

# Burning House / Burning Horse: The fire it always is

Ella Finer

The fire it always is

18.07.2022

London, forecast 40C

A return to *Burning House / Burning Horse*.

*The particulate matter of time has followed the weather, it's been sleeping on the wing. And then in an instant this fine mist magnetises – a cymatic gathering in which a pattern, an image appears. This energetic mass of stilled memory particles. As if from nowhere. The vibrant matter combusts into the fire it never became and always was.<sup>[1]</sup>*

I am writing this in the too high heat of early summer 2022, a heat wave intensifying across Europe, while listening back to the script I wrote in the colder climate of the pandemic's first winter, 2020. These temperatures (the fusion of past and present sensation) are doing something to me physically, and psychically. The warm air that moves me slowly through the

city strangely resembles the electric warmth of the blow heater beside me as I wrote; the machine imperceptibly burning the accumulated dust of its previous dormant summer into the winter of my writing. I could smell burning as I worked, that kind of atmospheric burning as by-product we learn to live with: something happening on a small scale, produced faintly, almost unnoticed. We learn to live with so much.

Why am I returning to this work now? The greater stakes of what we have learned to live with over the past two years (while not denying the personal work we have been doing to learn-by-imagining new ways of being together at distance, and to deepen practices of respect and solidarity) betray state mechanisms of control. Control through which we have been conditioned to learn to live with rules imposed by the government as pro forma, as necessary, as inevitable. This kind of *learning to live with* is a form of enforced forgetting of what is at risk in governmental choices that prioritise the 'ancient networks of privilege and influence', and it endangers all of us.<sup>[2]</sup> If you are with me in this writing-reading then you know we have been led to danger and that our systems of power do not serve us. You will have your own sense of what we have borne witness to, *living the inheritance of the state*, as we have gathered our energies and our exhausted bodies to protest however we have been able.

*It is dangerous to lie during a pandemic, and I am disappointed that the Prime Minister has not come to the House to correct the record and correct the fact that he has lied to this House and the country over and over again.<sup>[3]</sup>*

Last summer, a year to the month, Labour MP for Brent, Dawn Butler, was expelled from Parliament for calling out the Prime Minister as a liar. She was asked to withdraw from the House of Commons because she refused to

withdraw her speech and, as the Madam Deputy Speaker compelled her, to “reflect on her words” and by doing so “correct the record”. The record is the official report of all Parliamentary debates, Hansard, in which all speech is written into documentary evidence. By calling on the Prime Minister to correct the record for the lies he has repeatedly told the House and by extension the public he serves, Butler’s subversive speech act performs a clever, necessary exposure of Parliament’s selective memory – in how it writes or rewrites history, and with whose version of events. An intervention as advocacy, Dawn Butler writes into historical record the injustice we have all been living, by speaking it out loud.

*...It is funny that we get in trouble in this place for calling out the lie rather than for lying...Madam Deputy Speaker, I have reflected on my words. Somebody needs to tell the truth in this House that the Prime Minister has lied.<sup>[4]</sup>*

Preserved strictures of Parliamentary procedure aide the forgetting of disobedient narratives because they might “offend the dignity of the House.” Here is a provocation to talk about dignity in the seat of power, about respect, honour, truth. *Somebody needs to tell the truth in this House*, to speak the histories happening to us as we are living them and learning them, dignified in our disobedience.

I wasn’t waiting for a significant time to return to *Burning House / Burning Horse* in writing and, if anything, the last two years have made explicit how all times hold significant details, however obvious, however obscure. In 2020 I cited Jacqueline Springer writing “capitalism infects the virus capable of killing it”, a present tense warning at that point in time which now reads as grim prophecy. Jacqueline, who through her bold and brilliant love and friendship in this time has gifted me the deepest kind of learning and respect for the profundity

and preciousness of life, was right. The pandemic would be capitalised on and most perniciously, without accountability, by our government who awarded billions worth of contracts without competitive tender. I wasn’t waiting for this to come to pass, I wasn’t waiting for the revelations of Sue Gray’s report into the illegal gatherings during Covid restrictions (the parties *in the basement* not lost on me); I wasn’t waiting for another cruel confluence of dates, when the attempted Rwandan deportation flights fell on the same day as the Grenfell Tower fire’s 5th anniversary; I wasn’t waiting for the day the Prime Minister resigned into a role cynically defined as “care-taker”. I wasn’t waiting for the two years since I wrote *Burning House / Burning Horse* to combust under the high pressure of so much bad governance, so much dishonesty, so much sustained violence and pain. I wasn’t waiting for the time to write again, but maybe the time was waiting for us, you and I, deep listeners of history, waiting for us to remember, through making returns. So that by attending collectively to what kind of abuses and injustices have been, and are being, inflicted by this government of no integrity – of no confidence – we move ourselves to action. Ignited by each other’s hope, by our commitment to the powers of fierce feeling.

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Burning House / Burning Horse

5.11.1605 / 16.10.1834 / 5.11.2020

*The administration of forgetting—the calculated, administered, and often brutal amnesias by which a state or political entity tries to erase the secrets of its violence—nonetheless leaves telltale traces as a kind of counter-evidence. Violence seldom erases what it effaces; it leaves shadows of what it tries to encrypt.<sup>[5]</sup>*

Anne McClintock’s words begin and beat

through this work (an essay, an incantation, a call, a response), in which I raise some spirits, some traces and shadows as evidence that this night, tonight, holds three nights within it. If I were speaking with my mother I would say this feels premonitory, the way history sends smoke signals. I am speaking with her burning horse. After predicting the year of the Russian Revolution in mathematical detail, futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov wrote “If people don’t want to learn my art of predicting the future...I shall teach it to horses”.<sup>[61] [7]</sup>

I have no measuring instruments here. I have three dates and evidence in embers.

On one night a man is caught beneath the House of Lords with a slow match and 36 barrels of gunpowder. On the second, the House of Lords catches fire with economic relics for kindling. And tonight, details from the past stoke the fires of the burning present and the basements below.

The House is on fire.

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On this island we are asked to remember remember from as early as we can hold a rhyme. But what are we called on to remember, what memory are we being asked to match with bonfires and effigies? Whose version of events, with what evidence? The administration of forgetting deals in remembrance of this kind. Anniversaries more like moods through yearly cycles, than opportunities to question why something has happened that we are compelled to make present again and again. Celebrations become emptied of their trace elements, the dimensionality of the event stripped through the centuries they have travelled, until we are standing under a dark winter sky writing our names in slow-fade lines of sparkler light. The name that we do remember is of a man whose last written evidence fades away on the page – a signature so damaged it betrays how badly his

body had been tortured. And he has been burning ever since, a day, a year, at a time.

Anniversaries hold the time-space of a day – as soon as announced, ushered away. The one day leaves little time to speak with the dead, while the living turn the past to fictions in a flash. So when we need to remember why we are remembering, we need to trust that distance is a dream-space we can find our way back into.

I find my way to the river, and on the banks of the Thames at Westminster, the Houses of Parliament. I find my way here on these three winter nights, each two centuries apart, guided by galaxies made of burning coal and twinkling splinters turned navigating stars.

These three nights, beginning in the basements beneath the building, are elementally bound to each other. Imagine with me then that, below Parliament, Guy Fawkes (found in the night-time of the 4th/5th November 1605) lit a slow match, *with no one as witness*. This action was unknown even to himself. These were not the matches found on his capture, but another of altogether different chemistry. A slow match with a fuse of no fixed length, one that would burn into the future keeping score, track and tally of the House above. Imagine this fuse burning to this night and, stoked by the actions of uncared-for governance and administration, burning through the night of 16th October 1834 when Parliament *did* set fire – its cause: the incineration of centuries old medieval tax receipts made of wood, which “smouldered under the floor of the House of Lords chamber”.<sup>[62]</sup> And tonight, in 2020, consider with me how the slow match gathers oxygen in Parliament’s Houses, in its hall and hallways, in its overburdened underground, in the structures it tries to conserve.

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On 16 October 1834, in the same decade the toxic white phosphorous match was invented,

the Houses of Parliament set on fire. Charles Dickens, who had been a Parliamentary Reporter in the 1830s describes events leading up to the fire in detail in his 1855 speech on administrative reform at Theatre Royal Drury Lane, London. Opening his speech with “the smallest amount of faith in the House of Commons” he advises that Parliament “must have its memory jogged; and be kept awake when it happens to have taken too much Ministerial narcotic”. His gesturing to the memory of those in power is significant in relation to the cause of the 1834 fire; the cause described as an amnesiac attitude of the ruling class: the “obstinate adherence to rubbish which the time has long outlived”.<sup>[9]</sup>

The “rubbish” Dickens describes at length is actualised and symbolised in the form of the tally stick: a wooden accounting stick made to acknowledge the existence of debt, and accumulating for so long as archival records of the Treasury, that two cartloads of sticks had to be cleared at once. The tally stick – literally for keeping stock – was an early form of record keeping, the debt-memory notched in wood. There were two types of tally: the single tally and the split tally, which was in use by the Exchequer in England until 1826. With the split tally money owing would be recorded on the wooden stick with a notch cut into the wood, of differing depths dependent on the sum. The stick would then be cut in half lengthwise, with one half going to the issuer of the debt (the stock), and the other half going to the indebted as receipt (the foil). The two halves exactly matched each other, and if contested could be fitted together again as proof of the transaction. These were memory sticks, holding the memory of credit and debt, and *their memory was their value*.

For Dickens, the tallies represent six centuries worth of outdated customs and official routines that would take years of inquiry and administration to change. As he writes:

*Still official routine inclined to these notched sticks, as if they were pillars of the constitution, and still the Exchequer accounts continued to be kept on certain splints of elm wood called “tallies.” In the reign of George III. an inquiry was made by some revolutionary spirit, whether pens, ink, and paper, slates and pencils, being in existence, this obstinate adherence to an obsolete custom ought to be continued, and whether a change ought not to be effected.*

*All the red tape in the country grew redder at the bare mention of this bold and original conception, and it took till 1826 to get these sticks abolished. In 1834 it was found that there was a considerable accumulation of them; and the question then arose, what was to be done with such worn-out, worm-eaten, rotten old bits of wood? I dare say there was a vast amount of minuting, memorandumizing, and despatch-boxing, on this mighty subject. The sticks were housed at Westminster, and it would naturally occur to any intelligent person that nothing could be easier than to allow them to be carried away for fire-wood by the miserable people who live in that neighbourhood.*

As Dickens describes the painfully slow customary bureaucracy of change, it is hard not to think of the wasted time spent over useful materials rendered useless by administration. As the tallies could not leave the Parliamentary building as official and confidential Treasury records, the wooden sticks took on a confused value / use-value. The tally sticks (now substituted for an alternative form of accounting) no longer had any value as a record of account. They returned to their intrinsic value, which was as pieces of wood. But, while the sticks had no extrinsic value as accounting records, in turn the tally sticks’ intrinsic value as wood was rendered worthless, with value as

a fuel only ever a *potential* use value that could never be actualised.

As “useless” wood for burning they then become worse than worthless. Because of their former value they are unable to leave Parliament. They are sent to be burned, with no use in the fire, other than to make them disappear. This burning exposes something of the useless labour involved in the administration of forgetting – it can become dangerous, careless, with responsibility passed on and/or abdicated. There was no use in the fire that burned Parliament to the ground. If there is no use in doing something, why should we care? The action becomes a job, a mechanical response to the paid instruction. The wood could not be used as fuel for the common good – it did not heat homes, heat food, heat bodies. There was so little use and such wasted labour in the whole pursuit of making the tally sticks disappear that the stove in the House of Lords was stoked too quickly and too much, “overgorged” as Dickens wrote “with these preposterous sticks”.

The blaze, as he wrote, “set fire to the panelling; the panelling set fire to the House of Lords; the House of Lords set fire to the House of Commons; the two houses were reduced to ashes.” The fire would later be called “one of the greatest instances of stupidity on record” by the Prime Minister.<sup>[10]</sup> But stupidity overlooks the nuances of the job description, overseen by the clerk of works and undertaken by two workmen. According to Parliamentary resources on “The Great fire of 1834”, even while smoke seeped through floorboards and visitors raised alarms, the workmen insisted on finishing their job.<sup>[11]</sup> *They did their job*: stoking a fire with wood they might well have seen the intrinsic value in, for a purpose they may well have seen the waste in. This was one of the greatest instances of *carelessness* – and why? Describing the burning of the tally sticks as “unsupervised and ill advised” Caroline

Shenton draws us to the lack of attention given to this fire of no use.<sup>[12]</sup> There was no tending to the fire by those who were responsible for ordering it – people take care when they are cared *for* – and so it made its own use-value.

Denise Ferreira da Silva writes “with heat, it is possible to figure change not as progression but as material transformation.”<sup>[13]</sup> I am thinking while I read her words *On Heat* of Indigenous burning practices – cultural burns, broadcast burns – as ways of knowing-remembering the places and people that one cares for. To forget the land would be a forgetting to tend to it, to learn from it. Losing such a practical understanding of the elemental – not providing the means to support and sustain it – leaves us exposed to the wildfires and orange skies, the animals in the flames, the horses running. Fires have to be tended, as do the stewards who tend to them.

By the time of the 1834 fire, Parliament was, as Shenton writes, an “accident waiting to happen. The rambling complex of medieval and early modern apartments making up the Houses of Parliament was by then largely unfit for purpose.”<sup>[14]</sup> The echoes with present debates about the “Restoration and Renewal” of Parliament’s buildings at Westminster link this night of the “great fire” to our night tonight. The fire of 1834 began as an administrative job of clearing the dead wood to make space for new models of accounting; the housekeeping of slow reform undertaken without due diligence. Fire wardens now patrol the Houses of Parliament – there are fires *often* in the basements, where antique pipes are overlaid with years’ worth of tubing, cables, wires for new services and utilities. The infrastructure is as overburdened as the stove beneath the House of Lords was on the night of 1834.<sup>[15]</sup>

While there are wardens to fight flash fires, the building is sinking, the masonry is falling and no government in power wants to make the

move out because the subject is so weighted. The project of restoration will cost the public billions of pounds whether or not Parliament moves site while the work is done, but for some there are fears around how the arcane traditions of Parliamentary practice would survive a move into a completely other spatial and social dynamic. These concerns reveal the project of restoration as a project of conservation, holding on to the “monument”. The monument as Nirmal Puwar describes “whose architectural and theatrical style of embodiment is mirrored across a network of space, such as the debating chambers in Oxbridge and public schools ... together these institutional spaces form a physical, social and psychic web of ‘architectures.’”<sup>[16]</sup> Puwar reminds us that for *some* bodies the Houses of Parliament serve as ‘intimately familiar’, an extension of the spaces they have already inhabited, with no or little disconnect or need to adjust to the ritual details the building preserves and even celebrates. Traditions of violent masculinities, the denial of a culture of whiteness and ‘the systemic fantasy of imagined inclusiveness’ has led to “racism becom[ing] invisible”, unable to be named without fear of recrimination. *Unable to be named without fear.*<sup>[17]</sup>

Denial is viciously encoded into this institutional forgetting; a forgetting to attend carefully to the violent legacies inherited and perpetuated by the state. There are many debts owing, of monetary value and more than. The National Archives in Kew have tally sticks wrought into the design of their gates, reflecting the intended symbolism: the value of memory, the value *in* memory. *And* reflecting otherwise, the tally sticks communicate their deeper resonance: of partial remains, archival debts, the labour of forgetting. Who knows how many fires have burned through centuries of memory materials. One we do know: the colonial government records burned from the 1950s-1970s under code name Operation Legacy. Unlike the careless use of useless

materials in the fire of 1834, in Operation Legacy materials were destroyed because of their use and of what they could prove. The chilling administrative erasure of evidence now made public in the documents at the National Archives detail how to break up ash, how to bury at sea, how the documents should be, in one official’s words, “spirited away”.<sup>[18]</sup>

We are returning to the evidence in embers. The fire of 1834 was described by Dickens as setting fire to the panelling before the House of Lords and then the House of Commons. Now, the fire of this nation’s present, of this capital’s present – the fire in my heart and hands as I write – is *here* with us. We are reminded – in this image of panelling, in which wall coverings burn first – of cladding setting fire to the building that was not just a House, but a *home*. The fire of 1834 was no tragedy of human suffering, there was no human loss. 72 people died in the fire of Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017; the cladding on the building secured at discount price and made of combustible panels. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry, formally set up in August 2017, has heard evidence about a multitude of failures, of a sustained lack of responsibility and care for residents, of secret meetings, of gross professional negligence. Now in November 2020 recent hearings have exposed the mishandling of evidence. *Administrative work* – a computer wiped, notebooks binned. What has this short intervening time of three years, and the government – in power, accountable – allowed to be spirited away? Who does the monument serve, both within and outside its walls?

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James Baldwin told the Observer in 1967 that he was fond of Britain “if only because Dickens lived here.”<sup>[19]</sup> Dickens ends his narration of the 1834 fire to the Administrative Reform Association with a cautionary tale, a forewarning: “Now, I think we may reasonably

remark, in conclusion, that all obstinate adherence to rubbish which the time has long outlived, is certain to have in the soul of it more or less that is pernicious and destructive; and that will some day set fire to something or other; which, if given boldly to the winds would have been harmless; but which, obstinately retained, is ruinous.”

Hazelwood (for divination). Willow (from the banks of the Thames). Elm (of the underworld). These are the woods variously given in descriptions of Tally Sticks’ materials. Strange wood, destructive soul, to burn without care, to “obstinately retain”.

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The Houses of Parliament are vast and intricately compartmentalised – the ground plan looks like a memory palace, the ancient mnemonic device in which memories are placed and stored in imaginary rooms, with imaginary objects. The underpinning logic of the memory palace that: “orderly arrangement is essential for good memory” is undermined by Dickens’ reference to the “ghastly absurdity of that vast labyrinth of misplaced men and misdirected things.”<sup>[20]</sup> In the memory palace that has lost its sense of relation to the people outside and the world they live in – “their bodies and their manifold on-the-ground realities” – there are some bad legacies, there’s bad memory.<sup>[21]</sup> Governance forgets, it “holds on to the rubbish which time has long outlived” supported by parliamentarians who will not *move out* or *let go*. Staying still sediments layers of misplaced memories, lost to the structure that aides the forgetting, suppressed deep below the grounds of Parliament.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons* would appear at the level of naming to describe the spatiality of the subject here. *The fire begins below*.<sup>[22]</sup> Below the Lords directly, and in its proximity both physically and psychically, below the Commons also. The

significance of being in this Parliamentary “under commons” cannot be unconsciously, uncarefully, allied with Moten and Harney’s work in which a significant part of the deep power of the undercommons is that as “comportment or ongoing experiment” it is never exactly or clearly *placed*. I want to be clear about the distinction here, because the work I am doing exists in, and is sustained by, the undercommons, by ‘the movement of things’ as Jack Halberstam writes that “can be felt and touched and exists in language and in fantasy, it is flight, it is motion, it is fugitivity itself.”<sup>[23]</sup> The study I am doing here, patterning three nights into this one charged night of a dreamed revolution, did not begin, and is not isolated now, in the discrete bounds of this text. I speak with the horse dissolving into atoms to voice one confluence of space-time in the continuous “movement of things”, in fantasy, flight, motion. In the break “between locating ourselves and dislocating ourselves” – as Harney writes – we might more boldly attempt to listen to the evidence in embers, the information in the air, the voices of the dead.<sup>[24]</sup>

*This* is the study of remembering and forgetting I invite you to share in, of deep listening to material reverberations from the past, through the distance and into the – never simply *now* – present.

Let me take you to the river, the so-called liquid graveyard. Some of us stood on the banks as primary school children of the late 1980s – mudlarks searching for the tangible parts of London lost to foul water. We found some animal bones, afterwards grouted to a wall in our inner-city school. A mural about London, a chance archive of washed up remains made by small hands. In some ways my desire and method here is not so unconnected to the activities of this child self, holding bones eroded by time-spans beyond my reckoning. The first tally sticks appear as animal bones.

“I dreamt we were standing by the banks of the Thames...” My father’s lyric dreaming across distance for my mother in the same year I found those washed up bones. Let’s end by the river at night, at Westminster Pier, dreaming across distance, in the particle swarms of ash and embers, curling smoke and bone dust. The particulate matter of time has followed the weather, it’s been sleeping on the wing. And then in an instant this fine mist magnetises – a cymatic gathering in which a pattern, an image appears. This energetic mass of stilled memory particles. As if from nowhere. The vibrant matter combusts into the fire it never became and always was.

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*Debt at a distance is forgotten and remembered again.*

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons*.

The Slave Abolition Act took effect in Britain in 1834, two months before the so-called great fire. A year later, on 3rd August 1835, the chancellor of the exchequer agreed “one of the largest loans in history”, creating a debt that would last all the way to 2015. This long loan would be used “to finance the slave compensation package.”<sup>[25]</sup> As Kris Manjapra writes “the money went exclusively to the owners of slaves, who were being compensated for the loss of what had, until then, been considered their property. Not a single shilling of reparation, nor a single word of apology, has ever been granted by the British state to the people it enslaved, or their descendants.”<sup>[26]</sup> This debt is not ended because paid off; we cannot, in the words David Cameron used in 2015, “move on”. We live the inheritance of the state and society that produced this debt of generations; Parliament sits *now* on the remains of the fire that burned in the months between

the Slave Abolition Act taking effect and the agreement to compensate slave owners. Manjapra closes his article citing Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* to place in stark relation – and in so doing elementally bind – the dead to the ocean in the middle passage with the dead to Britain’s debt: “The Atlantic is one kind of vault of slavery’s aftermath. But so too is the ocean of British national debt, through which the ghosts of the enslaved circulated for centuries, waiting for their moment of due reckoning.”<sup>[27]</sup>

*The only thing that operates between you as an Englishman and I as a black man which doesn’t operate necessarily between a Norwegian and a Greek, is that once I worked for you. That when an Englishman or an American white man, in the main, looks at a black man, he is also looking at his own past, and a lot of what happens in the mind and heart of a white man looking at a black man is involved with his guilt, his guilt because I – after all – for nothing, went into the mines, and I, for nothing, built the city.*<sup>[28]</sup>

James Baldwin, on BBC’s *Encounter* series, 1965.

Here was Baldwin, as Rob Water’s writes, in 1965 “telling the British that they were not recognising their own history”, tying the bondage of his body, and his ancestors, to the building of the city, for *nothing*. London is the city in which state power has its Houses, where British national debt is accounted for, where fires have been burning for centuries. The symbolism of a burning house in Baldwin’s canonised rhetorical question [his rhetorical question on behalf of his community in *Letter from a Region of My Mind*: “Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?”] is vivid as I write of fire.<sup>[29]</sup> The question, as to the desirability for the black man of integrating into the morally and spiritually bankrupt



society of white America, is of as much urgency today as ever

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We know the Political narrative of events narrows complexities, obscures difficult subjects, chooses and spins its evidence. We know this when we are told the science we are instructed to remember; the science we are compelled to forget. Science, co-opted by those in power, but so too: history, geography, arithmetic, English. The curriculum is corrupt. But, the narrative is glitching. With politicians and their administration conveniently forgetting what they have asked us to remember, their actions betray the mechanisms of privilege, power, knowledge and self-protection in ways we cannot ignore. *We cannot forget.*

For those who govern, remembering and forgetting are actions-as-assets, instrumentalised not only on occasions of commemoration. While we remember to save the National Health Service it is incrementally dismantled; while we remember to stay at home, Britain's withdrawal from the European Union happens outside scrutiny; while we remember to keep our distance, as Jacqueline Springer writes, "capitalism infects the virus capable of killing *it*."<sup>[30]</sup>

But, we are remembering more than we are forgetting.<sup>[31]</sup> Or we are wiser to the workings, to the co-option of our own powers of recall. While anniversaries are calibrated projects of amnesiac returns, so too is our everyday existence in a state run from a burning house.

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[<https://thecontemporaryjournal.org/strands/emergency-emergence/the-fire-it-always-is>].

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[1]

*Burning House / Burning Horse* is the result of Bianca Stoppani's invitation to write about 'the need for radical change' in a time of transformation (for Almanac, London and Turin). The work, which premiered on 5th November 2020, is a video-essay for bonfire night, taking the form of a conversation with an outsized burning wooden horse – an artwork by my mother, Marcia Farquhar, filmed by my father, Jem Finer, in 2018. In the Summer of 2021 Cédric Fauq curated the work into group show *Governmental Fires* at FUTURA, Prague. Of the video's placement in the show, Fauq writes: *Then, it was manifest that Ella Finer's video-essay Burning House / Burning Horse (2020), dealing primarily with the burning of the British Parliament from its undergrounds in October 1834, had to find itself in the very guts of Futura. It is somehow – and the analogy is quite risky – like placing a ticking bomb in the depths of the institution.*

<http://futuraprague.com/en/futura/event/491-governmental-fires>

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[2]

John Harris, 'The lesson from Johnson's tenure – British politics needs dragging into the 21st century' *The Guardian*, 10 July 2022. 'Drastically altering our systems of power – and, via radical thinking about private education and Oxbridge, breaking up ancient networks of privilege and influence – would open the way to changes that would start to pull us out of our endless malaise...'

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[3]

House of Commons, (2021), July 22 Debate, Summer Adjournment (vol. 699, cols 1216-1217).

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[4]

House of Commons, (2021), July 22 Debate, Summer Adjournment (vol. 699, cols 1216-1217).

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[5]

Anne McClintock, *Monster: A Fugue in Fire and Ice, for Oceans in Transformation* (2020).

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[6]

Velimir Khlebnikov, from a letter to Vasily Dmitrievich Ermilov, dated January 3, 1921, in *The Collected Works of*

Velimir Khlebnikov, Volume 1, Letters and Theoretical Writings, trans. by Paul Schmidt, ed. by Charlotte Douglas (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.127.

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[7]

In 2010, Marcia Farquhar was commissioned by Danielle Arnaud to create a new work for the Tatton Park Biennial. The work Farquhar created in response – *The Horse is a Noble Animal* – was a site specific sculpture of an outsized rocking horse. As a stage from which to speak of equine matters – of equestrian statuary, of the secret class-coded language of hunting, of Freud and dream horses, of Leonora Carrington and DH Lawrence – the sculpture reflected being close and far from the privileged realm of horses, real and wooden, and the absurdity of class from astride an outsize high horse. The work was de-commissioned by the artist Marcia Farquhar at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park at dusk on 27 October 2018 and broadcast as *Burning Horse* on the last night of her solo exhibition *DIFFIKUAT* at CPG, now Southwark Park Galleries, London.

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[8]

Caroline Shenton, *The Fire of 1834, The History of Parliament: British Political, Social & Local History*. For detailed historical account of the fire of 1834 see Caroline Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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[9]

All references to Charles Dickens are from his speech on administrative reform to the Administrative Reform Association (27 June 1855).

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[10]

Shenton, *The Fire of 1834*. Online (as above).

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[11]

UK Parliament guide to “The Great Fire of 1834”.

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[12]

Shenton, *The Fire of 1834*. Online (as above).

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[13]

Denise Ferreira da Silva, *On Heat*, for *Canadian Art*, Features (October 29, 2018).

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[14]

Shenton, *The Fire of 1834*. Online (as above).

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[15]

In the opening speech of the Restoration and Renewal debate on 16 October 2020, the Conservative Leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg, describes the conditions of Parliament’s basements: “Steam pipes run alongside electric cables. Hundreds of miles of cabling are now in need of replacement. A sewage ejector, installed in 1888, is still in use today. In short, there is a meandering multiplicity of multifarious materials all in need of urgent attention and all increasing the vulnerability of the building. Those who want to see what 150 years of patch and mend looks like are advised to descend into the depths of the Palace and see for themselves.” In response, David Linden [Scottish National Party MP for Glasgow East] emphasises the vastly different attentions being given to the building and the world outside: “As I was listening to the illuminating opening speech by the Leader of the House, I felt as if I was having some kind of out-of-body experience, because when the UK economy is in freefall and experiencing a global pandemic, this debate does feel a bit like fiddling while Rome burns.” See: Hansard (2020), HC Deb vol. 678 cols 1736-1783, 16 October.

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[16]

Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), p. 84.

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[17]

Puwar (2004), p.137, p.136.

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[18]

Ian Cobain, Owen Bowcott and Richard Norton-Taylor, Britain destroyed records of colonial crimes in *The Guardian* (18 April, 2012).

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[19]

James Baldwin, Rob Waters writes, ‘In an interview at a London airport in 1967’ from “A Very British Welcome.” *Observer* 28 May 1967: 30. As cited in Rob Waters, “Britain is no longer white”: James Baldwin as a Witness to Postcolonial Britain”, *African American Review*, 46.4 (2013), 715-730 (p.718).

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[20]

Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 2010), p.2.

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[21]

This phrasing has stuck with me since I read the following in a newsletter on Social Movement and unknown afters from art organisation If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution (24 July 2020): "We are imagining what it might mean for an institution like If I Can't Dance to centre a politics of survival – a politics, that is, which is contingent upon maintenance of, and care for, bodies and their manifold on-the-ground realities – as the starting point for our daily practice of continuing to live and move together through these summer months and in their unknown afters."

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[22]

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013).

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[23]

Jack Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond: With and for The Undercommons*, introduction in Harney and Moten (2013), pp. 5-12, p.11.

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[24]

Stefano Harney in Harney and Moten (2013), p.149.

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[25]

Kris Manjapra, *When will Britain face up to its crimes against humanity?* in *The Guardian* (29 March, 2018).

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[26]

Manjapra (2018).

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[27]

Manjapra (2018) citing Christina Sharpe *In the Wake : On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

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[28]

James Baldwin quoted in James Mossman "Race, Hate, Sex, and Colour: A Conversation with James Baldwin and Colin MacInnes." 1965. Baldwin, *Conversations* 46-58. As cited in Rob Waters (2013)

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[29]

James Baldwin, "Down At The Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" in *The Fire Next Time* (London: Penguin, 1964).

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[30]

Broadcaster, lecturer and curator Jacqueline Springer, in conversation with Ella Finer and R Justin Hunt (October 2020).

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[31]

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