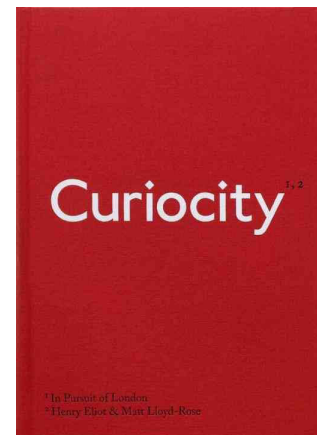


## **Curiosity:** *In Pursuit of London*

Particular Books (2015) 452pp.

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Cabinets of curiosities, or wunderkammer (wonder-rooms), were collections of undefined objects by merchants, philosophers and kings in the European Renaissance. They were microcosms, theatres of the world. Henry Eliot and Matt Lloyd-Rose set out to achieve a new wunderkammer in *Curiosity*.

Beginning life in 2009 as an eight-issue magazine, replete with fold-out maps and contributions from notable Londoners, the idea was cooked up when the authors came across seven noses stuck onto the outer walls of buildings in Soho. The original casts were made by the artist Rick Buckley in 1997. In the years between their creation and his confessing the stunt in 2011, they began to take on a life of their own. More noses were added, independent of Buckley's originals. Now published for the first time in book form, *Curiosity* is an encyclopaedic immersion into London's '2000 year creep across a floodplain', with a wry take on the evolving fabric of London and the life given it by the people living in it.

Structured as an A-Z, the book's 26 chapters use an eclectic range of themes to navigate routes through London's dense layers of human history and its co-existing, parallel worlds. Like an encyclopaedia, it is designed to be delved into at random. Footnotes act as portals to other pages, like hyperlinks on Wikipedia and you are encouraged to dip in and out. Eschew chronology as the author's suggest and you can find yourself reading of sex and love in the city in 'Eros' before shifting to the occult, paganism, folklore and mysticism in 'Wyrd'. The book is playful in nature and encourages you to explore the city. Themed walking routes open up Dickensian London and ley lines that intersect some of London's more sacred sites. The book's themes present the dynamism of the city. Eliot and Lloyd-Rose haven't totally disregarded London's darker issues either. The title page to 'Rules', for example, is emblazoned with CCTV cameras, a reminder that Londoners are some of the most closely watched people in the world, and in 'Quarters' we are reminded of the staggering gaps between the wealthiest and poorest. Step onto the southbound Victoria Line tube at Oxford Circus, we are told, and life expectancy for local residents falls by 18 years over the four stops to Vauxhall.

The maps that accompany each chapter present a London in which space is stretched and reimaged. Some distort London's geography entirely. 'Erogenous Zones', presents kinky London and its fetishes, showing its erotic territory as if in tantric maps of the subtle body and chakras. Other chapters portray an entirely fictitious London. 'Childhood Dreams', for example, shows the city as imagined by a group of children with different passions and imaginations. 'Dystopian London' maps the capital as imagined in dystopian fiction. In 'Underground', with Steph von Reiswitz's map 'A Flow Chart of London Sewage' and Edward Ward's 'Airspace' (with the four Heathrow holding stacks in each corner), we are reminded of the vertical dimension of London, where its airspace and subterranea are at times as congested as its roads.

There is often more of the cartoon to these maps than anything too serious. In 'Golgonooza', a map of William Blake's entirely fictitious London of the same name, *Luvah*, Blake's *Zoa* of man's emotion, stands enflamed with a hairy chest and wearing a pink thong. Two of the most striking and dramatic maps are 'The Riot of His Majesty King Mob' and 'London Underfoot', both by illustrator Levi Pinfold. In 'London Underfoot', the city below ground is illustrated as an abandoned cavernous subterranean kingdom, a *Moria* dug by dwarfs. In the centre of 'The Riot of His Majesty King Mob' sits a bulbous King Mob surrounded by political martyrs, riots and peasant revolts.

*Curiosity* is at its best when celebrating Londoners who have made and continue to make London, not just planners and politicians but also writers, revolutionaries, refugees, scientists, architects, chimneysweeps, hoaxers, orange-sellers and costermongers, burlesque dancers and prostitutes, merchants, priests and pagans. The authors remind us that the marble plaque that marks the spot where Stephen Lawrence was murdered in 1993 by a gang of racists is regularly vandalised, and hence that racism remains in the city. London's blue plaques have been commemorating secular saints since 1866 but it's the unofficial plaques that fascinate the most. Outside the Newman Arms on Rathbone Street a plaque commemorates its former proprietor 'Joe (You're All F\*\*\*ing Barred) Jenkins, Poet, Bon Viveur & Old Git'. Another in Hackney remembers William 'Mole Man' Lyttle, a council house resident who spent four decades burrowing under his house. That there is only limited space for these fascinating people is a frustration.

*Curiosity* can sometimes feel like a hipster's guide to the city. Phrases suggesting you 'water your wisteria with Fuller's London Pride' in honour of the 200 year-old wisteria at Fuller's Griffin Brewery, or 'interpret your waking dream outside the house of Sigmund Freud', become tedious after a while. There is too much information and too little depth for a sustained read. There is enough to arouse your curiosity but not satisfy it - but perhaps that's the point. *Curiosity* encourages exploration, and even trespass in the city, and for that alone it is commendable. Starting their journey with the discovery of a nose in Soho, Eliot and Lloyd-Rose suggest that 'As you pace London's highways and byways hunting for noses, why not add to the shifting city yourself? Leave your own trail of surreal clues for future chroniclers in pursuit of London.'