

# Sky Breaks: A Walk

Created and written by Amber Obasi  
Production and sound design by 饜桐 (Aí Tung)

**Break**, noun

The interruption of continuity or uniformity; a pause in work or during an activity or event.

*What is the point of breaks? What happens when we look at the sky, the streets, passersby?  
What transformations can be ushered in through daydreams?*

Sky Breaks is an interactive piece of writing produced by Amber Obasi and 饜桐 (Aí Tung), and created in collaboration with Deptford residents. It explores these questions, using benches, bus-stops, and public seating areas across Deptford to consider the power of public breaks. Not just as single moments of time, but as interconnected processes in the creation of change.

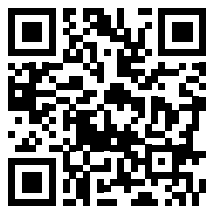
You are invited to immerse yourself in, and be guided by, these poems and recordings drawn from and inspired by Deptford.

The piece is based around seven locations in Deptford. Amber and Aí have created new poetic sound works, designed specifically to be listened to at each of these sites. To take part, we encourage you to navigate your way to the different locations and listen to the pieces as you stop, reflect, and consider what we truly want when we're not stuck in "business as usual."

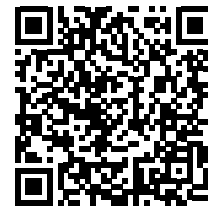
You can access the sound recordings via the QR code below or at: [spreadtheword.org.uk/sky-breaks](https://spreadtheword.org.uk/sky-breaks)

Please note this interactive piece is self-guided so you can complete it in your own time. The total listening time is around 25 mins. A transcript is also available at the end of this document.

Directions and a map to the locations are included below, although you're welcome to find your own way to the six sites. There are [What3Words](#) links to the specific locations and you can access the route on Google Maps via the QR code below, or at: [bit.ly/3FBgBYI](https://bit.ly/3FBgBYI). To walk between the locations via the route suggested at the end of this document is about 4 km or just over 2½ miles, and will take roughly an hour and a half to complete, including listening time. Do make sure to pay attention to traffic and other pedestrians as you follow the walk and keep safe.



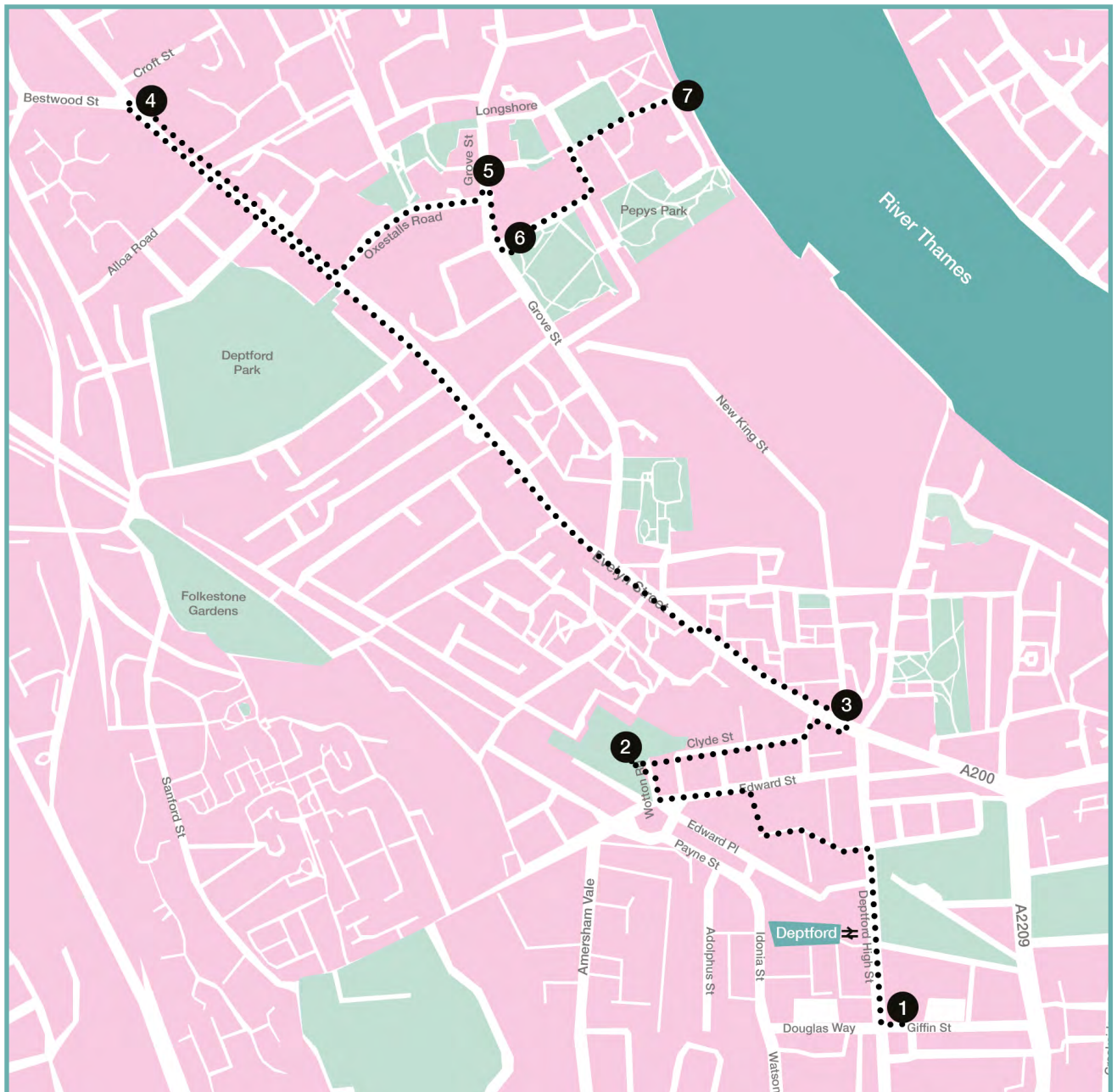
**Sound Recordings**



**Map**

# Locations

- 1. Giffin Square, outside Deptford Lounge**  
Public seating area  
[///honest.means.among](#)
- 2. Evelyn Community Centre**  
Picnic benches  
[///fits.shapes.define](#)
- 3. Evelyn Street x New King Street**  
Public benches  
[///chops.extra.models](#)
- 4. Bestwood Street, Stop N**  
Bus Stop  
[///waddle.visual.alarm](#)
- 5. Riverside Youth Club, Stop X**  
Bus Stop  
[///sugars.noise.reveal](#)
- 6. Lower Pepys Park**  
Picnic benches  
[///trades.spine.random](#)
- 7. Waterfront, outside Pepys Community Resource Centre**  
Public benches  
[///both.diary.runs](#)



# Directions

## Start

We begin outside Deptford Lounge. The first stop is the public seating area in Giffin Square, immediately in front of you.

## Stop 1



Standing in Giffin Square with your back to the Deptford Lounge, turn right up Deptford High Street. Continue for 200 yards, before taking a left down Hamilton Street. Continue straight on until the road reaches an end in front of Merganser Court. Turn right and cut through the pedestrian path to Edward Street. Turn left, crossing Edward Street at the zebra crossing. Continue along Edward Street, until just before the railway bridge. Taking a right through the gates and down Wotton Road towards the Blue Cage basketball courts and Evelyn Community Centre. Walk down the side of the courts until you reach the picnic benches, this is the location for stop two.

## Stop 2



Head back past the blue cages, but leave the park down the left hand side of The Lord Clyde pub along Clyde Street. Follow the road until you meet the Akwaaba Centre/New Testament Assembly building at its end, taking a left on the pedestrian cut-through to join Evelyn Street. Take a right and cross the road at the pedestrian crossing. Stop three is the benches in front of you slightly to the right, at the corner of Evelyn Street and New King Street.

## Stop 3



From your seat on the benches, cross back over Evelyn Street and head north west, passing the turning where you joined it earlier. Keep on for about a mile. Shortly after you pass Alloa Road on the left hand side you'll come across a large McDonald's restaurant. Stop at the bus stop outside the McDonald's, bus stop N. This is stop four on your walk.

## Stop 4



Continue up Evelyn Street a few yards, crossing at the zebra crossing, before turning back on yourself down Evelyn Street. After 500 yards, turn left onto Oxestalls Road. Continue to the end where it meets Grove Street. Opposite you towards the left is bus stop X. Cross the road carefully at the mini roundabout and make your way to the bus stop. This is stop five.

## Stop 5



From the bus stop, head past the mini-roundabout continuing down Grove Street. After 100 yards, as you pass Bowditch on your left hand side, head left and enter the open expanse of Lower Pepys Park. Take your pick from the picnic benches in this corner of the park to take your next break.

## Stop 6



Head out of the park onto Bowditch, and follow it as it bends left through a housing estate. After following it round the corner, take the second right down Longshore. Keep heading straight on, down the pedestrian path until this leads you out to meet the Thames. Immediately to your right along the riverside are a row of wooden benches outside the old brick building of the Pepys Community Centre. This is the final stop on the walk.

## Stop 7



You have now finished the walk and have a few choices from here, depending on whether you want to walk through the docks to Surrey Quays and pick up transport there, or take the bus back to Deptford or on to Canada Water.

To take the bus: retrace your steps to stop 5 on our walk, and the Riverside Youth Club bus stop. From here the 199 bus southbound (from stop X) will take you back down Evelyn Street to the top of Deptford High Street. Northbound (from stop S on the opposite side of the road) will take you to Canada Water station.

Alternatively, to get to Surrey Quays: facing the river, turn left and head north up the riverside. After about 700 yards, cross the footbridge over South Dock. After crossing the bridge, turn left and continue along Rope Street. As you reach the end of Rope Street head right and walk around the side of Greenland Dock to the underpass into Surrey Quays shopping centre. Here you can get the bus or overground from Surrey Quays station.



# Audio Transcript

## 1. A snail is a break

How long can a break last? How far can it go? How much can it change?

What if, when we see one, we help it along its way?

Imagine that. We bend down to lift one up, gently, using only two fingertips. Or we show it the care of a cupped embrace. Raising the break up to the sky, palms open as if in prayer.

We could linger here for a moment, take in the beauty of the break. There is much to learn from it, many already have. The Nauru people believe that the world began with the help of a break, two to be in fact. Not through a big bang or anything so sudden, but through the spider's hard work, using those two breaks to create the sun and moon to illuminate the darkness, and a worm to stretch open the clam of the world.

Look, see how its shell shines in the light, how its shell is the light, how the browns and blacks and oranges and ambers, and looking even closer, how its greens and blues carry the colours of the world inside it.

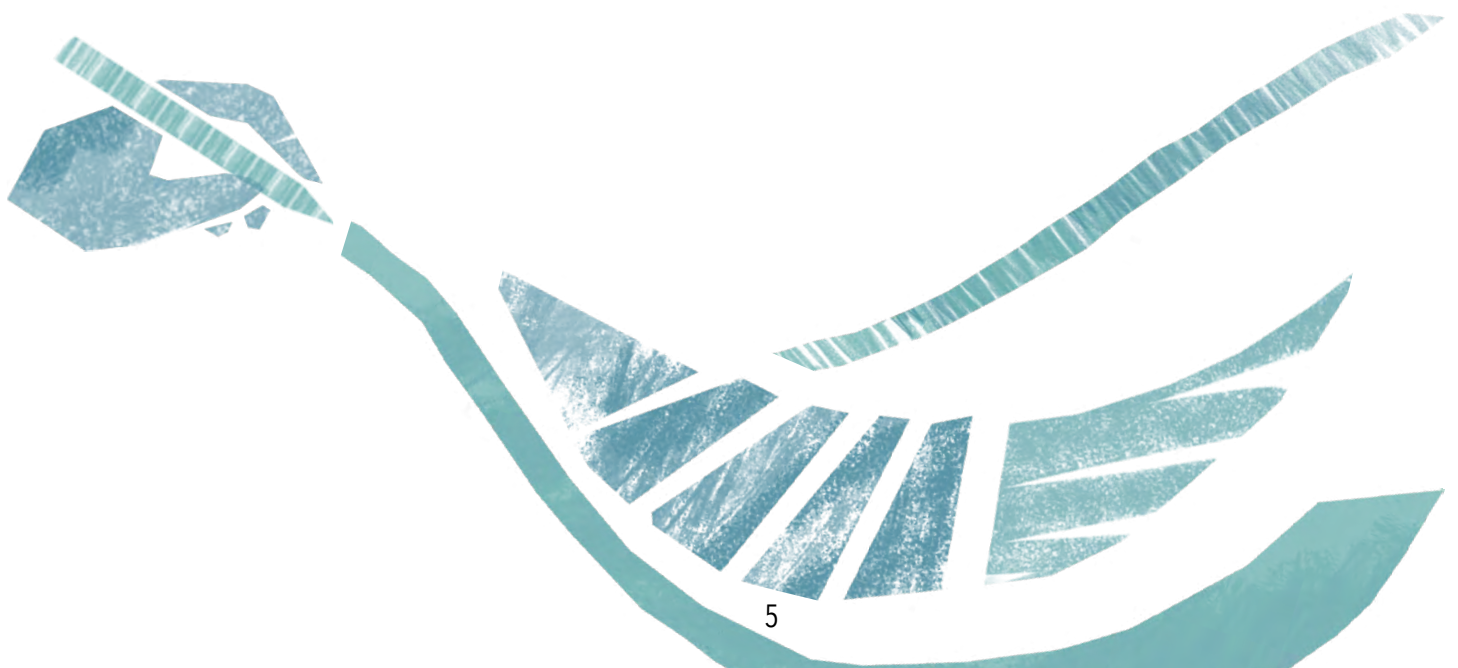
We could linger here for a moment. Take in the beauty of the break. There's so much to learn from it, many already have. The Zapatistas understand the quiet power of the break and live out its rotation, its name uttered often and its symbols littered all over their banners. They know that urgent is not the same as rushed. That sometimes, moving backwards, choosing to go slowly when the world is urging NEW and MORE and FASTER, refusing to abandon land or culture or each other for the sake of so called 'modernity', is the moving forward.

Imagine that. That we do not spend our days rushing, charging over breaks, crushing them with our footsteps eager to go on to the next thing.

That instead we raise breaks up, savour them and move them along. So when we let them go, setting them on a safer path from which to continue their journey, our hands remain sticky with their slime, ensuring their lessons are not too soon forgotten. So afterwards, when we lift our seemingly empty hands up to the sky, they now shine too.

Contrary to popular belief, a break is not the absence of movement. I'll say it again so that you cannot claim to have misheard me. A break is not the absence of movement. A break is not the absence of movement. A break is not the absence of movement, it is the sometimes slow, sometimes backwards but always conscious moving towards.

Towards what? Well that's for you to decide...



## 2. Breakthrough

Do you still think about it? it's on my mind a lot.

Usually I watch from the top, dreaming of how it would feel to join in. It always looks like it happens at all once, suddenly, spontaneously. One minute they're all sitting there, seemingly minding their own business, then the next they're up swaying in unison across the sky.

Sometimes swooping, sometimes soaring, but always together, close enough to move together but with enough space to prevent them from crashing into each other.

I'm never quite sure how it starts. Who decides when it's time, how long to go on for, which way to turn, where to land?

Maybe it's not that rigid, maybe it's simpler than that. Maybe there's no one leader that they all look for to say when, maybe there's only a feeling, an irresistible urge to move, dance, to feel part of a group. Maybe this energy fizzes through the air around them, tingling their feathers, tickling them until they have no choice but to open up to it, to rise up and ride the wind.

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It was I-don't-even-know-how-many days since the announcement that we had to stay inside when the tingling first began. At first I tried to ignore it, tried napping through it, and when that failed, tried going on my allotted one hour outdoor exercise time, but that failed too. I decided to take a trip up, thinking maybe the view would distract me. I chose the stairs instead of the lift, hoping the eight flights would ease my restlessness. But, when I got there, the opposite happened. The tingling grew stronger and I started to laugh, squawk even. My whole body began to shake, hard enough to break through the window's glass.

For a moment I thought I was falling, but then I soared, gliding over to lower park, or 'river' to you, and joined a flock of pigeons flying. They, open to my strangeness, took me in their stride, made space for me in their murmuration. We spun round Pepsys; sometimes I faltered but the energy of the group was enough to keep me in pace.

As we whipped round the tower I saw a face, your face, looking out at me. The moment suspended, lingered. Watching you watch me. Your face pressed up against a window, our faces overlapping when the light reflected mine onto the glass. You felt it too, I know I know. You were laughing the same way I had been. We moved away and our eyes broke contact, when we came back round I saw you again, this time with one leg out the window, ready to join our flight.

I, afraid that the birds wouldn't take kindly to another stranger, jerked to try and move the group away. This act of individualism broke through the connection, severing it, and without this connection the group flapped about, crashing into each other and splintering into different directions. I, losing the connecting energy, spun out.

After it was all done, after I touched down, I went back inside, embarrassed.

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Things are the same but different now. For one, I feel even the slightest change in the winds more strongly, and wherever birds in my vicinity begin their murmuration, I feel the pull to join and know I could if I opened up to it.

But what stays with me the most, what changed me the most, was the look you gave me. I know now what I was too afraid to know then: this ability to fly is not for me alone.

If I see you again, *when* I see you again, I'll do what I was too afraid to do that day, I'll move aside, make space for you, so that we can glide together.

### 3. Split/Share

A conversation with a stranger is nice, great even, but have you ever experienced the pleasure of witnessing a stranger enjoy your favourite view?

From the bench near the top, but not directly in the centre – the second highest, to be exact.

There is so much to see from there.

- *Bird*
- *Sky*
- *Children*
- *Dogs*
- *Bird*
- *Sky*
- *Children*
- *Dogs*
- *Bird*
- *Sky*
- *Children*
- *Dogs*

I struggle to take it all in, but there's something calming about all of this overwhelm. The great big expanse.

Some days I really need it. A break. Just a second for myself in a spot where the wind touches my face just so, where the tree perfectly bisects my vision and splits through my thoughts, preventing me from obsessing on one thing for too long.

On these days, I struggle to give it up to the stranger already sat there as I approach. I want to say something sarky like \*oh, so this is *your* favourite bench? Name your top ten moments here\*

But in reality, I let it slide.

Some days I walk away dejected, other times I stay a couple of paces back, watch them watch the scene around them.

I see the way their shoulders release, opening up or slouching depending on what they need that day. If I'm close enough, I can even hear the air expelled in their sigh. Sometimes they're just there for a fag and I watch the smoke ascend. From behind, it looks as if it's coming out of the top of their head, as if just by sitting there their thoughts are transformed into drifting clouds.

At these times, the ones where I stay to bear witness, I am glad. After all, why should it be just for me?

## 4. A short break for some thoughts on bus stops

### *Bestwood Street (Stop N)*

There's a rain shelter but no seating and no screen to tell you when the next buses are coming.

The only nearby ledge to perch on as an alternative seat is a very, very low wooden fence (so low it's almost more of a trip hazard than a fence) with a pointed top part, all of which makes it a very uncomfortable and impractical seating option.

And finally, not a fault of the stop per se but a problem nonetheless, the endless traffic on Evelyn Street means that you spend most of the time longingly starting at your bus as it crawls towards you, only for it to be too full to take on more passengers by the time it finally gets to you.

**0 stars**

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### *Wavelengths (Stops M and L)*

There are rain shelters and seats and, as a bonus, if you happen to be there at the right time of day you'll get to observe teachers trying to shepherd 20 distracted primary school children out of the leisure centre and back to school.

This bus stop would be rated higher but for the lack of live bus time screens and for the fact that the constant and yet inconsistent roadworks on Deptford Church Street means that you're playing a game of roulette every time you try to get a bus from there, and there's a high chance you'll lose.

**3 stars**

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### *Canada Water Bus Station (Stops B1, B2, C and D)*

There are numerous seats, although they are not evenly spread close to the numerous bus stops, and the steel means you risk frostbite sitting down in winter.

All the bus stops are on the same side, meaning that, for the uninitiated, it's easy to accidentally get on a bus going the wrong way.

Special dishonourable mention to this bus stop on behalf of passengers who have the misfortune of being on a bus that stops here with no actual desire to use the stop themselves, for whom the detour round the now-being-demolished Surrey Quays leisure park and the loop of the station will add 10 minutes to their journeys. I guess it's good for people who get the tube though.

**1 star**

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### *Abinger Grove (Stop W)*

There's a rain shelter and seats and a screen with live bus times, but the real stars of the show are the other seating options nearby. Mere yards away stand two gorgeous trees (maybe chestnuts?), around which you can sit comfortably. If English trees aren't your fancy, RnJ Barbers has a great array of plants growing in the front window and, if you need a shape up, they'll sort you out good.

Additionally, there's a sturdy picnic table, but this is usually occupied by elders playing highly competitive games of dominos, so I don't suggest you interrupt unless you can keep up.

If you'd like a snack while you wait, there's also very well stocked Londis a few feet away. Yes, there's a small chance you collide with a cyclist when trying to cross over to bus stop island but the vibes are simply immaculate.

**5 stars, no notes**



## 5. Craters

A system that forces people to sleep on the streets for nights on end is broken.

A system that treats the death of a person rough sleeping as 'not suspicious' is broken and murderous.

A system that votes to demolish people's homes and replace them with buildings for speculative students (aka for profit) while thousands of people wait on lists and in temporary accommodation is broken and murderous and greedy.

The breaks in this system are endless. These breaks are not small. They are not dislocated joints that just need to be reset, or small hairline fractures that will heal with time.

They are sinkholes, pits, craters, that are growing wider and deeper. Craters which more and more people are being pushed down.

No reforms, no tinkering around the edges, are enough. The holes expand faster than they can be fixed. There must be another solution.



## 6. Regulated Breaks

Rest breaks: Working Time Regulations 1998 state that employees are entitled to a minimum of one uninterrupted 20-minute rest break if they work for more than six hours a day. There is no specification that this rest break should be paid

Screen breaks: under health and safety regulations, employees have the right to break from working using a Visual Display Unit. There is no obligation for these to be rest breaks, however, it is sufficient for employees to switch to a different type of work.

The thing about these breaks is that they're not really breaks at all, just temporary, regulated pauses. And the problem with these pauses, the fallacy of them, is that there's not enough time.

Not enough time to cook or get food and eat and chat to someone and have a moment to yourself and maybe even nap and have a meeting for work that doesn't pay the bills but is actually more rewarding and have a fag and stretch and, and, and, AND, AND, AND.... It's shit if you only have 20 minutes and it's still not great even if you have the relative privilege of a full hour of time for lunch.

Some have found ways to stretch the pauses. They have done so through acts of refusal, through acts of subterfuge. Let's hear from some now:

"I refuse to work in the office five days a week. I go in once a fortnight, less if I can get away with it, and the other days, the days I 'work from home', I take my time. I set my alarm for 8.50 and open my laptop blurry-eyed, joining the first meeting with my camera off, still in my pyjamas."

"I tell everyone it's broken and permanently set my Microsoft Teams status to inactive, even when I'm in a meeting, so that no one knows when I'm actually not working."

"I set a Slack status saying 'focus time - do not disturb. No replies for 2hrs' then go and take a bath or go to the market or go have coffee with a friend."

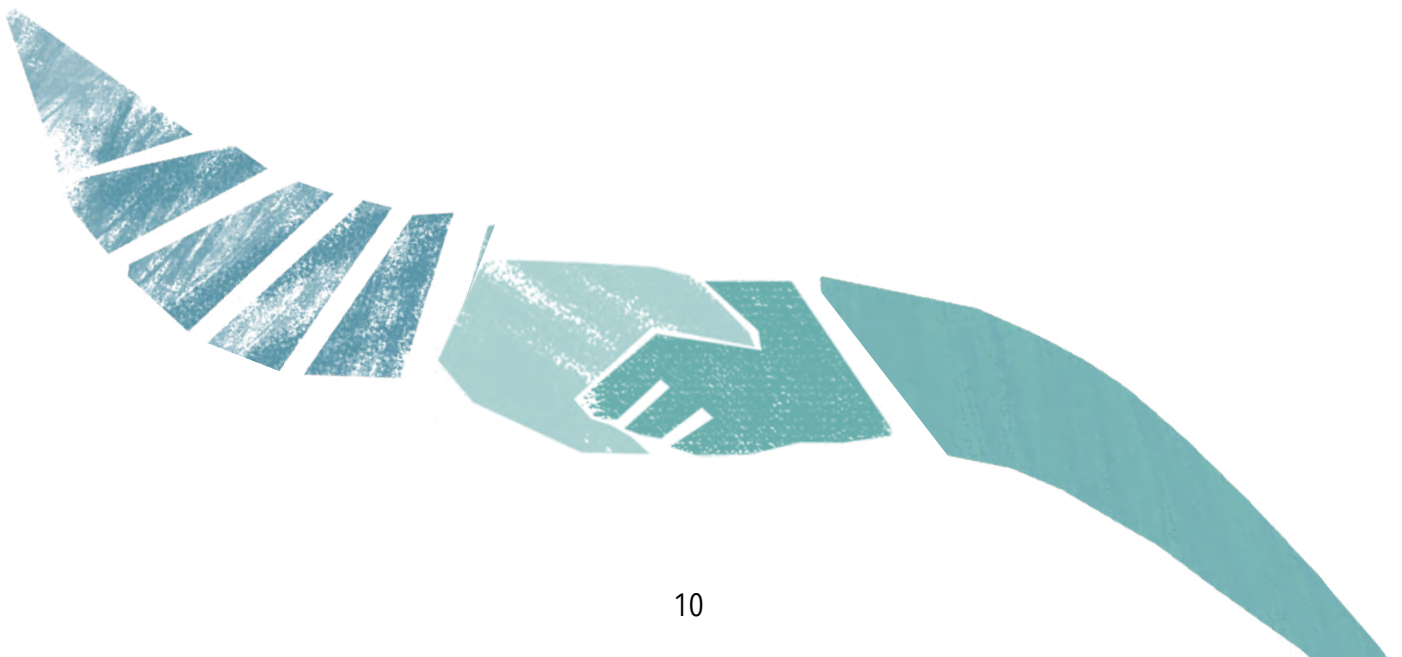
But is this enough? What about the people who can't work from home, who have to clock in and out every time they go to the bathroom to take a shit, who have nowhere to hide from the boss' glaring eyes?

What if we all stretched these pauses further together? If we all went on strike, pulled at their edges until the snap, break open?

What could this look like?

What would need to happen for this to be a possibility?

What roles could we play?



## 7. At the breaking of waves

There's something about the smell of it. I wouldn't go as far as to say it's fresh, if i'm being honest there's actually something quite industrial about it but I guess that's what I like.

While sometimes I come here to escape – from the business and the noise and flatmates and occasionally even from myself – the smell, the comfort I find in it, is a reminder that I don't really want to leave it all behind and escape to the countryside. That I'm really still a city kid at heart.

When I come here in the day I avert my gaze, worried that it will linger too long on the questionable blue/green/brown colour or the domineering glass structures of THE CITY looming from the other side.

Instead, I look at the other people. The rollerbladers, the cyclists, the scooters, the runners – there are always lots and lots and LOTS of runners. They move with such intensity it makes me wonder: should I be running too?

Of course, not all the day people are so active and there are other sitters like me. Some on benches, on the grass, standing propped up against the railing. Some with their own seats, wheels moving at the flick of a hand on a frame or a lever.

I find some joy in this – that we've all decided to be here, at this moment, even if for some it's just a more scenic way to get to a desired location.

The first time I had an extended chat with a stranger in Deptford, we met on the High Street (where I asked them whether the juice at the place they were sitting outside was actually worth the price) and they brought me here, us both strolling down juice in hand. I actually can't remember what we spoke about, nor can I remember the details of the numerous conversations in person and on the phone I've had here. I've bumped into friends on their way to here, on their way from here, or just strolling along.

Further along, close to the Dog and Bell, I've joined in ceremonial Christmas tree burnings, cheered as the flames grew while warming my hands and face in them, knowing that sand and tide will stop things from going too far.

I think it's best at night when it's dark enough to look into the water's expanse. Many harms have been committed in this water, in the name of this water and the city it's flanked by but when I look into it at night, I see not those who attempt to own it, to control it, to abuse it and abuse others through it.

At night I see its wildness, its sheer ungovernability. Even on a relatively calm night where the waves only lap the bank I know that if it wanted, the waters could change it all in a moment with one huge wave.

I think of all the moments that would lead up to this. All the thousands of water droplets that find their way into the river, all the thousands of droplets that form a wave, how the waves join together, push against each other to form even bigger waves, all the tension that leads to this act of creativity. How these waves keep building and splashing and pushing and building and splashing and pushing until ...

I sit, or I stand and I listen. Each wave sings the phrase:

Keep going  
Keep breaking  
Keep going  
Keep breaking

Sometimes I stay till daybreak. In this new light, the song continues:

Keep going  
Keep breaking  
Keep going  
Keep breaking  
Keep going  
Keep breaking ...