Will Wiles – The Concrete Tangle

July 2014. *The urge to tidy up cities is deadening – let's celebrate the tangled chaos and honky-tonk energy that keep them alive*

Whitechapel Underground Station in the East End of London is a long, wide trench, an unexpected burst of sunlight that comes just a couple of minutes after your train leaves the City. Being mostly subterranean, the Tube does not generally foster window-gazing, but here the raised, curious eye is magnificently rewarded. The train passes through a chasm of tens of millions of bricks, not one of which is truly intended to be seen: the canyon's arched retaining walls, the plain huts and outbuildings used by the Underground's operators, and the rears of the Victorian terraces on Whitechapel Road and surrounding streets.

This brickscape is just a backdrop. It is painted over by an impossible multitude of stains and seepages, deeply overgrown by pipes and cables. In places, an unplanned arrangement of steel I-beams suggests mismatched forces and structural quandaries. Overpasses bear streets above us. Creaking clapboard walkways carry our fellow passengers. More trains pass below – paradoxically, it's the Overground beneath the Underground. While many other Tube stations have criss-crossing routes and rumbling suggestions of deeper lines, here we can actually see those other trains and platforms; the whole station, in fact, has an eerie sense of unintentional exposure, as if the surface city has been peeled back in layers like one of Gunther von Hagens's plastinated corpses, urban viscera laid bare for inspection.

Read more: http://aeon.co/the-chaos-and-tangled-energy-of-living-cities/