

Transcript for the audio and video pieces “City Edge Radio Static”
By Griffyn Gilligan

Commissioned by Mainspring Arts for Two Metres ApART, May 2020

00:00:01

It’s dark inside my sitting room. And usually I like it that way. We do have windows that look out onto the street, but, uh, we keep the blinds down. Because otherwise people can just see right in. And also it’s—when the sun shines right in, it’s really, really bright. We’re allowed out for 30 minutes a day, I think. Or maybe it’s an hour, but I usually stay out for about 30 minutes. Um, I go to the hallway and there’s a light shining over the door. The hallway’s plain and white. I’ve got my shoes on and my coat on and I feel the weight of them as I reach out, and I touch the cool metal handle. It’s blinding. And then my eyes adjust and I see the concrete. The porch door handle. Checkered black walkway. Another cool, metal gate that swings open. It used to make a squeaking sound every single time, like rust, like *[imitates squeaking sound]*. And after... four years...I fixed it. So. It’s mostly quiet.

00:01:47

But I still feel the resistance of it as it clicks back into place. The ground is really uneven. I notice that immediately, now. The undersides of my feet have gotten used to the smooth, faux wood floors *[beat]* in my flat. I can feel the bumps in the pavement through my tennis shoes. The sunlight streaks across the top of the buildings on the street, making a line, like a bright white line, this really definitive line, and if I look above it, the reflection off the paint hurts my eyes.

00:02:33

Even already, it’s green. The trees. The shrubs in people’s tiny front gardens. Birds. It’ll be sunset in a couple hours, so there’s a fair number of birds out. And you can hear them. Chirp. Chirp—and I say chirp to myself—chirp, chirp—but of course they all sound really—chirp—different. Chirp, chirp. Chirp. Chirp. Chirp. When the sun gets too bright, I keep eyes focused on my shadow.

00:03:15

It’s mostly quiet. There’s a siren in the background. It kind of fades in. It echoes through the houses, but it’s far away. Car shadow. Lamppost shadow. Little green bits poking up here and there in the cracks. The street opens up onto a hill. And it’s one kind of green and sand and dirt. And the ground is uneven now, but in a different way. Little bit softer, more compact.

00:04:12

And I see the *[takes a deep breath]* trees. There’s a path over to the left. Which is long and green and filled with sort of a gold-green sunlight. And I take a deep breath. I like all the green. Everything is green. It’s all different kinds of green, but it means that I can focus on the bits that aren’t green. The bits that aren’t blue sky. And what I hear. What I feel beneath my feet.

00:04:44

The dirt path is packed down. And the tree branches all reach out. All gnarled trees grow along the pathway, curled and knotted. And some are sharp and stick out. And some are very, very long. Trees that tell stories of growing under things and sideways and up and down and up again before anyone cleared out the ghosts of other trees or—I don’t know, rocks or vines or something—that was in their way.

00:05:28

Someone’s playing a drum. I can hear it. Someone’s just sitting in the side of the woods and playing a drum and the rhythm is really distracting and it’s in my head. And I try not to replicate it. I try not to think about it, ‘cause I don’t want to be stuck with it. Back at home, the neighbours above me, most days they play music really loud all day. Really heavy base. And I can’t get away from the rhythms of it. So I keep walking. And I look at the dirt. I don’t look at the green. I look at the dirt and the brown and the speckles in it and the stones and little sticks and the twigs. Too close. Someone comes by on a bike. Much too close.

00:06:07

I step up onto the overpass, over the road. I keep my head down. The light on the white railings is...blinding. I focus on the little tufts of green; little friends sticking out from the pavement. Little friendly weeds or grass. Usually there's load of cars, but not right now. I like the busy-ness of all the cars. I like the buildings far away, down the highway, in the distance. They're a certain kind of grey, like a misty grey that I find really calming. And I sort of make up stories about them. Just far-off stories that comfort me.

00:07:07

I step back down onto the dirt, off the overpass. And there's a doggy coming along. And I look at it and I think to myself, "Dog, dog, dog, dog, dog, dog, dog, dog, dog." 'Cause I'm just watching the paws go. And the rhythm of the dog walking. And I want to say hi to the dog, and I don't want to say hi to the people walking with the dog. And, luckily, the person with the dog keeps running down the main path and the dog comes and visits me. On the side path. It doesn't stop. And I think about soft brown ears and soft brown mud. I think about soft tail wagging and I think about the soft, really, really soft tail my rabbit has got on at—my rabbit who's at home, 'cause it's not safe for him to run around outside in the woods. And I think about where my rabbit would go, and I turn. And I walk off the path, towards the brush.

00:08:18

Down a long dirt path, and I'm mostly looking at the dirt. And I'm trying not to step in the really muddy bits. I don't mind mud, actually. I really like it. I like feeling the texture of it, and I like feeling my weight sink down into the mud. If I touch it, I like how cool it is. And I like how smooth it is on my hands—just a little bit gritty. And if I need to, I can just focus on the smoothness and the grittiness, and I can ignore other stuff. But I don't like cleaning off. And I don't like cleaning my shoes. So I try not to step in the mud too much.

0:08:55

I walk down, away from the paths, and I find a crater, a really big crater. It's near some more trees that have twisted and turned and grown sideways along the ground. And I don't really know why—why all of them did that. And I imagine that a big asteroid came and landed in the crater and carved everything out. And all the animals made little burrows along the sides of it. They lived protected by the crater, and the trees and the bigger animals got scared. The trees grew away from the asteroid. But. I mean, it wasn't that. It was just a big tree that fell over, probably. Pulled up a bunch of dirt with it. But I don't know. It's an old forest. Someone told me it's been here for—like, pretty much untouched, besides the paths, I guess—for several hundred years.

0:09:57

There's a little pond. It's not anything in it, really. I don't think there's any fish in it, but I don't know. The light pings off the leaves, through the trees. And I like it when it's at angles. It sort of...creates shapes on the ground that just sit there. Like, really still shapes, but—when you look at them, but they won't be there in 15 minutes. They won't be there in an hour. Not the same. And it's not overhead. It doesn't hurt my eyes. It doesn't reflect off of everything.

0:10:36

You can see all the different shades of green. When I was really little, I was in the scouts and, uh, we had to do—every troupe had to do a project on a different country, and we got assigned to do Ireland. Um, this is in America, and, uh, our troupe—I remember, we were supposed to learn different things about Ireland and Irish culture and stuff and—and, I don't think our troupe leaders, like, did any research, really. I don't know. Maybe they did. I was pretty little. But I remember them telling us that, um, Ireland had over 40 shades of green. And I remember that being this really big, important fact to me. Like, wherever I went—and I—I grew up around, um, around woods, and—and wherever I went, I would look and see how many different shades of green I could count. Like, in the back of my head, there was this thing, like, I was gonna go to Ireland and see all the shades of green there ever were [*chuckles*]. Like, more than 40 of them.

And so I'm sure in my mind—in my brain—like, I didn't count, but I did sort of catalogue them. And I'm sure I, like have hundreds...of shades of green.

0:11:54

And every little bit of, like, tuft of weeds or dropped leaves or bit of moss around a campfire that's been left alone is a different shade. Big, bruised, gnarled trees. I think they look really beautiful and I think also they probably got all gnarled by being hurt. *[Takes a deep breath.]* Or on fire. 'Cause I guess that's how trees work. It's lovely and quiet here.

0:12:31

There's a bit in the forest that I really like, 'cause it's really, uh, really short hills and you can kind of run up and down them like a roller coaster. So I...drop. And then I run back up. And then I...drop again into another small crater and run up again. And down and up. And down. And I love it. And I'm beaming. Ah...and then there are some people coming farther down the way.

0:13:02

I like doing this. I like talking to myself. I like talking to you. I think often I want to do things like run and talk to myself and I stop when there are people around. I think talking to myself—or, talking to you this time—it helps me. Maybe it helps us...process everything around. Like, it's 23-whatever hours a day of basically the same light or artificial light in the same echoing soundscapes inside my house. And the same way that the fridge or the oven sounds or the way that I sound when I close a door or I cough or breathe deeply. But...it's a lot, going outside. And I think talking about it helps. There's a bird *[chuckles]*. Talking about it helps me think differently about things, too.

0:13:59

Like, I want to show you the bird right now. It's really beautiful, these birds we've got. I don't—I don't know much about birds. I don't know what it's called. It's white. It's got really vivid black and, uh, blue markings on it. I'm sort of chasing it down the path. Not on purpose. I'm walking slowly. But it's—as I get a bit nearer, it gets spooked and it flies off into the sun. And down and up again. The sun's in my eyes, but only for a few moments. And it's...dunno. When it's really direct like that, it's not too much. It's kind of just beautiful. There's the bird again. And he alights on a signpost where the path splits. We're gonna keep following him. We're gonna creep closer and see how close we can get. I want to see how close we can get to him together. And there, he's gone. We can still see him down the path. Every time he flies, his wings make these beautiful little white...arcs through the air, suddenly. Against this backdrop of green and brown. There's a big tree on the path, so I decide to loop around it, and I head back home.

00:15:31

I follow the path back. The same brown and green. And...the light's coming in at a sharper angle now. I don't like it so much. When light comes in the corner of my eyes, it hurts and distracts me. And I'm getting tired. I'm getting tired—not from walking. I'm getting tired from everything being so different. When I go to work, I'm used to a certain kind of adjusting to the train or to the noise of things. The way everything sound different outside, to people talking, to the green of the woods. Um, but, when I only get to get out once a day, it takes energy.

00:16:26

And then I see a little friend, a little tiny green something moving, really small. And I can tell it's hanging from a thread. Uh, I always look for things if they're in webs or hanging from threads. So, I think it's a little worm, like a silkworm. Just very, very small. And dancing gently in the breeze. Hanging over a big patch of mud. Such a vibrant, little moving green amongst all the still...ness.

00:17:07

And then up to my right, there's a pond again. I've never seen anything there before, but this time—and this is true—this time there's a—there's a duck. There's two ducks. They're a couple. And I wonder if they've got a nest. I can't see it, but I see the ducks paddling around and they look thirsty 'cause they're drinking. Or maybe they're just eating little bits of things.

I think about ducks being thirsty. Whether I'm thirsty. And I do kind of wish I was a duck. I wish I could just sit in the cool water. Have a drink. But...I don't know. Duck's heads always look to me like they're bent at very uncomfortable angles. I don't know how much I really want that.

00:17:58

And I watch the ducks. And then I step away. And I pass the crater again, and I think about aliens. I think about *[takes a breath]* if we did have aliens land. I think about how they would try to describe everything in their language. I think about how they have senses that we don't even know about. They would have whole, like, just entirely different ways of being in the world. Ways of understanding it and ways of, like—mostly, I'm thinking about green on my walk, 'cause there's so much green. And the sun. And, like, there are things I have no idea about that they might focused on for half an hour.

00:19:04

And I cross the overpass again on my way back. And I notice the rhythm of the slats in the guard on the side of the overpass. And that's soothing. And in my head I hear the sound of them like ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching-ching. Like, as if I was banging a stick against them. The gaps make these nice sounds in my head.

00:19:30

I get closer to the edge of the overpass and the—someone's still there with a drum. But this time, as I get closer to passing them, they stop. And they take a break for a couple of minutes until I'm mostly past. And they start up again. It's a different rhythm. And I can hear them. But, it fades into the distance. And there's another dog. And I don't see the dog at first. I hear another rhythm. But—tinny and moving toward me and it's coming out of a boom box. It's not live. And then I see the man carrying a little boom box and I see—there's a dog with him. And the dog's really friendly. But, um, he won't let the dog come see me. But he's friendly. He says hi. He keeps his distance. And he's listening to the music, so I know he doesn't want to talk. But he just wants to say hi, and that's nice, so I wave back. And then I hear him go past me. Back and to the left. And farther back, and farther back, and farther back. And then I can still hear him a little bit, but he's far enough away that I don't think about him anymore. I'm on my own again.

00:20:55

And I walk down the path and down the little hill. And it's back to the buildings again. And after the green and the brown it's brick and black cars and a red post box. And it's—it's a lot and I'm tired now. I was getting tired of all the green, and now I'm kind of just tired of everything. And so I keep my eyes down. Ahead of me. On the ground. And I think about—even though I really like being outside more—I think that I'll feel better when I'm inside again. When things are a bit dim and I know how all the sounds are gonna echo off the walls of one room or another one.

00:21:39

And I look down again at the cracks. And there's not many bits of green, but...you can see where paint splattered or where grains of sand or dirt or something else have been deposited by rain running down the gutters, running down the side of the street. I think about how long it took for all those things to get there, the story of them getting there.

00:22:09

And I shut the gate. And it rustily clicks into place. Down the black and white path. The cool handle of the porch door. The keys go into the lock of my front door. And they don't quite fit. And it's annoying when they don't fit, but I like the feeling of jostling them, of trying to get the pins to pop up in the right order. I look down at the light from the door in the dim hallway. And I take a deep breath.

Goodbye.