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Hit and Run: A Fable of Gallows, Gardens, and Grief

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With your permission, here is a 4-point caveat for the writing that follows:

1. It is an odd hybrid—not quite academic, nor quite intellectual. It's a bit of that, sure, but it's also a narrative, a story, a fable, if you will. It *is* architectural and spatial, full of landscapes, too, but maybe not in the usual review sort of way.

2. It is epistolary. Much of it takes the form of a kind of fever-dream letter I wrote to myself, in one sitting, a little while ago. And in that sense, it might *seem* like a soliloquy, but I wrote this without anticipating an audience. So, the moment of this writing is the first time I am putting this out as a public text, to a reading audience other than myself. And for that, I thank you.

3. This fever dream is a small marriage of anger, vulnerability, and, I hope, tenderness—some things that I believe we need quite a lot more of in architecture these days. There will be some difficult things in this text, so I will understand, too, if you need to step away or if you need to stop reading. And I ask—gently—that you please come back.

4. Lastly, this letter/fable has roots and landscapes and anchors from many different geographies and many different times; old and young roots and locales—both beyond my South African heritage and as recent as October 14, 2023, in Plainfield Township, Illinois (Wadea Al-Fayoume); September 16, 2022, in Ottawa, Canada (Savanna Pikuyak); February 3, 2020, in Brunswick, Georgia (Ahmaud Arbery); March 13, 2020, in Louisville, Kentucky (Breonna Taylor); May 25, 2020, and July 6, 2016, in Minneapolis, Minnesota (George Floyd and Philando Castile, respectively); July 17, 2016, in Staten Island, New York (Eric Garner); August 9, 2016, in the Cree Red Pheasant Nation of Saskatchewan (Colten Boushie); and November 22, 2014, in Cleveland, Ohio (Tamir Rice), among others—too many to be named without my entire word given over to naming, but each a tragedy, a loss of a world.

There are many dates and places here, there, and everywhere, but today, for this writing, by me and for you, this fever dream has a particular date: June 6, 2021, in Canada.

And so, this date. This is where we begin.

Dear Ozayr,

Preface/Epilogue (1): June 7, 2021, 2:00 pm ET

"Muslim Family Killed in 'Premeditated" Hit and Run in London, Ont., Driver Charged with Murder, Police Say," CBC News, June 7, 2021, 2:00 pm ET:

> A 20-YEAR-OLD MAN WAS CHARGED MONDAY WITH FOUR COUNTS OF MURDER AND ONE COUNT OF ATTEMPTED MURDER IN A HIT AND RUN SUNDAY INVOLVING A PICKUP TRUCK, IN WHAT LONDON, ONT., POLICE BELIEVE WAS A TARGETED ATTACK ON A MUSLIM FAMILY OF FIVE… POLICE SAY THAT AT 8:40 P.M. ET, THE FAMILY WAS WALKING ALONG HYDE PARK ROAD AND WERE WAITING TO CROSS THE INTERSECTION, IN NORTHWEST LONDON, WHEN THE TRUCK MOUNTED THE CURB AND STRUCK THEM.[1]

[1] "Muslim Family Killed in 'Premeditated" Hit and Run in London, Ont., Driver Charged with Murder, Police Say," *CBC News*, June 7, 2021, link. On November 16, 2023, during the editing of this essay, Nathaniel Veltman was convicted of these crimes.

To further set the stage, a frame of reference on naming and identity is offered here by the architectural historian Samia Henni:

> TO TEACH, HISTORICIZE, THEORIZE, SPEAK, AND WRITE ABOUT ARCHITECTURE—OR THE BUILT, DESTROYED, AND IMAGINED ENVIRONMENTS—ONE USES LANGUAGE. BE IT ARABIC, BENGALI, CHINESE, ENGLISH, FRENCH, HINDI, RUSSIAN, SPANISH, AND SO ON, EVERY GIVEN LANGUAGE EMBODIES A SET OF LETTERS, SYMBOLS, PHONETICS, REFERENCES, RULES, AND HISTORIES. HOWEVER, THE DOMINANT PRACTICES OF NAMING CITIES, STREETS, AND BUILDINGS, DEFINING CATEGORIES AND LABELING CONCEPTS, CLASSIFYING ENVIRONMENTS AND POPULATIONS, FRAMING AGES, IDENTIFYING VALUES, AND CITING KNOWLEDGE STILL OBEYS COLONIAL PROTOCOLS AND IMPERIAL REGISTERS.[2]

[2] Samia Henni, "The Pedagogy of Naming," in "Pedagogies for a Broken World," special issue, *Journal of Architectural Education* 76, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 193.

Hyde Park is an imagined, built, and destroyed environment: a real space, while also simultaneously an idea—of power, history, and speech. It is, as a name and a place, an imperial index that transcends geography and time, reaching out from the drizzly, gray atmosphere of the Big Smoke (Londinium, the Great Wen, the Square Mile, London) all the way across the pond to its Canadian analogue in Ontario. As the many roots and locales of this letter are tied to names like Wadea, and George, and Ahmaud, and Breonna, and Colton, Hyde Park becomes a tether to tell a story about how we see, are, and—just maybe—how we might *become* in the world.

Fever Dream 1/Letter 1: Hyde Park Was a Gallows, and in It Was a Tree

Dear Ozayr,

The Tyburn Tree was where the convicted were hanged, sometimes twenty-four at a time. The "tree"—London's famous gallows—was a triangle, raised high on three stout wooden legs. A ladder, as needed, was propped up against one of the horizontal beams of a triangle side, and dutiful men would climb it to throw and tighten the ropes slung over its three edges, so that executions could be in the round, like watching a Shakespeare play at the Globe. "And thereby hangs a tale," declares Jaques, from the bard's *As You Like It*, and we watch, measure for measure, there on the banks of the Thames.

The site on which Hyde Park now sits had been a place of death long before Henry VIII created and named it as a hunting ground in 1536; executions had taken place there since 1196. The Tyburn Tree was constructed in 1571, and with it came the shift from sword or axe to rope and noose. It was erected as a gallows that could accommodate multiple hangings at once, as well as, importantly, a crowd, moving the tenor of death from private hunting to public hanging. The Tyburn Tree was a spectacle and a performance, and you could watch—after purchasing a Tyburn Ticket—executions unfold in real space and in real time. You could sit on a wooden platform and look on, waiting for the drop.[3] The tree was at an intersection, in the middle of an old Roman road, where the gallows could stand as a stark landmark in the low urban fabric of London. Today, the gallows are commemorated by a flat stone disc on a traffic island bounded by Oxford Road, Edgeware Road, and Bayswater Street, at Hyde Park's northeast corner.

[3] Simon Devereaux, "Recasting the Theatre of Execution: The Abolition of the Tyburn Ritual," *Past & Present*, no. 202 (February 2009): 127–174.

Today, you can sit at the Gentleman Baristas coffee shop and look out at the flat traffic island. If you know the history of the gallows, then you know that *they* would have been *right there*, in front of you—that you could watch the convicted and the soon-to-die, brought in by carriage from Newgate Prison, through the Old Smoke's streets to this place, where they were hung, some in their Sunday best.[4] From Newgate, the infamous penitentiary that was one of London's first and most gruesome, to the Tree was only about three miles. But the route back in those days was packed with onlookers.

[4] Kenneth Morgan, "Petitions against Convict Transportation, 1725–1735," *English Historical Review* 104, no. 410 (January 1989): 110–113.

Alan Brooke and David Brandon write about the journey along this route—this processional of the damned—to "London's fatal tree":

> THE JOURNEY OF THE CONDEMNED FELONS FROM NEWGATE TO TYBURN PROVIDED FREE AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT FOR LONDON'S MASSES AND IT BECAME HIGHLY RITUALISED, PARTICULAR IN THE 16TH, 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES. PRISONERS STOPPED OFF AT WAYSIDE INNS AS THEY PASSED THROUGH CHEERING CROWDS OR, IF THEIR OFFENCES AND THEIR DEMEANOUR ANGERED THE SPECTATORS, THEY HAD TO RUN THE GAUNTLET OF A HAIL OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE. THEY WERE EXPECTED TO SHOW FORTITUDE AND WATCHING CROWDS WARMED TO THE FELON WHO MADE A VALEDICTORY SPEECH IN WHICH HE CURSED THE FATES OR, EVEN BETTER, THOSE WHO HAD BROUGHT HIM TO THIS SORRY PASS.[5]

[5] Alan Brooke and David Brandon, *Tyburn: London's Fatal Tree* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: History Press, 2004), 6.

What might take twenty minutes today on the red No. 23 bus, with its West End

theater banners and ads, would have taken long hours back then, along grimy, muddy roads. Executions and killings were public affairs after all (I mean, you bought a ticket!), and the horse-drawn carriages filled with the soon-to-be-hanged would take what seemed like years to go that short distance from prison to park. Death was—and is—a drawn-out affair, delayed and stalled, so that the attendant, anticipatory city could join in, slowing these fatal affairs so that urban and infrastructural logics of movement became not streets but rather scenic backdrops to the participatory performances of the spectatorial and gory practices of public killing. The living city, buildings full of the bloom of life with their flush cheeks, becomes a slow-motion stage set. Dying cities now play out on our screens, TVs, phones. Death is doubled and amplified, and we still watch. Buildings die, and people, well—always, buried in rubble and in our distant gazes, in institutional and political disclaimers, in discomforts and false equivalencies. The internet is cut, and shattered streets slow down death's parade, slow down ambulances, slow down everything. There is no ticket now, just your cable or internet provider. Now—today—what might have taken a few minutes by bus, there, is now hours and days on foot. Yet, there is a litany I say, in Arabic, a *wird*, as I—you, we, us—watch a city and its people become a Western oblivion. I repeat this litany over and over, from wake to sleep, as I walk and drive the city I am in. From living city to smoke-choked phosphorous airs, I say: Palestine. Gaza. Gaza. Gaza. Shifa. Al Quds. Falasteen. Olive trees—not Tyburn trees—olive trees. Repeat.

From the coffee shop, after you look up from the killings unfolding on your phone, you can stroll over to contemplate the now, to the then-history. You stand on that flat beige stone disc, which reads "The Site of Tyburn Tree." It even has an "X" at the center, because X, as we know, always marks the spot. Maybe when MVRDV's *Marble Arch Mound* was up, you could have paid your (overpriced) fee to climb to the top of their not-so-little architectural folly and look out at London, to where the Tree would have been, in front of you, a little to the left. You could have stood there, on that false green designer's box, and, because imagination is our architectural drug, you imagine that you could see, not far from you, the three legs of the gallows; through one side of its elevated triangle, you see that you are looking east toward Bayswater and Oxford Street. There, on our grassy knoll, you peer right and you see John Nash's Triumphal Arch. And, if you look hard enough, and patiently enough, you can look *into* the arch, through its marble face, into its hidden history and see the old police station inside it. There, inside that Roman analogue of a monument, you see an officer (and his cat) looking to deploy quickly to arrest London's "undesirables," to chase off the proles and the riffraff with batons and cuffs—or water cannons and tear gas, bullets and white phosphorus—and then, if we were back in London, haul them away to Newgate. Then: reverse, repeat, and back to the Tree.

If a coffee shop is not your cup of tea, you could retire to a Fleet Street pub, like old Jack Ketch—and all the other executioners—did, where, with a pint (or three or four) of bitter over the old weathered-oak bar, with its dirty floors and dim light, you could have—as many did after a hanging at the Tree—bought a piece of a used noose for a shilling an inch or, if you were so inclined, some of the dead's clothes. The heavier the dead, you see, the shorter the drop. The heavier the dead, the shorter the rope. If you were 8 stone, you'd drop between

8 and 10 feet. That's 120 shillings—about 800 Great British pounds today. A 14-stone convict, according to Samuel Haughton's 1888 "drop table," would likely fall six and a half feet, or 78 inches. Then, the Fleet Street bar/market would drop only 78 shillings into the executioner's pocket, today a little under 550 quid. A pint of beer is about 5 pounds today in London. A venti chai? 3 pounds, 25 pence? I look at Haughton's table and think, "How much drop for me?" And I, of course, think less, not that much, because, even now, I don't want to acknowledge how heavy I really am, my mother's and grandmother's cooking filling my heart and stomach. I laugh at my own stupid vanity. And then I sober. How much *would* my rope bring to Jack Ketch's dirty hands in that Old Bailey bar? How much is the cost of my fall? How long the rope? How profitable my death? Measure for measure, how profitable?

The noose and the clothes of the dead were considered magical, with curative abilities to assuage pains, headaches, illnesses. The Romans used noose fragments to cure sickness. Death's tools are our remedies.[6] The poison is the pill; the killer, the priest. The thing that kills you, me, us, is the thing, in the end, that saves them, that reassures them. The public street, the open plaza, the bar, the money that changes hands, even the clothes we wear. Our bodies, too, *could* have been a remedy and a balm, but not for *us*, or for those we loved. Better to break it up instead, after the short drop, so that even on the Day of Resurrection we will not be whole. Even though our bodies might be torn up by London's doctors,[7] they could, just maybe, build us a convent, hundreds of years later.

So, I ask: give me a convent, like the Benedictine Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre, who pray for Tyburn's Catholic martyrs, at an altar with a little model replica of the Tyburn Tree. Give me a convent. Give me an arch. Give me architecture. Or, at the very least, maybe give me a reliquary, where the linen from my shirt, or the leather from my shoes, or the hair from my head, or the rope from my neck might remember me. But not my body. Better to let that be broken apart by the spectators who line London's cobbled streets, who laughingly offer to buy me a drink at the pub on the way back. Or give it to the doctors who will open me up, my cooling, hardening skin giving way to unsterile instruments. Even my insides are not mine to keep: my brain, my heart, my liver, my eyes. Either way, I will not be whole on Judgment Day. And aye, there's the rub—even my *future* time, my post-drop time, my after-the-Tyburn-Tree time, can't be mine. Even my *time* does not belong to me. My past, my present. My city, my body. Not mine.

Three young oak trees, planted in 2014, now mark the site of the Tyburn Tree, a ring-around-the-rosie of the time-portal stone disc. *Love's Labour's Lost*, remember? Berowne, who sees the hypocrisy of the vow, and breaks it: "I could put thee in comfort. Not by two that I know. Thou makest the triumviry, the corner-cap of society, The shape of Love's Tyburn that hangs up simplicity."

Fever Dream 2/Letter 2: Hyde Park Was a Hunting Ground, and on It Were Deer

Dear Ozayr,

Hyde Park was made a royal garden, where deer were stocked and raised

[6] Michael J. Larson, "The Non-Allness of the Hangman's Justice," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 68–73.

[7] London's surgeons often fought each other—as well as attending locals—to claim corpses for medical study. See Peter Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot against the Surgeons," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay et al. (London: Verso, 1975), 65–117.

and then hunted for sport, with pageantry, music, and laughter. The park was created in 1536, pulled out of its marshy grounds and wet, sticky history, when Henry VIII—*Fidei Defensor*—was forty-five years old and recently wounded in jousting, an injury that troubled him for the rest of his life. Stretching from Kensington to Westminster, the enclosed park would host grand hunts, with its deer and other exotic animals. Nobles would participate, or perhaps just watch, from stands inside the royal sanctuary. This was not for the rabble and the proles, but for those in the know, those in the loop, those on the inside. Courtside, gallows-side, site-side. Because, here at the park, the nobility are Arthurian. They are Tristrams and Percivals and Agravains, and as each "growed in myght and strength, he laboured in huntynge and in hawkynge—never jantylman more that ever we herde of. And as the booke seyth, he began good mesures of blowynge of beestes of venery and beestes of chaace and all maner of vermaynes, and all the tearmys we have yet of hawkynge and hunting."[8] Here, these handsome, respectable, noble nobles would reenact Pellinore and Gawain and Arthur and magic, searching for beasts and vermin in the thick yews and oaks along the King's Road.

[8] Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur, 375.15–29, qtd. in Corinne J. Saunders, "Malory's *Book of Huntynge*: The Tristram Section of the *Morte Darthur*," *Medium Ævum* 62, no. 2 (1993): 271.

Like Tyburn, these Hyde Park hunts were theater. A ritual par force, in which everyone knew their part and what their role in the script of this particular theater meant. They knew where they had to stand and when they had to act. Death, as at Tyburn, was staged and the outcome never in doubt. Death was a ritual, a performance. Noble children were taught young how to hold a bow, crossbow, lance, spear, knife, sword. Noble children were taught war and death and how to do it from astride a pale horse, or a pickup truck[9] at an intersection in some distant version of London. Or, they are taught death from a classroom lectern, a dean's office, a design jury. Death is a kind of war. Even the staged and scripted *par force* was an analogue for the theater of war, for the criminalization of vermin, "undesirables," border-crossing "drug dealers and rapists," "towel-headed terrorists." Death is a kind of war we'll make a monument to—and put it beside the Pentagon, too. Hyde Park was fanfare, pageantry, a brassy soundtrack of horns, bugles, and drums.

[9] The man on trial for the murder of the Afzaal family even dressed the part. "At the time of his arrest, the accused was wearing a white T-shirt with a large black cross drawn or painted on the front and back. He told the detective it was a 'meme or joke' that is 'meant to look like a crusader shirt.' Asked by the detective to explain the joke, the accused said, 'Maybe later.'" Kate Dubinski, "Accused Killer of Muslim Family Explains in Post-arrest Rant His Rationale for Truck Attack in London, Ont.," CBC News, September 15, 2023, link.

"Of our British deer, only red deer and roe deer are truly indigenous. Fallow deer were almost certainly introduced by the Normans while three Asiatic species, Reeves' muntjac, Chinese water deer and sika arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries."[10] "Arrived," as if they chose, as deer, to come to the UK from Thrace and Anatolia, from the grass and air and wind of the steppe or of coastal plains to Londinium, of all places. If those deer came today, they would most likely be turned away by Rishi Sunak and the Tory party's immigrant policies. "Send the deer to Rwanda!" trust-fund lords and nepo babies would bellow in Westminster. Fallow deer—the most common now in England, according to the Wildlife Trusts—were introduced and became naturalized. So the Normans brought Asia to England and those deer were then intentionally "released into hunting forests."[11] And then the Normans brought their wealthy, protected children and their well-dressed men into fenced parks to hunt them down.

[10] "Deer Species," British Deer Society, last modified September 6, 2023, link.

[11] "Fallow Deer," Wildlife Trusts, last modified October 28, 2023, link.

"Whatever I capture, I give to the King," says the huntsman.[12] And we could watch, and cheer, and then eat well in the palace of the king, in the tented pavilion in the park. And the proles maybe would catch a glimpse of *Fidei Defensor* in his palanquin, lounging with venison in one hand, a gold cup of

[12] Shawn Hale, "Butchered Bones, Carved Stones: Hunting and Social Change in Late Saxon England" (master's thesis, Eastern Illinois University, 2016), 43.

wine in the other. The deer would run, the huntsmen would hunt, the king would eat, and the rich would watch. But the public, the public would be in the thick of it, at Tyburn. We, maybe, would catch a glimpse through the trees, from the edges, looking through, the thicket. We could see the deer run, the dogs chase, the falcon fly, the horses sprint, the branches creak, the arrow, the spear, the crossbow bolt, the rev of the engine, the carcass slung over onto a cart or over the back of a horse—or into the bed of a pickup truck. Something, after all, needed to be mounted in the hall at Hampton Court. Poor Cardinal Wolsey. If only he hadn't had such a beautiful house that caught the attention of the king, he might have been able to keep it.[13] Henry even built an extension. And so, we process from Hyde Park to Hampton Court, to dine among the trophies over our heads. How many stags' heads in that great hall? How many points on the buck?

Of the hunt, of pageantry and sport, I'll turn briefly to Percival Everett's incredible book *The Trees*, a text I devoured in a single sitting one day last summer. Not to spoil it, but one of the characters, a Black assistant professor—Damon Thruff—with three doctoral degrees (in cellular regeneration, psychobiology, and Eastern philosophy), who was denied tenure (duh—only three PhDs? And probably from a state school… gasp, maybe even… a land-grant school?) and placed in the Ethnic Studies department (where *is* his tenure home?), is writing down—in a fever, it seems—the many names of murdered innocents in the town of Money, Mississippi. Professor Thruff asks Mama Z, another of the novel's protagonists, why these murders happen. He asks her about white hate and fear and about the killing of Black men, and Mama Z responds, "I think it's sport."[14]

> MONEY, MISSISSIPPI, LOOKS EXACTLY LIKE IT SOUNDS. NAMED IN THAT PERSISTENT SOUTHERN TRADITION OF IRONY AND WITH THE ATTENDANT TRADITION OF NESCIENCE, THE NAME BECOMES SLIGHTLY SAD, A MARKER OF SELF-CONSCIOUS IGNORANCE THAT MIGHT AS WELL BE EMBRACED BECAUSE, LET'S FACE IT, IT ISN'T GOING AWAY.[15]

And as you might know, Money, Mississippi, is the site of Bryant's Grocery & Meat Market, the store Emmett Till walked into in 1955.

Fever Dream 3/Letter 3: Hyde Park Was a Podium, and on It Were Speeches

Dear Ozayr,

Hyde Park was a lectern, and on it were declarations. Near where the Tyburn Tree would have stood and where the Marble Arch stands now is Speakers' Corner. In 1872, a corner was set aside for public Sunday speeches. Before they were hanged, the convicted could speak, confess, plead, criticize, mock, or remain silent before the long or short drop.[16] It was not just for the condemned. Orwell spoke there too, and Marx. Lenin too. Individuals and crowds muster here, forming little toastmaster circles around modern orators, hundreds of little Globe Theatres spinning up into being at Speakers' Corner.

[13] "The Story of Hampton Court Palace," Historic Royal Palaces, last modified October 29, 2023, link. Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of York, was granted a ninety-five-year lease on this estate, which he lavishly renovated over a decade. Political duress (Henry was conspiring against him), led him to offer the palace as a gift to the king. In 1689, William and Mary commissioned Christopher Wren to oversee the renovation of the palace.

[14] Percival Everett, *The Trees* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2021), 5.

[15] Everett, *The Trees*, 215.

[16] James A. Sharpe, "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology, and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past & Present* 107, no. 1 (May 1985): 144–167.

Between 750,000 and 2 million people protested the Iraq War in 2003 at Speakers' Corner. The podium has given way to people today in Hyde Park. Some bring stools and folding chairs, to take in the discursive expanse of manifestos, scripture, economics, politics, pop culture—some murmured, some yelled. Years ago, during my PhD studies, I went to the park and watched a tired-looking man holding a Palestinian flag look on as another tired-looking man in a yarmulke, holding an Israeli flag, debated Middle Eastern politics with a group of tired-looking people. This year, "On the day a trickle of aid entered Gaza, where more than 1 million people have *left* [emphasis added] their homes because of the *conflict* [emphasis added], protesters gathered in at Marble Arch near London's Hyde Park."[17] You can move through a declarative or argumentative buffet—all-you-can-eat—in Hyde Park, being by turns persuaded, bemused, baffled, outraged, won over.[18] You can be drawn into Socratic discourse and balk at truthiness in all its unhinged Pizzagate-conspiracy theorizing. Everything is interspersed with everything there. The deep state is right next door to the humanitarian plea. The political is next to the pleasurable.

Hyde Park is a podium, made of stone, in London, England. There are Hyde Parks and Londons all over the world, and there is a Hyde Park Road in London, Ontario, and for a moment, at the London Muslim Mosque, there was a lectern, and a speech. Over 250 years after the last royal hunt in Hyde Park, 239 years after the last execution at the Tyburn Tree, 150 years after Speakers' Corner was established, almost 90 years after John Paxon's Crystal Palace burned, Justin Trudeau, the Right Honorable Prime Minister of so-called Canada, went to the London Muslim Mosque, a little over four miles (we're imperial now) from the intersection of Hyde Park Road and South Carriage Road. I don't know if he went *into* the mosque. If he took off his shoes. I don't know who prepared his speech, but he talked about hate, hate and vitriol in other Canadian cities and in Quebec City. Quebec City: where six men were murdered. Five years later, the vigil to remember them, meant to be held at the Peace Flame at Parliament Hill in Ottawa, across from the prime minister's office, during Black History Month, was canceled because of an antivaccine-mandate protest. Occupiers took up the downtown core of Ottawa, and had a DJ and a hot tub, and honked their truck horns for almost a month. And I flip back to Percival Everett and I hear Mama Z, as loud as the man with the Canadian flag on his back, a Confederate flag on his truck, a Trump-as-Rambo pennant in his hand, eyes hidden behind iridescent Ray-Bans. I flip back to Mama Z and hear her as loud as I hear him on his megaphone, I think it's sport, says Mama Z. I think it's sport, says Mama Z. I think it's sport, says Mama Z.

And so, even though I live next door to the province of Quebec, in the province of Ontario, and have only been to Quebec City once, with my brothers, a long, long time ago, I see the names of those men from that Quebec City mosque: they are conjured into my mind and heart-space instantly, like an arch from Rome. I see them, and they have brown skin like me, and beards like me. And they have luminous, beautiful names. Maybe my name could be like theirs, too—beautiful or lost. Maybe. And they had children, and families, like mine. And I, a professor, like Percival Everett's Damon Thruff (but with only one PhD, sadly, and only in architecture), write African names and Moroccan names and yes, *Muslim* names, with an expensive drawing pencil (according to my depart-

[17] Jill Lawless, "Tens of Thousands of Pro-Palestinian Protesters March in London as Israel-Hamas War Roils the World," *Associated Press*, October 21, 2023, link.

[18] Paul McIlvenny, "Heckling in Hyde Park: Verbal Audience Participation in Popular Public Discourse," *Language in Society* 25, no. 1 (March 1996): 27–60.

mental accountant) on a table in my office, at home. I arrange the paper and the camera. I plot the distance between names, and then, I write and write.[19]

Andrew Lupton and Kate Dubinsky, "What We Know about the Muslim Family in the Fatal London, Ont., Truck Attack," CBC News, June 8, 2021, 5:11 pm ET:

> YUMNA AFZAAL, 15, MADIHA SALMAN, 44, TALAT AFZAAL, 74, AND SALMAN AFZAAL, 46, WERE OUT FOR AN EVENING WALK SUNDAY WHEN THEY WERE RUN OVER BY A TRUCK IN WHAT POLICE SAY WAS AN ATTACK MOTIVATED BY ANTI-MUSLIM HATE… FAYEZ AFZAAL, 9, REMAINED IN HOSPITAL MONDAY.

Preface/Epilogue (2): Now

From Hyde Park in London, England, to Hyde Park in London, Ontario—we know that sites and geographies are loaded with multiple histories. There are Londons all over the world. There is London, Arkansas; London, Kentucky; London, Michigan; London, Ohio; London, Texas; London, Minnesota; London, Belize…

Sites are full of multiple associations, with multiple times and temporalities. Sites—and their names, as Samia Henni reminds us—are loaded, like a gun, a crossbow, a rope, a speech, a truck, a pedagogical initiative, a hiring strategy, a DEI plan. They are not only empty intersections with wishy-washy names, tied to colonial imaginary dreams. Hyde Park (*Road*) in London (*Ontario*) is an executioner's gallows and will always be that for a Muslim person who walks down that street on a summer evening, passed by traffic. It will always be a hunting ground for the privileged. It will always be a podium for mostly empty speeches and declarations and political point-scoring. Its future will be very uncertain for some, because not only is that intersection a name, a history, an associated history with names and places far, far away in time and in space, but also those other histories now layer onto its present an ancestral reality. All these pieces and fragments are a conspiracy to shape death's net, and not life's entanglements, to keep this place—and so many others—as incomplete histories.[20]

And in America, this is true because of one's Blackness, or one's Latino-ness, or one's Brown-ness or Muslim-ness. And not only, of course, in America. In Canada, in Toronto, Black people will be subject to the use of force five times more often a white Canadian. If you are Indigenous, or Middle Eastern, you are more likely to be carded and even strip-searched than your white neighbor.[21] A street is a safe place, but only for some. Geographies are safe, but only for some. Architecture is safe, but only for some.

An airport is escape for spring break, for Cancun, for the glittering cerulean waters of a Barbados holiday, but only for some. When I hear JFK, or LGA, or DTW—O'Hare, or Dulles, or Reagan—I think of being stopped at gunpoint because I looked suspicious, or because someone signed an executive order that said we need to close our borders until we can figure out what the hell is going on. Or that Mexicans are supposedly rapists and drug dealers. An airport is an airport, but it's also a border, a customs house, a law court, a tribunal, a gallows, a hunting ground, and a political platform. So too, this multiplicity, in all our imagined, built, and destroyed environments.

[19] Or, I type, and I type, and I type, as Professor Damon Thruff does in the very last page of Everett's The Trees. Which names do I type? All of them, as many of them as I can. In October 2023, I typed the name of a six-year-old Palestinian American boy, stabbed twenty-six times in his home in Plainfield, Illinois, by an extremist emboldened into a hatred that was co-signed by his government, whom until then this child had considered to be like a grandfather: Wadea al-Fayoume, Wadea al-Fayoume.

[20] See Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, "Potential History: Thinking through Violence," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 548–574.

[21] Scot Wortley, Ayobami Laniyonu, and Erick Laming, *Use of Force by the Toronto Police Service: Final Report* (Toronto: Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2020). See also the work of the Yellowhead Institute on police brutality. Krista Stelkia writes in a policy brief from 2020 that "both Indigenous and Black people are overwhelmingly overrepresented in police-involved deaths in Canada. Between 2007 and 2017, Indigenous peoples represented one third of people shot to death by RCMP police officers (Mercer, Fiddler, & Walsh, 2020). The Ontario Human Rights Commission found that a Black person was more than 20 times more likely to be shot and killed by the police compared to a white person (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018)." Krista Stelkia, "Police Brutality in Canada: A Symptom of Structural Racism and Colonial Violence," *Yellowhead Institute Policy Brief*, no. 72 (July 15, 2020): 1.

These environments are also about holding histories, and *attuning* to them as "kin studies," not just as case studies, as Zoe Todd and Anja Kanngieser write.[22] Sites, places, and names are about reckoning and grappling with the many inheritances they offer, and that we and others bring—not only our own selfish desires and our (our our our—our possessive) singular definitions of a place. When we come to a site and a place and a name, it must be instead received as an invitation of the profoundest tenderness. To understand a site is to acknowledge its terrible and sublime logics and ill-logics, its ideas, histories, and belongings, and about moving beyond that acknowledgment. The purpose of our learning and craft and education and practice is to change, to transform, to become—not to stay the same. If only we would learn to listen, to deep listen, to become still. To become soft, to become tender. If only we would, maybe, resist the capriciousness and extractiveness of design writ large, design writ intellectual, design writ as capital, we might hear other voices speaking, in the stones and gravel, in the earths and airs, in the Venturi wind as the pickup truck drives past, or as the horses race forward, or as the body falls.[23]

[22] Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd, "From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020): 385–393.

[23] Émélie Desrochers-Turgeon, Ozayr Saloojee, and Zoe Todd, "Kerogenic Relations," for *Transmediale Festival*, 2022, link.

Sites stretch across time and space, and so they have to be known in the many times and spaces of their existences: their names, their other lives, their other meanings, their myriad negotiations and complex entanglements with local subjectivities and local logics. To that end, "architecture," "landscape," "site," "research" are themselves terms that must be shifted, displaced, and made free of the intellectual and canonical moorings of supremacist certitude, disciplinary and professional arrogance, and, above all, the anchors of whiteness, of the baseness of our lower selves. Hyde Park is everywhere now: here in Colorado; in Etobicoke, Ontario; in Quebec City; in Minneapolis; in Staten Island. There are Hyde Parks in Boston, in Tennessee, in Tampa, in Boise, in Montrose, in LA. There is a Hyde Park on any street where there might be a truck. In any mosque where there might be worship. On any earth, in any school of architecture, in any practice.

Sites, names, places are not confined to themselves. Tyburn, after all, replicates itself. Hyde Park replicates itself. Speeches and sport, hunting and death replicate themselves. We, the public, pay for tickets to look and the glitterati dress in their finery and feast on the sidelines. Meanwhile, we pin pleas to stones or write our names on our hands, asking to be seen, to be recognized, to be more than merely acknowledged. Dear Ozayr, this letter is a reckoning with a fever dream of being in many places at once, in many skins at once, in many times at once. Hyde Park is a gallows. Hyde Park is a garden. Hyde Park is a podium. Maybe it can be a simple tree, a young deer, a tender speech. Maybe it can be a love, a repair, a flower passed to a soon-to-be short-dropped soul. Maybe it can be. Maybe, maybe, maybe. Maybe it can, one day, be certain. Maybe we can look at a place, and a site, and see it, erased—like Damon Thruff tries to do—and to be set free. Maybe. I won't know until I can really look at it, at its conspiracy, at its deathly net and its living entanglements and see, maybe, an unburdened life, with clean clothes, a whole, unbroken body with all its organs and insides. Maybe maybe maybe. I don't even need a stone convent or a marble arch—just look. And listen.

I think I am looking for, now more than ever, an architecture enacted otherwise. A practice of thinking about and doing architecture that is unmoored

from our typically gate-keeping discipline. What's changed since May 2020 and George Floyd? Since March 2020 and Breonna Taylor? Since February 2020 and Ahmaud Arbery? Since July 2016 and Philando Castile, or two years earlier and Eric Garner? Or August 2016 and Colten Boushie, or almost a decade on and Tamir Rice? What has changed since October 7, 2023, or 1967, or 1948, or or or or… The not-so-new normal? *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*?

But it doesn't have to be, I don't think—and it's hard to say that these days. But maybe, maybe, maybe—perhaps that's why a letter, to me, and maybe—just maybe—a letter to you, too. In *Writingplace*, Marko Jobst, Klaske Havik, Hélène Frichot, and Catharina Gabrielsson write about "transversal writing," as a way to bring forth and to locate knowledge—to put it *in* place, to put Hyde Park *in* place—and, as they argue, to challenge the position of the author (me, you, us).[24] Are we as authors insiders, participants, or external observers? And is it possible, at times, for the positions of researcher, author, and experiencing subject to merge? Lindsay Bremner writes of this, too, in her work on Johannesburg (my hometown, where there is another Hyde Park)—that writing *negates* the city as lived and makes an idea city to fill that absence.[25] How we write the city and architecture—in this case, through a letter—can invent another city, bring into being a tender cartography of a city, of place, a garden, a street. A situated, epistemic, fever dream of tenderness, vulnerability, mercy.

[24] Catharina Gabrielsson, Hélène Frichot, Klaske Havik, and Marko Jobst, "Reading(s) and Writing(s): Unfolding Processes of Transversal Writing," *Writingplace*, no. 3 (2019): 4–9.

[25] Lindsay Bremner, *Writing the City into Being: Essays on Johannesburg*, 1998–2008 (Johannesburg: Fourthwall, 2012).

With love,

Ozayr

Coda: June 9, 2021, 12:47 am, ET

We talked about going for a walk this evening. The girls in their hijabs, my wife in her black-and-white dress, me in my baggy pants and long, loose Syrian shirt. Sandals. Holding hands. But we didn't.

I haven't been able to really talk to them, yet, about London. I started to, then looked at their faces and took them in, over a barbecue in the backyard. A hot, humid late spring afternoon. All I can think of, really, is a nine-year-old boy, Fayez Afzaal. Who has to be told now that his whole nine-year-old world is empty. His parents, his sister, his grandmother, gone.

I remembered as I looked at their faces and spoke their beautiful names out loud in my head, how we look for each other on our walks, arm-in-arm, switching partners, taking turns holding mom's hand, dad's elbow, watching the kids; heads together.

I look at them and I think of Bhanu Kapil's twelve questions:

1. WHO ARE YOU AND WHOM DO YOU LOVE?
2. WHERE DID YOU COME FROM / HOW DID YOU ARRIVE?
3. HOW WILL YOU BEGIN?
4. HOW WILL YOU LIVE NOW?
5. WHAT IS THE SHAPE OF YOUR BODY?
6. WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUFFERING OF YOUR

MOTHER?

7. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE EARTH?
8. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SILENCE?
9. TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT DISMEMBERMENT.
10. DESCRIBE A MORNING YOU WOKE WITHOUT FEAR.
11. HOW WILL YOU / HAVE YOU PREPARE(D) FOR YOUR DEATH?
12. AND WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF YOU COULD?[26]

[26] Bhanu Kapil, *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Berkeley, CA: Kelsey Street Press, 2001), 9.

What is Hyde Park now, for Fayez?

Who will look for Fayez? Grasp him, reach for him, answer him? In the way his sister would, teasingly, jokingly? The way his parents would, fiercely, fully? The way his grandmother would, uncompromisingly, completely?

I hope we do.

Maybe maybe maybe.

Ottawa, Ontario, October 2023 // Hyde Park, London, Ontario (London/ England), June 7, 2021, and all the other times then, now, and coming.