSTREAM ARTISTS**

Subvertising

Jennifer Holzer — Truisms and Inflammatory Essays

Barbara Kruger

**Group work: writing and reading aloud an inflammatory essay**

## **4. LIVING ON THE STREET**

Stereotypes and the Homeless

Publications: The Big Issue and Fuori Binario

## **5. POETRY ON THE STREET**

Poetry on the Underground

M.E.P.

**Task: Translating and presenting a poem**

# **SECTION 1**

# **STREET ART AND GRAFFITI**

# GRAFFITI WRITING

v

# STREET ART

TAGGING STICKER BOMBING

illegal

anonymous

reclaiming the streets

anti-modernist

anti-elitist

anti-capitalist

ambivalent relationship with advertising

ambivalent relationship with museum and gallery

links with mainstream art world

aggressive/destructive/territorial

standardised international style/ hip-hop

elitist/codified/indecipherable

text-based/cartoon influence

spray paint/marker pens

throw ups/wildstyle/pieces/crews

political but less rebellious

local

populist

image-based

acrylic paint/rollers

murales/3-D/ L.E.D

stickers/stencils/flyposts

## IMAGES

### 1. Tagging



### 2. Gang graffiti — crossing out, cancelling



### 2. Sticker bombing and fly-posting



Obey



Clet

3. Throw-ups — large 2-colour tag, 3-D, bubble letters



Amaze — Barry McGee

4. Wild Style throw-ups — very complex, intricate tags with overlapping, interwoven letters, often more than 2 colours, sense of dynamism, 'exploding' tags.



5. Train Pieces Lee early 1980's photographed by Henry Chalfant



6. Stencils



Blek le rat



Banksy

## 7. Letter stenciling



John Fekner

## 8. Murales



Blu

### 9. Abstract decorative graffiti



Zeção



### 10. 3D street sculpture



'The Kiss' Darius and Downey



Clet

## Useful vocabulary and expressions for describing images

There is some lettering/writing saying . . . . .

There are some words/letters which read . . . . .

The words . . . . . are written/printed/stencilled/painted/sprayed

### **Positions**

*at* the bottom/top                      *across* the bottom/top

(horizontally) *across* the centre      (vertically) *down* the centre

*down* the right/left side              *running* from top to bottom/from left to right      *running* diagonally *across*

*in* the bottom left-hand corner/*in* the top right-hand corner

*in* the foreground/*in* the background/*in* the middle ground

### **Texture/Definition**

flat areas/fields of colour      textured/broken surface      dotted/striped/striated surface

with vertical/horizontal/diagonal/zigzag/dotted . . . lines/stripes/marks

clearly defined/clear-cut/finely detailed/      V      loose/sketchy/fuzzy/blurred/rough . . . marks/lines/areas

with strong chiaroscuro/with shading/with a strong 3-d effect

simplified/stylised/linear      naturalistic/photographic/hyper-realistic

distorted/warped/disturbing/surreal . . . perspective or proportions

### **Colour**

soft/muted/pastel/pale/subtle      V      strong/bright/gaudy/lurid

primary/complementary

### **Figures/Contrasts/Effects**

life-size /cartoon-like/scary/dynamic/kinetic

with a strong contrast between . . .





VIII  
*Fugitive Texts:  
Graffiti Writers*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote of "Night, the beloved. Night, when words fade and things come alive". But he was wrong. Night time buzzes with chatter. It is saturated with words and with text. Fanzine editors and club-night promoters hover outside poky taverns handing out flyers to stripy-stockinged goth girls and their boy-friends. Puffa-jacketed geezers stuff telephone booths with garishly Photoshopped cards advertising the breast sizes and educational prowess of local prostitutes. Flyposting teams armed with buckets of potato paste ride around town in white vans, hopping in and out to stick up A3 sheets about forthcoming tours by young comedians. The radio waves crackle and fizz with the sound of a thousand venomous MCs spitting and freestyling rhymes from inside high-rise council estates.

And then there are graffiti artists. They scuttle through the streets like urban foxes, textual happy slappers ready to coat the city with elaborate spirograms of colour and slang, a floetry of illegal form and content. They are, they like to think, artful dodgers, lexical prestidigitators who operate under cover of night. Space invaders, action painters, smash-and-daub pirates, invisible and tersely monikered showmen who have chosen to use the city as a canvas for their rudeboy art. They thrive on danger, regarding the hazards they face and the risks they take before they get to whip out and start spraying their cans of aerosol as a turn on, a necessary precondition of their fugitive scripting.

25 All of them are addicts. Painting – not just the product, but the adrenalin-rush they get from the process – becomes their obsession. It takes a long time to build up a portfolio and develop a reputation in the capital; they need to plug away with the same metronomic dedication as milkmen or postmen. Only a minority have steady jobs; the nocturnal hours needed to get their name up in paints means they fall into bed at almost exactly the same time that most Londoners are catching the tube or bus to work. The few who manage to bag part-time positions do so only because it helps to pay for more paints and sprays.

30 35 Graffers may like to think of themselves as shadowy lone rangers, cloak-and-dagger textualists, but their social composition, as they will readily admit, is far from heterogeneous. Almost all of them are young men who started out as disaffected teenagers pumped up full of testosterone and a need to vent their inner turbulence, hungry for the kicks or kudos they could get by playing a sophisticated version of Knock Down Ginger.

40 45 These aesthetic cherryknockers are mainly white, perhaps not least because the police tend to crack down more heavily on black teenagers out on the town at night. Many are middle-class misfits – bishops' sons, privately-educated graduates, Lloyds' microfiche operators – social autists who find in darkness a confidence and eloquence they lack in daily life.

50 **"The greatest buzz is when you've stayed up all night painting a carriage in a station that you've been staking out for ages. The security guards saw you and chased you but you managed to get away from them and hide. So you're there, hiding in a corner, totally knackered but you still really want to see your train. Then when it finally pulls in and it's got the design that you've been thinking and sweating about for weeks – that's lush."**

The *London A-Z* means little to most graffers. They create their own maps of London. They see themselves as metro-rodents, part of a slippery squad of restless voles and tunnel rats who operate according to geographies darker and craftier than those of other city dwellers. They hang around bridges, empty playgrounds, arches full of smackhead debris. They are drawn to the derelict and dingy: broken yards, battered lock-up garages, semi-deserted industrial estates – spaces where they hope to find the time and the peace to paint unhindered by the law.

Abandoned, obsolete London is their fiefdom. No part of the city is antiquarian to them. Over time they build up a vast, working knowledge of its disused train lines, secret tunnels, the catacombs below Farringdon, the shafts at Brixton. They know how to break into buildings, which doors are alarmed and which disabled, how high a drop from a window will be. They ascend higher and descend lower than other Londoners, climbing under fences, shining up pipes and stomping across rooftops with an ease that seems to ridicule the night's murky light. When they get together, as they occasionally do, they swap stories about pals who were chased by rifle-wielding vigilantes, electrocuted on live rails or had their arms ripped off by oncoming trains. They'll talk about 150-year old sewers that they managed to penetrate, the postal tunnels that M15 operate from Mount Pleasant.

Graffiti artists are speed-orientees and routefinders. They compare themselves to dyslexics who can mentally rotate the capital in 3D. "We see the city as a shape," says one, "We're always looking at it from above rather than through the dimensions in which we're walking." Theirs is a mutable cityscape, its architecture a set of conundra and challenges to be overcome. They divine ways in and out of buildings. They can gauge the weight of a drainpipe down which to slide. They know that if they cut through an alley and through someone's garden they will end up in the same place they started.

This mastery is not total:

35 "Once we were in West Hampstead trying to climb over the back of this notorious kebab shop that used to poison everyone who ever ate there. It was winter and the place was covered in frost and ice. My mate, who was quite big, walked over some wooden planks near some undergrowth. They gave way, so he fell into a septic tank full of meat cuttings and dripping oil and piss and sick. It was freezing cold too but he still couldn't scream, otherwise we'd get caught. The last time we saw him was running down the road on his own, bits of kebab falling off him."

Graffers are criminals. They wouldn't have it any other way. To legalise their work would be to delibidinalise it. They are willing to stake out a prime site for as long as two months, usually during the winter when they have more darkness to play with, giving up their weekends so that they can lurk like private cops logging the movements and tabulating the itineraries of security staff. They are stalkers, burglars casing a joint, combatants bent on storming military patrol. The language they use for their handiwork – 'bombing' involves writing your name on as many places as possible; a 'throw up' is when a long name is abbreviated – conveys the damage and messiness that they wreak.

55 Uniforms, or any costume worn for working rather than partying, help them stay undercover or invisible. Those who wear the orange coats of railway workers or the bright yellow waistcoats of street cleaners find that no one gives them a second glance. Others don helmets, balaclavas or doo-rags. A melodramatic and health-conscious few wear gas masks to stop them inhaling spray-can fumes that scald their lungs. They'll also come armed with boltcutters, washing-up gloves to protect their hands from give-away traces of paint, and polyester overalls that they ditch easily if caught.

1 Veteran graffers and taggers don't expect to get caught too often  
though. Their ears are alert to the sound of police-radio crackle or  
the distant crunch of Dr Marten'd security officers. And because  
they are, in however soft a fashion, part of the night's criminal fra- 35  
5 ternity, they don't feel like victims. They develop neutral walking  
styles exactly half-way between over-confident flexing and the  
shaky vulnerability of the drunkard or the homeless. They don't even  
care about roaring helicopters or the thousands of CCTV cameras  
festooned across the city. The former, they believe, regard them as 40  
10 small fry; the latter are very often broken or unmonitored - mere  
ventriloquist surveillance. Karaoke panoptics.

"There's a mystery to graffiti that is really appealing. It can  
challenge your visual sense. You ask yourself how did someone  
manage to get up that building to write that? There's no drain- 45  
15 pipe and no ladders that tall. It's weird. I remember seeing  
some along the Thames, on the South Bank. I thought it must  
have been written by someone standing on a boat, but then I  
found out it was actually someone hanging on a rope off the  
side of the bank. Even though it was a low tide, he was getting 50  
20 his feet wet all the time he was painting."

The micro-texts that the graf artists create are pieces of ephemeral  
street furniture that fill the areas where they are found with frag-  
mented reminders of a forgotten history of post-war pop writing: 55  
from the KBW signs scrawled by anti-immigrant bully boys and the  
chads chalked by medical students in the 1950s, through the anti-  
Vietnam and George Davis Is Innocent slogans of the 1960s and  
1970s to the pro-Ocalan or Bin Laden-exalting messages daubed  
by second-generation ideologues today.

30 The tags and throw ups, by their very existence as much as by  
their words or their obsessively rehearsed shapes, are less a dirty  
protest against modern London, and more a fierce yelp of freedom

and straight-to-hell kidult affirmation. They are part of the chatter,  
the spectrum interference, that city authorities feel obliged to  
silence. They tattoo the skin of the city; disfiguring or, according  
to the perspective of the viewer, beautifying it. They say what so  
many people who work at night would like to shout from the top of  
Telecom Tower: "I am here."

Graffiti is a kind of fingerprint. Metropolitan police officers have  
been known to turn up to the opening nights of graffiti-based  
gallery shows armed with photographs of tags in order to pin down  
the individuals behind the art. Veteran taggers don't need to resort  
to entrapment; they claim they can read off a biography from most  
walls. The height of a text betrays how tall the artist is; the slope of  
the lettering if they're left- or right-handed; the intensity of the  
spray whether the can has been tilted or held at length.

Ornate styles, those where the tops of letters have a lot of flare,  
or which effulge with star and cloud symbols, tend to be the work  
of Europeans. British tags, by contrast, are normally more blunt,  
less affected: the can is neither pulled back or pushed forward -  
merely held straight to the wall. London tags are noted for their  
rawness: almost always simple motifs and on the small side, they  
are often in black and white as those putting them up don't have  
enough time for colour. In villages or small towns, it only takes one  
or two distinctive tags to make an artist's name; in the capital,  
where competition is fiercer, there is a greater focus on quantity.  
The art veers towards branding: the shape of the letters, endlessly  
repeated across the city's buildings, is as important as the words.

60 Graffers, relentlessly combing the city looking for next surfaces  
and sites to paint, are keen students of typeface and texture. In their  
spare time they flick through specialist books and jackdaw the web  
for images drawn from Mexican wrestling masks, 1950s pulp car-  
toons, fetish zines and sixteenth-century Bavarian tombstones  
which they can recycle or recraft for their own designs. At night, when

they're not blasting the walls with paint-filled fire-extinguishers, they clock the signs and calligraphies of the city with connoisseurial eyes. They notice, even in dim light, that handpainted storefronts are disappearing, only to be replaced by corporate chains that sport logos familiar from television and newspaper ads. They notice that space previously occupied by fly posters and student xeroxes is being bought up by Clear Channel.

Graffers also know, first hand, that London is starting to feel different. Alien to the touch. Electricity boxes used to be green and smooth; now they're stony and spiky to stop them being defaced with marker-pen insignia or stickers. Anyone who brushes against them ends up as grazed and scratched as if they'd just emerged from a playground fight. Other public surfaces have tough vinyl coatings, with the steel designed so that any illegal paint can be easily blasted off.

Some taggers see themselves as playing a cat-and-mouse game with the law and are excited by the challenge of having to hatch new ruses to counteract the emulsifying strategies of local councils. Others view such crackdowns as creative straitjacketing, burgher-pleasing three-line whips designed to snuff out anything messy, random or spontaneous within the city. "All the local authorities have anti-graf squads now," complains one. "Plus they're spending quids on fat forty-year-olds in Japanese vans with high-pressure hoses to rid the streets of chewing gum. Everything is getting cleaned up and buffed out. It's just a different version of them tagging all these young kids and sticking ASBOs on them."

Graffers, whether they like it or not, are part of the urban grime economy, enemies of order. Their art is deemed a fist of defiance. They themselves see, night after night, how the forces of beige-ness are encroaching on the spaces that they used to encroach upon. The warehouses and abandoned shops they lacquered with colour are being razed and reconstructed anew. Empty, weeded sites are being filled in. Dark streets are better lit since well-connected newcomers to formerly tough areas hassle their councillors about improving local safety. Graffers, struggling to lurk in the city's disappearing shadows, know that their art is migrating to glassy surfaces and onto the web. They also write in the knowledge that the

Olympics will soon obliterate their texts: the Games' organisers, keen to ensure that tourists clap eyes on a gleaming, yacht-white capital, have pushed through zero-tolerance policies that means graffiti disappears within 24 hours of going up.

"Once we were on this rooftop near Hoxton doing a painting job. Then all of a sudden this woman who lived over some shops stuck her head out of a window right by us and started shouting: 'I know what you're doing.' We thought she was going to tell the police and were ducking down. Then she said, 'Don't worry. It's cool. But the tiling's not safe. When you finish just come and knock on my window and I'll let you out of the door.' We were a bit surprised..."

Graffers create liquid architecture, temporary graphic structures that, no matter how much graft or guile has gone into their production, may vanish within hours. Their self-proclaimed works of vandalism may in turn be vandalised by other street-artists playing at one-upmanship. They try to insulate themselves from regret by taking snaps of their work, leaving home in the evening with fresh reels of film in case they get caught by the police who use old pictures of them larking about with their crews to track down and prosecute their friends. A painting is never really complete until it has been shot and entered into the artist's noctographic portfolio.

Some parts of London, however, are cleaned less rather than more often. Artists talk in hushed, reverential tones about a tunnel from Moorgate to Farringdon that contains a huge archive of metropolitan night texts from the last twenty years. Sunlight, even more rain, destroys wall markings; darkness freeze-frames and preserves them perfectly. Wipe away the dust, point a torch at the tunnel wall, and there, for anyone hardy enough to smuggle themselves into this subterranean gallery, are markings and tags written in styles dating back to the dawn of London's urban graffiti scene. They are as thrilling for the graf artist to unearth and behold as prehistoric cave drawings might be to a historian. In the ephemeral world of night writing, these B-Boy calligraphies are almost Palaeolithic.

Walls have appetites. They soak up text, draining it of colour and definition. But this process can take many years. Artists talk of ghost walls on which the outlines of old shapes and designs can just

about be discerned. These are rebukes to the aggressive, now-fixated amnesia of some night writers. They also offer the opportunity of applying one layer of text onto another, of creating a tacit dialogue between past and present, a graffiti palimpsest.

5 "Sometimes you get a shock when you see homeless people in tunnels. But they're scared of us as much as we are of them. Mostly it's workers you see at night. If they don't turn their dogs on you, they'll give you a cup of tea and talk about the old days: 'When I was your age we'd be throwing stones through windows'. Then when you tell them you have to go, they'll say, 'By 70 the way, mind you stay off the rail,' or 'Carry on a hundred yards after that corner, and there's a big bridge you'd like.'"

Graffers are so used to being labelled vandals that they learn to embrace the tag. They revel in the fact that those outside their circle 75 think of their painting as vomit, artistic flytipping. But they're far from blind to the beauty of what they do or of the city on which it is displayed. Summer, though it allows them less hours to paint, is when they go to work in shirts and shorts. They'll carry 4-metre long rollers that they lug up to the roofs of tower blocks and then 20 lean over the side and write their aliases upside down. The fumes stink and soon they feel the twinge of tendonitis.

Finally, just as dawn is breaking through, the job is completed. Their feet still dangling over the edge, they'll reach into their rucksacks for a can of beer or light a joint. They feel a woozy tranquillity 25 and a pride at accomplishing their latest mission. The sun begins to come over London and gently lights up St Paul's, the Gherkin, the Nat West Tower. Below them are the infinite streets and back walls which, as tongue-tied, acne'd teenagers many years before, they started painting to make the girls at school like them. Now, just for 30 a second or two, the city feels all theirs. They smile and nod at this thought. "Nice," they say.

## **SECTION 2**

# **INTERVIEWING ARTISTS**

## Fragments

Interviews conducted by Cedar Lewisham with Lady Pink, Henry Chalfant, Mode 2 and Martha Cooper taken from *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, Cedar Lewisohn, Henry Chalfant. 2008, Tate Publishing

*These interviews are also important to give you information about the development of graffiti art in N.Y in the 70's and 80's.*



Lady Pink photographed by Martha Cooper

**Cedar Lewisham:** *From 1975 to when you started in 1979, graffiti expanded incredibly fast from just being basic tags to being this fully formed art form. Why do you think it developed so quickly?*

**Lady Pink:** Because of the competition in the different boroughs. The subway trains would travel from Brooklyn to the Bronx and people would challenge each other, not verbally or physically, but for better work, bigger work, more work. By 1976, I think they'd achieved some of the biggest and the best works that were done. So, within a  
5 very short period of time, by '76, two different groups **pulled out** ten whole cars, top to bottom, end to end — that's an entire train.



Henry Chalfant (photographer)

**Cedar Lewisham:** What do you think have been the most important factors in graffiti's development?

**Henry Chalfant:** Police repression. Hostility. The mayor and administration trying to get rid of it — and  
5 **ineptly**. That just **spurred it on** and made it even more fun.

**Cedar Lewisham:** Do you think people trying to stop it was what encouraged it?

**Henry Chalfant:** Sure, in the early years. Then, after about ten years, the **crack-down** (on subway painting) was serious enough for people to say 'It's not worth it'

**Cedar Lewisham:** 1989 is seen as the end for subway painting in New York.

10 **Henry Chalfant:** I would say '82, '83, there were really good artists **dropping out**. They'd work and work and their stuff wouldn't run or it would get **crossed out** by some **jerk**. By '89 it was basically over in New York.



**Mode 2:** Cities used to evolve around the strongest crews. So for local youngsters starting that would be their history and those would be the people they looked up to. But suddenly the fanzines were available everywhere and people could pick and choose the style they wanted. So suddenly there was no longer the evolution based on geography and cities didn't have an identifiable style anymore.

Find synonyms for the words underlined in the text above.

What were the main factors in the development of graffiti writing in NY in the 70's?

What changed in the 80's?

**Cedar Lewisham:** How would you describe the development of graffiti lettering?

**Henry Chalfont:** There was a lot of inventiveness for the first three or four years. Then an interesting thing started to take place in terms of the evolution of wild style.

10 **Cedar Lewisham:** Is Tracy 168 the inventor of wild style?

**Henry Chalfont:** Don't ask me who the inventor was!

**Cedar Lewisham:** It's a debatable issue?

15 **Henry Chalfont:** Yeah, there are several people could lay claim to wild style. I think it's significant that it developed on trains, on a moving object — that helped give it its kinetic energy. One thing about wild style is that the pieces do move. They've got directionality. It was a kind of interaction with comics and the rapidity with which it had to be done and the fact that it was done on a thing that moved.

Kase brought out a particular camouflage style, making it so complex it was hard to copy. That's another thing that influenced the evolution of graffiti style: you had to be really complex to avoid being copied easily.

**Cedar Lewisham:** Copied by who? Other writers or advertisers?

20 **Henry Chalfont:** By toys (amateurs). No one had heard of the advertisers back then. You know, writers were very jealous of their style and they gave it out in drips and drabs to friends and people that they were nurturing to become the next artist, the next master. They mentored people and they gave them the style,

and they had a certain amount of control over it. Of course when the photographers came along, they changed all that. They had it fixed and people could sit and copy it.

**Cedar Lewisham:** Lots of the graffiti writers showing in galleries in early 1980's didn't really **cross over** into the art world for long.

- 5 **Henry Chalfont:** Some did. There were people who crossed over and stayed, like Lee and Futura. Others went in opportunistically and got bored and left. They thought, 'This is dull. I'm going back to bombing.'

**Cedar Lewisham:** Do you think that's what happened or do you think it was just a **fad** that was picked up and dropped?

- 10 **Henry Chalfont:** As far as the galleries went, yeah. But as far as the writers went, most of them got bored with it anyway. Most of them went on with it until about 1984, when the Sydney Janis gallery put on a show (post Graffiti curated by Dolores Neumann)\* As you know, that was the Big Time. She'd been responsible before that for the Abstract Expressionists and the Pop artists.



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2 photos by Martha Cooper



**Cedar Lewisham:** Can you tell me about the process of making the Futura Train?

**Martha Cooper:** The Futura train was one of the later trains that I took. I had gotten interested in graffiti and wanted to take pictures of cars, especially the top to bottom whole cars in the context of the Bronx.

5

**Cedar Lewisham:** How did you know the pieces were running?

**Martha Cooper:** The kids would call and tell me. And they would tell me which side it was running on.

**Cedar Lewisham:** How long would you normally spend, waiting to get these images?

**Martha Cooper:** That would depend. Say I heard there was a freshly painted car and I would go to the Bronx at seven in the morning to my predetermined spot. It might come by immediately or it could take five hours.

10

**Cedar Lewisham:** How did you gain access to the scene?

**Martha Cooper:** My entrée into the community of graffiti writers was based on my skill as a photographer. The kids had always tried to take photos of their trains but they did not have the professional camera equipment. But the pictures are what they showed round to their friends. The pictures were the evidence. I was able **to tap into** the fact that they wanted pictures.

15

**Cedar Lewisham:** The photos are now some of the main documents showing that this movement ever happened. Was the ephemeral nature of what you were photographing an important motivation?

**Martha Cooper:** I was always aware that then photos would last longer than the pieces. If the pictures weren't available, would a lot of what has happened now have happened? Kids all over the world were able to study what these pieces looked like.

**Cedar Lewisham:** Do you see your photos as art works in themselves?

- 5 **Martha Cooper:** I'm a documentary photographer, a visual anthropologist. I would like my photos to be viewed as a collaboration between me and the writer. In the photos I was saying, let's look at the trains in the context of the environment from which many of these writers came.

Find synonyms for the words underlined in the text above.

What were the main characteristics of wild style ?

How did the photographers change things?

\*See the link below to read more about *crossing over* and gallery artists

10 ***GALLERY VIEW; ON CANVAS, YES, BUT STILL EYESORES***

By Grace Glueck

<https://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/25/arts/gallery-view-on-canvas-yes-but-still-eyesores.html>

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# A short chat with

Interview conducted by Elio Sottoscritti



No one can provide information about the world of graffiti better than a REAL writer. That's why I decided to do an interview with one of them. Obviously he doesn't reveal his real name. The only thing we are allowed to know is that he signs himself Ribes and he is part of the ADR crew. He has been tagging and bombing for many years. To understand who we are dealing with, just have a look around when you are walking round Florence... You will catch sight of his tags everywhere! Check 'em out!

**Me:** Here we go... so Ribes is your tag, right?

**Ribes:** Yes, that's my tag.

**Me:** How would you consider yourself? I mean, do you think you are an artist?

**Ribes:** No, absolutely not. I'm not an artist, I'm a writer. I do graffiti.

**Me:** So, you have nothing to do with Street Art?

**Ribes:** A writer has nothing to do with Street Art. It's important to distinguish between Street Art and Graffiti. As a writer, I do graffiti not murals. Graffiti has to do with vandalism. We do tags, throw-ups and that's all. We bomb and run away.

**Me:** When you're using your spray cans, doing a piece, don't you search for the beauty of it? I mean, what you do, you don't want it to look 'beautiful' or 'artistic'?

**Ribes:** I don't care if my piece looks "artistically beautiful". Graffiti is about lettering. Everything that I do, has actually already been done before. I'm  
5 talking about graffiti's techniques, there are several, you just have to learn and then start using them.



10 **Me:** So what's the most important thing in Writing?

**Ribes:** It's not a matter of how "beautiful" your piece looks . It's a matter of bombing and ruling the city. Your tag can be the simplest ever and can be done with very few lines, but it has to rock. Your tag has to be original, cool. A  
15 writer's tag must be seen in black and white, in order to know if he's good at tagging. Remember that it's more difficult to do something cool with just a few lines rather than with a bunch of them.

**Me:** But there are pieces that look amazingly artistic and hyper-stylized! You mean that these are not worth mentioning while a simple "old school" looking tag drawn everywhere in the city, is more important?

**Ribes:** Well, there are two ways of being a writer. You can be a “bomber” or you can be a “stylish”.

**Me:** What’s the difference?

5 **Ribes:** The bomber does only tags and throw-ups. His purpose is to rule the city. Tags and throw-ups are the best techniques to do this. An example of a true bomber is Jado (he’s another writer from the ADR crew N.d.r). He worships the Shock and Awe way of writing. The stylish writer cares about what we were talking before, about how his piece will look . I used to almost not consider the latter as a real way of doing graffiti. The real deal is to use  
10 both of these styles. A good writer must be all-round. He has to bomb trains, the longline (area surrounding railway N.d.r), even legal pieces, he has to do everything, as fast as he can. Don’t forget that we’re talking about illegal writing. It’s vandalism. There are cities in which writers carry guns!

15 **Me:** Woha..I was wondering how come the city is full of tags and graffiti? What about the police?

**Ribes:** Here in Italy they don’t give a fuck about graffiti. We can do whatever we want. Maybe because they’re dumbasses, otherwise they would catch more of us. In Germany for example, the police are very tough about graffiti, they have these “Vandal Squads” that look for writers in order to kick their  
20 asses.

**Me:** Have you ever had problems with the law?

**Ribes:** Skip it.

**Me:** Right then. Are you in a crew?

**Ribes:** I’m a member of different crews. These photos regard ADR.

25 **Me:** ADR... It’s the crew’s name, right? Do you guys go out in the middle of the night working together?

**Ribes:** It depends. I like goin’ bombing when there are a lot of us. I mean, we’re like relatives. We’re more than friends. Joining a crew it’s just like becoming part of a family, sometimes they make you pass some kind of test to  
30 do it, but it’s cool.

**Me:** Ok Ribes I think we're done, I would like to thank you for the great contribution you gave us!

**Ribes:** you're welcome, cya in da streets!

5 **ADR**

ADR is the name of a crew acting in the district of Florence. ADR stands for "Akt Der Rache" but can also be "All Dreams Real". This crew was born in Germany and then brought here to Italy by one of their members: Rais. Other well-known mates are Jado, Decks, Irwin and also Ribes.

10

**A Piece by ADR**



This was made one year ago. It has been done on the side of a regional train. 5 colors, spray cans. First lines (the trace) and then the fill in. Then the background, the outlines and lights, all in sequence. Sometimes there's someone who adds in-lines, that are like strokes. Time taken: 15 minutes.

15 **Second assignment:**

20 Invent a character for yourself. You are a graffiti writer or a street artist. Then write or record an interview with this invented character.

## **SECTION 3**

# **SUBVERTISING AND MAINSTREAM ARTISTS**

# SUBVERTISING

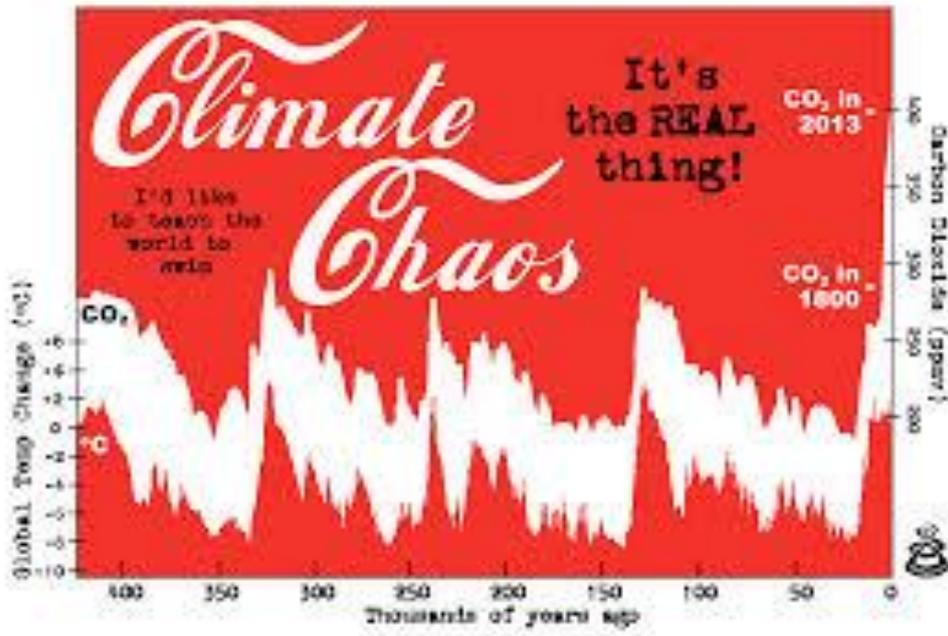
- 5 The practice of making parodies of corporate and political advertisements in order to make an ironic statement. This may be done either by adding something to an existing advert or by creating a new advert that imitates the style and 'look' of the original.



GREENPEACE

Greenpeace International, 2004. "Greenpeace wins against oil giant", 5 February 2004.  
http://www.greenpeace.org/global/news/press/2004/02/05/greenpeace-wins-against-oil-giant





5



10

# JENNIFER HOLZER 1950

## Truisms 1977

5 Like other artists of her generation, Holzer turned to the strategies of the mass media and advertising in her work. In the late 1970s, she devised nearly 300 aphorisms or slogans, which play on commonly held truths and clichés. Initially, the Truisms were infiltrated into the public arena via stickers, T-shirts and posters. Later, Holzer started using electronic displays. In 1982 she blazed these messages across a giant advertising hoarding in Times Square, New York. The Truisms are deliberately challenging, presenting a spectrum of  
10 often-contradictory opinions. Holzer hoped they would sharpen people's awareness of the 'usual baloney they are fed' in daily life.

*Tate Gallery label, October 2000*

MURDER HAS ITS SEXUAL SIDE  
MYTHS MAKE REALITY MORE INTELLIGIBLE  
NOISE CAN BE HOSTILE  
NOTHING UPSETS THE BALANCE OF GOOD AND EVIL  
OFTEN YOU SHOULD ACT LIKE YOU ARE SEXLESS  
PEOPLE ARE BORING UNLESS THEY'RE EXTREMISTS  
PEOPLE WHO DON'T WORK WITH THEIR HANDS ARE PARASITES  
PEOPLE WHO GO CRAZY ARE TOO SENSITIVE  
PEOPLE WON'T BEHAVE IF THEY HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE  
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE IS ESCAPISM  
PLAYING IT SAFE CAN CAUSE A LOT OF DAMAGE IN THE LONG RUN  
POLITICS IS USED FOR PERSONAL GAIN  
PRIVATE PROPERTY CREATED CRIME  
RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY  
RANDOM MATING IS GOOD FOR DEBUNKING SEX MYTHS  
RELATIVITY IS NO BOON TO MANKIND  
REMEMBER YOU ALWAYS HAVE FREEDOM OF CHOICE  
REVOLUTION BEGINS WITH CHANGES IN THE INDIVIDUAL  
ROMANTIC LOVE WAS INVENTED TO MANIPULATE WOMEN  
SACRIFICING YOURSELF FOR A BAD CAUSE IS NOT A MORAL ACT  
SALVATION CAN'T BE BOUGHT AND SOLD  
SELF-AWARENESS CAN BE CRIPPLING  
SELFLESSNESS IS THE HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENT  
SEX DIFFERENCES ARE HERE TO STAY  
SLIPPING INTO MADNESS IS GOOD FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON  
SOMETIMES SCIENCE ADVANCES FASTER THAN IT SHOULD  
STARVATION IS NATURE'S WAY  
STUPID PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BREED  
SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST APPLIES TO MEN AS WELL AS ANIMALS  
TEASING PEOPLE SEXUALLY CAN HAVE UGLY CONSEQUENCES  
THE FAMILY IS LIVING ON BORROWED TIME  
THE MORE YOU KNOW THE BETTER OFF YOU ARE  
THE MOST PROFOUND THINGS ARE INEXPRESSIBLE  
THE ONLY WAY TO BE PURE IS TO STAY BY YOURSELF  
THERE ARE TOO FEW IMMUTABLE TRUTHS TODAY  
THERE'S NOTHING REDEEMING IN TOIL  
TIMIDITY IS LAUGHABLE  
TORTURE IS BARBARIC



15

See also p.31 Please Change Beliefs

## **INFLAMMATORY ESSAYS 1978-82**

*DON T TALK DOWN TO ME. DON'T  
BE POLITE TO ME. DON'T  
5 TRY TO MAKE ME FEEL NICE.  
DON T RELAX. I'LL CUT THE  
SMILE OFF YOUR FACE. YOU  
THINK I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S  
GOING ON. YOU THINK I' M  
10 AFRAID TO REACT. THE JOKE' S  
ON YOU. I'M BIDDING MY TIME,  
LOOKING FOR THE SPOT. YOU  
THINK NO ONE CAN REACH YOU,  
NO ONE CAN HAVE WHAT YOU  
15 HAVE. I' VE BEEN PLANNING  
WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING. I' VE  
BEEN SAVING WHILE YOU' RE  
SPENDING. THE GAME IS  
ALMOST OVER SO IT' S  
20 TIME YOU ACKNOWLEDGE ME.  
DO YOU WANT TO FALL NOT  
EVER KNOWING WHO TOOK YOU ?*

25

YOU GET AMAZING SENSATIONS FROM  
GUNS. YOU GET RESULTS FROM GUNS.  
MAN IS AN AGGRESSIVE ANIMAL;  
5 YOU HAVE TO HAVE A GOOD OFFENSE  
AND A GOOD DEFENSE. TOO MANY  
CITIZENS THINK THEY ARE HELPLESS.  
THEY LEAVE EVERYTHING TO THE  
AUTHORITIES AND THIS CAUSES  
10 CORRUPTION. RESPONSIBILITY  
SHOULD GO BACK WHERE IT BELONGS.  
IT IS YOUR LIFE SO TAKE CONTROL  
AND FEEL VITAL.THERE MAY BE  
SOME ACCIDENTS ALONG THE PATH  
15 TO SELF-EXPRESSION AND SELF-  
DETERMINATION. SOME HARMLESS  
PEOPLE WILL BE HURT. HOWEVER,  
G-U-N SPELLS PRIDE TO THE  
STRONG,SAFETY TO THE WEAK  
20 AND HOPE TO THE HOPELESS.  
GUNS MAKE WRONG RIGHT FAST.

25

*FEAR IS THE MOST ELEGANT WEAPON.*

*YOUR HANDS ARE NEVER MESSY.  
THREATENING BODILY HARM IS CRUDE.  
WORK INSTEAD ON MINDS AND BELIEFS,  
PLAY INSECURITIES LIKE A PIANO. BE  
5 CREATIVE IN APPROACH. FORCE  
ANXIETY TO EXCRUCIATING LEVELS OR  
GENTLY UNDERMINE THE PUBLIC  
CONFIDENCE. PANIC DRIVES HUMAN HERDS  
OVER CLIFFS; AN ALTERNATIVE IS  
10 TERROR-INDUCED IMMOBILIZATION. FEAR  
FEEDS ON FEAR. PUT THIS EFFICIENT  
PROCESS IN MOTION. MANIPULATION IS  
NOT LIMITED TO PEOPLE. ECONOMIC,  
SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS  
15 CAN BE SHAKEN. IT WILL BE  
DEMONSTRATED THAT NOTHING IS SAFE,  
SACRED OR SANE. THERE IS NO  
RESPITE FROM HORROR. ABSOLUTES ARE  
QUICKSILVER. RESULTS ARE SPECTACULAR.*

20



# PLEASE CHANGE BELIEFS 1995

Select a truism.



To improve or replace the truism

[click here](#)

Yours will be added to a new master list.

[PLEASE CHANGE BELIEFS](#)



5



# BARBARA KRUGER



5



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**Third assignment** Write an inflammatory essay in the style of Jennifer Holzer. The layout and style should follow all the conventions of her work: 100 words in capitals, in a block form, breaking sentences at any point in order to keep the lines more or less the same length. Try to include characteristics like ambiguous reference, unusual juxtaposition of adjective and noun and remember that the message must be indirect and ironic (saying the opposite of your real message).

## **SECTION 4**

5

# **LIVING ON THE STREET**

10

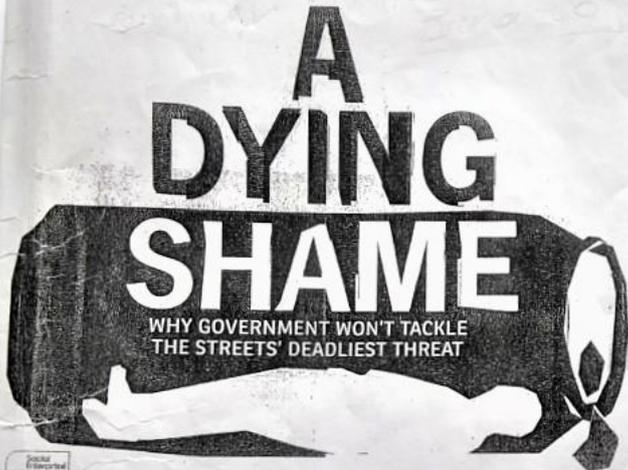
## GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Think of all the different words in English and Italian which can be used to refer to homeless people. Decide which words have negative, positive or neutral connotations?
2. Where do homeless people sleep, spend their time?
3. How do we usually picture homeless people (age, gender, race, dress, character, behaviour etc).
4. What is our attitude to them ? How much is our attitude influenced by where we meet them, what they look like, how they behave etc ? Discuss the different ways you instinctively react to different categories.
5. For what reasons do people end up homeless?
6. What associations or charities help homeless people?

PLUS! BOMB DISPOSAL, INSANITY, FOOD WARS AND ALAN HANSEN

# THE BIG ISSUE

A Hand Up Not A Handout  
August 23 - 29 2010 No.912 £1.70



## Street Lights *The Voice of the streets*

The work on these pages is exclusively by homeless, ex-homeless and vulnerably-housed people. It is a space for them to air their views and opinions, and to display their work. Views expressed on these pages are not necessarily those of The Big Issue. If you are homeless and have a comment to make, Street Lights is for you - contact 020-7526 3333

### FIRST PERSON

# 'Street life is not for everyone'

Here I am, back on the streets. I went into rehab but things did not work out. I am now waiting to get into a St Mungo's Rolling Shelter (temporary accommodation where the staff help residents to move on to permanent accommodation). Hopefully it will be within the next day or two. My referral has been put in now; it's just a waiting game to see what becomes available.

I can't wait to get back off the streets again, and in to normality. Street life is not for everyone. If you are not used to the streets then I would say that if you can avoid it, do so.

I have only been on the street for a week now since I left rehab. But if people have been following my stories that have been in Street Lights over the last two years, then they will know I was on the street for a long time. Ten years to be precise.

I can see the changes on the street now. People are getting younger. I'm an old person on the road compared to these guys now.

Also, I have noticed that a lot of people's attitudes have changed towards the homeless. I think the public are a lot more tolerant now than they used to be. I suppose it is because they see this every day when they go to work, and when they come home of a night. They must think that we have nothing to do during the days, which could be true, because a lot of the day centres are now limited in what services they can offer.

But I am going into a day centre on Monday, that will help me. The Southwark Spot Team are there and I am hoping that they can find a room for me in a Rolling Shelter. There is a lot of people in the same situation as myself, all trying to get into hostels. As soon as one bed becomes available in a hostel, there is always someone needy to fill the space.

People think that it's easy to get into the hostels (when I say people, I mean members of the public). They don't know how the hostel system works. From my experiences of being on the street, I think people should be made aware of how hard it is to get into a hostel, and they should also remember that these hostels are not five-star accommodation. Some of the hostels are falling to bits but the government are not providing the funding for them to be done up.

So if the government doesn't do that, they should let the hostels have their own control and refurbish them in their own time. I've seen a couple of hostels that have been done up and I can tell you, they look great.

I have always said that I hope the next hostel I go into will be a refurbished one, because I think that if I am in a good hostel and the environment is right, then there is no reason why I would not be able to prosper and get my own place.

So I will have to wait and see what happens for the future. But, as I sit here at London Bridge watching the people go by, I bid you all farewell until I write again.  
Joseph Anthony

The Big Issue has helped Rachel Murray – a tattoo artist and body piercer – to escape domestic violence and join a different kind of family



I've been selling The Big Issue on and off for five years. I first started selling it in Australia where I was introduced to it by a couple of friends. I had been in an abusive relationship and finally managed to escape. These friends put me up whilst I was in hiding.

The Big Issue allowed me to break the cycle of violence and provided me with the money I needed to move on. If I hadn't had the support of the Big Issue and a means to earn some money, I think I would have ended up in jail by now, as I would have been pulled into a world of petty crime.

Selling The Big Issue helps me to maintain my dignity and gives me a real confidence boost, and it's the same for all of us Big Issue sellers. Being a part of the Big Issue is like being a part of a bigger community; the Covent Garden sellers and co-ordinators are like family to me.

I'm looking to take the next step now and would like to start working on one of the Big Issue co-ordination posts that the sellers buy their magazine from. At the moment they shut at 4pm, so I'd like to keep it open until 8pm.

It can be hard work selling the magazine. I'm out on average for eight hours a day, but it's a great way to break down the barriers and re-educate people about homelessness and make people reassess their stereotypes. When I'm not selling I like to relax with a book; I'm an avid reader and always carry a couple of books around with me.

I'm really looking forward to the Night Walk, as it's a great way to say thanks to those who have supported me from the Big Issue Foundation, and a chance to give something back. Why not join my team and help show your support.

.....  
*Join Rachel, her team, other vendors and hundreds of people, as they hit the streets to help the homeless to help themselves on The Big Night Walk on October 1 in London. For more information go to [www.bignightwalk2010.com](http://www.bignightwalk2010.com) or telephone 0845 2179023*

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## **SECTION 5**

# **POETRY ON THE STREET**

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# Poems on the underground



## INTRODUCTION

ANYONE who suffers from an addiction to reading cereal box tops or bus tickets will understand the special appeal of 'Poems on the Underground'. The programme began as an idea shared among a few friends: how pleasant it would be, we thought, to read a few  
5 lines by one's favourite poet on the Tube, instead of advertisements for temps or toothpaste. We were Londoners by birth or adoption, habitual users of public transport, lovers of poetry. We shared the conviction that poetry is a popular, living art, and that the pleasures of rhythm and rhyme are part of common life. The  
10 Underground, also an inescapable part of our common life, had large numbers of empty advertising spaces. It seemed an entirely reasonable idea to propose filling the blank grey slots with poems, for the entertainment of the travelling public.

London Underground was surprisingly responsive to our suggestion that they provide unlet spaces free for this civic purpose.  
15 They agreed that if we could raise money to pay a modest charge for five hundred spaces, they would match the number. With an Arts Council grant from the Compton Poetry Fund, set up 'for the wider dissemination of poetry', and generous support from the  
20 publishers Faber and Faber, who produced the posters for the first two years, and Oxford University Press, who provided matching funds, we presented the first group of poems to an unsuspecting public.

On Wednesday, 29 January 1986, 'Poems on the Underground'  
25 was officially launched at Aldwych, a station usually closed between rush hours, and often used for filming movies about the Second World War. Many of those who descended to the Underground platform that rain-drenched morning might have had in mind the journey made to the infernal regions by  
30 Orpheus in search of Eurydice. Ordinary signs – TICKETS AND TRAINS, THIS WAY DOWN, STAND CLEAR, DOORS CLOSING – assume a

special significance when such a setting is taken over by poets and their friends. Official party fare was coffee and doughnuts, but wine flowed too, and when the train bearing its consignment of poems arrived, twenty minutes late, we all climbed aboard, 5 pursued by representatives of the press, radio and television. Within minutes the carriages were alive to the sounds of happy poets declaiming verse by Shelley, Burns and, of course, by themselves.

10 When we began to scatter poems about in public, we had no idea how people would respond; it was all a bit reminiscent of the lovesick youth in the Forest of Arden, hanging 'odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles'. Not that the London Underground is anything like the Forest of Arden; on the contrary, it is the ultimate expression of the modern urban working world. But 15 poetry thrives on paradox, and the poems seemed to take on new and surprising life when they were removed from books and set amongst the adverts. Commuters enjoyed the idea of reading Keats's 'Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold' on a crowded Central Line train, or trying to memorise a sonnet between Leicester Square and Hammersmith. Just as we had hoped, the poems 20 provided relief, caused smiles, offered refreshment to the soul – and all in a place where one would least expect to find anything remotely poetic.

25 The truth, as we soon discovered, is that England is a nation of poetry-lovers. Hundreds of people wrote in with queries about particular poems, suggestions of their own, and comments; many letters just said, in effect, 'Thank you, whoever you are, for the poems.' Three years after our launch, London Underground agreed to provide all spaces free and to quadruple the number, in 30 theory providing at least one poem to each train carriage, and to pay production costs as well. Posters go to British Council libraries throughout the world, and the Poetry Society maintains a subscription list, mainly for schools and libraries, but also for hospitals, community centres and prisons. We are set to continue 35 indefinitely, and there seems no possibility of running out of poems, either from the past or by contemporary poets.

From the start, we have tried to offer as wide a variety of tone

and subject matter as possible, to share our own favourites and our special discoveries, but also to present new voices. At least two poems out of each group of five (occasionally six) are by living poets. We have taken material from the earliest times to the present, and we have made a point of including poets from English-speaking countries throughout the world. A few translations are also included, and 'Anon.' features largely, in songs and riddles, nursery rhymes and broadside ballads.

We have kept a special place for London poems, and for poets who had close associations with London – Donne, Milton, Blake and Keats, among others – though some of the most celebrated London poems (like 'To the City of London', by the Scottish poet William Dunbar, and Wordsworth's 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge') were written by poets as they were passing through. Of London poems in our collection by contemporary writers, one is by the New Zealand-born poet Fleur Adcock, another by the Guyanese poet Grace Nichols. Then again, A. E. Housman wrote *A Shropshire Lad* when he was working every day at the Chancery Lane Patent Office; and we have assumed that the imagination is free to wander where it will. What we have listened for is the individual voice, and we have tried to offer poems in which the poet's voice speaks directly to the modern reader about the common themes of poetry through the ages.

The great subjects are well represented here: love, death, war, the natural world, time, memory. But these are not the only themes of poetry, nor is the high-flown the only mode. There is also a fine tradition of comic verse, and in amongst the passion and nostalgia we placed a few banana skins in the form of light, humorous and quirky verse. We have included writers of comic nonsense like Edward Lear, Spike Milligan and Wendy Cope; there are also pieces in a witty, conversational vein by poets ranging from Michael Drayton and William Carlos Williams to Stevie Smith and Liz Lochhead. Some light or funny verse was chosen with children in mind, but we found that these poems often appealed as much to adults as to children; Roger McGough's 'The Leader' found its way into a number of boardrooms and political party headquarters.

5 The programme has now been in existence for five years and  
has spawned a number of associated projects. In November of our  
first year, we organised a gathering of poets for a twelve-hour  
Remembrance Day reading in St James's Church, Piccadilly, at  
10 which more than ninety people contributed readings and music  
from all over the world. A further venture was made possible by a  
grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which twice  
enabled us to fill every advertising space in a train carriage with  
poems written by schoolchildren. These were chosen initially  
15 from work produced in London school workshops; a second  
selection was made from the huge entry received in workshops  
and competitions organised by the Poetry Society, the BBC Radio  
5 programme *Talking Poetry* and the 'Young Telegraph'. We have  
also given annual readings at the British Library, as part of the  
20 Stefan Zweig Series, with programmes that draw on the Library's  
collections. Poems featured on the Tube have often been broad-  
cast and discussed on local radio and also on the BBC World  
Service, reaching audiences as far afield as Bulgaria and Japan.  
Similar projects have sprung up elsewhere in Britain and abroad,  
with poems riding public transport systems in Newcastle, West  
Yorkshire, Dublin and Stuttgart, and decorating bus and railway  
platforms in Vienna and Melbourne.

25 This anthology has come about in response to public interest in  
the programme, and in particular poems that appeared briefly on  
the Tube and then vanished from sight, leaving only a memory of  
a single line or image. They are all here (with one substitution) in  
the order in which they appeared on the Tube, in groups of five or  
six. Many of the poems will be familiar to readers; others are  
fairly obscure and hard to find without special library resources;  
30 some are unique to this volume. We hope that the collection as a  
whole will appeal not only to addicted poetry-lovers but also to  
readers who are coming to poetry for the first time.

Gerard Benson, Judith Chernaik, Cicely Herbert  
London, 1991

The first five poems used in the Poems on the Underground projects.

Discuss why you think they were chosen and whether they were a good choice. Consider length, difficulty, familiarity, theme that would appeal to a traveller, provenance of the author.

Which five poems would you choose if you were starting a project like this in Italy?

5

### Up in the Morning Early

Cauld blaws the wind frae east to west,  
The drift is driving sairly;  
Sae loud and shrill's I hear the blast,  
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

CHORUS: Up in the morning's no for me,  
Up in the morning early;  
When a' the hills are cover'd wi' snaw,  
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

The birds sit chittering in the thorn,  
A' day they fare but sparely;  
And lang's the night frae e'en to morn,  
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

CHORUS: Up in the morning's no for me,  
Up in the morning early;  
When a' the hills are cover'd wi' snaw,  
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

ROBERT BURNS (1759–96)

### Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is OZYMANDIAS, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792–1822)

10

### The Railway Children

When we climbed the slopes of the cutting  
We were eye-level with the white cups  
Of the telegraph poles and the sizzling wires.

Like lovely freehand they curved for miles  
East and miles west beyond us, sagging  
Under their burden of swallows.

We were small and thought we knew nothing  
Worth knowing. We thought words travelled the wires  
In the shiny pouches of raindrops,

Each one seeded full with the light  
Of the sky, the gleam of the lines, and ourselves  
So infinitesimally scaled

We could stream through the eye of a needle.

SEAMUS HEANEY (b. 1939)

### This Is Just to Say

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883–1963)

### Like a Beacon

In London  
every now and then  
I get this craving  
for my mother's food  
I leave art galleries  
in search of plantains  
saltfish/sweet potatoes

I need this link

I need this touch  
of home  
swinging my bag  
like a beacon  
against the cold

GRACE NICHOLS (b. 1950)

## The Aegean

This music has lasted since the world began.  
A rock was born among the waters  
While tiny waves chatted in a soft universal tongue.

- 5 The shell of a sea-turtle  
Would not have foretold the guitar.  
Your music has always risen to the sky.  
Green taproot. Mother Sea.  
First of all firsts. You enfold us,  
10 Murmuring us with music- threat,  
Fable, hypnosis, lullaby, roast,  
Omen, myth,  
little agonies  
of grit, of wreckages, of joys-
- 15 MARIA LUISA SPAZIANI( b. 1924) Translated by Beverly Allen

## Egeo

- Dal principio del mondo dura questa musica.  
Nacque fra acque un sasso,  
chiacchieravano ondine in morbido esperanto.
- 20 Non avrebbe previsto la chitarra  
un guscio di testuggine marina.  
Da sempre sale al cielo la tua musica.  
Verde radice prima, mamma-mare,  
prima di tutti i prima. Ci avvolge  
25 nutrendoci di musica- minaccia,  
favola, ipnosi, ninnananna, rombo,  
Presaging, mito,  
piccole agonie  
di graniglie, relitti, di allegrie-

30

Original Italian edition from Poesie (1991)

## From *Inferno*

In the middle of the journey of our life

I found myself astray in a dark wood

5 where the straight road had been lost sight of.

How hard it is to say what it was like

in the thick of thickets, in a wood so dense and gnarled

the very thought of it renews my panic.

It is bitter almost as death itself is bitter.

10 But to rehearse the good it also brought me

I will speak about the other things I saw there.

Translated by SEAMUS HEANEY

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita

mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,

15 ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura

esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte

che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant' è amara che poco è più morte;

20 ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,

dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

DANTE ALIGHIERI (12 65-1321)