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Abstract: This article focuses on *High Rise eState of Mind*, a devised ensemble hip hop performance developed by the Beats & Elements theatre company between 2017 and 2019, and later performed online during the Covid-19 pandemic (Manchester HOME 2020). The performance explores the impact of housing injustice on working-class millennial Londoners, shedding light on the ways in which the overarching neoliberal order produces systemic inequities. Processes of gentrification in working-class districts of London have been well documented in scholarship and elsewhere since the 1970s. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, and with increasing velocity post the 2012 Olympics, working class areas of London have undergone huge and unprecedented change such that the effects of gentrification across and within discrete districts might now be framed as evidence of a culture of ‘housing crisis’ in the city. The housing crisis is exacerbated by consumptive neoliberal conditions, which produce mistrust and can have deadly effects, such as the Grenfell Tower fire in west London in 2017, where 72 people lost their lives. Here, I explore the ways in which *High Rise eState of Mind* in both process and performance makes use of

love and truth in order to expose and also to bare the corrosive and frequently tragic effects of the neoliberal housing crisis. Using the work of Hannah Arendt, Adrienne Rich and bell hooks, I ask how working-class Londoners are using arts practices embedded in ethics of love and honesty to respond to housing precarity, and explore the ways in which modes of knowing produced through hip hop might help us to live joyfully in London in the twenty-first century.

High Rise eState of Mind: Love and honesty in the midst of London's neoliberal housing crisis

Katie Beswick

It is a miserable day in November 2020. One of an interminable string of miserable days since the announcement of the latest “lockdown” measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 in the UK during the pandemic. I’m in my bedroom, watching a live-stream of the hip hop performance *High Rise eState of Mind*. The four performers who make up the theatre company Beats & Elements stand in a square formation on the stage of Manchester’s HOME theatre, each with a mic and a chair. The chairs demarcate the high-rise block of flats where the play is set (as the story unfolds, we come to understand that the two chairs upstage indicate the first floor and the two downstage the twenty-fourth floor, more of which later). The performers are dressed in hooded sweatshirts and baseball caps, they rap about life under conditions of housing precarity and insecurity. Their London accents vibrate tinnily through my laptop speakers. I know the performers personally, having worked with the company over the past two years, attending their shows, documenting rehearsals, writing about their practice, and getting to know them socially through this process. My phone rings, as, on the laptop screen/stage, the performer Conrad Murray has stepped out of character and is telling

the audience he's calling someone who he knows is watching. I answer and it's Conrad. He wants to know about my housing situation: where I live and where I'd choose to live if all my dreams came true.

"I'm from South London, but I live in Devon at the moment," I tell him, "but if I could choose, I'd go back to the 90s and live in New York."

"Who would you live with?", he asks me.

"An Afghan dog, and a hot man."

Conrad nods at me through the laptop screen and hangs up the phone — David Bonnick Jr (known as Jr, pronounced "Junior"), a rapper and performer in the show, steps forward. He uses my answers as the basis for a freestyle rap,¹ weaving my housing dreams into funny and surprising lyrics ("*Yeah, Katie/She's really pretty/Wants to be like those girls from Sex and the City*").² For the first time since the November lockdown was announced, I feel connected to other people and part of something bigger than myself, existing in a world beyond the confines of my house. It is the familiar pleasure of theatre, albeit in a digital-live capacity, and it is a relief.

The pleasure and relief I describe above are where I am going with this article, which examines how the hip hop theatre practiced by the London-based company Beats & Elements might create possibilities for connection and affinity (or 'love') and for truth and honesty under conditions of post-truth and dishonesty produced by the prevailing neoliberal system. Like much (perhaps all) theatre, Beats & Elements' work responds to the pressing social issues of its time, and in London in the twenty-first century, there are few issues more urgent or pressing than the scarcity of affordable housing. *High Rise eState of Mind* is a Beats & Elements show that takes London's housing crisis as its point of departure. Before I dwell on the company and the performance in any detail, however, I will divert us elsewhere for a

while, parsing the social and political landscape in which the company work in order that we might return to their practice with a clearer sense of its context and therefore of its stakes and implications.

London's Neoliberal Housing Crisis

On its British website, the media outlet *Vice* regularly publishes a satirical social commentary feature called “London Rental Opportunity of the Week”. In this feature, the journalist Joel Golby selects a rental advert for a property in London, typically taken from a popular national property marketing website such as Zoopla, Rightmove or Gumtree. He issues a caustic take-down of the property on offer, whose price often equals or exceeds the average monthly wage of all but the very wealthy,³ and is likely to strike the reader as hugely disproportionate to the quality and comfort of the advertised dwelling. In a characteristic example, Golby summarises what is on offer for £1,052 per calendar month in the North-West London district of Willesden Green: “Two wardrobes with the poisonous looming energy of small-town bouncers and two beds with the temporary energy of all the members of your family crammed into one house overnight ahead of a funeral”.⁴

It is no longer possible to argue that London rentals, in the main, facilitate anything other than the financial interests of the rich. As the apparently endless material fuelling “London Rental Opportunity of the Week” reveals, homes, especially in a desirable metropolis such as London, do not primarily function as basic human necessities providing shelter and comfort — but are crudely reduced to individual units from which as much monetary value as possible can be extracted: a phenomenon known as “hyper-commodification”.⁵ By selecting the most egregious examples of hyper-commodified housing, Golby’s feature presents the state of the housing market in London as ludicrous. The column satirises not only how the neoliberal city prices out low and average income earners,

but also how the processes of neoliberal financialization through the housing market rely on untruths and obfuscation. It sends up the artifice of estate-agent marketing speak to reveal such “opportunities” for what they really are: exploitative means of accruing profit for the landlord.

As Nathan Brooker writes in a *Financial Times* review of Anna Minton’s 2016 book *Big Capital*: “If the price of food had risen at the same rate as London house prices over the past 40 years, then a chicken would now cost £100. That’s how deranged the city’s property market has become. At the beginning of 1996, the average home for a first-time buyer in London cost 2.6 times the median salary; at the end of last year, it was more than 10 times, and more than 30 in the wealthy borough of Kensington and Chelsea.”⁶ Minton’s book offers an account of the acceleration towards financialization London’s housing market has undergone in the twenty-first century. Processes of gentrification in formerly working-class districts of London (such as Islington, Camden and Hackney) and other major urban centres across the globe, which result in seemingly ever-increasing house-prices and the displacement of lower-income residents, have been well documented in scholarship and elsewhere since the 1970s.⁷ Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, and with increasing velocity post the 2012 London Olympics, working-class and even formerly middle-class areas of the capital have undergone huge and unprecedented change such that the effects of gentrification across and within discrete districts are evidence of a housing crisis in the city.⁸

According to the charity Shelter, the housing crisis is a UK-wide phenomenon, generally understood as the result of inflated house prices, spiralling rents and a shortage of social housing, producing ever more precarity for low and average income earners.⁹ In London, the crisis is especially acute: average house purchase and rental prices are higher in most parts of London than almost anywhere else in the UK.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the social housing

shortage in the capital has resulted in widespread “social cleansing”, where those on lower incomes are forced out of the city by profit-driven housing policy and the private development of social housing estates,¹¹ effectively removing working class Londoners from the city. Often, new developments in London are marketed and sold to overseas investors (who will never live in them) before they are made available for rental or purchase to local residents,¹² further driving up prices. The London housing crisis has particular impacts for young people and for the so-called ‘millennial’ generation (those born after 1980 up to the turn of the twenty-first century), who are far less likely to own their own home than were their parents’ generation, and who experience particular modes of housing and economic insecurity.¹³ The tendency of this demographic to live in shared rented accommodation, or to continue living with parents into adulthood, and the difficulty for them of owning a home in cities such as London at any point in their lifetime,¹⁴ has led to the label “generation rent” being applied colloquially to millennials and, increasingly, to those born in the late 1990s and early 2000s, sometimes referred to as “generation z”.¹⁵

In the remainder of this article, I will consider London’s housing crisis as the product of an affective culture of neoliberal dishonesty, effected through the untruths and obfuscation I allude to above. I will outline the affective consequences of neoliberal processes, before considering their effects in London in the twenty-first century through the example of the Grenfell Tower fire. I use this as a way into thinking about feminist notions of honesty and love, and their potential for disrupting the corrosive affects of neoliberal processes. I then turn back to the work of the hip hop theatre collective Beats & Elements — a group of working-class millennial Londoners making performances about their experiences of living in the city. I offer a reading of the Beats & Elements rehearsal process and performance of *High Rise eState of Mind*, in order to think through the possibilities for performance practices in facilitating truth, love and connection within a wider cultural landscape of dishonesty. I

ask how working-class Londoners have used performance practice to respond to housing precarity, and how practicing hip hop can provide us with ways of bearing what we can't control.

Grenfell Tower and the Affective Consequences of Neoliberal Dishonesty

The culture of unregulated financialization and hyper-commodification that I refer to above occurs as part of the neoliberalization of the city. Indeed, urban regeneration has frequently been a feature of neoliberal processes in global cities during the twenty-first century.¹⁶ Neoliberal processes are generally understood as those that are driven by “privatization, deregulation, financialization and globalization”.¹⁷ It is important here to emphasise that neoliberalism is nothing more than a particular form of capitalism. As Sarah Brouillette points out, too often those using the term ‘neoliberalism’ do so as a result of “reluctance to name capitalism as the culprit in the destitution and immiseration of people’s lives”¹⁸. Rather, neoliberalism is “precisely the unique set of policy provisions that attend those attempts to secure profitability amid crisis which became definitive for capitalism from the early 1970s on”¹⁹. The current state of affairs is the inevitable result of such policies, which have frequently led to tragedy for the least well off, as can be seen in the example of the horrific Grenfell Tower fire, discussed in more detail below.

In scholarly critiques of neoliberalism, it has become common to describe neoliberal policies and their attendant processes in morally neutral terms, even where their damaging effects are the subject of the critique. Or else scholars refer more or less obliquely to the corruption at the core of the neoliberal system – it is “inherently fuzzy, diverse, contingent, ever-mutating”;²⁰ its immorality “‘individualizes’ ethics”²¹— these critiques can do the linguistic work of letting neoliberalism off the hook, by allowing moral judgments to remain implicit, or by suggesting that capitalism done another way might produce different

outcomes, rather than acknowledging neoliberalism as the inevitable result of capitalist advancement. I assert the necessity of exercising explicit moral²² judgement, as a political act at a moment of crisis. It is my position that neoliberal processes must also be understood and discussed in moral terms (as evil) in order to understand the affective dimensions of neoliberalism, and its consequences for those living in advanced global cities such as London. Confronting the moral and spiritual vacuum caused by neoliberal governance becomes vital at a period of total emergency, such as the one we are living through now — where the logic of astronomical profit for the few is prioritised over the lives of those impacted by the crises of housing, climate and health caused by neoliberalism’s consumptive logic.

As a form of governance, neoliberalism can be characterised by its moral failings — by the deceit, dishonesty and manufactured complexity that are inherent to its processes, and which, in the case of urban development, shape the affective experience of the city space for low, average and increasingly even high-income earners. That is to say, the experience of living in the neoliberal city is increasingly one of hyper-isolation and mistrust (as the response to the Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated, those demographics most harmed by neoliberal policies are most susceptible to mistrust²³). This is because the modes and mechanisms of privatization, financialization, deregulation and globalization create conditions where effective collective action is impeded by manufactured complexity; the results of such processes are also frequently obscured or concealed by practices which re-cast them as social or personal benefits, create illusions of transparency and consultation, or which otherwise neutralise the blunt force of their clearly corrosive consequences.

In urban regeneration projects, one mode via which such concealment happens is so-called “artwashing”, where artist or community art projects are commissioned by developers to add a palatable gloss to projects that otherwise decimate the local area, and remove freely

available communal spaces.²⁴ Moreover, in this neoliberal model, personal responsibility for damage and harm caused by interventions such as urban development is also very often evaded. Minton's account of London's housing crisis highlights how people forcibly removed from their homes and neighbourhoods suffer. In the London district of Elephant and Castle, erosion of local provisions such as shopping centres catering for lower income residents, coupled with the decimation of social housing, has priced out working class residents and created increased rents for those who have stayed,²⁵ pushing residents closer to poverty.

Meanwhile, those with decision-making roles in regeneration processes are concealed from view, and structures that ostensibly provide recourse to justice are wrapped in such bureaucracy that individuals are utterly at the mercy of financialized corporate mechanisms that render no-one responsible, even when something goes badly wrong. This is even though it is usually easy to identify individuals who profit from neoliberal processes. This state of affairs is most clearly exemplified by the case of the 2017 Grenfell Tower atrocity, which has become a catalytic moment in terms of discussions of London's housing crisis. This horrific event saw a fire break out in a tower block on a social housing estate in the West London borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Because the cladding erected on the façade of the building was combustible, the fire spread uncontrollably, killing at least 72 people and injuring many more. As Nicholas Kent and Richard Norton-Taylor's recent production *Value Engineering: Scenes from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry* (Tabernacle 2021), staged less than a mile from the estate where the fire took place, indicates, neoliberal policies led to oversights, errors and outright untruths that resulted in mass fatality, and which I contend are illustrative of a wider affective housing cultures in London and beyond.

In her play *Refuge Woman*, the writer and performer Cash Carraway²⁶ gives some insight into the affective results of the fire for those in proximity to the tragedy – she

describes how the children in the emergency accommodation close to Grenfell, where she lived at the time, became plagued by nightmares, terrified they might die “next”. Meanwhile, the poet Caleb Femi, who grew up in London’s North Peckham social housing estate (now demolished), writes how his phone began to auto-correct the word “grief” to Grenfell as he struggled to make sense of the tragedy through text messages with his friends. He asks “is this how collective mourning works?”²⁷ The sense of powerlessness, grief and fear for those living in high rise accommodation in London and elsewhere, where similar cladding is ubiquitous on both social and private accommodation, has been an affective result of the fire.

In his lengthy report into the tragedy for *The London Review of Books* Andrew O’Hagan describes how the cladding had come to be used on the building, despite its dangerous unsuitability, mostly as a result of persistent lobbying on behalf of the plastics industry. Such lobbying has resulted in decreased oversight of the safety of products as “marketing pressures begin to warp building controls”.²⁸ Residents of Grenfell Tower had long expressed concerns about the safety of their building, sending numerous complaints to the Tenancy Management Organisation who oversaw the day-to-day management of the site on behalf of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. These complaints were received, but not acted upon.²⁹ According to a council worker interviewed by O’Hagan, this was because the council was “bombarded” with complaints that were difficult to keep on top of. O’Hagan’s conclusion is that the council cannot be held responsible for the tragedy — he argues that responsibility lies with the plastics industry, and ultimately those who sanctioned the deregulation that led to the drop in safety standards. However, pinpointing individual responsibility in a way that makes individuals legally accountable becomes extremely difficult when blame lies at a structural level, rendering justice an exhausting process of uncovering layers of bureaucracy. As Minton argued in response to O’Hagan’s article:

At issue here is not simply who has direct responsibility for the Grenfell Tower fire but the way in which councils are operating to undermine the democratic process in many parts of London and the UK, not just in Kensington and Chelsea. [...]

Exclusion from the democratic process is not about actual corruption but the opaque processes that make it possible for councils, developers and lobbyists to make unpopular decisions without public participation.³⁰

She goes on to suggest that deals and social relationships benefitting specific individuals do in fact lie behind the Grenfell tragedy, and can be traced through information in the public domain.

The lack of a clear chain of command within local authorities conducting public-private partnerships, and the ease with which responsibility can be shirked by those who are very likely guilty of wrong-doing, has been illustrated throughout the public inquiry into the Grenfell fire.³¹ Nonetheless, the fact remains that the Grenfell Tower fire was a product of a system where the rule of law is deliberately undermined by corporate lobbying whose purpose is to maximise profits and erode accountability.³² This system renders individual accountability redundant by reducing governance to a series of tangled bureaucratic processes. The moral failing here, of course, is that when it is impossible to discern personal responsibility, it is also difficult to dismantle the feelings of injustice, insecurity and mistrust caused by the structural failings that led to tragedy — feelings that extend beyond those directly affected by the fire. If no one is held accountable, how do we signal that moral failings have occurred? How do we ensure that such an event does not recur?

The culture of obfuscation, bureaucracy and deceit that resulted in the Grenfell tower fire is characteristic of neoliberal governance, and has affective consequences. In this particular instance, it meant that the residents of the tower felt they had little voice in the

management and safety of their homes — and has resulted in an exhausting and, as yet, fruitless campaign for justice (at the time of writing the inquiry continues). Furthermore, it has led to an increased sense of precarity for others living in London social housing and in private accommodation covered in similar cladding across the country, some of whom are unable to sell their properties and face potential bankruptcy because of the costs associated with making their homes safe. For those living under the governance of neoliberal logic, even where they are not subject to failings such as those that occurred at Grenfell, there is no sense of a system that might be acting in their best interests. Stories of corruption and dishonesty in politics are rife, and wealth inequality and its attendant impacts on health, life expectancy and wellbeing evidence that governing systems are not working in the interests of the populace. This situation offers, at best, an affective experience of constant frustration, resulting in a sense of injustice and mistrust. At worst, as the case of Grenfell Tower indicates, the results of neoliberal processes are deadly.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy symbolises a shift in the relationship between the cityscape and wider ideological conditions. The burning of Grenfell indicates how those high rise buildings built as social housing during the utopian revisioning of the post-war era have become increasingly anachronistic icons of a bygone period at a moment where the ‘high-rise’ has come to symbolise the absolute power of capital. If the modernist high rise tower block provided the utopian promise of decent affordable homes for everyone following the destruction caused by war, then the modern skyscraper stands as testament to the power and influence of global financial interests. In London, the role of the skyscraper is most clearly illustrated by the controversial The Shard. This 95-storey tower, designed to look like a giant shard of glass, sits as part of The Shard Complex at London Bridge. With a 95% ownership by The State of Qatar, the building, which includes luxury hotels, restaurants and residential apartments, alters the skyline of London. It is a futuristic, hyper modern icon to global

investment that references London's connection to the globalised capital that structures the skylines of other advanced neoliberal cities, like New York, Hong Kong and Shanghai. The Shard is one of a number of skyscrapers erected in London since the turn of the century, including 'The Gherkin' at 30 St Mary's Axe (2004), Heron Tower at 110 Bishopsgate (2008), and 'The Walkie Talkie' at 20 Fenchurch Street (2010). These skyscrapers point to the hyper commodification of the city: they are a visible reminder of the scale of recent change to the fabric of London.

Truth and Love: Possibilities for Change

As the example of Grenfell Tower illustrates, citizens' lives are inevitably under threat when governing structures are nebulous and always out of reach. In this system, material resistance to the physical inequalities of the city is almost impossible, and even where activism and collective action might be possible, it is often exhausting, lengthy and unmanageable for those already struggling to survive day to day. A discussion of the possibilities for such resistance is certainly beyond the scope of this article; in its absence, for the moment at least, the challenge for Londoners must be to find ways of overcoming the spiritual and moral challenges with which life in the city confronts us. I propose that this must come from a renewed attention to the moral and spiritual possibilities of human connection and recognition of the responsibility we hold for one another, and that theatre can be a form through which such connection might be facilitated.

When I was invited into the rehearsal process for *High Rise eState of Mind* in March 2019, after writing about Murray's work in a previous project, I was immediately struck by the relationships between the participants, and the warm and intensely nourishing way the rehearsals operated. My notes, which I published at the time on my personal blog following rehearsal observations, demonstrate my impressions at the time: "The four performers, who

have written and devised the show over a two-year period, are old friends. They work together the way you'd imagine an ensemble would work in utopia, but which I've never experienced so utterly in real life despite being in rehearsal rooms of one kind or another for much of the past twenty-three years. There's a lot of laughter, there's chatting about the state of politics, relationships, culture, and there's the business of rehearsing the show itself. What surprises me is the seamless movement between the social moments and the production moments, there is no 'we're going to start a run now', they just sort of spontaneously gather into the performance, so that I turn suddenly from participant in the action to audience."³³

The affective sense of this experience is difficult to convey without risking fetishization, but it offered a sense of peace, pleasure and relief similar to that I describe in the opening to this article, when I watched a live-stream of the production during the Covid-19 lockdown. I do not mean to suggest that this collective is uniquely blessed with a capacity for creating nurturing collaborative processes — but I want to think through how their methods of working operate in the specific context of affective despair that I outline above. Leaving the rehearsal room and continuing to attend workshops and performances conducted by the company, I began to reflect on the ways their collective processes acted as an antidote to the pressures to achieve individual success, and to the business-like maxims of some aspects of the theatre industry, which insist on certain kinds of practices and performances of professionalism (expectations of classical training, the ability to speak in RP, the absolute supremacy of the director, the idea that you should 'leave your problems at the door' to facilitate a productive rehearsal) that emerge from neoliberal agendas³⁴ and can produce similar affects of insecurity and mistrust. This train of thought provoked reflection on the moral imperatives under which we are compelled to operate (in both rehearsals and the wider world), and left me with a deep sense of the importance of connection, truth and transparency as means of overcoming neoliberalism's affects.

I am influenced in this thinking by Hannah Arendt's observation that notions of right and wrong become particularly sticky matters in contexts under which "the moral maxims which determine social behaviour and the religious commandments [...] which guide conscience [have] virtually vanished".³⁵ Arendt is writing here about the trial of former officials in Nazi Germany. I am writing in a context of "post-truth" and "fake news",³⁶ where ideologues "claim that there is an alternative to every fact" while they "criticise knowledge as constructed through power", and where the mistrust generated by neoliberalism threatens to usher in an age of totalitarianism.³⁷ My position is that, if analysis and criticism of neoliberal processes are undertaken with the moral relativism which refuses to acknowledge an "instinct in such matters"³⁸ of right and wrong, then it is difficult to see how we will untangle ourselves from the destructive processes driven by neoliberal logic. I use the term 'moral' to insist on our capacity for individual and collective judgement, and the necessity for such judgements to continue to be asserted in the public sphere — even where consensus is difficult. The notion that there are in fact moral and spiritual truths of human experience, both literal and affective, resonates with the concepts of truth and love in the work of feminist writers such as bell hooks and Adrienne Rich. Feminist thinking provides insights that I position as strategies for affective survival within the overarching neoliberal system. Moreover, they offer us ways of thinking with the artworks Londoners, such as those working within the Beats & Elements collective, have made about their experiences of navigating the neoliberal city.

In Rich's 1975 essay, "Women and Honour: some notes on lying", lying is presented as an impediment to realising the possibilities of connection between people. Truth, meanwhile, is the basis for authentic human expression, and a means of making real the possibilities for fulfilment within human relationships. Lying, Rich proposes, is a plea for the kind of simplicity that can never exist— the truth is always complex. Telling the truth is a

commitment to working through this complexity, in an attempt to fulfil desire. “The unconscious wants truth, as the body does”, Rich writes. Although writing about women’s relationships with one another, and before the expansion of neoliberalism, Rich points to the pernicious nature of political lies and the ways we have become “accustomed to the contempt inherent” in them.³⁹ In our personal lives, she says, lies make us “feel a little crazy”, and foreclose the potential that exists within human connection.⁴⁰

Like Rich, I see a relationship between the overarching culture of politics and dishonesty in our personal lives, limiting the possibilities for humans living within dishonest political systems. Reading her work some forty-four years after it was written, I experience her call for a commitment to truth between women as an illuminating message to those living now, urging us to recognize the ways that a culture of dishonesty has eroded human potential. This reminder about the importance of what exists between people is vital in a culture where people are subjugated to processes. Truth is not only essential between women, but fundamental to the flourishing of possibilities in intimate and professional relationships, and even those between the state and its populace. Through truth we might seek to redress the crimes of neoliberalism and insist on connection and harmony as the basis for a governance. If this vision of a truthful governance is a utopian ideal, then at the very least there exists real potential, right now, in finding points of connection, intimacy and trust with other humans as a means of cultivating foundations from which to understand, navigate and sometimes to reject the neoliberal order that imposes itself through the very structure of the urban cityscape. Art, and in particular the collective potentials of theatre and performance, offer methods for cultivating such connection and trust in order to reclaim our humanity in a system in which humans have been regularly subsumed by monolithic neoliberal process and their attendant symbolism.

Hooks' notion of a "love ethic" also has the potential to inspire strategies for commitment to truth. In her book *All About Love: New Visions*,⁴¹ hooks attributes the polarisation of society and what she takes to be the pervading sense of hopelessness, within both personal and political realms, to the erosion of love. hooks proposes that connections between people must be nurtured as a means of addressing the moral and spiritual despair caused by the culture of political dishonesty that permeates all aspects of our lives. In the abstract to an article on social work, Gooden points to hooks' promotion of "love as a political process to transform systems of injustice such as capitalism, patriarchy, and racism"⁴²: her "love ethic" is a "a model of relationship-oriented activism encompassing dialogue, nonviolence, interconnectedness between people and between people and nature, reflexivity, shared power, and solidarity".⁴³ As hooks writes: "To live our lives based on principles of a love ethic (showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and the will to cooperate), we have to be courageous. Learning how to face our fears is one way to embrace love. Our fear may not go away, but it will not stand in the way. Those of us who have already chosen to embrace a love ethic, allowing it to govern and inform how we think and act, know that when we let our light shine, we draw to us and are drawn to other bearers of light. We are not alone."⁴⁴

Her use of the term 'ethic' resonates with the notion of morality that I have articulated in this article. It seems to insist on individual judgement (encouraging the reader to perform ethics in action, to choose and to show love), while the metaphorical shining of a light invokes concepts of illumination that speak to the necessity for truth in ways that resonate with Rich's writings. These works push against impulses of neoliberalism and post-truth, which seek to conceal and deny, creating atmospheres of fear. Rich and hooks' writing offered me a way into thinking about the affective and practical impacts of Beats & Elements work, where truth and love emerge as aesthetic and affective strategies that open moments of

connection which push against neoliberal affects. I use the word ‘moments’ deliberately here. I am not suggesting that the practices under discussion have any role to play in the structural dismantling of capitalism — rather I am interested in the possibilities for affective disruption, often fleeting and momentary, which help us (as artists and audiences) to survive conditions of crisis and emergency and which enable different ways of being that, although again often fleeting, might align more closely with our moral and spiritual sensibilities. Focusing on love and truth allows me to bypass totalizing critiques of the hip hop form prompted by the ethical shortcomings of some of its more commercialized manifestations, and instead look for the light and embrace the loving possibilities of the form. This too is an ethical choice.

High Rise eState of Mind: Truth, love and hip hop

Devised by four working-class “millennial” Londoners working as Beats & Elements,⁴⁵ *High Rise eState of Mind* takes JG Ballard’s 1975 novel *High-Rise* (which sees the residents of a fictional residential high-rise descend into apocalyptic chaos) as a stimulus for portraying the experience of living in London in the twenty-first century.⁴⁶ Beats & Elements was established by the performers Conrad Murray and Paul Cree, who both have a background in hip hop and community theatre work — Murray runs the successful Beatbox Academy at London’s Battersea Arts Centre, while Cree is a spoken word artist and poet.

The mission of the company, as expressed to me through conversations and interviews, is to create theatre that mixes hip hop techniques with a British working-class perspective on life in the city, for working-class audiences. Hip hop is a practice that is perhaps especially primed for expressions of love and truth. Core tenets of hip hop include practices of “realness” (i.e the attempt at honesty and authenticity)⁴⁷, and “knowledge” (i.e. commitment to establishing connections between people fostered by truth and understanding).⁴⁸ Despite the reputation of commercial hip hop for cultures of crime,

misogyny and violence, hip hop as practiced by Beats & Elements remains committed to love, even if that commitment is inevitably compromised and complicated in practice.

High Rise eState of Mind was conceived when Murray and Cree came together with their friends and fellow artists Lakeisha Lynch-Stevens and David Bonnick Jr in the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy. Although not specifically about that event, the work nonetheless speaks to the context in which Grenfell occurred, not least because the performers are a multi-racial working-class cast (the victims of the Grenfell fire were mostly working-class people from a variety of races and ethnicities), living in London under the hypercommodified and highly stratified housing system I have described above. Over a two-year development period, using key images from Ballard's novel, the company developed a collection of characters, lyrics and songs. These traced the journeys of residents of a fictional high-rise development as they attempt to "climb" the strict social hierarchy inside the building by accessing accommodation on ever higher floors—the motto of the fictional development where *High Rise eState of Mind* takes place is "hard word pays off". This phrase, like Golby's "London Rental Opportunity of the Week", satirises the prevailing neoliberal ideology, in which individual wealth and power are positioned as the result of unique talents and graft, rather than as the inevitable and unfair results of structural inequality. It was performed as a series of work-in-progress showings at Camden People's Theatre in 2018, and then received a full run at Battersea Arts Centre in 2019. It was live streamed for Manchester HOME in 2020. I saw all three performances, which were attended by a mostly young, multi-racial audience who appeared (from reactions in the theatre, conversations in the bar and comments on social media) to understand the world of the play and relate deeply to its themes and context.

The plot of the play is delivered almost entirely through rap, dialogue and song, with the performers in or near their chairs while in character: A doctor, David (played by Bonnick

Jr), moves into the mid-level of the newly built “Mark One” apartments, part of the (fictional) “City Heights” development, waited on by a sycophantic jobsworth building manager “Tony” (Cree). Meanwhile, a couple, Luke and Michele (Murray and Lynch-Stevens), move into the bottom floor of the apartment complex. As the couple try to cope with the cramped conditions and noise from neighbouring homes, their relationship is put under strain. Michelle meets Dr David in the building’s elevator, and he immediately lusts after her — she soon takes up residence in his mid-level apartment, leaving Luke alone on the first floor. Unable to find satiation through carnal and consumer pursuits, Dr David grows ever more dissatisfied, gorging on luxury food and cocaine. Life in the apartment complex eventually descends into chaos, as Luke is evicted from the building, while Dr David and Michelle fester, loveless, in their mid- floor complex as armed residents patrol the floors outside. Dr David eventually dies by suicide, and Tony threatens Luke with murder should he return to the premises. A dead dog falls from the roof of the building. The plot is interspersed with ‘real-word’ stories from the performers’ experiences of London housing, as they step to the front of the stage, speaking as themselves. The play thus becomes a reflection on the psychological consequences of architecture, and of housing policies which make it impossible for individual humans to thrive absent of conditions under which all of humanity might thrive. If, as Ned Beaman argues, Ballard’s novel might be understood as a reflection on how “architecture can transform the moral and sentimental lives of human beings”,⁴⁹ then *High Rise eState of Mind* connects, via the performers’ “real word” stories, the destruction of moral, spiritual and sentimental lives caused by the specific conditions that shape housing conditions in London. The “eState of mind” in the title points both to London’s rapidly diminishing stock of social housing (usually on estates), and to the role of the state in creating the circumstances on which the production reflects — this includes the wider context of the

Grenfell Tower fire as well as the micro-injustices faced by all low and average income Londoners trying to “get by”⁵⁰ in a hyper-commodified and extremely expensive city.

The soundscape of the play, which might be understood as “gig theatre” (that is a show where the live performance of music is of similar quality to a concert or music ‘gig’), can be positioned as part of the aural turn that Duška Radosavljević⁵¹ argues constitutes a paradigm shift in twenty-first century theatre. The sonic aspects of the performance invoke the sensory experience of millennial Londoners, drawing on hip hop, grime and spoken word forms, which have come to dominate the so-called urban cultural scene. At points the music seems to break out of the confines of the fictional world of the play and become a direct comment on the state of London and the world. Certainly, the lyrics of the many of tracks offer specific critiques of the London housing experience. On “Looking Up”, for example, Cree describes the modernist high-rise building (*‘Welcome to City Heights/It’s the pinnacle of civil engineering design/Modern metropolitan living now redefined/An architectural tribute to mankind...’*), hinting at how the neoliberal ideology is built into the modernist architecture that has come to define neoliberalism (*‘Walk the walkways/Be inspired/Spiritually climb/Let the individual flourish/We encourage one to rise’*).⁵² Indeed, many of London’s social housing estates were built along principles that were patronizingly intended to morally ‘improve’ the lives of residents, before they were sold off to corporate interests or otherwise fell into disrepair.⁵³

On “What Floor?”, the company link the poor housing conditions that many London residents experience, resulting in youth crime and despondency, to spiritual and moral failings (*‘What floor are we on? How do we get off? And does god know that we’re here?’*). Murray raps that, *‘The rubbish stuck in the chutes is like a metaphor for the youth...’*, referring to the (often clogged) “chutes” used as waste disposal systems in much of London’s high-rise social housing. Referencing the bland corporate skyline that has come to define the

city, he asks, “*what’s the cost of architectural holocaust?*” answering himself with “*habitat of the lost cause*” —a critique that points to the ways working-class Londoners are left out of a vision of the city’s future.

Meanwhile, ‘How Long’ appears to directly refer to The Shard (*‘there’s metal rungs and there’s sharp shards’*) as it portrays the bewildering effects of living under neoliberal processes, where navigating life within complex corporate systems is an isolating feat of endurance, in which the sense of waiting perpetually for positive change becomes a pervasive affect. In Murray’s verse he emphasises the generational impact of neoliberal policies, and the impossibility for working-class millennials and generation z of getting ahead:

“Generation rent all the time spent learning/Your mind inspired/Heart’s burning/Now was it worth it?/Working for what?/What was the purpose?/ We gave a 100%/Why you want hurt us?...Generation rent/We’re the real earners.”

Lynch-Steven’s verse meanwhile, narrates her character Michelle’s attempts to enquire about the status of her tenancy within the Mark One apartment complex. It is a verse that concisely captures the familiar affective register of dealing with bureaucracy: “*So/ Tim. Tim put me through to Helen/Who copied in the lady/Who told me wait on Sharon./Sharon saw my email and told me to write a letter/Said I needed credit checks and references/ I let her, do her thing/ Ring - Back through to Tim/“Sorry love, Mark One enquiry's not my thing"/So then what? How long's this gonna take?/ "If you've already sent your letter off - you'll just - you'll have to wait.”/ Hung up - what a fucking bellyache/It's too early for a mug when I've barely even ate.*” The last line in the verse uses colloquial South London language (“bellyache” – for an annoying protracted event, and “mug” – employing here the double meaning of a cup you drink breakfast tea from and a person who is idiotic/or extremely irritating)⁵⁴ to express a particularly located frustration. It is worth dwelling on the way that local vernacular works to create meaning in layers here, as to do so offers a sense of the way

that rap, which is not usually considered as a serious literary form, plays with language in a complex and thrilling ways that create pleasure for the listener, and connect performer and audience. The term ‘mug’ has multiple meanings in informal South London vernacular, and more generally in formal English, which are deduced from context. Here, it is being used in the senses I describe above: ‘cup’ and ‘idiotic/extremely annoying person’ — that is, as a noun (the adjectival form of this would be ‘muggy’, as in ‘muggy cunt’, a common South London insult). The second meaning is likely derived from the rhyming slang ‘mug and spoon’ for ‘loon’ or ‘lunatic’ (sometimes ‘cup and spoon’): a crazy person, or someone who makes you feel crazy or angry. Over time, its usage has evolved to generally indicate someone you disrespect, or find idiotic and annoying (the urban dictionary.com gets close to this meaning when it describes ‘mug’ as a synonym for “muthafucka”, although in South London it is probably more closely aligned to “dickhead” as a term of derision). In an exchange with Paul Cree while writing this article, we discussed how the single word “mug” affords so much linguistic pleasure in this verse — but how this pleasure is contingent on a highly localised understanding of the meanings of the word. Perhaps this tendency in hip hop to use slang, which by its nature is often hyper-local and laden with multiple meanings, is part of the reason why it is often overlooked by the kinds of formal literary critics who are unable to grasp its complexity.

If the story of *High Rise eState of Mind* is dystopian, the form and methods of production offer the audience practical and aesthetic strategies where pleasure is created, and through which such dystopia might be more easily borne. These pleasures are not only sonic and linguistic — they are also embedded in the principles of truth and love that I have discussed in this article. This is evident firstly in the ways in which the play offers the truths of the cast to an audience via what the ensemble refer to as “real-world moments”. This formal technique, as the performers step out of character and address the audience directly

with their housing stories, uses truth as a strategy for connection, between the fiction and reality represented on stage, but also between the performance and its spectators. It draws on hip hop traditions of “realness”, where trust is gained through a truthful relationship with the content of a performance, to give a hearing to experiences often silenced or marginalized in mainstream political discourse – and as the play demonstrates, consistently frustrated within neoliberal processes.

While discussing these real-world moments with Murray, who encouraged the cast to develop these truthful exchanges with the audience, we reflected on how difficult some members of the cast had found it to share their stories. These were often tales of precarity and shame, of moving from one substandard rented home to another, or living with a parent long into adulthood (stories that resonate with a wider millennial experience). Sometimes the stories did not reflect well on the performers, or at least revealed taboo secrets (such as when Murray ends a real-world moment by singing about having sex with a girlfriend as her mother sat in the room next door – a reflection on the lack of privacy available to adults unable to afford accommodation away from the family home). However, the telling of these stories also enabled exchanges of humanity that resonate with Rich’s vision for the possibilities that might be available through truth. As Murray told me, even when the stories themselves may not have seemed revealing, the honesty of a body in the space provided great potential for connection: “When you connect with the truth it makes you feel connected. It makes you realise we’re all part of something. We’re not alone — which I dunno if that sounds trite or whatever, but there’s a lot of truth in that. People want to feel some sort of connectedness, and we’re increasingly not connected and any ways that we can just share truth – and it’s not just facts, it’s about a body in space, it’s about a person. It doesn’t even need to be words.”⁵⁵

Such connectedness, which hooks might term a “love ethic”, works in Beats & Elements’ practice as a means of collective working, where each individual is seen and respected, treated with care and decency – even through the inevitable periods of disagreement, unrest and antagonism that emerge in any creative process. This is not a utopian project which we should fetishize as unusual, but a deliberate set of working methods that prioritize support, friendship and mutual respect as fundamental. (Rebecca Hillman has similarly proposed the rehearsal space as an arena in which connection and belonging can be fostered through loving practices in the work of her collective In Good Company⁵⁶). This deliberate strategy of care results in a reciprocal and open environment, unburdened by the expectations of certain kinds of professionalism and time management that sometimes structure workplaces. This is not because the company are unprofessional, but because they understand how arbitrary rules about conduct do not take into account the specific circumstances of individuals. For example, if a member of the cast arrived late, or was unable to attend rehearsals (due to other work commitments when there was no funding for the project, for example), then the rest of the ensemble adapted accordingly. The non-hierarchical nature of the ensemble also facilitated a loving, connected atmosphere, as an absence of clearly defined roles enabled everyone to contribute to the creative emergence of the work, and to use their unique skills to create truthful, in-the-moment connections with audiences. Bonnick Jr, as I describe at the start of this chapter, used his freestyling MC skills, to spit verses based on spectators’ answers to questions about their housing dreams. In the live performance, clearly delighted responses from audience members fortunate enough to be selected for a freestyle dedication offered testament to the power of music to enabling truthful and profound connections.

The love ethic is perhaps particularly enabled by the hip hop theatre form. I suggest this is especially because it relies on creating space for “multiple voices”⁵⁷, where collective

endeavour and improvement is valued over individual achievement. Hip hop emerges from collective responses to inequality in the urban inner city, and despite its co-option into the neoliberal marketplace and inevitable contradictions,⁵⁸ draws in its most pure iterations on a spirit of “oneness”— that sense of connection between all people and things. This sense can be especially enhanced by live performance.⁵⁹ Hip hop oneness offers a means through which those isolated by the neoliberal processes that structure the city can find points of connection. Oneness is a way to cope in a cultural moment where isolation threatens to destroy us. Indeed, musical performance, particularly that emerging from Black and working-class culture, has long provided points of connection for those living in London as an advanced capitalist city.⁶⁰ Through musical performance, people from different class, racial and ethnic backgrounds have found moments of joy, spontaneity, and community, where they feel connected and human, even when the surrounding political climate might induce despair. *High Rise eState of Mind* draws on this musical tradition, but also uses live theatre’s capacity for story-telling and intimate audience engagement, along with processes of care, to facilitate an environment where love and honesty might appear. These momentary brushes with love and truth act as sustaining forces when the imminent threats of neoliberalism and its crushing impact seem impossible to dismantle.

Notes

¹ Freestyle rap is the practice of improvisation, where a rapper takes a stimulus and immediately creates rhymes either acapella or over a beat. This practice is a display of skill, and the aim is usually to amuse and thrill the audience with an unexpected display of quick-fire lyrical wit and impeccable delivery and timing.

² This lyric is roughly transcribed from my memory, with the help of the performers. It was improvised and we don’t have access to the recording, thus it may not be totally accurate. I include it here to give a sense of the humour and energy of the delivery.

³ The website [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com) estimates the average London wage at £37,000 per year at the time of writing, that is a monthly take-home pay amount of approximately £2,391 after statutory deductions – not including pension, student loans or other discretionary deductions, which can see take home pay further reduced. It is likely that this average figure is skewed by very high earners at the upper end, and many lower income and minimum-wage earning Londoners will take home significantly less than this figure.

⁴ Joel Golby, “Rental Opportunity of the Week: Winner of the ‘Worst Landlord Move of 2019’ Award”. *Vice*. (12th December 2019), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvvgmq/flat-to-rent-willesden-green-two-bed> (accessed 29th May 2021).

⁵ David Madden and Peter Marcuse, *In Defence of Housing* (London: Verso Books 2016), 57.

⁶ Nathan Brooker “Big Capital – Who Broke London’s Property Market?” *Financial Times* (2nd June 2017), <https://www.ft.com/content/82a1af1c-46cc-11e7-8d27-59b4dd6296b8> (accessed 29th May 2021).

⁷ See for example, Sharon Zukin, 1987. “Gentrification, Culture and Capital in the Urban Core”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 12 (1987): 129-147; Tim Butler “Living in the Bubble: Gentrification and its ‘Others’ in North London”. *Urban Studies* 40:12 (2003): 2469-2486; David Harvey, “The Right to the City” *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23-40

⁸ Anna Minton, *Big Capital: Who is London for?* (London: Penguin 2016).

⁹ Shelter “What is the Housing Emergency?” (2019)

https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/what_is_the_housing_emergency (accessed 20th December 2020)

¹⁰ Nolettinggo “The Ten Most Expensive Places to Rent in the UK” <https://nolettinggo.co.uk/blog/10-most-expensive-places-to-rent-in-uk/> (accessed 29th May 2021).

¹¹ Minton, *Big Capital: Who is London for?*

¹² Robert Booth. “Foreign investors snapping up London homes suitable for first-time buyers”. *The Guardian*. (13th June 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jun/13/foreign-investors-snapping-up-london-homes-suitable-for-first-time-buyers> (accessed 29th May 2021).

¹³ Jennifer Hoolachan and Kim Jennifer and McKee “Intergeneration Housing Inequality: ‘Baby Boomers’ verses ‘Millennials’”. *Urban Studies* 56:1(2019): 210-225.

¹⁴ Katheryn Owens and Chris Green “Performing Millennial Housing Precarity: How (not) To Live Together”, *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 40:1 (2020): 44-53.

¹⁵ So-called because those born between 1960 and 1980 became known during the 1970s as ‘generation x’, the generation now known as millennials were thus ‘generation y’, with the generation following that ‘generation z’.

¹⁶ See for example, Paula Brudell and Katia Attuyer “Neoliberal ‘Regeneration’ and the Myth of Community Participation” in MacLaren, A., Kelly, S., MacLaran, Andrew (Eds.) *Neoliberal Urban Policy and the Transformation of the City: Reshaping Dublin*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014)

¹⁷ Hugo Radice “How We Got Here: UK Higher Education Under Neoliberalism” *Sociology* 12 (2013): 408.

¹⁸ Sarah Brouillette “Keyword: Neoliberalism” https://www.academia.edu/14334492/Keyword_Neoliberalism (accessed 7th February 2021):4, with thanks to the author for permission to cite here.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

²⁰ Giles Pinson and Christelle Morel *Journel*, Christelle “The Neoliberal City: Theory, Evidence, Debates” *Territory, Politics, Governance*. 4:2 (2016): 137.

²¹ Peter Bloom, *The Ethics of Neoliberalism: The Business of Making Capitalism Moral*. (London: Routledge 2017):17.

²² I am influenced in my use of language here by Hannah Arendt’s discussion of justice and judgement in the post-script of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where I read her as using the term ‘moral’ in the sense of referring to our ability to make individual judgements: to tell ‘right from wrong’- and to judge individual moral responsibility (2006: 295). I expand on this point later in the essay, but use of the term moral here refers to individual capacity for judgment. When I use the word ‘ethical’ or ‘ethic’ it refers more broadly to the application of moral sensibilities in practice.

²³ Mohammad S. Razai, Tasnime Osama and Douglas G.J McKenzie “Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Among Ethnic Minority Groups” *BMJ* (26th February 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n513> <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n513> (accessed 30th May 2021)

²⁴ Steven Pritchard “Artwashing: Social Capital and Anti-Gentrification Activism’ *Colouring in Culture*. (2017) Available at: <https://colouringinculture.org/uncategorized/artwashingsocialcapitalantigentrification/> (accessed 7th February 2021).

²⁵ Maisie Allen “The Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre and the Toxic Nature of Gentrification” *Roar* (14th October 2020) <http://roarnews.co.uk/2020/the-elephant-and-castle-shopping-centre-and-the-toxic-nature-of-gentrification/> (accessed 30th May 2021).

²⁶ Cash Carraway, *Refuge Woman* (2017), unpublished manuscript.

²⁷ Caleb Femi, *Poor* (London: Penguin 2020): 114.

²⁸ Andrew O’Hagan “The Tower” *The London Review of Books* (2018) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n11/andrew-o-hagan/the-tower> (accessed 30th May 2021).

²⁹ Richard Norton-Taylor with Nicholas Kent, *Value Engineering: Scenes from the Grenfell Inquiry* (London: Methuen, 2021) 91-94.

- ³⁰ Anna Minton “Letters” (2018) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n11/andrew-o-hagan/the-tower> (accessed 30th May 2021).
- ³¹ Jack Peat “Grenfell documents and design drawings lost forever after being wiped from a laptop” *London Economic* (September 17th 2020) <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/grenfell-documents-and-design-drawings-lost-forever-after-being-wiped-from-a-laptop-201735/> (accessed 30th May 2021) and John Booth “Building inspector ‘truly heartbroken’ for Grenfell Tower victims” *The Guardian* (1st October 2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/01/building-inspector-truly-heartbroken-for-grenfell-tower-victims> (accessed 30th May 2021).
- ³² O’Hagan “The Tower”
- ³³ Katie Beswick. “Notes from the Rehearsal Room: What’s it Worth?” *Contemporary Theatre Review Backpages* (12 March 2019), <https://katiebeswick.com/2019/03/12/notes-from-the-rehearsal-room-whats-it-worth/> (accessed 7th February 2021).
- ³⁴ Lilach Marom and Claudia W. Ruitenberg “Professionalism Discourses and Neoliberalism in Teacher Education” *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 64:4 (2018): 364-377
- ³⁵ Hannah Arendt 1964. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York, Viking Press: 1964) 2006: 295
- ³⁶ Sergio Sismondo “Post Truth” *Studies of Social Science* 17:1 (2017) 1-4.
- ³⁷ Sebastian Schindler “The Task of Critique in Times of Post-Truth Politics” *Review of International Studies* 46:3 (2020): 376.
- ³⁸ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 295.
- ³⁹ Adrienne Rich “Women and Honor – Some notes on lying” in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (London: W.W. Norton and Company 1979) ?
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ bell hooks, *All About Love New Visions* (New York: William Morrow 2000).
- ⁴² Naomi Joy Godden, “The Love Ethic: A Radical Theory for Social Work Practice” *Australian Social Work* 70:4 (2017): 405
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 405.
- ⁴⁴ hooks, *All About Love*, 87-88.
- ⁴⁵ Paul Cree, David Bonnick Jr., Lakeisha Lynch-Stevens and Conrad Murray.
- ⁴⁶ It builds on Beats & Elements previous work *No Milk for the Foxes* (2015), which explored working class culture through a story about the friendship between two shift-workers on zero-hours contracts.
- ⁴⁷ Jonathan D Williams “The Realness: In Search of Hip Hop Authenticity” *College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal*, University of Pennsylvania (2007) <https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1093&context=curej> (accessed 30th May 2021)
- ⁴⁸ Travis Gosa, “The Fifth Element of Hip Hop: Knowledge” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015).
- ⁴⁹ Ned Beaman “Introduction” in *Ballard, J.G High-Rise* (London: Harper Perennial 2014): ix.
- ⁵⁰ This phrase is in reference to Lisa McKenzie’s work on working-class housing estates, *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain* (Bristol: Policy Press 2015).
- ⁵¹ See <https://www.auralia.space/> (accessed 30th May 2021).
- ⁵² At the time of writing all quoted tracks can be accessed free of charge at the following link, quotations are transcribed by me from these recordings: <https://soundcloud.com/rodiium-beats/sets/high-rise-estate-of-mind> (accessed 30th May 2021).
- ⁵³ Katie Beswick, *Social Housing in Performance: The English Council Estate on and Off Stage* (London: Methuen 2019): 172.
- ⁵⁴ Another slang noun usage of mug is as a synonym for ‘face’, especially an unattractive one (as in ‘look at your ugly mug’), or one appearing close-up in a photograph (‘mugshot’) – this also works as a verb (‘to mug’ is ‘to pull a silly face’). ‘Mug’ can also be used in slang as a verb to mean taken for a fool, tricked or taken advantage of (‘to mug’ or to be ‘taken for a mug’, or to ‘mug off’). You might also use this in a noun form (as in, ‘what a mug he is’/‘don’t I feel a mug’), to indicate someone who has been taken for a fool, easily deceived or behaved foolishly, or to indicate your own embarrassment at having been fooled (this likely comes from a formal meaning of mug as verb form, as in to be ‘mugged’ or stolen from in a public place) — this meaning has some cultural dominance due to its frequent invocation in the television series *The Only Way is Essex* (‘You mug!’).⁵⁴ In the *High Rise* lyrics, ‘it’s too early for a mug’, Michelle is saying it is too early in the day to deal with someone who is very annoying, but creates humour with the reference to rhyming slang where mug is vessel for drinking breakfast tea. Other interpretations of the lyrics lose the grammatical logic of the line and the rhyming slang word-play, but might still make sense in the logic of the song, or impinge on and add texture to this primary meaning (e.g. that Michelle feels taken for a mug or fobbed off/embarrassed; that the man on the phone is ugly/foolish).
- ⁵⁵ My interview with Murray August 2020
- ⁵⁶ Rebecca Hillman “Home is where the heart is: building, belonging and emotional engagement in anti-austerity performance” *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 40: 1 (2020).

⁵⁷ Daniel Banks “Introduction” *Say Word! Voices from Hip Hop Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2011).

⁵⁸ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop-and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

⁵⁹ Christina Zanfagna “Under the Blasphemous W(RAP): Locating the ‘Spirit’ in Hip-Hop”, *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 12 (2006). 1-10.

⁶⁰ Caspar Melville, *It's a London Thing: How Rare Groove, Acid House and Jungle Remapped the City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2019).