

Stepping inside The Writers' Room with Bleet!

While hordes of people flocked to London Fields to soak up the last rays of sun on a warm evening mid-July, I was heading in the opposite direction, towards a church of all places. Specifically to attend a writer's workshop.

Located in Cloudesley Square in Islington, the Holy Trinity Church is no longer a house of worship. Instead, it's home to fifteen artists' studios, though you wouldn't know it by looking at the aged stone facade. These artists' studios are funded by the Florence Trust, which runs a year-long studio residency and [The Writers' Room](#). The programme's co-lead Lucy Cunningham had joined forces with Bleet! (a publication and events space that's committed to foolish ideals, being critical, making noise and being heard).

After joining the growing crowd outside, we were ushered through the gates and round the back lawn (wonderfully unkempt) and towards the Writers' Room.



With drinks in hand and general introductions out the way, all 15 or so of us were led into the studio to begin the session's first segment: breaking the "creative" ice.

First up, we were given 20 minutes to scribble down everything we had done in the past 12 hours. This day-in-the-life exercise was purely personal, for clearing away the metaphorical cobwebs. You didn't have to read it aloud. A good thing; meetings about timesheets are seldom funny.

handy if you're asked to write something on demand. The way we did it was simple: You pick a word or a sentence from Le Guin's work, and whatever you land on will be your writing prompt. You can choose a few words or a sentence and write something inspired by that.

Silence ensued, punctuated by the slightly anxious sound of pen scratching paper. After about ten minutes, we were called to a stop and volunteers were asked to read their writing out loud. Braver souls than I took that risk.

After a short break of mingling outside and topping up drinks, we went back inside for our final writing exercise: the mural.

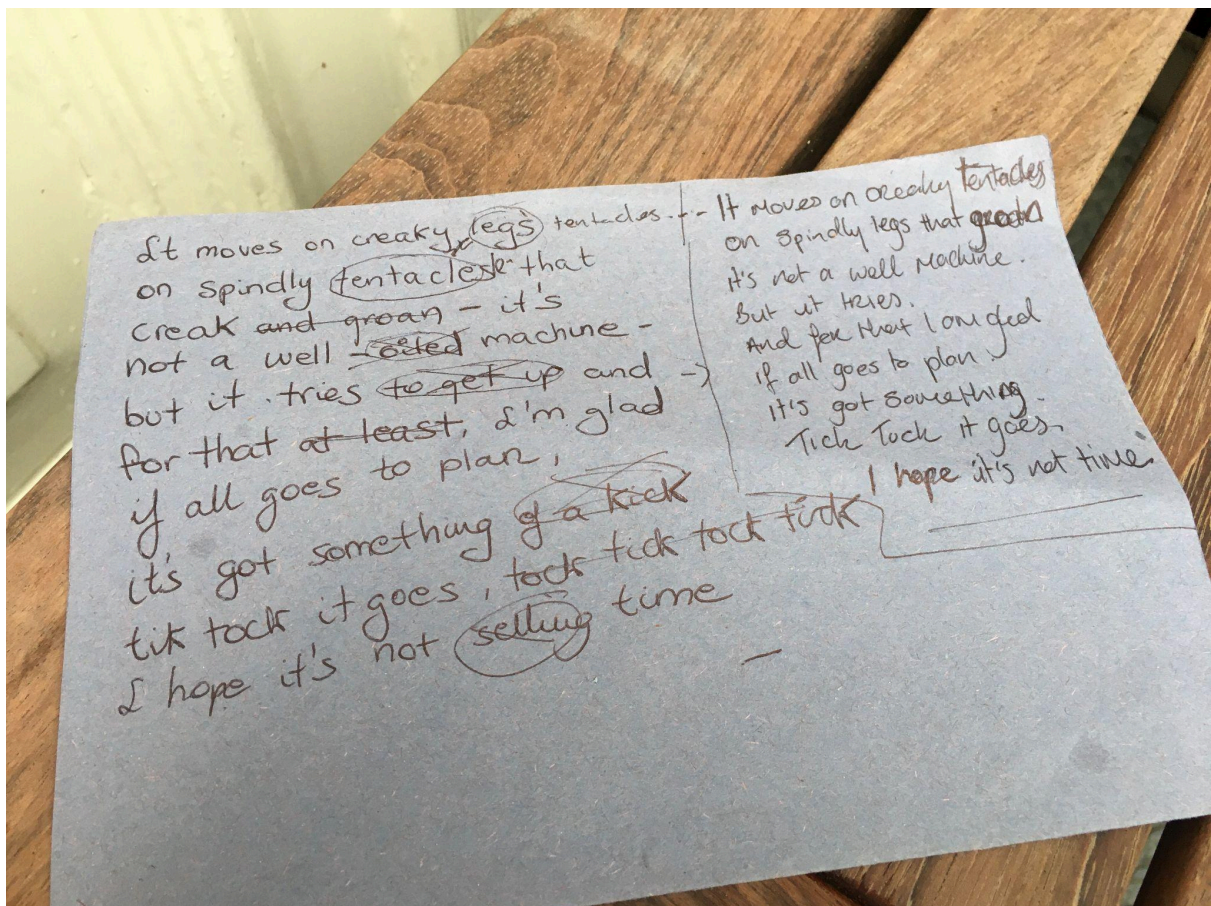


The mural on the wall ([A Manic Fragment](#)) was left here by courtesy of Richard Zeiss during his own residency in July. His creation spans the entire back wall of the studio, and centres around non-verbal language with glyphs and pictograms and other whacky symbols. It's a stunning piece—but temporary. The mural was to be painted over the following day for the next resident.

We were instructed to look at the mural and write something (anything) that inspired us.

Personally, the painting reminded me of slow-moving machines, of creaky clocks and metallic tentacles. (For some reason, Miyazaki's moving castle sprung to mind.) But the depictions vastly differed: there were space cadets, existential dilemmas and somewhere over the general chatter, I'm pretty sure I heard someone mention ducks.

Next up, we had to pass this prose over to the person on our right; they would then use their editing chops to transform that piece. Self-editing is lonely work, and can be a b***h when you're married to your own words. Giving way to someone else's ideas is usually an eye opener. Case in point: the person next to me gave my prose a makeover and it was honestly much better for it.



We then wrapped up the workshop with a Q&A about collaboration, what it means to be a writer (always a subjective take) and the line

between plagiarism and drawing inspiration from the greats. The take: credit where credit is due, people.

It's fitting that Bleet! focused so heavily on Ursula K. Le Guin, for whom loudness—or as she put it, 'making female noises, shrieking and squeaking and being shrill'—led to her discovery of performance poetry in the first place. The workshop was a riot, and I think we'll all be a bit louder because of it.