

Climacteric

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A text evoking a walk around Susan Phillipsz's *Surround Me*, City of London, November 2010.

At a minute to noon, as I arrive, the moving staircase of *Weep, O Mine Eyes* is folding to its close. Eight minutes then to wait in the nameless square above Moorgate, sitting at the hub of the wind that skirls round its perimeter. A drowned church coughs out the tremulous waveborne hours. *Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell*. The song resumes, the voice plied fourfold on itself, following in its own footsteps. My route will be a roundelay of such conjunctions and concordances, twistings and trystings, appointments missed and kept, plaiting place with time. *Court'sied when you have, and kiss'd*. How many times round, beating these bounds, would it take for me to learn its lockstep, syncopated cinquepace, my arrivals coinciding precisely with every beginning, the piece persisting each time just the time I need to tread the measure of the space it scoops, and punctually desisting only as I myself recede?

Listening, I orbit the bleak court, widdershins, coiling in little the cochlear anticyclone I'll soon be pacing through the streets, turning and turning in a tightening gyre. Then set off west along the Moorgate Highwalk, on a slow bow-bend, slanting south down a stair sinistral to street level. Gutter Lane pours me out into Milk Street, where salty *Lachrimae*, pausing, forming, dropping slow, are silver sound-slivers of brightness falling from the air.

Bow Lane and Garlick Hill conduct me to Thames side and I am lifted on to London Bridge. I hear the music creep up from the waters, but must cross the bridge to find the stair to funnel me down, deasil now, to the riverpath. The sign at the top of the octave of slimed steps leading down to turbid murk confides, with mad composure, 'River Only'. As I wait for *Flow My Tears* to come round, we are mocked, I attending and it withholding, by the walloping belly-flops of the slovenly wash, that call to the song to come on in, come down to be drowned. Water wants to be round, as does music, no less sound.

Climbing away from the river, I wheel northward, turning away from the low sun. Mark Lane skirts the squat, spireless stump of All Hallows, necklaced by its little ring-a-rosary. *Oh My Love* trips a pretty petal-picking kiss-chase, lapping itself (he loves me), and catching itself out (he loves me not), mouth on mouth at last concurring.

Unto these yellow sands. The city's secret airs silt up in alcoves, endroits and eddy-places, where fingertips of sound can cling on for a space. In the blind alley of Tokenhouse Yard, the walls are all ears, till, with a soft soprano shock, its mute throat unlocks. After, I pay the reeking reverence due from men and dogs to corners, my stream purling and looping a lazy logarithmic spiral.

I lose my way at the last amid the maze off Lombard Street, curling out a cinching bass clef, before I come to rest in Change Alley's glaucous grotto, sinkhole of the long lefthanded zodiac, the whole place an intent ear clapped shell on shell to a stopped mouth. Here I am just two minutes as the crow flies, and two hours traffic as the snail trails, from where I began. Out of the blue, on the dot, the drydocked oyster-huckster's cry starts up, briny tang grit-tingling on a ghost-gone tongue, groat a peck, groat a peck. *And then take hands*.