

Niyas CK, *Cyberpunk Train Yard*, 09/07/2016, Digital Art, 1920x960 px, Artstation.com.



1 BODY

Train track veins creep out from the shining metal body,
bleeding life from the city as the seconds go by.

At the heart,

a strong pulse of silver and concrete teems with people

like ants in a nest.

The corded nerves sing
with electricity as we are passed along them,
as we are transferred through
to lend our lives to another city.

2 PASSENGER

The metal tracks spun out from the hub like a complex web. I sat, waiting to be taken through the city by one of the beast-like trains that screeched their way in and out of the centre like clockwork. My nerves prickled as the lines above the track quivered and hummed. To my right, one was rounding the corner with its headlight eyes shining bright against the mid November rain and dusk. It slowed to a halt briefly before starting up again; eager to get to its destination.

I sat with my forehead pressed against the window. Looking out but not really seeing.

On the opposite side of the glass, the landscape slowly morphed from greenery to metalworks and smoke. Industry spreading through the countryside like a virus.

My head was spinning as I walked from the station. I was always looking back to double check. As if I'd somehow left pieces of me behind wherever I paused for breath. Like my body wasn't meant to be constantly in motion, but at the same time, if I ever stopped I'd get lost. Or I'll fall apart and never find those little pieces I'd left in my wake.

It was dark now.

My steps splashed against the wet tarmac. The noise itself is nothing against the screaming city around me. Life poured out uncontrollably, traffic and people and advertisements assaulted you from the second your feet touched the ground around here.

It was beautiful and horrible. Glass and metal structures twisted into the clouds, imposing their presence and dominance on all those who walked beneath. Light

bounced off every shining surface, creating a kaleidoscope that gave a dream-like atmosphere you had to shake yourself out of. Colour seemingly bled from the sky to the puddles at your feet.

Nobody was your friend here. You had to watch your back at every turn and keep your eyes downcast lest you looked at someone the wrong way. It was busy, it was chaos. Nothing like the country less than an hour from the hub she walked through now. Everywhere you looked, lights assaulted your vision and bounced off the glass; creating a sickly glow that never ceased.

The city of a thousand stars.

That's what they called her.

There was something in the energy here that was addictive as much as it was toxic. Some people could easily get stuck here and not realise until years later. What more could you want: culture, opportunity, money, corruption and sin.

The place practically hummed with it.

Violence settled in the air like a winter chill.

There might be some bright lights around here but all that meant was more shadow lurking behind.

3. INTERSECT

She was late. That's what she got for using public transport. One splash of water and the whole system gets fucked. Picking up her pace, she shouldered her way through the crowd checking her watch as she went. Very late, it seemed.

If she was lucky, the rest of the company would be running behind as well. She scrambled to get herself together before facing a room full of people. Boots thundered against the tarmac as she ran the last few minutes to their meetup.

An office building of course. One of thousands spread throughout the city. A carbon copy of the one next to it... and the one next to that. You'd have to be living here not to get lost all time. As for her, she had her own built in map that she'd worked hard to develop over the years.

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His shoulder knocked against the lady next to him. They tried to brush past each other smoothly but the city pressed in on them from all sides and forced them together. Her blazer clad arm hit him right in his side even though he instinctively tried to shield the injury from harm. Pain muddled his brain as he tried to apologise and quickly move on. Luckily for him, she was in a rush too and barely spared him a glance before resuming her march to whatever business meeting she looked like she was attending. Heels were surely a stupid choice for someone so late?

Trying not to look behind him, he carried on his half limping run through the crowd. Red fell through his fingers and he tried not to look down, not to think too much as the sliver

of glass in his side ghosted along his rib bone. His stomach was pulled up and into his throat as his torso throbbed where he'd crashed into that woman in the street.

Hearing shouts behind him, he knew he needed to move. Now. He should never have crossed over into this side of town. He knew that. Had always known. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

A last ditch effort to evade danger had him turning into a side street and squeezing past a couple of strangers tangled together in the dark before he found a place to wait it out.

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Kissing him was a bad idea. Like dancing on a blade's edge hoping not to get cut, or being dared to jump off a cliff into the dark waters below. When his mouth opened beneath mine, I did. Falling into a black ocean of desire. All I could think about was him, the hands in my hair, the warmth of his skin against me. As his hand fisted in my hair and he grabbed at my waist, I let myself be swept under.

I was drowning in this feeling; my racing heart, the tremor in my hands, the nervous clench in my stomach that told me I should be careful. It was as delicious as it was dangerous and I could not get enough.

Because of him, I understood why people described loving as falling. Rushes of adrenaline, overwhelming fear, the breathlessness and that weightless feeling that left

you unburdened and free. We all feel some savage joy in the danger of free falling into oblivion. What people fail to say is that falling often ends badly and almost always leaves you broken.

I found that I did not mind falling into the void that was him. I did not care that it would break me. Break *us*.

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Across the road, through the thick glass of the cafe and the milling crowd, she stared at the couple twined together in the dark. She remembered what it was like to steal away moments like that with someone. To feel as if the world would end if you weren't breathing the same air. She looked over at the empty chair across the table. With her resolve hardening she stood up, leaving few notes on the table. Not bothering with her bag she breezed through the door and headed to the staircase at the back of the building. With each step she felt less alone and the higher she climbed the lighter she felt.

The city roared beneath her. Metal and lights stretching out endlessly to the horizon.

Looking up, she smiled.

I'll be there soon, she thought.

A deep breath in. And then she jumped.

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My knuckles whitened on the wheel as I gripped it to avoid screaming out my frustration. The seconds ticked away loudly and I glanced at the clock on my dash in panic while resisting the urge to check my phone for the fourth time in as many minutes. Ahead of me, cars were jam packed along the road. A standstill, it seemed. I flicked up the radio and listened closely to the overly cheerful voices while trying not to cringe.

An accident apparently. I tried. I really tried not to be insensitive. But I was stuck and I needed to get to the hospital. I would have been there by now. If I missed my own daughters birth I'd-
I don't know what I'd do. It just couldn't happen.

In a split second, I made my decision. As the traffic began to crawl forward, I pulled through a side street hastily. Surely I could find my way from here.

A second before it was too late, I saw him walk out in the road in front of me. Heart in my throat I swerved-

“HEY!”

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You stare at the man in front of you, clearly not experienced enough to be driving the massive machine that nearly crushed you. Anger bubbles over and spills out your mouth as you shout an angry “HEY!”, and then “Watch where you're going next time.”

You stalk off as the guy continues to balk. Serves him right. What an idiot, not looking where he’s going. Some people need to get their fucking heads out of the clouds. You lift your hand and stare at the tiny tremor that shakes it. Maybe you should have been looking too. The thought rises up on its own and you push it back down as quickly as you can. That one was definitely not your fault.

The thoughts halt as you round the corner to see a street engulfed in chaos. Sirens scream throughout the city and blue light blinds every onlooker.

Bile stings the back of your throat as you stare at the body on the floor. Nearby, a woman in stupid shoes and professional clothes dry heaves onto the pavement. You guess she saw it happen. A couple hold on to each other, their eyes as glued to the body as they are to each other.

Collective horror keeps the streets silent save for the bustle of the paramedics and police. Blue lights illuminate the crowd as darkness falls on the city. You force yourself to move on.

You have somewhere to be, Like everyone else does. Nothing but ants in this giant nest.

One by one, the crowd disperse and the night continues.

4. CONFUSION

Vibrant, pink, dark and crushed

Everyone hustling and rushed

Quietly loud and loudly quiet

It's busy but I am alone

Dizzy from the riot

Of colour and sound

That encompasses me from

All around.

The bustle hums

As the train lines shudder

And strum

The tracks along which they run

Racing against each other

In a race that repeats itself forever.

Does it ever stop

5. URBANISATION

Where shadows coat every floor
And metal bones frame the sky.
Gemstone lights shine for evermore
In a sickly glow that will never die.
She lives on the shoe stomp heartbeat
And those frozen winter breaths
Of citizens in her maze of concrete,
Glass and a thousand living deaths.

6. HEIGHTS

The sky never expects us to fall. It holds us up in defiance of gravity. For a split second it lets us feel what it's like to fly. But we can only hold on for so long until the grip slips and then we're falling through the air that so solidly held us only a moment before. We can't trust the sky above us, nor the ground beneath to catch us when we fall.

So what makes us keep jumping. What is it inside that makes us want to run and leap.

My heart thunders as I stare at the gap between the buildings; sickened and excited by the death drop that ploughs down to the streets below. My legs twitch and blood rushes through me as I prepare myself for the jump.

Part of me gawks at the distance, the risk and the concrete below.

I hesitate only once. At the beginning. And then I go for it.

For a moment, there is nothing. Only the taste of my fear and the sting of the wind against my cheek. My legs swim midair as I'm held up by the sky. Everything is below me. I'm on top. And then I'm not.

Asphalt bites my skin and reality hits me hard. My brain wakes up and I grab on.

Scramble to make sure the edge is nowhere near me.

The sounds of the city explode around me as I lay on the rooftop, limbs shaking with adrenaline. Hearing the noise below, I realise how alone I am up here.

So easily, I could have fallen. The thought pushes a laugh from my lips and I clap my hands over my mouth at the unexpected sound. Then I'm laughing uncontrollably on the rooftop like a madman.

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Beneath my feet, the metal vibrates with a low threatening hum that I feel in my bones. My eyes are closed and I can hear my heartbeat in my skull. Carriage after carriage whips past on my right, I am balanced precariously and the wind knocks me but I stay focused. Breathing deep.

I'm waiting, waiting.

And then I felt it. The grind and whine rattles my ribcage, my pulse picks up and my stomach drops. Gently, my breath curls in the air as I exhale. My legs are shaking now and bells are ringing in the station. No one sees me or if they do, they say nothing. As it rounds the corner, I open my eyes. Blinded by the lights that I stare directly into; I force myself to look.

Everything in me itches to run. The longer I wait, the more my chances dwindle, yet I am rooted to the spot. Metal has grown up my legs and frozen my muscles. The tracks have trapped me and I can do nothing but stare at the beast approaching. I am afraid. I am excited.

It eats up the space between us and I know I need to move before it's too late. My body is screaming at me to run but I *need* to feel this for a second longer. Every bit of me is alive and burning.

With milliseconds to spare, I leap to the side. A mere moment later, the train crashes past annihilating the spot where I just stood. I lay there, shaking, until I can pull up my hood and stumble away from the station.

REFLECTIVE ACCOUNT.

Personal experience with writing stimuli and inspiration suggests that there is never a singular aspect in play. The work itself is usually inspired by a number of elements (consciously and subconsciously) that come together. This project, for me, entailed finding a piece through which I could channel all of my current inspirations and closely explore some of the elements the work depicts. Choosing concept art for a cityscape logically aligns with my recent move to a big city. The art work will allow me to refine some ideas already affecting my writing and my responses will be given life.

The writing process.

I found the writing process for this assessment to be particularly fragmented. Rather than sitting down and forcing myself to write, I found it helpful to engage with a number of different approaches including writing exercises and challenges. Every time I have travelled in recent months (train, car or otherwise) I have pushed myself to write about the journey and the destination whether it be a sentence, poem or passage of prose. Despite this fragmented approach the pieces themselves link as they explore similar or the same experiences through different perspectives and voices. For example, both *Urbanisation* and *Passenger* make reference to the buildings within the city, their size, and the materials they are made of. "Glass and metal structures twisted into the clouds" and "Where shadows coat every floor And metal bones frame the sky." These both explore the same part of the city in different contexts and voices. The reason this

happened during the writing process was likely due to my own fascination with the presence and impact of the structures in a modern cityscape. Within the Cyberpunk Trainyard ¹piece the first thing I noticed was the difference in levels between the trains and the buildings of which you only see a fraction. The trains seem impossibly small in comparison and this thought process resulted in exploring the relation between the individual parts of the city to the whole. In the various pieces, I find different ways to convey this with comparisons made to an “ants nest”, a human body through the use of biological terminology “Nerves, heart, veins, blood, pulse” and in the personification of the city as seen with “she lives”. While the approach was fragmented and the writing process required a variety of different methods, the overall effect was very successful as the pieces all link. I feel as though I have taken advantage of the brief for the project in order to explore the same topic in different voices. For example, the longest piece Intersect, uses three different pronouns within the text to emphasise the difference in voice between each point of view.

In addition, travelling on trains (although difficult due to covid-19) I realised offered me a unique opportunity for writing. A different approach was to write whilst travelling on the train but this time I would note down whatever phrases came to me, whether or not these were related to a cityscape. Sentences such as “the city of a thousand stars” and “where colour bleeds from the sky into puddles at our feet” are some of the things I wrote during my commute. I was then able to collect my thoughts later on and expand these into a narrative by drawing some of the fragments together and seeing how they

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connect. Some pieces felt better when left untouched. One example being Body. In some instances, adding to it felt as if it took away from the overall effect although the trial and error involved was helpful and I learnt a lot from the mistakes made during this part of the process. The only change made was in the structure following a peer review where experimentation was recommended. The words themselves are very raw and remain virtually unchanged from the original.

I also felt as though I didn't want to stick with the obvious and only explore one of the elements present in the piece and ignore the others. Something else that struck me when I first saw the picture was the use of colour and the atmosphere created by this. I found the dark and seductive colours inspired me to write about some of the more dangerous parts of city life and I felt the urge to look into private moments happening within the city. Sticking with the dark and dangerous atmosphere created by the colours. This led me to think about sin, corruption and violence. I looked into the contrast between the seemingly innocent countryside and the more sinister city. The disparity between these two ways of life was something that caught my attention and I felt it could be explored in my work.

Another thought that struck me while brainstorming the artwork was the population of a city and how each tiny part of the whole would have their own intricate lives. This led me to explore small scenes from the lives of people in the city. I then wondered how all these parts relate to the whole and at which point they link together. Although each piece takes a unique approach with voice, technique and style differing, there is a link

that connects them throughout. The way the trains are seen to cross over and intersect pushed me to consider how human lives do this within the context of the city.

Overall, I felt as if the assignment was successful as I created some pieces I'm proud of and I pushed myself out of my comfort zone to explore different voices and styles. The task has enabled me to grow as a writer and I feel confident now using art as a starting point for future work. I found it extremely rewarding to explore the Cyberpunk Trainyard in as many ways as possible and the direction it provided me in my work was extremely helpful. I enjoyed the challenge and will be looking to use artwork in my writing again.

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