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**IAIN SINCLAIR AND THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF
THE SPLIT CITY**

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PhD
2015**

I, Henderson Downing, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Iain Sinclair's London is a labyrinthine city split by multiple forces deliriously replicated in the complexity and contradiction of his own hybrid texts. Sinclair played an integral role in the 'psychogeographical turn' of the 1990s, imaginatively mapping the secret histories and occulted alignments of urban space in a series of works that drift between the subject of topography and the topic of subjectivity. In the wake of Sinclair's continued association with the spatial and textual practices from which such speculative theses derive, the trajectory of this variant psychogeography appears to swerve away from the revolutionary impulses of its initial formation within the radical milieu of the Lettrist International and Situationist International in 1950s Paris towards a more literary phenomenon. From this perspective, the return of psychogeography has been equated with a loss of political ambition within *fin de millennium* literature. However, the tangled contexts from which Sinclair's variant psychogeography emerges have received only cursory scholarly attention. This study will unravel these contexts in order to clarify the literary and political ramifications of the seemingly incompatible strands that Sinclair interweaves around the term.

Are Sinclair's counter-narratives to the neoliberal consensus of the early twenty-first century comparable to the critique of capitalism and urbanism advanced by the Situationists? Or is his appropriation of psychogeography emblematic of a broader contemporary recuperation of the oppositional tactics and strategies associated with counter-cultural currents from a more politically adversarial era? Is Sinclair's transition from the margins of experimental poetry to the literary mainstream correlative with urban gentrification? By examining these questions through the orientating device of a series of psychogeographical *plaques tournantes* with which Sinclair is preoccupied, this study facilitates a more nuanced evaluation of Sinclair's compulsively associative use of psychogeography to navigate the split city of London.

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1) INTRODUCTION: LONDON'S *PLAQUES TOURNANTES* AND THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL TURN

In the psychogeographical research primarily undertaken in Paris by the Lettrist International (LI) and subsequently the Situationist International (SI) during the 1950s and early 1960s, different zones of ambience within the urban landscape were observed to cluster around pivotal points of attraction or repulsion. These key psychogeographical points or hubs were designated as *plaques tournantes* (a term more commonly used to signify various kinds of 'turning places'). By charting the distribution of *plaques tournantes* within the city, the LI and the SI argued that they could begin to detect the different ways in which the seemingly mundane geography of everyday urban experience generated specific modes of conscious and unconscious behaviour. A psychogeographer drifting through these shifting zones of ambience sought to become increasingly responsive to the subtle fluctuations in the production of emotions and sensations between one location and another in order to map the patterns of their interaction – the 'psychogeographical relief' of the territory with its 'constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry or exit from certain zones' – so that the ideological conditioning attached to the most prominent conjunction of psychological and geographical factors operative within a particular terrain at a particular time could be identified and exposed.¹ The practice of psychogeography aimed to transform the banal observation that some areas of the city produced a generally pleasant atmosphere while others produced a more negative response into a radical critique of urbanism. Cultivating a playfully serious approach

¹ See Guy Debord, 'Theory of the dérive', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1989), pp. 50-54 (p. 50).

to the city, a combative strategy modulating between the disciplined rigour of scholarly solemnity and a more dissolute tone of bohemian excess, the psychogeographical data gathered by the LI and SI suggested that the affective qualities of the built environment assisted in the stimulation, or even simulation, of a constrictive band of desires and sensations that ultimately served the commercial imperatives of capitalism. While executing their urban drifts, collective walks designed to short circuit established social or economic motivations for moving through the city, the frequently penurious and often intoxicated Lettrists and Situationists attempted a synthesis between formulating the generalities of psychogeographical theory and documenting the psychogeographical particularities of place. One purpose of the drifts was to determine how certain *plaques tournantes*, in a kindred mode to the disorientating device of the drift itself, appeared to be capable of dismantling the ‘habitual reflexes’ usually produced in an individual or a group by the prevailing form of urbanism that functioned as a support structure for the increasingly dominant forces of capitalist production and consumption.² In this context, psychogeography facilitated a heightened perceptual awareness of the provisional combination of psychological and geographical features that enabled such *plaques tournantes* to exhibit different degrees of resistance to the alienating techniques of contemporary planning and its carceral architecture. As features that could be replicated, these *plaques tournantes* contained the potential to awaken the slumbering city to its revolutionary history and to alternative visions of urban development, opening up pathways for rethinking urban space as an experimental site for a radical transformation of subjectivity and social relations.

² Guy Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’ in Knabb, *SI Anthology*, pp. 5-8 (p. 5). For examples of psychogeographical analyses of urban drifts, see Guy Debord, ‘Two accounts of the Dérive’; Michèle Bernstein, ‘Square de Mission Étrangères’; and Abdelhafid Khatib, ‘Attempt at a psychogeographical description of Les Halles’, in *Theory of the Dérive and other situationist writings on the city*, ed. by Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (Barcelona: Actar, 1996), pp. 28-32; p. 52; pp. 72-76.

However vague psychogeography remains as a theory (especially when considered in parallel with the scarce examples of Lettrist and Situationist practice), the concept of psychogeographical *plaques tournantes* provides a useful orientation device for navigating a series of texts by the writer and filmmaker Iain Sinclair that circulate around the focal point of London. Sinclair's London is a labyrinthine city split by multiple forces deliriously replicated in the complexity and contradiction of his own compulsively associative work. This study will identify a series of sites that Sinclair repeatedly portrays as receptive to the turbulent flow of the city's social, political, historical, cultural, economic, and emotional forces. Such sites are also emblematic of the complex internal divisions that interpenetrate the geography of the urban environment and the psychology of urban experience. Given Sinclair's integral association with the resurgence of psychogeography in the 1990s, where the practice of urban walking rematerialized as a bespoke form of fieldwork for the exploration of neglected spaces and the excavation of their submerged histories, this projected orientation around key London locations will facilitate a sustained analysis of the conjunction of psychogeography and the split city within his work. As the geographer Alastair Bonnett has persuasively reiterated, the narratives of place that have been reconstructed from the field recordings of the 'psychogeographical turn' often seek 'to re-enchant and re-mythologize prosaic geographies' in a bid to retrieve the radical energies of the past that have been lost or by-passed.³ *Lights Out for the Territory*, published in 1997, is the first of Sinclair's books where the term psychogeography is used repeatedly to describe multiple aspects of cultural production and spatial practice

³ Alastair Bonnett, 'The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia in British Psychogeography', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26 (2009), 45-70 (p. 46). See also Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (London: Continuum, 2010).

that demonstrate similar processes of retrieval.⁴ The book garnered more reviews than any of Sinclair's previous publications and reached a far wider audience.⁵ The opening sentence presents a dynamic variant of the re-imagined psychogeography that Bonnett describes, with Sinclair delineating his professed intention to 'vandalise dormant energies' within 'the sprawl of the city'.⁶ If the dormant energies locked within such defensive frameworks as the seemingly inviolable domain of contemporary property rights need an act of vandalism to awaken their potential, then Sinclair's preferred mode of destruction is to drift purposefully through the urban landscape, recording and retrieving data while accessing a heightened state of pattern recognition. When reconfigured for publication, Sinclair uses the purposeful drift as a generative device for assembling an array of associative chains of actual and imaginary correspondences that will be embellished further as part of the creative process when layered onto the dense network of intersecting and overlapping territories already traversed and transformed into texts. Although the resurgence of a re-imagined psychogeography began in the 1990s, many of its characteristics were already present in Sinclair's earlier work so that the turn towards psychogeography located in *Lights Out for the Territory* needs to be situated as part of a longer continuum (including Sinclair's faltering turn away from psychogeography in the twenty-first century). For example, in his experimental book-length poem *Lud Heat*, first published in 1975, Sinclair's imaginative mapping of the occult alignments between the early eighteenth-century London churches designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor supplied a nascent London psychogeography with an infamous cluster of architectural *plaques tournantes* and an

⁴ For psychogeographical examples that range from the spatial economics of bookdealing to visionary urban poetry, see Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* (London: Granta, 1997), pp. 21; p. 25; 127; 143; 151; 187; 214; 217; 226-27; 300. The 'House in the Park' section of *Lights Out for the Territory* reconfigures passages from Sinclair's *LRB* article on Stewart Home that marks the earliest arrival of psychogeography into Sinclair's vocabulary. See Sinclair, 'Who is Stewart Home?', *London Review of Books*, 23 June 1994, pp. 21-22.

⁵ See Robert Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2007), pp. 7-8.

⁶ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 1.

influential methodology for producing alternative narratives of the city and urban experience. In the wake of Sinclair's continued association with the kinds of spatial and textual practices from which such speculative theses are derived, and the identification made by Sinclair and others in the 1990s that such imaginative speculations could be productively reconceptualized as psychogeography (enabling the Hawksmoor churches to be retrospectively designated as psychogeographical hubs), it can be argued that the subsequent trajectory of this strand of psychogeography has swerved away from the revolutionary impulses of its initial formation within the radical milieu of the Parisian avant-garde towards a more exclusively literary phenomenon. The hermetic conspiracies and Gothic associations mischievously threaded throughout Sinclair's work have been sampled by more high profile writers such as Peter Ackroyd and Alan Moore who have repackaged and disseminated them to a wider audience. However, it is only a partial exaggeration to argue that the relative popularity of this predominantly London-based psychogeography – with its melodramatic and Gothicized representations of the city – has threatened to clog the streets of Whitechapel with budding *dérivistes* for whom Jack the Ripper becomes a disturbingly compelling synecdoche of the violence and criminality attached to specific locations. Preoccupied by macabre narratives and unexplained phenomena with the potential to become commercially reanimated as uniquely localized specimens of the city's secret histories and its beguiling mysteries, it can be argued that London psychogeography has also provided marketable narratives for property developers and estate agents that have contributed to the gentrification of certain neighbourhoods. In an article pointedly entitled 'Paris Envy', the filmmaker and writer Patrick Keiller rebukes this aspect of the psychogeographical turn. According to Keiller, the return of psychogeography in the 1990s proved indicative of a wider loss of political ambition in the immediate decades leading up to the *fin de millennium*.

Keiller argues that rather than inheriting the revolutionary momentum of the Parisian psychogeographers or attempting to rescue a latent radicalism from a supposedly post-historical state of oblivion conducive to the rise of neoliberalism, late-twentieth century psychogeography can be positioned as merely the ‘preliminary to the production of literature [. . .] and to gentrification’.⁷ Keiller’s argument appears to imply that the production of literature is both a diversion from the active pursuit of political change and a contributing factor in sustaining or even fostering existing social inequalities based on the dominant model of capitalist development. To what extent can Sinclair’s work be viewed as either confirming or repudiating Keiller’s critique? Is it possible to track comparably radical currents in Sinclair’s work to that found in his psychogeographical precursors who pursued a more explicitly activist political agenda? Or is Sinclair’s appropriation of psychogeography emblematic of a far broader recuperation of the oppositional tactics and strategies associated with those radical currents from a more politically adversarial era, revealing an uneasy complicity with various agents of oppression and exploitation who in their capacity as gatekeepers of the city and guardians of culture simultaneously function as key targets of his savage criticism and hyperbolic satire? From this perspective, should Sinclair’s work be aligned with the late-twentieth century transformation of the urban everyday from a potentially emancipatory site of revolutionary praxis into a more conservative site where opposition and resistance to the dominant capitalist mode of culture merely equates to developing a more creatively consumerist counter-culture?⁸ However remote a proposition, could Sinclair’s psychogeographical re-enchantment and re-mythologizing of certain parts of London actually be considered responsible for

⁷ See Stephen Daniels, ‘Paris Envy: Patrick Keiller’s London’, *History Workshop Journal*, 40 (1995), 220-2. See also Keiller’s essay ‘Imaging’ in *Restless Cities*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 139-54 (p. 152).

⁸ For an illuminating discussion of the historical emergence of the everyday as a site of revolutionary praxis and its subsequent reversal after the demise of the SI, see John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (Pluto: London, 2006).

contributing to their gentrification?⁹ And does the movement of his work from the margins of experimental poetry to the literary mainstream during this period demonstrate a similar process, a form of cultural and linguistic gentrification of the obscurity and difficulty associated with the peripheral status of his earlier neo-modernist texts? Although previous accounts of psychogeography and of Sinclair have alighted upon these questions while pursuing related lines of enquiry, there remains a need for a more thorough investigation that takes as its focus the ways in which Sinclair's engagement with the tangled topic of psychogeography interweaves seemingly incompatible strands that exhibit both a loss of political ambition complicit with contemporary capitalist development into all areas of urban experience *and* a retrieval of radical energies that contain a potential to contribute to the recharging of the faded batteries of political disobedience struggling to generate new strategies and new forms for reclaiming a right to the city beyond the ubiquitous imperatives of capital within that same field of urban experience.¹⁰ Consequently, rather than simply positioning Sinclair as either a radical or a reactionary, this study proposes to facilitate a more nuanced evaluation of the complexity and contradiction that pervade his engagement with psychogeography. This requires a close scrutiny of the contexts within which an identifiable psychogeographical turn emerges in Sinclair's work, tracking the consistencies and contrasts between his representations of the *plaques tournantes* that provide an orientating schema for the following chapters, and pursuing

⁹ For an introduction to the geographical and theoretical contexts associated with gentrification, see Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Evvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
¹⁰ See Bonnett, 'The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia in British Psychogeography'; Peter Brooker, 'Iain Sinclair: The psychotic geographer treads the border-lines', *British Fiction of the 1990s*, ed. by Nick Bentley (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 226-37; and Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpending: Pocket Essentials, 2006). For two critical accounts that dwell on Sinclair's recognition and inclusion within his work of the kind of double bind associated with complicity and resistance, see David Cunningham, 'Living in the slashing grounds: Jack the Ripper, monopoly rent and the new heritage', in *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, ed. by Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 159-75 and Niall Martin, *Iain Sinclair: Noise, Neoliberalism, and the Matter of London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

the recurring themes and preoccupations that haunt Sinclair's writing and filmmaking and that have come to be characterized as psychogeographical often decades after their first manifestation in his work.

Amplifying and reviewing the correspondences between literature and gentrification outlined in this introduction, the next chapter contextualizes Sinclair's alignment with London psychogeography in the 1990s within the wider trajectory of his work, examining the intertextual and intratextual components that result from his compulsive associationism. A short poem by Sinclair listing objects for a proposed exhibition at London's Tate Gallery illustrates the generative potential of his associative composition process while also presenting examples of a cluster of psychogeographical *plaques tournantes* that connect discrete sites within the city. To provide a thicker description of the convergences and divergences between the main aspects of Sinclair's version of psychogeography and the constituent parts of his avant-garde forerunners, a comparative analysis is initiated between the psychogeographical theory and practice formulated by the LI and SI and the corresponding methodology that Sinclair develops to construct representations of the urban landscape and urban experience. By sketching a brief history of the different incarnations of the London Psychogeographical Association, this chapter also considers the significance of London as a pre-existing psychogeographical focus for the LI and SI.

The third chapter situates Sinclair's early work within the late-1960s counter-culture and the events that revolved around the geographical hub of the Roundhouse in North London during the making of *Ah, Sunflower*, a documentary film by Sinclair and Robert Klinkert that focuses on the participation of the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg at the

Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation. Occupying the Roundhouse for the last two weeks of July 1967, the Congress was organized by the leading figures of the anti-psychiatry movement, including David Cooper and R. D. Laing. Several of the counter-cultural luminaries invited to speak outlined an urgent need to reassess the social and institutional construction of madness and schizophrenia in an alienated society.¹¹ In *Ah, Sunflower* and the related publication *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*, Sinclair tunes in to the frequencies of splitting and doubling associated with these topics while recording a series of impassioned interviews and discussions intended to demystify the different types of violence functioning to preserve the alienated state of the *status quo*. During the Congress the Roundhouse emerged as a site of another complex separation when the volatile strands of a fragmenting counter-culture temporarily converged only to rupture once more in terms of their respective political aims and strategies. To illuminate how these multiform divisions correspond with representations of London as a split city, and to continue the comparative analysis between Sinclair and the LI and SI, the chapter also outlines the psychogeographical influences that filter into Debord's radical analysis of a global politics of separation and alienation in his uncompromising text *The Society of the Spectacle*, first published in Paris at the end of 1967 (a few months after the Congress at the Roundhouse). Several aspects of Debord's analysis of spectacular society retain attenuated traces of his earlier immersion in the psychogeographical milieu that he had helped to establish. Debord's initial advocacy of psychogeography included the production of essays and psychogeographical maps illustrating the data collected by the LI and SI during their drifts. As part of a revolutionary strategy, this material was ostensibly designed to provide a theoretical basis for the construction of urban spaces with the potential to

¹¹ See the compilation of selected talks from the Congress in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, ed. by David Cooper (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

liberate the frustrated desires and suppressed creativity of people alienated by everyday life in 1950s and 1960s Western Europe. For the LI and SI, this alienation derived from living in a society where emotions and actions were increasingly conditioned by the spatial regime that accompanied an unprecedented growth of consumer capitalism in the period subsequently labelled as *les trentes glorieuses*.¹² The city became the focus of their psychogeographical analysis because it represented both a paradigmatic environment produced by those conditions yet also a potentially revolutionary space where a different social order could be most readily constructed. Although psychogeography disappears as a reference point within Debord's work from the mid-1960s onwards, it can be detected as a submerged presence within his later critique of urbanism. Foreshadowing Keiller's critique of the resurgence of psychogeography in the 1990s, the disappearance of psychogeography from its formative milieu suggests that the SI were aware that the term had become susceptible to recuperation and that its usefulness as a critical theory and spatial practice could be compromised by redeployment within ideological channels antithetical to their revolutionary purposes.

The fourth chapter begins to explore the shifting interrelationships between what can be provisionally differentiated as psychogeographical models and pathways by comparing and contrasting the different kinds of mapping of the city produced by the SI with that produced by Sinclair in *Lud Heat*. While the *plaque tournante* of the Roundhouse offers valuable insights into Sinclair's subsequent concerns with psychogeography and the city, *Lud Heat* represents the first full flowering of Sinclair's London project. Consisting of sections of poetry and prose composed and revised

¹² For an elucidative account of the rapid modernization of France after the Second World War, see Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

during 1974 and 1975, the book appeared during the downturn after successive decades of post-war economic growth.¹³ While presenting memorable glimpses of the material realities of this period where Sinclair was intermittently employed as a casual labourer in various parts of East London, the book is also animated by more esoteric studies, particularly relating to the contemporary popularity of para-academic texts on sacred geometry and earth mysteries, which Sinclair systematically projects upon the same geographical territory. Sinclair's methodology also owes a significant debt to modernist literary experimentation, particularly the open field poetics of the mid-twentieth century American poet Charles Olson.¹⁴ The opening prose section charts the supposedly occult alignments that Sinclair detects between Hawksmoor's early-eighteenth century churches. By extending this imaginative interpretation of the spatial relationships between specific buildings to incorporate other landmarks within the city, *Lud Heat* purportedly reveals some of the myriad buried 'lines of influence' that flow unseen across the labyrinthine landscape of London.¹⁵ Sinclair's mapping of Hawksmoor's *plaques tournantes* invites comparison with the earlier maps of Paris constructed by Debord and Asger Jorn (images that in recent decades have become paradoxical icons of a movement predicated on creatively dismembering such commodified representations).¹⁶ The theme of the city as a labyrinth that can be creatively remade via alternative cartographies devised from traversing its streets and observing its buildings connects to the importance of a radical conception of play

¹³ See Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge* (London: Vintage, 1995). The Vintage paperback edition brings *Lud Heat* together with *Suicide Bridge*, Sinclair's other major work from the 1970s. The subtitles of each book clarify the dates of composition: *Lud Heat* is 'A Book of Dead Hamlets/May 1974 to April 1975' while the sequence of poems in *Suicide Bridge* comprise 'A Book of the Furies/A Mythology of the South & East/Autumn 1973 to Spring 1978'. Both books were first published by Sinclair's own Albion Village Press, *Lud Heat* in 1975, *Suicide Bridge* in 1979.

¹⁴ See Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', in *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) pp. 239-49. For more on Olson's theory of the open field and a poetics of place, see also 'Letter to Elaine Feinstein' in the same volume, pp. 250-52.

¹⁵ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶ These maps are much reproduced in publications on the SI. For a particularly clear example, see Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog, 2005), p. 35.

within psychogeography. This chapter pursues this point by returning to the topic of models and pathways, focusing on the Situationist project to construct a labyrinth in an Amsterdam art gallery as a critical moment in the history of the SI in which the initial formulations of psychogeography inherited from the LI contribute to a split within the movement that offers resonant insights into the political and epistemological limitations of the subsequent psychogeographical turn with which Sinclair is associated.

The fifth chapter narrows its focus from the proto-psychogeographical mapping of Hawksmoor's London churches to one of those churches in particular: Christ Church, Spitalfields. As part of a contested site of gentrification that has proved symptomatic of a perceived cultural and social faultline running between the City of London and the East End, Christ Church functions as a geographical landmark between the steel-and-glass towers of a modern global financial centre and the economically deprived neighbourhood of Whitechapel. Tracking Sinclair's turn towards fiction in his first novel *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings* (published in 1987) and his prizewinning follow-up *Downriver* (published in 1991), this chapter also explores Sinclair's preoccupation with late-Victorian London as a lodestone for urban Gothic. From this angle, Christ Church becomes a hub around which another set of resonant sites are distributed: the locations of the Whitechapel murders of 1888. A major associative thread running through Sinclair's engagement with the conspiracies engendered by this grisly topic involves negotiating the narrative traces disseminated by the same period's 'prophetic' works of fiction that he argues created 'the myths by which this late-Victorian period can still be accessed', works that spawned characters such as Sherlock Holmes, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, and Dracula, who have 'achieved an

independent existence' within the culture and the city.¹⁷ As the fragile borders between the actual and imaginary city collapse (together with the separation of past, present, and future) to reveal how these seemingly different spaces are partly constitutive of each other, the Whitechapel murders provide a disturbing model of the ways in which the real and imagined horrors attached to specific locations become abstracted and instrumentalized as sources of fascination for the commercial exploitation of what Sinclair labels as the city's 'dark heritage' and to which the psychogeographical turn can be seen to problematically contribute.¹⁸

The final chapter continues to scrutinize Sinclair's uneasy negotiation of the double bind in which his variant psychogeography is implicated by examining a series of *plaques tournantes* that have featured as prominent hubs for Sinclair's explicitly psychogeographical excursions on either side of the millennium. As both a spatial practice and a creative process that activates an array of cultural and historical associations that disclose the affective particularities of place, psychogeography involves mapping sites of resistance to the spatial homogenization of the city by capitalist development. But this same process also threatens to prepare the ground for the exploitation and monopolization by urban planners and property developers of the symbolic capital that psychogeographical accounts potentially add to an area.¹⁹ Paradoxically, from this critical perspective, psychogeography has become partially complicit in perpetrating the cultural, social, and spatial expulsion of the more

¹⁷ Iain Sinclair, 'Introduction', Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. vii-xxiv (p. xii, p. viii).

¹⁸ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 301. For an important discussion of the role that heritage plays in the abstraction and trafficking of history, see Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For a subtle reconsideration of the historical, social, and political contexts of heritage and the critical phenomenon of 'heritage-baiting', see Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994).

¹⁹ See Cunningham, pp. 170-71.

subversive, marginalized, and disenfranchised elements that its radical approach to historiography usually seeks to rescue from an increasingly spectacular amnesia. Picking up on the motif of the city as a site of disappearances, this chapter tracks the ways in which Sinclair's excavation of buried traces and exposure of occluded realms within the urban and cultural landscape enables him to produce counter-narratives that challenge official versions of heritage and history. Finally, by juxtaposing Sinclair's representations of the split city with the spatial practice of the Occupy movement, the chapter contests the argument that the legacy of the psychogeographical turn solely reflects a deactivated radicalism that is merely a prelude to literature and gentrification.

Although the broad chronology outlined above appears to negate the need for the orientating device of the *plaques tournantes*, this study will also address the difficulties in critically isolating specific periods within Sinclair's work. Throughout this study the linearity of a chronological approach will be repeatedly intersected by a spiralling temporality that loops forwards and backwards along the spectrum of Sinclair's texts tracking several of the recurring themes and topics that can be provisionally tethered to the *plaque tournante* under scrutiny. Attempts to compartmentalize this spectrum into discrete publications or distinct literary forms are also undermined by similar loops that link numerous passages of poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction, within ostensibly separate books that themselves blend together disparate forms and genres. Many critics have noted the difficulty of adopting a suitable reading practice to engage with Sinclair's texts. As Robert Macfarlane observes in relation to Sinclair's novels and documentary works, it can take time to develop the requisite 'orientation devices' to cope with the high degree of tangential connectivity, a process that sometimes manifests as 'frantic hyperlinking' between

established and emergent preoccupations, encountered on each densely compacted page:

His style is forcibly intransitive: verbs are deprived of their objects, prepositions are suppressed, conjunctions vanish, full-stops proliferate. Passage through his prose is demanding, immersion is obligatory, and cognitive dissonance is high [. . .] Sinclair is often described as ‘digressive’, but the term doesn’t work, for it suggests a central path from which his divagations occur. A buzzword from the emergent critical vocabulary of ‘ergodic’ literature may help: one doesn’t read Sinclair so much as ‘navigate’ him.²⁰

The stylistic complexity of Sinclair’s later prose works can be traced back to the development of an experimental neo-modernist poetics in *Lud Heat* and *Suicide Bridge*.²¹ However, for Julian Wolfreys, the labyrinthine excessiveness of Sinclair’s texts makes them ‘unreadable’ in a way that has ‘nothing to do with the language, the syntax, the grammar or any other formal element. They are unreadable inasmuch as everything that is to be said already finds itself on the surface of the text’.²² Sinclair’s texts are studded with an expanding series of constellations whose interrelated intensities shift from moment to moment so that across all the black ink spilt to form the night sky of his oeuvre a cluster of points associated with a particular reference will suddenly burn more brightly than others. Rather than allowing any critical focus to rest exclusively on whichever constellation burns the brightest there is a supplementary need to consider the overwhelmingly dense network of relationships that appear to anticipate any future interpretive developments between each of these

²⁰ Robert Macfarlane, ‘Iain Sinclair’s struggles with the city of London’, *The Guardian*, review section, 16 July 2011, p. 2. For an introduction to ergodic literature, see Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997).

²¹ On Sinclair and neo-modernism, see Robert Bond, *Iain Sinclair* (Cambridge: Salt, 2005). See also the chapter ‘Poetry: The Hard Stuff. The Toffee of the Universe’ in Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 25-41.

²² Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London Volume 2: materiality, memory, spectrality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 161-62. See also Julian Wolfreys, ‘Iain Sinclair’s millennial fiction: The example of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*’, in *British Fiction of the 1990s*, ed. by Nick Bentley (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 195-208.

overlapping constellations of references. This process opens up a seemingly infinite array of interlocking pathways of research where each slight shift in Sinclair's focus prompts further shifts throughout the recessive surface of his multiple texts. To limit the maddening scope of such labour, this study navigates by those London *plaques tournantes* that occur in a series of constellations illuminating the conjunction of psychogeography and the split city.

Obviously, the act of traversing a city offers another seductive analogue for navigating Sinclair's work as well as forming the principal activity depicted within the majority of his narratives (themselves usually grounded in actual walks undertaken by Sinclair). However, warning signs about the hermeneutical perils of such an approach can be found in *Lud Heat*. In the opening section of the poem Sinclair states that when charting the connections between Hawksmoor's churches and other significant sites on a map of London the 'scenographic view' becomes 'too complex to unravel here, the information too dense; we can only touch on a fraction of the possible relations'. In a move that resonates with the idea of psychogeography being developed as a future franchise, Sinclair also acknowledges at this early stage in his London project that the 'churches are only one system of energies, or unit of connection, within the city; the old hospitals, the Inns of Court, the markets, the prisons, the religious houses are the others. They have their disciples, aware of the older relations'.²³ It is a vision of the city as a space in which the concept of totality is pulverized by information overload. Acolytes of singular system builders mine their partisan seams independently of each other, separate, secretive, split into factions, willing cogs in a clandestine version of capitalist production. Defending Sinclair against possible accusations of deploying paranoia and occultism as devices that signal a disengagement from social and

²³ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 16; pp. 17-20.

political realities, Sebastian Groes argues that at the heart of Sinclair's work 'lies an ongoing engagement with the representational problems posed by the writing self that is subject to the collusion of political and capitalist powers'. Unlike those who perceive an ever-expanding shelf of Sinclair texts as a multicursal labyrinth of forking paths, Groes argues that Sinclair's project is 'remarkably coherent and, for want of a better word, rational, and it exploits the occult and schizophrenia as metaphors for social and cultural diagnosis'. Groes views Sinclair as a writer on a rescue mission, constructing a 'highly personalized mythic geography of London that recovers an increasingly fragmented city by mapping its *disjecta membra*'.²⁴ However, as Sinclair's London project develops, a contradiction arises within the relentless drive to connect the possible relations between myriad bits of coded information within an imaginatively rhizomatic poetics of pattern recognition, mapping the morphic and orphic resonances of the split city.²⁵ As Peter Brooker has perceptively discussed, it is remarkable how Sinclair's 'excess and plenitude tumbles into a familiar code'. Addressing the digressive impulses of Sinclair's 2001 novel *Landor's Tower*, impulses that can be directly aligned with a psychogeographical turn and its retrospective application to Sinclair's earlier work, Brooker identifies the 'characteristic movement' of the 'tactic of *dérive* within the novels, whereby the planned journey from A to Z steps off track into occultist byways, pulp fiction or Gothic tangents and parodies in a jumbled abracadabra'.²⁶ Instructively, Sinclair's *Landor's Tower* already includes within its pages a correspondingly colourful assessment of Sinclair's digressive tactics to those made by Brooker. A character called 'Bad News' Mutton harangues Andrew

²⁴ Sebastian Groes, *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 96.

²⁵ See Iain Sinclair, *The Firewall: Selected Poems 1979-2006* (Buckfastleigh: Etruscan Books, 2006), p. 31.

²⁶ Brooker, 'Iain Sinclair: the psychotic geographer', p. 230.

Norton, the novel's narrator-figure (a recurring character in Sinclair's later works who frequently functions as an avatar of the author):

'Your books, man,' Bad News shouted, 'no fucker can tell them apart [. . .] Every novel starts with a stalled car, a squabble of bookdealers. What are you, a fucking Catholic? What's with this three-part structure? One: lowlifes running around, getting nowhere. Two: a baggy central section investigating 'place', faking at poetry, genre tricks, and a spurious narrative which proves incapable of resolution. Three: *quelle surprise*. A walk in the wilderness. What a cop-out, man!

'Your women are a joke and you can't do working-class. Or black or Jews or immigrants of any kind. As for kids – where are they? Frightened of being taken for a nonce?

'You rely on portentous hints, bits and pieces stolen from better writers. The ethics are shit. You think you were satirising Thatcher? You were celebrating the bitch, delighting in the ruined riverscape. The worse it got, the better you liked it. That's an elitist programme, man. You've become part of the accepted apparatus of disapproval, the so-called – lily-livered, sponsored by Beck's – counterculture.'

In a move that explicitly illustrates the point raised by Wolfreys on the anticipatory aspect of these texts, Sinclair has Norton accept that Mutton's thesis was not a 'bad riff' and that he had read 'much worse in the broadsheets (at least Mutton didn't bang on about verbless sentences)'.²⁷ But this extended passage fuses (rather than defuses, as its caricature of Mutton as a para-academic with a 'doctorate in boredom' superficially suggests) various criticisms that have been levelled at Sinclair's work, particularly in relation to his representations (or lack thereof) of women and ethnic minorities.²⁸ Through a haze of obscenity and self-referentiality, Mutton's accusations raise important issues regarding the recuperation of Sinclair's rebellious satire into state-sanctioned oppositionality. The refracted self-consciousness of this auto-critique

²⁷ Iain Sinclair, *Landor's Tower* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 285.

²⁸ Sinclair, *Landor's Tower*, p. 284. Alongside Brooker's critical article on Sinclair as a 'psychotic geographer', see also the 'Re-imagining London' chapter on Sinclair in Peter Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 96-119. See also Rachel Potter, 'Culture Vulture: the Testimony of Iain Sinclair's *Downriver*', *Parataxis: Modernism and Modern Writing*, 5 (Winter 1993-94), 40-8. For a partial defence of Sinclair against such criticisms, see Paul March-Russell, "'And did those feet?": Mapmaking London and the Postcolonial Limits of Psychogeography', in *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essays*, ed. by Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 79-95.

also signals the unresolved condition of Sinclair's contrary amalgam of discontent and delight in the dereliction of the urban environment and its social and economic equivalents. Circulating around the tension between Sinclair's labyrinthine work and the 'familiar code' of its repetitiveness, and the broader gulf between psychogeography as a radical methodology for producing counter-narratives that challenge the dominant neoliberal consensus and its reactionary appropriation as a promotional tool for capital accumulation, these criticisms filter into the concerns of subsequent chapters where such contradictions and tensions are seen to animate Sinclair's central yet idiosyncratic role in the proliferation of a psychogeographical turn.

2) LEAVING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: IAIN SINCLAIR AND THE FORGING OF A PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL FRANCHISE

To comprehend the conceptual chasm that lies between the theory and practice of psychogeography formulated by the 1950s Parisian avant-garde and Keiller's critique of its resurgence and reimagining in the 1990s requires a brief definitional excursion. Psychogeography first appeared in the early 1950s as a general term for the study of the different types of urban phenomena accumulating from investigations into the city undertaken by Debord and other figures associated with the Lettrist International.¹ In the seminal text 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', Debord described these investigations as research 'on the arrangement of the elements of the urban setting, in close relation with the sensations they provoke'. Fine tuning the parameters of his definition, Debord observes that psychogeography 'could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'.² Stressing the contingency and speculative status of psychogeography as a term, Debord avoids detailing specific restrictions on its applicability. Arguably, such details would have

¹ In commentaries on the LI and the SI there is a tendency to turn the critical spotlight on Debord's role at the expense of illuminating other members of these groups. This study exacerbates this tendency while offering the qualification that several key texts on psychogeography (including its 'definition') were authored by Debord, and that where other Lettrists and Situationists are involved their contributions are comparatively addressed. For a fuller account of the main participants in the LI and SI, and one that admirably resists acquiescing to the temptation to denigrate Debord as the arch manipulator of his own move into the radical limelight, see McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (London: Verso, 2011).

² Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', p. 5. The term psychogeography has also emerged separately within environmental psychology to describe the study of the relationship between human development and an embodied cognition of the physical and social world in which individuals and groups are situated. See Howard Stein, *Developmental Time, Cultural Space: Studies in Psychogeography*, 2nd edn (New York: Library of Social Science, 2012). See also *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*, ed. by Howard Stein and William G. Niederland (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

proved problematic to delineate during this early stage of development, although Debord also highlights the need for a methodology of constant ‘critique and self-critique’ regarding the bold hypotheses that result from psychogeographical investigation. From another angle, for Debord to sustain the term’s operative flexibility as a tool for radically transforming the everyday experience of the city, it was important to resist replicating the kinds of prescriptive perspectives and delimited possibilities that the LI had begun to identify as part of the urban planner’s lexicon of social control. As part of a ‘revolutionary transformation of the world’, psychogeography is ultimately designed to stimulate an awakening in the ‘masses’ of ‘the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them’.³ This practical change involves dismantling the alienating environment which supports those conditions and constructing new spaces – including new cities – in which the oppressive elements of such conditioning in the service of the spectacular forces of capitalism have been eliminated. When such arguments are framed more fully as an attack on the spectacle that saturates ‘all domains of life’, Debord’s registration of the conditions imposed upon the ‘masses’ threatens to overestimate both the integration of individual subjects into a society of total alienation and the collective revolutionary potential of developing a radical subjectivity capable of actively resisting the enforced passivity of that society.⁴ By differentiating between those individuals capable of recognizing the ideological intricacies that manufacture the mind-forged manacles of the society of the spectacle (and of formulating the practical means of changing the oppressive conditions in which such a society exists) and a blindly responsive mass society seemingly oblivious to the various structural formations that produce and are produced by those oppressive

³ Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, p. 6, p. 8.

⁴ See Richard L. Kaplan, ‘Between mass society and revolutionary praxis: The contradictions of Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15 (2012), 457-78.

conditions there is a flickering sense that Debord relies on a variation of the divisive strategies against which his own arguments are vehemently opposed. Yet by advancing a set of ideas associated with psychogeography, Debord's essay points to a more complex account of the relationship between subjective agency and social structure than that found in the problematic contrast between a somnolent majority passively hibernating under the dream-sleep of capitalism and the revolutionary agents of their mass awakening. As with the drive to awaken a sense of recognition of the alienated status of subjectivity under the dominant regime of the spectacle so that a transformation can occur, the theory and practice of psychogeography is developed by the LI and SI to reveal how everyday life is conditioned by the urban environment and how changes to that urban environment – including changing the way in which one navigates through that urban environment – can stimulate a corresponding awakening. It is important to clarify that the awakening that Debord references is not one that would return subjectivity to an idealized golden age of authenticity where each identity is miraculously essential and immediately transparent to each other. For Debord, the processes that sustain any degree of self-determination regarding the ongoing construction of subjectivity are always interpenetrated by historical context and social relations. Debord argues that the spectacle blocks the capacity for the subject to actively direct any self-determination within the historical context of the late-twentieth century partly because the spectacle has paralyzed history, freezing both its temporal and spatial momentum so that subjectivity is separated from its own historical agency. Outlining psychogeography in its adjectival form, Debord advances yet more definitional disclaimers:

The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any

situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery.⁵

In its emphasis on ‘a rather pleasing vagueness’, this passage also provides an important reference point for considering how other investigations that ‘reflect the same spirit of discovery’ have the potential to be classified – or, as in the case of Sinclair’s early work, *reclassified* – as psychogeography. One of the touchstones for this psychogeographical ‘spirit of discovery’ involves studying how certain disregarded areas and unremarked rhythms of city life retain a capacity to expose existing conditions of alienation and enable the improvisatory construction of spontaneous situations that resist following the dominant narrative of the city’s scripted spaces. However, alongside such pleasing vagueness, Debord’s materialist perspective situates psychogeography as a practice embedded within particular contexts, notably the metropolitan centres of Western Europe. In Niall Martin’s innovative analysis of Sinclair’s noisy relationship with neoliberalism, the context of the London incarnation of the psychogeographical turn is positioned as ‘a response to precisely the opposite situation than that of mid-twentieth century France’. Martin argues that the Situationists used psychogeography partly to respond to ‘rationalist city planning predicated on a need to impose order on a fundamentally chaotic, or noisy, city’ while London psychogeography attempts to make sense of a neoliberal city ‘rendered unreadable not by the alienating effects of an excessively rationalist urbanism, but by the more generally disorientating effects of postmodernity: as a consequence of the atomization of society and disappearance of any functioning notion of collective space’.⁶ While accepting the validity of Martin’s differentiation between these particular contexts, this study views the SI’s use of psychogeography as

⁵ Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, p. 5.

⁶ Martin, p. 74.

part of a wider attack on the already ‘generally disorientating’ and irrational contexts of a spectacular capitalism for which a rationalist urbanism provides a complex support structure. In relation to the socially atomized spatial economy of a *fin de millennium* neoliberalism, rather than being a response to a situation that is ‘precisely opposite’, London psychogeography intersects with the exacerbated conditions of the separation of subjectivity from historical agency and the fragmentation of collective space already established as a primary concern of the SI, albeit in an era where urban experience in the West was marked by Fordist rather than Post-Fordist patterns of production and consumption. As an abstract theory, psychogeography is lifeless, empty, literally offering no grounds for analysis. It is only when applied to the study of such matters as the affective patterns generated by particular geographical environments that psychogeography materializes as a practice, or a set of pleasingly vague practices.

Psychogeography arose as a form of active engagement with the environment through the spatial practice of the *dérive* or drift, a method of sensitizing oneself to the barely perceptible shifts in the psychological contours of the city, of becoming attentive to the ways in which one’s experience is conditioned by the space through which one drifts, of gathering information on the arrangement of the components of each of the unities of ambience encountered while drifting and to chart what Debord termed ‘their principal axes of passage, their exits and their defenses’. Deploying such methods one ‘measures the distances that effectively separate two regions of a city, distances that may have little relation with the physical distance between them’. One can then survey the urban *plaques tournantes* that confirm the ‘central hypothesis of the existence of

psychogeographical pivotal points'.⁷ Throughout 'Theory of the *dérive*', the essay by Debord from which these quotes are taken, there is an attempt to differentiate both the drift and psychogeography from earlier forms of spatial practice, notably the ludic wanderings of the Surrealists in the interwar years of the twentieth century where random strolls were undertaken in search of chance encounters with the marvellous.⁸ Debord argues that if chance plays an important role it is 'precisely because the methodology of psychogeographical observation is still in its infancy'. Again, there is an emphasis on cultivating an 'awakening':

One can *dérive* alone, but all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same awakening of consciousness, since the cross-checking of these different groups' impressions makes it possible to arrive at objective conclusions.⁹

Eager to claim an empirical basis that would differentiate psychogeography from the less systematic methods of other avant-garde precursors, Debord lapses into pseudo-scientific rhetoric about the objectivity of these conclusions. By utilising the drift and psychogeography, the city was supposed to materialize as a fragmented landscape where encrypted lines of force could be decoded to illuminate the diffusion of power that sustains the spectacle. Ultimately, for the Situationists in the late 1950s and early 1960s, these techniques and the maps produced to illustrate their propositions were intended to be used as part of a wider transformation of the everyday experience of the city. Psychogeography would play a key role in facilitating the production of a radical subjectivity in the urban population, preparing the ground for unitary urbanism: a

⁷ Debord, 'Theory of the *dérive*', p. 53. For an early twenty-first century account of the psychogeographical shifts and existing separations between adjacent regions of Paris, see Eric Hazan, *The Invention of Paris: A History in Footsteps*, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2011).

⁸ See André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1994) and Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. by Simon Watson Taylor (London: Picador, 1980).

⁹ Debord 'Theory of the *dérive*', p. 51.

revolutionary project to construct situations at an urban scale capable of sustaining a permanent liberation of suppressed and frustrated desires in its participatory inhabitants. By the mid-1960s, in the aftermath of the practical abandonment of unitary urbanism and with the emergence of a wider discourse on separation slowly expanding into *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord no longer explicitly references psychogeography. However, as David Pinder has keenly observed, *pace* those critics who accept a schism between ‘early’ and ‘late’ periods within the SI, urban space continues to be a key topic in late SI texts including *The Society of the Spectacle*. Pinder states: ‘the SI’s early spatial concerns remain significant, being reworked rather than simply dropped from its agenda; such spatial concerns also have important implications for how the group’s subsequent theorizations of capitalist society and the spectacle are understood, and vice versa’.¹⁰ Although the seemingly utopian project to construct new cities that emerged in the mid-1950s had seemingly shifted into a revolutionary manifesto a decade later, the two were always latent in each other. Debord consistently resisted the categorization of the aims of the SI – including unitary urbanism – as idealistic or utopian. For Debord, the social and spatial transformations that the SI proposed were practically achievable given the existing material conditions of society and the development of available technologies that had yet to be assimilated to non-spectacular objectives. At the start of the 1960s, the SI argued that two of the most serious obstacles to actualizing such radical transformations were the neutralization of the concept of the ‘revolutionary’ and the ongoing success of capitalist urbanism in conditioning certain models of behavior in which the ‘inexhaustible energies’ of such transformations were ‘trapped in a petrified daily life’:

¹⁰ See David Pinder, *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 130. See also Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 3, p. 12.

The development of the urban milieu is the capitalist domestication of space. It represents the choice of one specific materialization, to the exclusion of other possible ones [. . .] Our first task is to enable people to stop identifying with their surroundings and with model patterns of behavior. This is inseparable from a possibility of free mutual recognition in a few initial zones set apart for human activity. People will still be obliged for a long time to accept the era of reified cities. But the attitude with which they accept it can be changed immediately.¹¹

The proposal for initially establishing a few experimental zones in which human activity can freely emerge without being conditioned by the usual motives of urbanism remains as vague as any abstract definition of psychogeography. It also demonstrates how during its more technophile moments the SI retained much of the intellectual optimism of the period regarding both the immanent and imminent possibility of social and urban transformation.¹² More pressingly, the different spaces within the reified cities of Western Europe provide specific models for the SI to investigate as a prelude to formulating how such free ‘zones’ could be adequately constructed without an overarching design or model prescribing particular types of behaviour. As a practice that attempts to trace the various forms of conditioning deployed in such particularized urban environments by detecting the series of different behavioural and emotional affects that such conditioning produces, psychogeography seeks to occupy a position that opens up the possible materializations of alternative constructions of the city that are excluded by conventional urbanism. Contrary to the revolutionary call for an awakening that the SI regularly invoke, yet simultaneously supplementing the possibility of liquefying the representations of ‘petrified daily life’ in the capitalist city

¹¹ Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem, ‘Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism’, in Knabb, *SI Anthology*, pp. 65-67 (pp. 66-67). On the need to reconceptualise the ‘revolutionary’, see ‘Instructions for Taking Up Arms’, in Knabb, *SI Anthology*, pp. 63-65. Both articles initially appeared in *Internationale situationniste*, 6 (August 1961).

¹² See Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

to provoke that awakening, the practice of psychogeography enables a negotiation of the dialectic between individual agency and social structure that resists reducing the complex relationships between the particular instances of those terms to binary opposites. In subsequent decades, Debord will propose a more pessimistic view of the ability to extricate oneself from the tentacular grip of an increasingly integrated spectacle. In this latter scenario, the erasure of individual agency appears unavoidable. The social structure assists in the solidification of the spectacular as the only available world view. The dominant order becomes capable of recuperating or neutralizing the dissident energies of any oppositional currents to the homogenization of space and paralysis of time by the forces of capital. In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Debord describes those who challenge the spectacle as unintentionally being ‘at the service of the established order right from the start’ because the language of the spectacle is the only one with which they are familiar: those who would ‘like to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric [. . .] will use its syntax: This is one of the most important aspects of spectacular domination’s success’.¹³ Framed as comments on the intensification of secrecy, conspiracy, and terrorism as decisive indices of the late-twentieth century spectacle, Debord’s paranoid vision of society is forged in an adversarial form as both a provocation and a refinement of his earlier analysis.¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* also provokes a question that will recur in various configurations: does Sinclair service the established order by using its syntax while marshalling his rhetoric against specific forms of its domination? Or does the antagonistic form of this struggle retain a more dialogical potential where opposing discourses combat each other within the parameters of a

¹³ See Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990), p. 31.

¹⁴ For an informative analysis of the shifts in Debord’s conception of the spectacle, see Jeffrey Kinkle, ‘Spectacular Developments: Guy Debord’s Parapolitical Turn’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010).

shared code? Gravitating towards the second position, this study argues that rather than defining psychogeography as a failed or stalled practice allied to the awakening of a permanent revolution against the totality of the spectacle it is more critically *and* politically efficacious to identify instances where its contemporary resurgence opens up alternative visions of the city to those representations that sustain the dominant neoliberal order (while registering that in the early decades of the twenty-first century Debord's concept of the integrated spectacle appears increasingly prescient as a description of the uncontrollable ubiquity of capital in a leaderless landscape which seeks 'to turn secret agents into revolutionaries, and revolutionaries into secret agents').¹⁵ Intriguingly, the methodology associated with Sinclair's variant psychogeography also mobilizes a paranoid mode of engaging with the spectacle of urbanism.¹⁶ The texts by Sinclair that document these alternative visions generate counter-narratives that question the authority of dominant histories and challenge the stability of various forms of identity – from the self to the city – while also disrupting the separation of narrative into genres and of analysis into specialized disciplines. There is a notable Situationist antecedent to this process. In a letter to Piero Simondo, written a month after the foundation of the SI, Debord voiced his concerns that although it was necessary to define the different domains within which the SI planned to operate these definitions should not lead to 'individual specialization'. Intriguingly, the example he gives involves the identification of a specific domain upon predominantly nationalist lines: 'we must be careful not to fall into a kind of specialization based on nationality (the English concerning themselves with

¹⁵ Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, p. 11.

¹⁶ At this juncture, psychogeography intersects with the concept of cognitive mapping advanced by Fredric Jameson, particularly in relation to the role of conspiracy and paranoia in providing orientation within an otherwise disorientatingly ungraspable totality. See Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping' in *The Jameson Reader*, ed. by Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 277-87 (p. 282). Jameson extends the concept of cognitive mapping from its initial use in Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1960). See also Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1992).

psychogeography, the Italians with architecture . . . etc.) which would hardly be convenient and could moreover look ridiculous'.¹⁷ To address the resurgence of this potentially 'ridiculous' identification of psychogeography with the English – or, more specifically, to a London psychogeographical association– requires acknowledging that by delimiting this particular strand to such a location the intention is not to suggest that it should be viewed as an exclusively London specialization, although the founding moment of the SI included just such a correspondence.

London Psychogeographical Association

A black-and-white photograph taken towards the end of July 1957 in the small Italian village of Cosio d'Arroscia high in the Ligurian Alps provides a deceptively remote port of entry for continuing to explore the conjunction of psychogeography and the city in relation to Sinclair's work. The photograph documents a small gathering of artists, activists, and writers, principally comprising delegations from the Paris-based LI and the more nomadic International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB). As self-appointed representatives of these obscure splinter groups from a declining Western European avant-garde, the delegations spent the majority of their time in Cosio enjoying the local hospitality while consolidating their respective achievements and debating their collective future, a process that led to the formation of a new group: the Situationist International. Amplifying the stature of the founding members of the SI, the photographer of this group portrait adopts a worm's-eye perspective below the eight figures gathered in a row. On the far left of the photograph is Pinot-Gallizio, a

¹⁷ Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)*, trans. by Stuart Kendall and John McHale (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte(e), 2009), p. 42.

man in his mid-fifties dressed in a light suit with an open-necked shirt. His face is in profile under a fedora, looking wryly and benignly across at the others in the frame. Next to him stands Piero Simondo, a slender young man with a wine bottle extending from his right hand. Simondo is gripped by his wife Elena Verrone who adopts a somewhat matronly stance behind her husband, supporting his right shoulder and left forearm as if fearing that at any moment he might topple over the edge of the elevated stone platform on which the group poses. Cosio was Simondo's birthplace and his relatives provided the nascent situationists with accommodation and supplies. 'We stayed drunk for a week', claimed one participant.¹⁸ Other accounts, and the bottle dangling from Simondo's fingers in the group portrait, seem to corroborate this claim.¹⁹ Occupying the centre of the photograph stands the Parisian delegation, Michèle Bernstein and Guy Debord. These two representatives of the LI stare directly into the lens, almost mirroring each other. Both wear dark clothes open at the neck, both have short dark hair. Bernstein holds her hands behind her back, Debord buries his hands deep in his pockets. In their complementary sense of detachment, Bernstein and Debord seem to inhabit a different space from the figures that flank them, as if they had been seamlessly collaged into the group portrait by a skilful manipulator of images (whose skill, however, could not eradicate their lingering sense of aloofness). Next to Debord stands the Danish artist Asger Jorn, relaxed, laughing, exuding a youthfulness that belies his status as one of the two elders within this gathering (and, at this stage, the only member of the SI with a notable profile in the international art world). Jorn clasps a cigarette in his right hand while turning his head towards Pinot-Gallizio as if responding to the punchline of a joke. Next to Jorn stands Walter Olmo,

¹⁸ Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 2002), p. 36.

¹⁹ According to one commentator, the supply of rough local wine 'turned the tongues of the Parisian delegation purple'. See Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Cape, 2001), p. 111.

also holding a cigarette in his right hand while staring back across the group towards Pinot-Gallizio. How does the photograph that captures this brief moment of spontaneity while the participants pose for the camera relate to psychogeography and the city? For the purposes of this study, the answer requires tracing the gaze of Bernstein and Debord back towards the photographer on the other side of the lens: Ralph Rumney, the only founding member of the SI at Cosio with a camera.²⁰ Although an artist, Rumney had not come to Cosio as a representative affiliated to any existing artistic movement or political organization. In a bid to make the proceedings ‘sound international’, he suggested that he should represent the London Psychogeographical Committee, a grouping that was ‘a pure invention, a mirage’.²¹ As with the perspective of the photograph, Rumney’s suggestion points to a desire to amplify the stature of the new group.

In other versions of these events, the Committee metamorphoses into the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA).²² Although the theory and practice of psychogeography formulated by the LI had already established urban environments as a primary focus for future SI activity and analysis, it is Rumney’s inventive mirage that playfully and problematically implicates London as a key site for collective psychogeographical research. Alongside the formation of the SI, Rumney’s photograph can now be seen to document an alternative founding moment for a predominantly London-based variant of psychogeography. Retrospectively, Rumney’s absence from the definitive group portrait of the SI’s founding members becomes highly suggestive, already positioning London psychogeography as a useful invention

²⁰ Debord thanks Rumney for sending ‘the negatives from Cosio’ in a letter dated 15 November 1957. See Debord, *Correspondence*, p. 55.

²¹ Rumney, p. 37.

²² On Rumney and the London Psychogeographical Association, see Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Stirling: AK Press, 1991), p. 30.

to be spontaneously activated from an imaginary status located just beyond visible or verifiable representation. The photograph anticipates the uncertainty that will haunt London psychogeography as an identifiable practice on either side of the millennium. Rumney was also a notable absence as a contributor to the first issue of the SI journal. Having agreed at Cosio to complete a psychogeographical survey of Venice for inclusion, personal circumstances led to Rumney delivering his survey two months after the journal had been published. Having also argued at Cosio that ‘any lack of the fanaticism necessary for our advancement must be punished by expulsion’, Rumney was expelled from the SI.²³ Rumney’s belated contribution eventually took the form of a psychogeographical photo-narrative titled ‘The Leaning Tower of Venice’, a playful subversion of stereotypically romantic photo-stories that had become popular in 1950s magazines aimed at female readers (and known in Italian as *fotoromanzi*).²⁴ ‘The Leaning Tower of Venice’ exemplified the kind of graphical détournement that would influence later SI integrations of preexisting aesthetic elements from mainstream culture. To replace the scheduled photo-narrative in the first SI journal, Debord printed two passport-style photos of Rumney beneath a brief article with the bullet-pointed heading ‘Venice Has Conquered Ralph Rumney’.²⁵

Before the founding of the SI, London had already been a site with which the Lettrists had expressed an interest in a mockingly censorious ‘Letter to the Editor of *The Times*’ published in the LI newsletter *Potlatch* in October 1955. Reacting to urban development plans in the city that included the projected demolition of large parts of Limehouse, the LI protested that ‘it is inconvenient that this Chinese quarter of London should be destroyed before we have the opportunity to visit it and carry out

²³ Rumney, p. 54.

²⁴ Rumney’s ‘The Leaning Tower of Venice’ is reprinted in Ford, *Situationist International*, p. 54-55.

²⁵ The article (including the photos of Rumney) is reprinted in Rumney, p. 54.

certain psychogeographical experiments we are at present undertaking'.²⁶ Through the figure of the 'Chinese quarter' the LI's satirical reference to the potential fertility of London as a city ripe for psychogeographical investigation introduces an important component in the development of London psychogeography. The image of Limehouse that the LI address is one in which the material reality of the neighbourhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been repeatedly spliced with imaginary representations from a range of cultural sources (including journalism, literature, art, and film) so that the verifiable existence of a cluster of Chinese inhabitants in this part of London contributes to the production of sensational narratives that characterize the neighbourhood as 'Chinatown'. In *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, Sinclair identifies such narratives as 'the antiquarian picaresque of Thomas Burke and Sax Rohmer', two popular early twentieth century authors whose stereotypical fictions are condensed into a series of vivid snapshots: 'Chinatown Nights. Fabulous opium dens. White women gone to the bad. The savage perversions of the Orient. Dogs' heads simmering in woks. Triad assassins with gold teeth. Dragon tattoos. Books of wisdom printed on skin'.²⁷ From a psychogeographical perspective, while the imaginary projections of Limehouse as a clandestine enclave run by Chinese criminal gangs and riddled with opium dens can be dismissed as racist fantasies, alongside such a dismissal there needs to be an acknowledgement that the ambience that these fantasies and projections layer over the neighbourhood contain the potential to generate affects that alter the emotions and behavior of both the individual and collective experience of the geographical environment. For the LI, these affects would become the focus of 'psychogeographical experiments'. The imaginary projections cannot be simply separated from the material reality of the city. They have a capacity to transform the material reality of the city.

²⁶ See 'Letter to the Editor of *The Times*', in *Theory of the Dérive and other situationist writings on the city*, p. 54.

²⁷ Iain Sinclair and Dave McKean, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (London: Phoenix House, 1997), p. 171.

This shapeshifting dimension to the everyday experience of the urban environment, where images and symbols interpenetrate with the streets and buildings, and where metaphors and myths intersect with memory and history, will become a pivotal focus of London psychogeography. Later in the century, Limehouse would become a site for psychogeographical experiments but only after the planners and property developers had destroyed most of the buildings along Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway, the streets commonly associated with ‘Chinatown’ in the early twentieth century.²⁸ For Debord, many Parisian neighbourhoods had also been subject to the politically motivated ravages of urban planners because the city’s ‘ever-renewed revolutions had so worried and shocked the world, and because they had unfortunately always failed’.²⁹

Towards the end of the 1950s, the SI also turn their psychogeographical gaze towards London, on this occasion more explicitly concentrating on the ways in which literary representations of the city connect with the emotional states generated by the environment:

The transformation of the environment calls forth new emotional states that are first experienced passively and then, with heightened consciousness, give way to constructive reactions. London was the first urban result of the industrial revolution and English literature of the nineteenth century bears witness to an increasing awareness of the problems of atmosphere and of the qualitatively different possibilities in a large urban area.³⁰

²⁸ For an informative account of the social and cultural history of this quarter, including a persuasive analysis of the sensationalist construction of Limehouse as a Chinese enclave, see John Seed, ‘Limehouse Blues: Looking for “Chinatown” in the London Docks, 1900-40’, *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (2006), 55-85. See also Paul Newland, *The Cultural Construction of London’s East End: Urban Iconography, Modernity and the Spatialisation of Englishness* (Rodopi: Amsterdam and New York, 2008), pp. 105-28.

²⁹ Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, trans. by James Brook (London: Verso, 1991), p. 44.

³⁰ ‘Unitary Urbanism at the end of the 1950s’, in *The Situationists and the City*, ed. and trans. by Tom McDonough (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 99-103 (p. 103). The anonymous article was first published in *Internationale situationniste*, 3 (December 1959).

As an example of the ways in which the changing atmosphere of a rapidly expanding city influences literary production, the anonymous author of this article cites the youthful love between Thomas De Quincey and Ann in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* as marking ‘a turning point in the slow historical evolution of the passions’.³¹ Separated by circumstances beyond their control, the young De Quincey fruitlessly searches for Ann, the young prostitute who had ‘stretched out a saving hand’ during a melodramatic moment of ill health when he was destitute in Soho, and imagines her reciprocating his search efforts as they pass ‘through the mighty labyrinths of London; perhaps even within a few feet of each other’.³² In the atomized world of capitalist modernity friends and lovers can no longer rely on being able to find each other again after their initial contact, particularly when either their ephemeral association or their precarious economic position precludes exchanging such details as a stable address (or even a last name).³³ Relationships degrade as the city grows, rendering it more and more difficult for those within the city to recognize each other. The city begins to shape the narratives – and, in De Quincey’s case, also the dreams – that emerge within its labyrinthine circuits, an influence that renders the status of the city as a new type of character in its own right rather than as a supplementary setting within which characters act and interact exclusively with each other.³⁴ Retrospectively, as he walks through London De Quincey meditates on the

³¹ Unitary Urbanism at the end of the 1950s’, p. 103.

³² Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 51, p. 64.

³³ For a detailed discussion of these points in relation to De Quincey’s *Confessions*, see John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 85-92.

³⁴ On the disintegration of ‘knowable communities’ within an increasingly urban landscape and society, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993), pp. 165-81. See also Raymond Williams, *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1984), pp. 28-59. On the ways in which the urban episode with the figure of Ann governs the production of De Quincey’s dreams, see Alina Clej, *A Genealogy of the Modern Self: Thomas De Quincey and the Intoxication of Writing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 90-111.

possibility that he could be separated from Ann by the spatial distance of ‘a few feet’ that proves a barrier ‘amounting in the end to a separation for eternity’.³⁵ In such a situation it becomes necessary to be able to identify and navigate the barriers that begin to proliferate in the city while simultaneously searching for an exit from the labyrinth. In the SI article, De Quincey is identified as a precursor of the psychogeographical drifter and a further passage from his *Confessions* is quoted at length:

seeking ambitiously for a *northwest passage*, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys [. . .] I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted, whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London.³⁶

The concept of separation as a consequence of the new formations of the urban environment and the representation of London as a labyrinthine city will return respectively as key themes of the following two chapters. But in terms of the uncertain status of London psychogeography, it is noteworthy that at this stage of the SI’s development that London literature is included as a useful reference point for understanding the development of the concepts that the Situationists will repeatedly utilize as part of an ongoing critique of urbanism, particularly in the role that urban planning plays as a support structure for the processes of alienation that underpin the growth of consumer capitalism. In 1960 the SI selected the East End of London as the site for their fourth annual conference. At the end of that same decade Sinclair also

³⁵ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 64. On the ‘double symmetry’ between De Quincey and Ann as both criminalized and peripatetic, see Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London* (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 297-319 (p. 303). Beaumont also references the suspicion that Ann was a composite portrait, but comments that what matters is ‘her role as a mythological figure of female suffering and redemption’, see Beaumont, *Nightwalking*, p. 308.

³⁶ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 81. The first emphasis in the longer citation is found in the SI article but not in the original text. For a discussion of the nocturnal setting of this ‘passage’, see Beaumont, *Nightwalking*, p. 313.

settles on the East End of London as a site for what will become a future psychogeographical franchise.

Between Literature and Gentrification

Sinclair's psychogeography can be described as an expanded form of place-writing that incorporates different genres and media while recording compulsive explorations of specific locations across the city. These explorations stray beyond the porous disciplinary boundaries of literature as a topic of academic study (or a designated browsing zone within a library or a bookstore), particularly when Sinclair uses his exploratory reports to negotiate the restless intersections between the urban landscape and such expansive topics as capital, culture, ecology, history, imagination, and memory. While such negotiations connect Sinclair's work to wider discussions within contemporary cultural production regarding the competing and complementary claims of genre proliferation and postdisciplinarity, the psychogeographical association that Keiller activates between literature and gentrification remains a central issue for understanding Sinclair's work. Keiller's disparaging account of 1990s psychogeography raises broader questions regarding the representation of literature at the start of the twenty first century. Is it accurate to portray literature as a depoliticized sector within a culture industry rendered largely incapable of producing or retaining any radical energies that might resist, challenge, or subvert the perpetuation of the dominant ideology of the market? Or does such a portrayal risk returning the idea of literature to an idealized state of privilege and separation, decontextualized from the social and historical processes in which it is inextricably immersed, isolated from engaging in a dialectic of subversion and containment with a capacity to contaminate

the consolidation of the forces of gentrification with which it is provisionally associated? It is tempting to enlist Keiller as a contrasting figure to Sinclair within this variant strand of psychogeography, positioning him as someone whose work retains a more explicit, and more playfully melancholic, commitment to the Situationist call that a ‘bridge between imagination and reality must be built’ (even in a less politically ambitious period).³⁷ But could a predominantly literary psychogeography also be interpreted as revealing a commitment to building a bridge between imagination and reality?

Sinclair is a prolific twenty-first century author. Since the start of the new millennium he has published novels, short stories, poems, pamphlets, articles, essays, reviews, as well as several introductions to new editions of works by other writers (notably Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* and Alexander Baron’s *Lowlife*, two texts that respectively signpost Sinclair’s fascination for forms of writing typically classified as ‘genre fiction’ – whether a late-Victorian detective story with a dash of urban Gothic or a mid-twentieth century pulp classic from a ‘reforgotten’ canon of dirty realists writing about London’s East End).³⁸ He has also edited a voluminous compendium of texts on London as a city of disappearances and produced a range of documentary works that include films, audio recordings, and exhibitions, as well as several lengthy books generated for the most part from a series of walks (most famously around the M25 orbital motorway in *London Orbital*) intended to test one pleasingly vague thesis after another. One of the substrates of these theses is the notion that mindful walking

³⁷ See Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press, 1994), p. 45. Keiller’s narrator cites this phrase at the start of the film *Robinson in Space*. For a perspective that views Sinclair and Keiller as producing contrasting rather than complementary work, see Owen Hatherley, ‘How Patrick Keiller is mapping the 21st-century landscape’, *Guardian*, 31 March 2012, review section, p. 17. On Keiller’s films as psychogeography, see Coverley, *Psychogeography*, pp. 133-37.

³⁸ ‘We live at a time when the pre-forgotten seek out the reforgotten’, Iain Sinclair, ‘Introduction’ to Alexander Baron, *The Lowlife* (London: Harvill, 2001), pp. v-xii (p. v).

can be a subversive act, a proposition with a lengthy pedigree and one which has become steadily more elementary in a twenty-first century context.³⁹ Since the start of the 1990s vast tracts of public space in London (as well as many other UK cities) have been sold into private ownership.⁴⁰ Sinclair's account of his walks include details of the ways in which issues relating to security and demographic profiling increasingly limit routes or block access to certain types of free movement that were previously possible, if not always permitted, across the city. From walking to writing, Sinclair's restless productivity seems to have capitalized on the momentum that led to the release of five separate book-length publications in 1999, although the status of these titles as separate publications needs qualifying with reference to Sinclair's own description of this sequence as a series of rehearsals for *London Orbital*, as 'missing chapters of a larger whole, outstations'.⁴¹

The broad trajectory of Sinclair's career as a writer can be concisely sketched: after a lengthy gestation period in the margins of experimental poetry in the 1970s and 1980s, Sinclair was eventually ushered into the outer reaches of the literary limelight as a novelist after rallying his prose into battle against Thatcherism, first obliquely in *White*

³⁹ See Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001). See also Tina Richardson, 'Introducing Schizocartography: Challenging Anti-Production – Schizocartography as Method and Practice', *Society of Cartographers Bulletin*, 44 (2010), 31-38, and the compilation of images and texts by the fluid collective of performance artists, writers, and walkers that circulate around the figure of Phil Smith in *Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways* (Axminster: Triarchy, 2010). Through their respective formulations of schizocartography and mythogeography, Richardson (the founder of the Leeds Psychogeography Group) and Smith have pioneered new developments in the psychogeographical theory and practice of walking.

⁴⁰ See Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First-Century City* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁴¹ Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital* (London: Granta, 2002), p. 460. The five publications by Sinclair are *Crash* (London: BFI, 1999); *Dark Lanthorns: David Rodinsky as Psychogeographer* (Uppingham: Goldmark, 1999); *Rodinsky's Room* (London: Granta, 1999); *Liquid City* (London: Reaktion, 1999); *Sorry Meniscus: Excursions to the Millennium Dome* (London: Profile, 1999). Two of these books were collaborative works: *Rodinsky's Room* with the artist and writer Rachel Lichtenstein, *Liquid City* with the photographer Marc Atkins. The fact that these books were produced by five different publishers points to another kind of restlessness within Sinclair's oeuvre. As one of a series of Sinclair's cinematic collaborations with the writer and filmmaker Chris Petit, the film *London Orbital* can also be added to this list of outstations.

Chappell, *Scarlet Tracings* and then more antagonistically in *Downriver*. Entering the 1990s, Sinclair's presence as a prize-winning visionary satirist and provocative cultural commentator brought him ever closer to the mainstream with a series of non-fiction writings mostly concerned with London, notably through his commercially successful series of excursions on the secret history of the city collected as *Lights Out for the Territory*. This late-twentieth century penetration into the more remote regions of the United Kingdom's popular consciousness and its concomitant media channels (late night arts slots on BBC2; sporadic bursts of cultural chatter on Radio 4; articles in the *London Review of Books*, *Modern Painters*, *Sight and Sound*) established him as a writer strongly associated with that same late-twentieth century period into the new millennium where his documentary works have proliferated and his presence as a contemporary novelist has dissipated. There is a broader context for such an association that Sinclair captures with despairing irony when discussing the rise of New Labour, observing that although 'the Conservatives might have been wiped out in successive elections' throughout the 1990s, the 'Thatcherite lineage is secure with Tony Blair. All that has happened is some discreet rebranding, less confrontation, better suits'.⁴² However, rather than reflecting the consistency of his opposition to a fundamentally unchanging political lineage, the temporal lag attached to Sinclair's critical reception as a twenty-first century author needs to be considered as primarily a consequence of his reliance on a proven methodology that has become conveniently summarized as psychogeography.

The standard format that most of Sinclair's mainstream publishers use when listing his publications is to divide the output into three separate categories: poetry, fiction, documentary. However, by hybridizing the notionally discrete elements of the forms

⁴² Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 227.

or genres that usually anchor the reader's expectations (and shape the sales pitch of the publishers and booksellers), Sinclair's work frequently destabilizes the fragile borders between the different categories so that at the level of the text any solid segregation between publications melts into air. Granta labelled the essays in *Lights Out for the Territory* as 'Fiction' on the back-cover of the original trade paperback. In later editions, this classification was altered to 'Non-Fiction'. The multiple categories within which the book can be provisionally categorized testify to the slippery status of genre in relation to Sinclair's compositional methodology. As psychogeography, this methodology connects the disparate elements of his oeuvre. Picking up on the speculative etymology of 'autopsy' as 'the act of seeing with one's own eyes' that Sinclair proposes in relation to the films of Stan Brakhage in a prose section of *Lud Heat*, Sebastian Groes has argued that Sinclair cannot be approached 'without analyzing his interest in the representational problems that writing the self poses in the process of textualising the city'.⁴³ Whether documentary, fiction, or poetry, Sinclair's texts become a form of autopsy where the 'I' that sees is as fully autobiographical as the 'floating autobiography' of a walk.⁴⁴ But there is a complication in the division of categories, a gremlin in the grooves of genre. Sinclair occupies a contradictory space in relation to the split city, subjecting the urban environment to radically subjective readings while simultaneously abandoning himself to its restless rhythms. Contrasting Sinclair with Peter Ackroyd, Groes describes the blank transparency of the author's position as a form of absence that impacts upon the concept of documentary, fiction, and documentary fiction:

The disembodied transparent self is a space where the distorting effects of manipulation by political and economic powers are registered and

⁴³ Groes, *The Making of London*, p. 99.

⁴⁴ Iain Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison: In the traces of John Clare's 'Journey out of Essex'* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005) p. 160.

experienced as a form of linguistic estrangement. In *Radon Daughters* (1994) the Sinclair-figure states: 'Writing, the physical act of it, dissolves the ego. Lets the elder voices through. Everything I write, even the act of ventriloquism, is autobiography.' The writing self conflicts, then, with the idea that Sinclair's visionary qualities do manage to create transparency. A difference with Ackroyd's approach is, however, that Sinclair's prophetic qualities are transgressive because codes of the self are mixed up with codes of other literary and cultural signs inscribed in, paradoxically, the absent self. We should therefore rethink the clear-cut distinction between Sinclair's fiction and non-fiction: the writing self is always linguistically dislocated, a fiction.⁴⁵

In the mirror world of representation, the writing self is a fictional phantom haunting the writing self. Every figure in Sinclair is a 'Sinclair-figure' and not Sinclair. This linguistic estrangement is linked to a registration of the deformative and oppressive energies of capital and its political power, generating the alienation and separation identified by Debord as key components of what he categorizes as the society of the spectacle. Superficially split by the complexity of the urban environment and its representations, language and textuality should not be severed from the material conditions and social relations of their formation, production, and reception. The 'I' that is a textual construct needs to be constantly reconnected to its social context to gain intelligibility. Sinclair's subjective construction of the 'I' carries an additional transgressive charge because of its hybridized social dimension: 'It is the act of witnessing of the narrating subject that gives "authority" to the unconscious witnesses whose existence and/or writings are acknowledged'.⁴⁶ Sinclair is not just 'a perambulator of margins, walking the hidden psychogeographical maps of London,

⁴⁵ Groes, *The Making of London*, p. 100. The quote from *Radon Daughters* is from a section purporting to be the first-person journal of a character called Rhab Adnam. While Groes labels this voice 'the Sinclair-figure', Brian Baker identifies this 'eco-warrior' as a caricature of Sinclair's friend Renchi Bicknell. See Baker, *Iain Sinclair* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University, 2007), p. 162. See also Sinclair, *Radon Daughters*, p. 287.

⁴⁶ Groes, *The Making of London*, p. 100.

past and present' but also 'our witness, recording the city'.⁴⁷ In this role as witness, Sinclair operates as a psychogeographical filter through which a network of energies and accumulated information are channelled and recorded into text and images. Sinclair's seemingly dysfunctional relationship to the sorting office of genre is not just a question of splicing together different literary modes or forms (poetry, novels, essays) or interweaving different literary genres and sub-genres (open field poetics, neo-modernist fiction, gonzo journalism, pulp noir, urban Gothic, psychogeographical travelogue) it also involves negotiating a position described by Jacques Derrida as the law of genre in which every text 'participates in one of several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging'. As Derrida explains, this lack of belonging does not stem from 'an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself'.⁴⁸ The identifying marks of genre that flow through Sinclair's texts represent notable examples of the linguistic dislocation of the writing self that Groes analyzes. The multiplicity of genre within Sinclair's individual works, often within individual paragraphs, conjoin various strands of narrative expectation that bring attention to the artifice of the material act of composition, while the absence of the self is sustained by that self's ongoing translation into the role of the perambulating witness who fills the ensuing void with words and images. This process is compounded by Sinclair's persistent return to a set of places, preoccupations, and practices that have already been firmly established in his late-twentieth century work. Consequently, alongside the twin prongs of his extensive and intensive *periegesis* of the contested territory of the contemporary city, where the subject of topography

⁴⁷ Samantha Skinner, "'This patron of the spurned, this perambulator of margins, this witness": Iain Sinclair as Rag-Picker', in *The Swarming Streets: Twentieth-Century Literary Representations of London*, ed. by Lawrence Phillips (Amsterdam and New York: Rodolpi, 2004) pp. 169-74 (p. 174).

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 221-52 (p. 230).

intersects with the topic of subjectivity, his work also offers an intriguing test case for probing the hybridity and mobility of genre in contemporary literature. However, because the identifying marks of earlier decades continue to be stamped upon his later work and its critical reception, Sinclair remains a relatively neglected presence within studies of twenty-first century literature. Indeed, Sinclair's continued association with psychogeography – in spite of his occasional twenty-first century dismissals of the term or other low-key attempts at dissociation (such as claiming that his work should be viewed more as a 'psychotic geography') – offers valuable insights as to why this should be the case.⁴⁹

A pertinent example of Sinclair's creatively ambivalent response to being repeatedly associated with a spatial practice limited to a specific place or time occurs in his collection of short fictions published as *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* in 1997. In this collection Sinclair introduces the figure of Norton as a fantastical alter ego. As a jaded writer, the shapeshifting Norton is described as the 'Prisoner of London', able to move backwards and forwards through time but unable to leave the city.⁵⁰ Through his portrayal of Norton, Sinclair appears to be acknowledging that the relative success of the texts and films that comprise his own London project threaten to imprison his work within the city limits of that topic (and also within the generic limits of a predominantly London-based psychogeography). But as well as an acknowledgement, Sinclair also uses Norton as a way of mocking such an eventuality by self-reflexively positioning the nightmarish predicament of his protagonist as an extreme correlative. Transcending temporal boundaries, Norton could be seen as a site-specific aberration

⁴⁹ Kevin Jackson and Iain Sinclair, *The Verbals: In Conversation with Iain Sinclair* (Tonbridge: Worple Press, 2003), p. 75.

⁵⁰ See Iain Sinclair and Dave McKean, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy: incidents from the notorious career of Norton, Prisoner of London* (London: Phoenix House, 1997).

of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, witnessing the city's significant wreckage as it piles up around him.⁵¹ But he is also:

A hack. A grubber so deluded with self-importance that he would work for nothing, gratis, publish without payment. A thief, a leech. A man of letters. A whore who would scrape any sheet for the pleasure of seeing his name in print.

By authoring this caricature of the amoral, egomaniacal, and opportunistic writer eager to prostitute himself in order to publish, Sinclair both embraces *and* rejects comparisons with his own situation as an author. Norton takes a wrong turn while walking the city streets, enabling Sinclair to add more corresponding layers to this dubious comedy in which Norton out-Sinclair his maker:

He fucked up. Beetled into a cul-de-sac and there was no way out. Norton's eyes on these forced marches, roved endlessly. They travelled the cracks in the paving stones, they flicked over walls. They caressed the outlines of buildings, absorbing them into his peculiarly selective address book.⁵²

Norton reappears in variant forms throughout Sinclair's subsequent fiction, a process that reaches a self-referential peak in his 2004 novel *Dining on Stones*. The novel is divided into three sections that accompany the division of the novel into three 'books', each with their own fictitious title page. Book One is titled 'Estuarial Lives' by Andrew Norton. The book is purportedly published by Granita Books, a two-tined pun

⁵¹ See Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', trans. by Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume Four: 1938-1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 389-400.

⁵² Sinclair and McKean, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, p. 137, p. 138. Norton's 'eyes' have a notable literary precedent in Virginia Woolf's short essay 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' where the walker in the city becomes an 'enormous eye'. Although Woolf's 'eye' drifts purposefully through the streets of London. Unlike the eyes of Sinclair's Norton, Woolf's monocular eye 'is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure'. See Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', in *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life: Selected Essays: Volume Two*, ed. by Rachel Bowlby (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 70-81 (p. 71).

that pokes fun at Sinclair's previous publishers Granta while referencing the Granita restaurant in Islington that had achieved notoriety as the venue where Tony Blair and Gordon Brown allegedly met for dinner *à deux* in the summer of 1994 to make a pact regarding the imminent Labour Party leadership contest. Writing almost a decade later, halfway through Blair's second term in office, the name of Sinclair's fictional publisher references the continued speculations over the existence of the so-called Blair-Brown Agreement or Granita Pact and its significance in shaping the political direction undertaken by the Labour government in the intervening years. Given the novel's key motif of doubling, the public unravelling of this private pact also points to the disorientating split within the narration in which two versions of Norton operate as narrator-authors. Book Two of *Dining on Stones* is titled 'Allegories of Insomnia & Continuous Sky', written by A. M. Norton and published by Hamish Hamilton (publishers of *Dining on Stones*). The title of Book Three is 'The Middle Ground', again written by Andrew Norton but this time published by Albion Village Press, Sinclair's own small press that he ran during the 1970s from his home on Albion Drive in Hackney. The overly self-conscious paratextual and metafictional devices that Sinclair uses throughout the novel give it a more postmodern veneer than that found elsewhere in his fiction. But underneath that veneer the novel exhibits many of the recurring themes and preoccupations that have come to be characterized as the psychogeographical aspects of Sinclair's work. Towards the start of the novel, Andrew Norton comments on the genesis of 'Estuarial Lives':

Magazines ran extracts – and then, when every word of the thing had been sold twice over, I delivered the typescript to my publishers [. . .] My riffs were posthumous but ripe with déjà vu. The culture classes, professionally lazy and ill-informed, are only comfortable when the job has been done for them. Having absorbed, without noticing it, earlier versions of the A13 walk – as art criticism, psychogeography, anthologized fiction – they greeted my book with temperate enthusiasm. Copies didn't leap from the shelves and nobody copped a

hernia unloading stock. Broadsheets echoed each other, leading to radio fillers, talks at recently upgraded polytechnics: the University of Clapton, the Swanley Interchange Arts Festival, a Sunday recital in an otherwise engaged Finchley Road chainstore.⁵³

The thinly disguised autobiographical elements draped over the comic frame of self-parody in this passage need to be considered in relation to the middle term of those ‘earlier versions’ avariciously recycled for publication: ‘psychogeography’. Later in the novel, Sinclair gives Norton a walking companion, a young American artist who with stark simplicity is named Track. Nearing Brick Lane in London’s East End, Track reveals that she is carrying with her a ‘battered old novel, pages loose as a junkie’s teeth’ that also contains a narrative involving two characters walking through the same streets. An extract from the novel reveals that it is Sinclair’s *Downriver* whereupon Norton comments that he could have written the prose in his ‘sleep’ and that the ‘guy who produced Track’s novel must have stolen my notes and given them a language spin’. The passage from *Downriver* knowingly recycled as a quotation in *Dining on Stones* is also quoted in one of Sinclair’s chapters in *Rodinsky’s Room*, an earlier non-fiction collaboration with the artist Rachel Lichtenstein.⁵⁴ As the interpellated figure of Sinclair and his various avatars move through the city in each of his texts, they often appear to document nothing more than an ongoing debate or ‘language spin’ unfolding in the over-populated region of the author’s brain. ‘Sinclair can’t camouflage his stylistic signature’ acknowledges one reviewer in relation to *Dining on Stones*, arguing that this recognizability is ‘a function of his chosen genre – psychogeography’. By the logic of this argument, when a novel prioritises places rather than people (and thus reveals its anxieties over placelessness), space rather than

⁵³ Iain Sinclair, *Dining on Stones* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2004), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁴ Sinclair, *Dining on Stones*, p. 89. See also Sinclair, *Downriver: (Or, The Vessels of Wrath) A Narrative in Twelve Tales* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 136, and Lichtenstein and Sinclair, *Rodinsky’s Room*, pp. 67-68.

time (inaction over action), then topography dominates narrative, it begins to demonstrate the generic tendencies of a psychogeographical text. Yet this interpretation also stresses that the ‘multiple narrators represent a conversation taking place inside Sinclair’s own head’ – as if such imaginary conversations (with narrators or other characters) are not the immaterial substance that most authors generate when producing the material of fiction or finessing the artifice of documentary.⁵⁵ While the splits and doublings that haunt the narratives have a corollary in the splits and doublings that seem to permeate the author’s own thought processes, the structural features of Sinclair’s internal dialogue are perhaps better understood as pointing towards a dialectical mode within his writing that the turn towards psychogeography helps to clarify. One way of approaching this process is to acknowledge Sinclair’s sense of the writer as a medium, channeling the voices of the places through which he passes, opening the pores to let the variety of urban experience seep into the body. This model, with its mid-century modernist roots in Olson’s open field poetics, reflects the portrayal of Sinclair as someone who has developed a particular hypersensitivity to the shifting ambience of the built environment while also accumulating a vast repository of local knowledge and cultural capital. From this perspective, the two sides of this double portrait are capable of generating a productive feedback loop that Sinclair activates by moving through the urban landscape, recording the material that he will then edit for the page, podium, or various types of screen. The words are the long roll of thunder that follow the lightning flashes of illumination sparked by innumerable conjunctions of the everyday and the extraordinary that trigger Sinclair’s

⁵⁵ See Jonathan Heawood, Review of *Dining on Stones*, *The Observer*, 18 April 2004, review section, p. 15.

‘compulsive associationism’.⁵⁶ The force with which such a compulsively associationist methodology has shaped a popular conception of psychogeography is an integral theme of this study. Meanwhile, for the character of Track, the prison of psychogeography is nothing but a fashionable intellectual fad destined to fade. While walking towards Brick Lane in her company, Norton reports that Track did not ‘buy into the current Birkbeckian vogue for psychogeography’. The next sentence extends the metropolitan scope of this academic ‘vogue’ while beginning to flesh out an illicit psychogeographical genealogy: ‘Goldsmiths, the RCA. That mob, over the river in Lewisham. They were awash with it. Stewart Home and his chums didn’t realize what a monster they were liberating when they started to rip off Guy Debord and the Lettrists.’⁵⁷ Sinclair uses Norton as a kind of sardonic anti-virus, deploying a mischievously condescending reference to ‘Stewart Home and his chums’ as a way of momentarily blocking any explicit admission of his own role in liberating the ‘monster’ of psychogeography.

In the early 1990s, the ‘mirage’ of Rumney’s London Psychogeographical Association was revived by Fabian Thompsett and Stewart Home. The self-styled psychogeography of this new incarnation of the LPA was part of a deliberately ambiguous appropriation of LI and SI techniques: principally *détournement*, where ‘preexisting aesthetic elements’ of past and present cultural production are integrated into what the SI termed ‘a superior construction of a milieu’.⁵⁸ Home dismisses both the assumption of superiority and the general import of the SI’s use of such constructive plagiarism, observing that *détournement* is, ‘on a grander scale, the

⁵⁶ Considering the questionable status of *Downriver* as a novel, it is perhaps characteristically problematic that Sinclair gives the felicitous label of ‘compulsive associationism’ to the compositional methodology of ‘Sinclair’ the narrator in this book. See Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 184.

⁵⁷ Sinclair, *Dining on Stones*, p. 87.

⁵⁸ See Guy Debord ‘Definitions’, in Knabb, *SI Anthology*, pp. 45-46 (p. 45). See also Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, ‘Methods of Détournement’, Knabb, *SI Anthology*, pp. 8-16.

system by which most human technology and thought develop'.⁵⁹ Through comically provocative newsletters that blend politics, philosophy, conspiracy theory, and occultism, the LPA launched a series of pre-emptive counter-conspiracy strikes upon the monarchy, freemasonry, and far right political campaigners in East London.⁶⁰ But it was not just the ostensible targets of these playful broadsides that were held up for ridicule. As fragments of quotations from Asger Jorn collide with references to occult alignments of London ley lines, elements of the recent cultural history of the radical avant-garde (particularly those relating to Debord) are equated with other branches of mystification.⁶¹ The *détournement* of this ensemble of sources via the often preposterously apocalyptic content of the newsletters, disorientatingly pitched somewhere between the breezy tone of a tabloid hack and the paranoid histrionics of a street ranter, meant that groups such as the Situationists were recast as exponents of a form of intellectual posturing also ripe for attack. Yet the combination of critique and pranksterism that characterized the LPA was not too dissimilar to the blend concocted by the SI, albeit one mixed with a *fin de millennium* sledgehammer rather than a mid-century rapier, and also heralded the return of a mutated version of psychogeography to the more obscure quarters of underground cultural politics in London.

Iain Sinclair and the Psychogeographical Turn (Look Out, There's a Monster Coming)

As indicated by the description of various books published in 1999 as 'outstations' of a larger work that includes *London Orbital*, and as the echo-chamber of *Dining on*

⁵⁹ Home, *The Assault on Culture*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ A number of the LPA newsletters are reprinted in *Mind Invaders: A reader in psychic warfare, cultural sabotage and semiotic terrorism*, ed. by Stewart Home (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997).

⁶¹ See for example 'Who Rules Britain?', *Mind Invaders*, pp. 45-47.

Stones begins to broadcast, regardless of their ostensible status as poetry, fiction, or documentary, each of Sinclair's texts can be interpreted as merely the next iteration of an elaborately cross-referential series of connected topics. Such connections had already been identified by Sinclair at the end of his first novel *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*. Sinclair explains that the book 'closes the triad begun with *Lud Heat* (1975) and *Suicide Bridge* (1979): it opens, hopefully, a second triad'.⁶² If Sinclair's first novel opens a second triad, it is also positioned within 'a quartet of books which would be to do with White Chapels of various sorts' within Britain (a thematic emplotment that reinforces the *plaque tournante* as a useful tool for navigating Sinclair's work).⁶³ These books are planned to be geographically distributed around the four compass points with *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* covering the East and Sinclair's novel *Landor's Tower* covering the West.⁶⁴ Reinforcing these grand projects, the repetitive qualities of the work formed in this matrix of compulsive associationism continually threaten to dissolve the singularity of any discrete publication when considered in relation to the rest of his expanding corpus. In a review of *London Orbital* Nicholas Lezard puts it more simply, arguing that all of Sinclair's books are 'book-length footnotes to his other books'.⁶⁵

How to orientate oneself amongst the developmental stalemate of this intratextual density?⁶⁶ One response, as exemplified by Heawood's review of *Dining on Stones*, is to label Sinclair's entire oeuvre as psychogeography. From this perspective, it is as if Sinclair's continued identification as the principal figure within the

⁶² Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 211.

⁶³ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 113.

⁶⁴ See Sinclair, *Landor's Tower*. At the time of writing (June 2015), the other two books in this quartet have yet to be completed.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Lezard, 'Meandering around the M25', *Guardian Review*, 21 September 2002, p. 14.

⁶⁶ For a sustained discussion of Sinclair's intratextuality, see Robert Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair* (Northcote House: Tavistock, 2007).

psychogeographical turn of the 1990s has stifled critical discussion of his relevance as a contemporary author, rendering his numerous publications on this side of the millennium merely addenda to an already established and moderately successful genre rooted in the cultural, social, and political contexts of a previous century. Although the image-obsessed entrepreneurial culture of successive British Prime Ministers has proved a consistent target for Sinclair's satire and outrage, it is the source of that culture in the neoliberal policies that flourished under the Thatcher government that continues to resonate most loudly. Portrayed as the grotesquely megalomaniacal figure of 'the Widow' in *Downriver*, Thatcher emerges as Sinclair's arch nemesis, a focus for his ferocity regarding the state of the nation under her governance.⁶⁷ Contrary to Norton's diversionary account of the liberation of a monster psychogeography (a liberation that necessarily defers any reference to the author behind the figure of Norton), by persistently allowing the description of 'psychogeographer' to be attached to his work and to his public appearances, Sinclair must share a portion of the blame for promoting such interpretations. In an extended conversation with Kevin Jackson published in 2003, Sinclair makes the following wry observation: 'I thought psychogeography could be adapted quite conveniently to forge a franchise – which is what happened, more than I could have imagined'.⁶⁸ In another interview, Sinclair describes psychogeography as being for him:

a way of psychoanalyzing the psychosis of the place in which I happen to live. I'm just exploiting it because I think it's a canny way to write about London. Now it's become the name of a column by Will Self, in which he seems to walk the South Downs with a pipe, which has got

⁶⁷ See Sinclair, *Downriver*, pp. 219-60. While John Major, Gordon Brown, Tony Blair, and David Cameron have all roused Sinclair's venom, there is a passing resemblance to the diminution of scorn heaped upon successive presidents of the United States by Hunter S Thompson after his arch nemesis Richard Nixon left office.

⁶⁸ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 75.

absolutely nothing to do with psychogeography. There's this awful sense that you've created a monster.⁶⁹

Again, Sinclair selects the word 'monster' from the formidable arsenal of his vocabulary to describe the variant psychogeography spawned in the last decade of the twentieth century. A critical tension can be detected here between Sinclair's playfully shamefaced acknowledgment that his exploitation of psychogeography has generated a monstrous version that has escaped the confines of that genus while also providing a conveniently generic label under which to file his own monstrous work. 'The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system' writes Jeffrey Jerome Cohen.⁷⁰ The dissolution of category boundaries or the blending of genres become significant attributes of the monster, challenging ontological certainty and scientific rationality, threatening order with chaos and form with formlessness. Similar charges of monstrosity have been deployed to describe the urban landscape as well as individual entities, notably by modernist architects such as Le Corbusier eager to remedy the sickness thought to permeate the sprawling organism of those 'monster' cities suffering from unplanned and unregulated growth.⁷¹ When Asger Jorn, a co-founder of the SI, describes psychogeography as the 'science fiction of urbanism' there is an implicit welcoming of the monstrous, of those aspects of the city that defy rationality and order and combat the purifying drive found in the dominant modes of modernist urbanism.⁷² While Sinclair's 'monster' psychogeography also seeks to defy

⁶⁹ Sinclair quoted in Stuart Jeffries, 'Profile: Iain Sinclair', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2004, review section, p. 20. 'Psychogeography' was a weekly column in *The Independent* newspaper written by Will Self (with illustrations by Ralph Steadman) that ran between October 4 2003 and October 4 2008. Sinclair's capsule summary of Self's appropriation of the term references the very first 'Psychogeography', reprinted as 'South Downs Way' in Will Self, *Psychogeography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), the first of two book-length collections culled from the columns.

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster culture (seven theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25 (p. 7).

⁷¹ See David Pinder, 'Modernist urbanism and its monsters', in *Surrealism and Architecture*, ed. by Thomas Mical (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 179-90.

⁷² Jorn's comment is cited approvingly in the second issue of the SI journal by Abdelhafid Khatib. See Khatib, 'Attempt at a psychogeographical description of Les Halles', p. 72.

the homogenizing force of the rational and the orderly, as an uncontrollable ‘franchise’ it begins to emulate the monstrous irrationality of capitalism where the logic of continuous capital accumulation overrides any other determining factor in a given situation, delimiting the scope of collective action and erasing individual autonomy and agency.⁷³

The forging of a psychogeographical franchise was a gradual process that crystallized into a distinctive form capable of turning monstrous in the mid-1990s when several related elements of Sinclair’s London-based research interests found a profitable conjunction in the literary crucible of *Lights Out for the Territory*. Subtitled ‘9 Excursions in the Secret History of London’, *Lights Out for the Territory* consists of nine sections of documentary prose that revise and extend essays and reviews written by Sinclair for the *London Review of Books* and other publications earlier in that same decade. The book was widely reviewed in the national press with several commentators providing publisher-friendly quotes: ‘As a stylist he is incomparable’, Peter Ackroyd observed in *The Times*, ‘he is the De Quincey of English letters, scathing and sometimes savage’. Ackroyd’s review also hinted at the presence of Sinclair’s existing corpus, a cluster of largely unfathomable and unobtainable publications. He describes Sinclair’s polemical take on the London essay as ‘a form of urban necromancy’ and warns that the essays at times become ‘so fraught with coincidences and correspondences and connections that the reader may find it difficult

⁷³ ‘Teratological specificity demands attention’, argues China Miéville. The broad discussion of the monstrous in this section risks simplistically equating science fiction with monsters and the monstrous with an undifferentiated spectrum of difference to normative constructions of the subject and of cities. As Miéville wisely advises, such a discussion requires more historical and cultural specificity than this study can accommodate. See China Miéville, ‘M. R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?’, *Collapse*, IV (2008), 105-28 (p. 114).

to follow the author's thread into the centre of the London labyrinth'.⁷⁴ In *The Guardian*, James Wood also described Sinclair as 'a latter-day De Quincey', and again laid a great emphasis on the style of the writing: 'Anyone who cares about English prose cares about Iain Sinclair, a demented magus of the sentence'. Shipwrecked by the free market tempests of Thatcherism and New Labour, the citizens of the contemporary metropolis were being alerted to the presence of a new Prospero channelling the unseen spirits of their noisy urban island from a terraced cell on Albion Drive. Such reviews suggested that *Lights Out for the Territory* contained enough residual traces of Sinclair's earlier rough magic to challenge any simple notion that it marked a significant shift in the oeuvre. While the phrase 'a demented magus of the sentence' soon came to adorn the covers of Sinclair's major works as a promotional puff of seemingly unqualified praise, the extent of Wood's admiration was counter-balanced by a capsule critique of Sinclair's political and philosophical limitations. Wood raised the possibility that an audience blessed with a modicum of the reviewer's own intellectual common sense might share an aversion to Sinclair's penchant for pulp fiction and ersatz thaumaturgy:

One does not have to believe Sinclair all the time. So purely is he a stylist that he returns prose to a state of decadence: that is to say, one can find Sinclair's mind limited, his leftish politics babyish, his taste for pulp writing tiresome, his occultism untrue, and forgive all of this because the prose, gorgeously amoral, is stronger than the world it inhabits. It consumes the world it inhabits.⁷⁵

The implication is that a demented magus of the sentence provides a more palatable figure than a demented magus stalking the material world of the city. While the former

⁷⁴ Peter Ackroyd, 'Lights Out for the Territory', *The Collection: Journalism, Reviews, Essays, Short Stories, Lectures* (London: Vintage, 2002), pp. 286-88 (p. 286, p. 288). Ackroyd's review of *Lights Out for the Territory* was first published in *The Times*, 9 January 1997.

⁷⁵ James Wood, 'Magus of the city', *The Guardian*, 23 January 1997, Section A, p. 10. For clarification of Wood's own belief in relation to literature, see James Wood, *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (London: Cape, 1999).

is capable of putting on a display of awesome literary pyrotechnics at a safe distance, the latter threatens to offend the rational sensibilities of those who witness his credulous antics and objectionable tastes. Perhaps unintentionally, Wood also implies that these distinctive strands in Sinclair's work are not so easily separated. By announcing his willingness to forgive the more unpalatable elements because of the stylish qualities of the decadent prose, Wood paves the way for an interpretation that suggests the two forms of demented magic are not only deliberately imbricated by Sinclair but also deeply reciprocal in their sensuous engagement with the practical material activities of communicating the immediately mysterious yet inherently social complexities of urban experience. Although from *Lights Out for the Territory* onwards Sinclair invests the act of walking in the city with a general political purpose (which occasionally gains a degree of specificity when cast as counter-conjurations against state-sponsored projects and events such as the Millennium celebrations or the London 2012 Olympics), the flashes of profane illumination generated from the retrospective narration of these walks are more haphazardly spontaneous than theoretically rigorous or clearly formulated.⁷⁶ Indeed, the specific tenets of Sinclair's politics are difficult to discern. Wood describes Sinclair's leftish leanings as 'babyish', a description whose political orientation is challenged by Ben Watson who tunes into Sinclair's contrary flirtation with a 'right-wing cynicism'. The question comically posited in the title of Watson's essay is whether Sinclair can be viewed as a 'revolutionary nihilist or revolting novelist?', a question that Watson answers by amalgamating the two proposed alternatives, resisting the quick fix of a simplistic resolution to revel in a dialectical process more responsive to Sinclair's endlessly contradictory work. Sinclair is at times both (and at times neither) a revolutionary nihilist and a revolting novelist

⁷⁶ For a critique of Sinclair's counter-conjurations, see Roger Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic and the limits of the "spectral turn"', *Textual Practice*, 16 (2002), 527-46.

(the latter in multiple senses: in revolt against the great tradition of the genre with its canonical literary templates, rebelling against conventional narrative structures, and refusing to produce rounded characters, thus polluting what could be caricatured as the smug politesse of the English novel's middle-brow manifestations with his own exaggerated figures; Sinclair also offends the values of free market conservatives and politically correct progressives with what Peter Brooker terms his 'white, masculinist imperfections', and eschews the politically radical with what Watson terms his 'anarcho-libertarian hostility' towards activist politics).⁷⁷ Without blithely subscribing to its more utopian hopes, the legacy of the counter-culture gives a recognizably libertarian streak to Sinclair's anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment stance. But there is a notable lack of engagement in his work with the history of class struggle within the secret history of the city. Aligned with the unlikely commercial success of his other 'revolting' aspects, such an omission threatens to undermine a sustained comparison with the radical politics of a psychogeographical precursor such as Debord. Given these qualifications, is it still possible to argue that Sinclair's work retains any political efficacy in relation to the development of a radical subjectivity or to the collective transformation of the social relations of the city? For Watson, it is 'as a poet of the urban and the concrete that Sinclair scores; as a political columnist he is sad indeed'.⁷⁸ It is the delirious force of his poetic observations and the remarkable tenacity with which he charts his constellation of preoccupations that gives the work a radical momentum that moves beyond the banality of the politics it occasionally espouses. From this perspective, Sinclair's work proves most psychogeographically perceptive when deploying a language densely laden with startling images and

⁷⁷ See Ben Watson, 'Iain Sinclair: Revolutionary Nihilist or Revolting Novelist?' *Critical Literalism*, <<http://www.militantesthetix.co.uk/critlit/SINCLAIR.htm>> [accessed October 31 2014] and Brooker, 'Iain Sinclair: The psychotic geographer treads the border lines', p. 227.

⁷⁸ See Watson, 'Iain Sinclair: Revolutionary Nihilist or Revolting Novelist'.

unexpected perceptions to document the effects of the urban environment on the emotions and behavior of various figures moving through its overdetermined network of actual and imaginary spaces and events. It is at such challenging points of intersection, where his paranoid reading of the secret city is fused with a demented and decadent prose style that requires active deciphering, that Sinclair's labyrinthine counter-narratives can be unravelled so that their alternative visions of the city and alternative versions of reality move beyond the occult revelation of invisible lines of influence and power towards a more materialist critique of the capitalist organization of space and of language. The title of Watson's essay contains a subtle reference to Walter Benjamin's seminal essay on 'Surrealism'. For Benjamin, no one before the surrealists perceived the 'revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded"' or perceived 'how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism'. Both Wood and Watson stress the significance of Sinclair's attention to language, explaining from different platforms on the literary-political spectrum how Sinclair invests language with a magical propensity to transform the everyday experience of material reality into something stranger and more provocative. 'Language takes precedence', observed Benjamin of the Surrealists. Where Wood and Watson part ways is where the material city meets the demented magic of Sinclair's sentences, where language is conjoined with the revolutionary energies of the outmoded and the destitute. In Sinclair's terms, language connects with the re-forgotten elements that haunt London as a city of disappearances. Here the idea of haunting is not just a trope to be filed under the spectral turn of London Gothic or the seductive phantasmagoria of hauntology (although both of these factors are at play), it also relates to a more material transformation attuned to the real that lingers in the surreal:

This is not the place to give an exact definition of Surrealist experience. But anyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but something else – demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature – will also know, for the same reason, that the writings are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms.⁷⁹

As a revolting novelist, Sinclair's intoxicating accounts of the urban and the concrete can also be described as not exactly literature but something else. Writing against the grain of literary production and its ideological limitations, in revolt against the illusion of unity that literature conventionally seeks to represent, Sinclair produces documents, bluffs, forgeries that form fragments of a disjunctive and interruptive psychogeographical franchise. This is not to claim that Sinclair seeks to replace one form of mimetic texture with another more representative of urban experience. It is not his mission to continue to replace the symmetrical gig-lamps of literary realism with a luminous modernist halo. Sinclair interrogates the gaps opened up by the consistencies and contrasts between the experience of the city and the experience of writing and reading the city. As with Benjamin's account of the surrealist conversion of 'the immense forces of "atmosphere" concealed in these things to the point of explosion', Watson suggests that Sinclair's combustible prose is capable of creating a pressurized atmosphere in which the destitute components of urban experience also contain a

⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1997 [1929]), pp. 225-39 (p. 229, p. 227). Attention needs to be paid here to Benjamin's complex differentiation between experience as *Erfahrung* (as with the experience of the Surrealists) and *Erlebnis*. For an account of this difference in relation to Benjamin's 'Surrealism' essay, see Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 173-215. For a sustained engagement with the correspondences between Benjamin and Sinclair, see Robert Bond, 'Speculating Histories: Walter Benjamin, Iain Sinclair', *Historical Materialism* (14.2), 3-27. On hauntology, see Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006).

potential to be transformed into the profane illumination of a revolutionary nihilist.⁸⁰ But if the Surrealists, with their dedicated study of revolutionary theory and their pedigree of insurrection, proved too ill-disciplined to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution, is it really plausible that Sinclair's work – emanating from a position of resistance to activist politics and an attitude of scepticism towards collective transformation – could provide a spark to ignite an explosion?⁸¹ More contextual clarification is required here. Watson is analyzing the Sinclair of the early poetry and the first three novels. With the publication of *Lights Out for the Territory*, Watson detects a sense of 'slackening' in the urgency of Sinclair's writing but remains largely optimistic that if not co-opted by the literary establishment 'the punk bludgeon of Sinclair's debunking materialism' will continue to be of use in confronting the political conflicts ahead.⁸²

Archer's Moles: A Case Study in Compulsive Associationism

The revision and expansion of earlier material into a book-length form in *Lights Out for the Territory* established a model that Sinclair has replicated in subsequent documentary works as well as in those works classified as either fiction or poetry. A brief consideration of the minor differences between two published versions of Sinclair's short poem 'The exhibition I didn't hold at the Tate would have included' offers a conveniently small-scale example of the fertility of Sinclair's compulsive

⁸⁰ Benjamin, 'Surrealism', p. 229. See Watson, 'Iain Sinclair: Revolutionary Nihilist or Revolting Novelist'. For a view of Sinclair that emphasizes his affinity with Benjamin's reading of the rag-picker as a similar purveyor of destitute elements and outmoded revolutionary energies, see Skinner.

⁸¹ Rod Mengham raises similar concerns when he asks whether these exposed energies challenge of become complicit with the oppressive networks of power that they decode. See Rod Mengham, 'The Writing of Iain Sinclair: "Our Narrative Starts Everywhere"', in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 56-67.

⁸² Watson, 'Iain Sinclair: Revolutionary Nihilist or Revolting Novelist'.

associationism in establishing a network of proliferating correspondences across different texts. First published in 1996, around the time that the term psychogeography began to recur as a reference point within his work, the full text is as follows:

‘The exhibition I didn’t hold at the Tate would have included’

- (1) ½ the pickled brain of Wyndham Lewis
- (2) the mantle of Powhatan
- (3) the Tradescants’ missing Ark
- (4) the skin of Ld Archer’s back (with its prophetic moles)
- (5) a silent video of JH Prynne’s famous lecture on
Willem de Kooning’s *Rosy-Fingered Dawn at Louse Point*
- (6) Jeremy Bentham mummified in a perspex Panopticon
- (7) the River Thames⁸³

In a version of the poem published in 2006, all the proposed exhibits remain the same apart from a slight change in the description of the fourth item: ‘(4) the peeled skin of Lord Archer’s back (with its psychogeographic moles)’.⁸⁴ Sinclair has explained that the moles on Jeffrey Archer’s back refer to a story reported in the British press in the late-1980s that Monica Coghlan – a prostitute whose clients included Archer (then deputy chairman of the Conservative party) – had claimed that she could identify Archer by the distinctive pattern of the moles on his back.⁸⁵ In the latter version of the poem the ‘prophetic’ moles have mutated into ‘psychogeographic’. Is this shift merely a belated and obscure example of Sinclair propelling the psychogeographical bandwagon into more prominence across his entire output? Or can this move be deciphered as a critical nod towards the perils of turning psychogeography into a franchise where the meaning of the term will only weaken in relation to the expanded field of its popular application, ironically exemplified by being associated with a

⁸³ Douglas Oliver, Denise Riley, and Iain Sinclair, *Penguin Modern Poets 10* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 146.

⁸⁴ Sinclair, *The Firewall*, p. 153.

⁸⁵ Iain Sinclair in discussion with the author, 10 February 2013.

figure such as Lord Archer? Given this example, it is tempting to suggest that any arrangement of points on any variety of surface – from a grouping of city churches to the moles on the back of a Tory peer – could be categorized as psychogeographic, emptying the term of any critical specificity. On one level, this seems to be Sinclair's *point*. But it needs to be remembered that when Sinclair's poem was first published it was almost a decade after Coghlan had been embroiled in a high profile libel case after a national newspaper alleged that Archer had paid her for sex (it transpired that Archer had also given her £2000 to leave the country when reporters began investigating the story). Although Archer won the libel case and was awarded £500,000 damages, Coghlan insisted that she was telling the truth about her client. If Archer's moles were first prophetic when attesting to the veracity of Coghlan's statements against the initial findings of the judge and jury, then their psychogeographic status only becomes apparent after the prophesy has been fulfilled and Archer's back has been metaphorically 'peeled' to reveal that hidden truth. By the time of the publication of the latter version of the poem, Archer had been convicted of perjury and perverting the course of justice in the original libel case and had been sentenced to four years imprisonment. Sadly, Coghlan had died in a car crash a month before the latter trial began. For Sinclair, Archer represents the 'bad psychogeography' of power, corruption, and lies infiltrating everyday life from a lurid fantasy world of media manipulation and propaganda.⁸⁶ The luxury riverside penthouse in which Archer resided had James Bond connections (Bond composer John Barry had been a previous owner of the flat) and was set amongst a paranoia-inducing landscape of espionage a few doors down from the MI6 headquarters at Vauxhall Cross and directly across the river from MI5. It is an area of London that Sinclair explores in the section of *Lights Out for the Territory* entitled 'Lord Archer's Prospects' that was written around the

⁸⁶ Iain Sinclair in discussion with the author, 10 February 2013.

same time as the first version of the poem: ‘Not content with the river frontage between Westminster and Vauxhall Bridges the spooks had wired all the pubs and caffs. Debriefing came with the grappa.’⁸⁷ With or without grappa, a debriefing of the poem reveals a series of connections that link this part of the city to a series of Sinclair’s texts and projects across three decades.

In an article written in 2005, Sinclair addressed the significance of the river Thames as a thematic consistency in the exhibition of work by Turner, Monet, and Whistler then showing at Tate Britain. Towards the end of the article, Sinclair recollects that an idea for a similar show was first floated in 1988. He had been consulted (‘fed sandwiches and coffee’) on the making of an event that would use the river as its central theme:

My unworkable (and definitively unfundable) proposal leant towards the Tate Gallery as a cabinet of dredged curiosities (after the fashion of John Tradescant’s eccentric jumble, his Lambeth Ark). I wanted to retrieve the dark history of sugar. Sir Henry Tate’s bequest shackled to the Silvertown refinery. I wanted documentation from the Tate’s early disguise: as Millbank Penitentiary [. . .] I wanted to challenge the alternate art collection on the far shore, Lord Archer’s penthouse conversation pieces.⁸⁸

In the ‘eccentric jumble’ of Sinclair’s work, the Ark in which he reconfigures an exhibition of his own collection of curiosities, this article covering a 2005 exhibition at the Tate explicitly connects to the poem written a decade earlier that presumably lists several of those ‘unfundable’ items that Sinclair contemplated in 1988. The labyrinthine passageways that these associations open include the chapter of Sinclair’s critically acclaimed second novel *Downriver*, in which the Widow – Sinclair’s

⁸⁷ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p, 173.

⁸⁸ Iain Sinclair, ‘Paint me a River’, *The Guardian*, review section, 5 February 2005, p. 16. Sinclair’s juxtaposing of historically connected sites and his accompanying proposal to present ‘the Tate Gallery as a cabinet of dredged curiosities’ return in a variant form in ‘Tate Thames Dig’ by Mark Dion in 1999 and in ‘The Robinson Institute’ by Patrick Keiller in 2012.

fantastic caricature of Thatcher – agrees to the commissioning of a memorial in Silvertown dedicated to her recently deceased husband. The chapter title is ‘Art of the State (*The Silvertown Memorial*)’, a phrase that encodes the Tate as a pivotal point in the city that can be aligned or juxtaposed with the Tate and Lyle sugar factory located further East in what was then the declining riverside area of Silvertown.⁸⁹ This coupling of key sites is replicated in ‘Lord Archer’s Prospects’ where Sinclair notes:

I always think of the gallery on Millbank as twinned with the belching treacle factory at Silvertown, a long haul down river – but the distance that measures the point at which all cultural pretensions are abdicated [. . .] No one should be allowed to gawp at the Stanley Spencers, or lift the felt from the cases of Blakes, until they have completed a tour of inspection at Silvertown, licked sugar crystals from the web of their fingers.⁹⁰

Less occulted than many of Sinclair’s exercises in urban pattern recognition, his observations demand that the cultural hub of the world famous art gallery is reconnected to a psychogeographically resonant site further downriver that functions as a material reminder of the historical and economic source of Sir Henry Tate’s philanthropy *as well as* a geographical reminder of the turbulent flow of power and influence that interconnects the city.

A comparative analysis of the almost identical versions of the poem begins to illustrate the complexity and contradiction behind the forging of a psychogeographical franchise. This analysis also establishes the applicability of selecting a series of *plaques tournantes* as a means for orientating oneself amongst the folding paths of Sinclair’s maze of references and textual convolutions, especially at those points where his combination of associative thinking and metalinguistic commentary threaten

⁸⁹ Sinclair, *Downriver*, pp. 219-60.

⁹⁰ Sinclair *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 180.

to contaminate the layers of critical distance through which that work needs to be scrutinized. Regarding this latter point, before fully turning away from the disturbing presence of Archer's mole-strewn back, there is an additional reference that needs examining. Sinclair's alter ego Norton, the prisoner of London, has also been appropriated by Alan Moore. In Moore's *Century* series of comics, Norton appears outside of Kings Cross station at various points in the history of the city yet cannot leave this urban setting. Visually, the character of Norton bears a notable resemblance to Sinclair. But this resemblance is satirically augmented by the cryptic speech that emanates from Norton as if the words are being channeled from elsewhere. The tidal flow of references will be familiar to those who have read Sinclair's works, including a reference to 'a constellation of cigarette burns on Archer's back'.⁹¹ Such an appropriation of Sinclair's fantastic alias in a popular comic by a successful cult writer signals a level of cultural penetration at odds with the outsider status still attached to Sinclair. As covertly intimated by the reclassification of Archer's moles from 'prophetic' to 'psychogeographic', the critical tension between Sinclair's dual status as being both mainstream and marginal needs to be acknowledged and interpreted as a key component that filters into other contradictory elements within his output. It is as if his work represents various points on the spectrum of cultural visibility that he has described as functioning according to the 'Xerox principle' where 'only the copy of the copy of the copy is sufficiently familiar to achieve success':

Take any maximum visibility airport artifact by Dan Brown, or whoever, and you can follow it backwards, step by step, through moderate recognition, *success d'estime*, cult status, to proper obscurity: the mad-eyed intransigent in the attic. The stapled pamphlet. The green-ink notebook. Weirdness comes out in the wash. With each improved

⁹¹ Alan Moore and Kevin O' Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Century #1: 1910* (London: Knockabout Comics, 2011) (n. p.).

version (*homage*, pastiche, rip-off), textual debris smoothes into silky tarmac.⁹²

As the concluding spatial metaphor intimates, the ‘Xerox principle’ operates as a variant form of gentrification. Each ‘improved version’ attempts to ensure that the risks being taken by the author are significantly reduced, together with a concomitant reduction in the risks associated with the artifact by removing its more volatile properties and unknown quantities to protect those consumers who come into contact with its potentially unstable presence from experiencing any weirdness, obscurity, difficulty – any *difference* – that might stop the artifact from being immediately absorbed back into the familiar. At such points, Sinclair’s punk bludgeon does appear to have been softened through co-optation by the literary establishment. Yet there are residues of the ‘textual debris’ within that work that resist recuperation, that, perhaps more accurately, fragment, split, double, so that Sinclair’s contrary nature evolves to outmanoeuvre any total absorption by the mainstream or any fixed identification by literary critics. But can that punk bludgeon and its debunking materialism survive within the ever-narrower confines of such a literary context? The novelist and critic Michael Bracewell discusses a similar process regarding the ‘gentrification of the avant-garde’ during the decade that psychogeography returned to the streets of London. For Bracewell, the process of jettisoning the weirdness in the wash of gentrification is allied to a turn towards infantilism manifest throughout the 1990s:

It seemed to begin as an act of recoil, bang on cue, some time around the Black Monday stockmarket crash of 1987, with a yearning for small, comforting things: reassuring little treats from the August of childhood or the springtime of adolescence. From guilt, necessity or neurasthenia, it seemed as though we needed to comfort ourselves. A little while later, we would start to sweeten the sharp, bitter taste of

⁹² Iain Sinclair, ‘Sickening’, in *Restless Cities*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 257-76 (p. 270).

culture's equivalent of absinthe – the underground, the margins, the extreme and the radical – and, in making those more potent draughts more palatable, somehow rob them of their punch.⁹³

Implicating himself in this process, Bracewell positions his scenario as an infantile reaction on the part of an affluent society to an economic crisis that exemplified the kind of unpredictably radical event that sent shockwaves through the totality in ways that the revolutionary praxis of an increasingly exhausted avant-garde sought to animate, if not emulate. Superficially, it seems like a bizarre paradox that the society experiencing those economic reverberations sought solace by diluting the marginal, extreme, and radical currents that flowed through its culture, currents that opposed the dominance of the system responsible for the need for solace in the first place. But such paradoxes litter the history of capitalism and were a prime concern of the LI and SI in relation to the recuperation of revolutionary energies by counter-revolutionary forces. From a Situationist perspective, if gentrification is another name for Sinclair's Xerox principle then recuperation is another name for gentrification. In terms of the repercussions of repetitive copying, the formulaic qualities of Sinclair's multiplex recycling process contribute to the general impression that Sinclair has a tendency to reproduce familiar variations on increasingly predictable themes rather than develop his work in new directions. While this general impression elides Sinclair's frequent expansion of his work (and his walks) into uncharted territory, a process that almost imperceptibly reconfigures what appears to be a strange case of thematic stasis, the repetitive structure of his work and a gradual diminution of the more challenging and experimental elements of his use of language has rendered his own copy of the neo-modernist poetics of his earlier poetry and prose more palatable to a mainstream audience. In terms of textual practice, once again a compelling analogy arises between

⁹³ Michael Bracewell, *The Nineties: When Surface Was Depth* (London: Flamingo, 2003), p. 124.

this movement towards the mainstream (alongside the lesser momentum of the mainstream's movement towards Sinclair) and the process of gentrification. Like the incomplete transformation of the East London street in which he has lived for over four decades from an impoverished neighbourhood to an enclave of the affluent middle-class, Sinclair's prose seems to have been subject to a form of linguistic gentrification. If such an analogy is allowed, what consequences does this process have on Sinclair's self-mocking exploitation of psychogeography as 'a canny way of writing about London'?

Sinclair recalls first encountering the word 'psychogeography' in the 1960s, 'but it didn't take':

The Situationist Era drifted through me, and I didn't think I was practising anything which resembled it, until it kicked in as a term employed by Stewart Home and his associates, who were re-working cultural history, and using Situationist terms to parody the National Front's activities in Limehouse. I mean, they weren't seriously interested in where things fell on the map, they were just using those forms, but I seriously *was* interested in where things fell on the map.⁹⁴

Debord recognized that at the early stage of its development 'the first psychogeographical attractions discovered run the risk of fixating the *dériving* individual or group around new habitual axes, to which they will constantly be drawn back'.⁹⁵ Sinclair's imaginatively delirious mapping of the lines of influence running unseen through London's East End, principally through the psychogeographical *plaques tournantes* of Hawksmoor's churches, reveal a tendency to return habitually to a territory that reinforces certain obsessions. In a discriminating reading of the ways in which Situationist psychogeography is indirectly reconstituted in London by Sinclair,

⁹⁴ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 75.

⁹⁵ Debord, 'Theory of the *dérive*', p. 51.

the geographer Steve Pile notes that the experiences gleaned from such a practice are confined to the particular. Pile argues that such experiences, by attending to ‘specific mythologies’ are in danger of layering ‘a particular ambience over the mood of a city, an atmosphere that you already knew in advance of the experiment’.⁹⁶ If the force with which Sinclair’s franchising of psychogeography confronts these particular limits has at times threatened to merge his own mythography with those histories of London already assimilated into the mainstream, it does not preclude an acknowledgement of the relevance of such limitations regarding the influence of specific places:

Energy lines produced by men of the suburbs favour the suburbs: Burnt Oak, East Barnet, Croydon. Lines forged by Limehouse labourers highlight Hawksmoor churches, blue-and-yellow murder sites, decommissioned hospitals and synagogues. Geography is personalized. A walk is a floating autobiography.⁹⁷

Sinclair had conceived his imaginative remapping of the city while working as a labourer and parks gardener (or ‘grass manicurist’) in Whitechapel, Limehouse, and other parts of London’s East End in the 1970s.⁹⁸ Since then he has repeatedly undertaken a series of floating autobiographies through and around the city accompanied by a rotating cast of friends and associates. It is to the personalized geography of these floating autobiographies that we now return.

⁹⁶ Steve Pile, “‘The Problem of London’”, or, how to explore the moods of the city’, in *The Hieroglyphics of Space: Reading and Experiencing the Modern Metropolis*, ed. by Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 203-16 (p. 213).

⁹⁷ Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison*, p. 160.

⁹⁸ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 21.

3) TO THE ROUNDHOUSE: PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND A VERITABLE SPLIT IN THE COUNTER-CULTURE

Strikingly, even Sinclair's relatively exiguous documentary output from the late 1960s includes distinctive traces of the type of spatial preoccupations categorized as psychogeographical in later decades. In the short film *Ah, Sunflower* and the scrapbook of texts that comprise *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*, Sinclair establishes specific London sites – predominantly Primrose Hill and the Roundhouse – as focal points for contemplating the political and psychical state of the culture and, more acutely in these instances, the counter-culture. As a literal *plaque tournante* (specifically used to signify a railway turntable), the circular Roundhouse, a former engine shed built for turning locomotives, can be positioned as the first in a series of urban *plaques tournantes* studded throughout Sinclair's city texts. In relation to the events that circulated around the Roundhouse during the summer of 1967, the building also serves as an apposite hub for addressing the ways in which counter-cultural influences deriving mostly from Anglo-American sources flow through Sinclair's work, and for continuing to explore the continuities and discontinuities between the mode of psychogeography originating in the urban investigations practiced and theorized by the LI and SI and the variant psychogeography later associated with Sinclair. Although a landmark site such as the Roundhouse functions prominently (and hence rather obviously) as a *setting*, Sinclair also begins to recognize in these early works that such spaces should not be considered as neutral locations or as merely the medium within which events unfold. As Henri Lefebvre's monumental study of the topic has forcefully shown, space is *produced*. It is also productive, social. As with the

psychogeographical research of the LI and SI, Lefebvre's pioneering analysis challenges the idea that space can be reduced to the level of a mathematical or geometrical abstraction, an empty and transparent container ready to be filled and emptied without consequence. In an era of global capitalism, Lefebvre stresses that the role of space becomes 'less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end'.¹ To ascribe neutrality to the space of a place such as the Roundhouse is a simplification that fails to consider how that space is constructed through the often conflictual coming together of physical, social, and mental spaces. To comprehend the spatial complexities that resonate within the theory and practice of psychogeography when applied to particular urban sites there is a need to understand the various cultural and historical contexts, economic forces, and social relations operative in the production of space. For Lefebvre, physical and psychological spaces are dynamically imbricated. From a terminological perspective, the very concept of psychogeography incorporates that imbrication. By cleaving psychogeography into its component parts – the *psychological* and the *geographical* – this chapter will demonstrate how the significance of *splitting* in relation to alienation, madness, and the counter-culture resonates with the centrality of *separation* and *alienation* as key terms within Situationist psychogeography.

In the burgeoning secondary literature on Sinclair, insufficient attention has been paid to his connection with the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation held at the Roundhouse during the last two weeks of July 1967.² The Congress was organized by

¹ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 411.

² There are two notable exceptions to this tendency, see Simon Perril, 'A Cartography of Absence: The Work of Iain Sinclair', *Comparative Criticism*, 19 (1997), 309-39; and Ben Watson, 'The Kodak Mantra Diaries: The Politics of Sinclair's Poetics', in *City Visions: The Work of Iain Sinclair*, ed. by Robert Bond and Jenny Bavidge (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), pp. 82-89. Picking up on Perril's incisive

the leading figures of the anti-psychiatry movement, including David Cooper and R.D. Laing. Many of the invited speakers outlined variations on the theme of reassessing the social and institutional construction of madness in a society conditioned to accept alienation and repression as its norms.³ The discursive practices addressed at the Congress under the emotive banners of madness and schizophrenia were intended to demystify the different types of violence that preserved the alienated state of the *status quo*. During the Congress the Roundhouse emerged as a site of another split when volatile strands of the counter-culture momentarily converged only to irreparably fracture. The splitting and doubling that populates Sinclair's later texts are partly a tropological refunctioning of this discourse. To clarify the significance of inhabiting a split mind within a split city to the latent psychogeography not yet named in Sinclair's early work, a productive juxtaposition can be made with Debord's radical analysis of the multiplex politics of separation and alienation in *The Society of the Spectacle*, first published in Paris a few months after the Congress.⁴

Separation and the Spectacle

The Society of the Spectacle is a theoretical assault on a world in which the economic imperatives of capitalism have taken on an independent existence. Reconfiguring specific strands of Marxist thought for the post-war period, Debord observes that the

commentary, Brian Baker also addresses Laing's continued influence on Sinclair's work, see Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 5-10.

³ See Cooper, *The Dialectics of Liberation*. The first British publication of an English translation of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* also appeared in 1967 in a series edited by R. D. Laing and with an introduction by David Cooper that registers the coincidence of anti-psychiatry with Foucault's analysis. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Tavistock, 1967).

⁴ See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994). Hereafter referred to in the text as *SS* followed by the relevant numerical reference to Debord's numbered theses.

alienating relations perpetuated by the techniques of capitalist production were intensified by the colonization of everyday life by the commodity form. In the midst of the rapidly expanding consumer society of France during *les trente glorieuses*, Debord renews Marx's critique of commodity fetishism to extrapolate a theory positioning the commodity form as the ruling force structuring what he designates as 'the society of the spectacle'. As Debord states in his Preface to the Third French Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*, the book was composed 'with the deliberate intention of doing harm to spectacular society'. It is a work of revolutionary theory designed to have a practical application as a manual of resistance to the techniques of the spectacle. The spectacle (note the definite article) denotes a totalizing system of social control: the 'spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation' (SS 32).⁵ Crudely and somewhat abstractly simplified, the 'spectacle' refers to an array of forces that saturate subjective experience so that all forms of lived immediacy and direct participation are mediated by images that represent such immediacy and participation, rendering people more akin to passive spectators than active agents of their own lives. Although the structure of the spectacle ensures that those roles are endlessly inverted to render the appearance of participatory action (even, or especially, if the extent of that participation involves admitting that passivity is a conscious choice). Alienated from the reality of their own desires, such passive spectators become active participants in their own subjugation (although the concept of such a spectacular society raises perplexing philosophical questions concerning definitions of the authentic desires and liberated imaginations engendered by a *reality* based on a *true* consciousness beyond the tentacular grasp of the spectacle, Debord's primary focus lies elsewhere). His revolutionary aim is to conjoin theory and practice to expose

⁵ For an introductory account of the sources of the term 'spectacle', see Jonathan Crary, 'Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory', *October*, 50 (Autumn 1989), 96-107.

the foundations upon which the power structures that sustain the inverted version of truth and the impoverished version of reality experienced in the spectacular realm of the commodity form are built. ‘Self-emancipation in our time is emancipation from the material bases of an inverted truth’, he states at the start of the final thesis (SS 221). Without self-emancipation the carceral conditions of alienation and separation will continue to prevail through the techniques of ‘separation perfected’.⁶ For Debord, the parameters of the spectacle are delineated by separation: the spectacle’s ‘alpha and omega’ (SS 25). He argues that the perfection of separation in the modern capitalist era includes the splitting of the world that the spectacle holds up to view into a simultaneous absence and presence:

at once *here* and *elsewhere*; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience. The commodity world is thus shown *as it really is*, for its logic is one with men’s estrangement from one another and from the sum total of what they produce (SS 37).

The critical emphasis on the alienation propagated and sustained by techniques of separation gives Debord’s dissection of contemporary life a spatial dimension whose roots had already surfaced – albeit through far less rigorous formulations than those expressed in *The Society of the Spectacle* – in the collaborative psychogeographical research undertaken in the previous decade. For example, in Debord’s seminal 1955 text ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, psychogeography emerges as part of a strategy for establishing ‘a new way of life’ from that experienced by an alienated urban population yet to ‘awaken to the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them’.⁷ Reworking

⁶ The 34 theses of the opening section to *The Society of the Spectacle* are collected under the sub-heading ‘Separation Perfected’. These theses were first published as ‘La séparation achevée’ in the SI journal *internationale situationniste*, 11 (October 1967) 43-48.

⁷ Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, p. 5, p. 8.

fragments from Marx (amongst several other sources) in *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord accentuates the pivotal position of alienation. Superficially charting similar territory to the contemporaneous research of the London-based anti-psychiatrists (attempting to synthesize elements of Marx and Freud while wearing the lab-coats of existential phenomenologists), Debord diagnoses a society literally riddled by various forms of alienation. Where people are ruled by the inverted logic of the commodity, they become estranged from the world, from their activities, from each other, and from themselves:

The spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence/absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the *real presence* of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. The individual, though condemned to the passive acceptance of an alien everyday reality, is thus driven into a form of madness in which, resorting to magical devices, he entertains the illusion that he is reacting to this fate. The recognition and consumption of commodities are at the core of this pseudo-response to a communication to which no response is possible (SS 219).

The ‘form of madness’ generated by the psychological and social alienation of a society unknowingly ruled by the repressive forces of spectacular commodification intersects with the analysis of madness, violence, and alienation central to the psychopolitical discussions initiated by the anti-psychiatrists at the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation. As Sinclair has commented, the term *psychopolitics* peppered the speeches at the Roundhouse and was heard far more frequently than psychogeography within the counter-cultural conversations of this period.⁸ By linking a ‘resorting to magical devices’ with the madness produced by everyday social

⁸ Iain Sinclair in discussion with the author, 10 February 2013. Sinclair made similar comments at an event held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London on 8 February 2008 in conversation with Will Self and Kevin Jackson.

relations under the shape-shifting machinations of capital, Debord also echoes Marx's analysis of the fetishistic structure of the commodity form. For Marx, the commodity abounds in 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'. Through the commodity the social relations existing between people assume 'the fantastic form of a relation between things'. Marx makes an analogy between the commodity and the fetishism attached to objects produced and then endowed with an independent being in 'the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world'.⁹ As a schizoid phenomenon that splits from its own physical materiality and deforms social relations, the commodity form disturbingly encapsulates both an abstracted corporeal presence and a phantasmagoric spectrality. It is simultaneously material and anti-material, present and absent. As Debord notes, through the commodity form, the spectacle represses 'all directly lived truth beneath the *real presence* of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances'. Like Marx, Debord recognizes that the falsehood propagated by the logic of the commodity world is not an ideological delusion masking authentic experience but an embodiment of the alienation of everyday life '*as it really is*'. The critical task is to become emancipated from this 'alien everyday reality'.

By emphasizing the central importance of alienation and the commodity form, Debord positioned himself outside the Althusserian circles beginning to dominate academic discussions of Marx during this period in Paris. For Louis Althusser, Marx's dissection of the fetishism of commodities exposed a 'last trace of Hegelian influence', a trace considered extremely harmful 'since all the theoreticians of "reification" and "alienation" have found in it the "foundation" for their idealist interpretations of

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 165-66.

Marx's thought'.¹⁰ Consequently, the issues that Debord highlighted had been relatively neglected or dismissed by the Marxist vanguard of French academia. However, it is worth recalling that the concept of alienation and the humanism of the young Marx remained a vital part of Lefebvre's thinking over several decades. At the start of the 1930s, alienation had been a key concept in Lefebvre's translations (in collaboration with Norbert Guterman) of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*. The theory of alienation found in these translations (the first versions to appear in French) became a cornerstone of Lefebvre's prolific critique of everyday life in the boom decades after the Second World War when France underwent rapid modernization and urbanization.¹¹ In an endnote to his English translation of Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, John Moore makes the valuable insight that 'Marx uses various words to express the concept – *Entfremdung*, *Verfremdung*, *Entwirklichung*, *Verselbständigung*, *Enttäusserung*, *Vergänglichliching* – but it is Lefebvre's practice to translate them all by the single word "alienation"'.¹² Consequently, compressed into French, the sense of alienation becomes far more spatialized in Lefebvre than that implied in the diverse set of terms used by Marx. Other commentators have been attracted to Lefebvre's selection of the term in relation to ideas of space. Picking up on an etymological thread left dangling by Kristin Ross, Rob Shields has clarified that:

Lefebvre's 'alienation' is a *spatial* concept referring to displacement and distance. Like 'alien', it derives from the Latin *alienare*: to render foreign, other and further, from *alienus* or *alius*. And, from that, comes the French term *ailleurs*, elsewhere, and the equally English terms *alias* and *alibi*. Ross adds: 'Dilemmas of alienation highlight the twin poles

¹⁰ See Louis Althusser, 'Preface to *Capital* Volume One', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 71-106 (p. 95). Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *La Chinoise* offers a vividly playful account of the Maoist influences emanating from the Ecole Normale Supérieure where Althusser was firmly ensconced. For the SI's characteristically critical position on Godard's filmmaking, see 'The Role of Godard', in Knabb, pp. 175-76.

¹¹ See the lengthy 'Foreword to the Second Edition' in Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I: Introduction*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 3-99.

¹² See John Moore's translator's endnotes in Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1*, p. 258, n. 5.

of location and identity; to be alienated: to be displaced from oneself, to be foreign to oneself'.¹³

Alongside an amplification and intensification of the significance of 'alienation', Lefebvre's particular contribution extends the use of the term from the specifics of the workplace into the wider realm of everyday life. It is this extension that Debord stretches still further in his analysis of the society of the spectacle, an analysis that also flags 'the twin poles of location and identity' in a series of theses that frequently return to a spatialized terminology to validate its critique. For Lefebvre, although everyday life was the site of alienation it also provided the only access to authentic experiences through 'moments' that could regularly undermine the prevalence of alienating processes. Lefebvre and Debord had first become acquainted in 1958.¹⁴ Although Lefebvre never joined the SI, he had found much common ground with Debord in their interest in the transformative potential of everyday life. Lefebvre had been one of the first to subject the usually disregarded elements of what came under the heading of 'everyday life' to a sustained sociological and philosophical critique.¹⁵ Anselm Jappe, in a particularly astute intellectual biography of Debord, remarks that by the time the two men met 'each had arrived independently at similar conclusions, though it is a reasonable assumption that Debord was acquainted with the first volume of Lefebvre's *Critique*'. Jappe notes that at this stage the idea of Lefebvre's most closely aligned to the future theses of the Situationists is that 'the everyday constitutes the only reality in face of the *unreality* produced by alienation'.¹⁶ For Lefebvre, although everyday life had become increasingly colonized by commodification, the everyday provided the only space in which alienation could be disalienated so that emancipatory possibilities

¹³ Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 40. For the displaced citation from Ross, see Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 150.

¹⁴ See Hussey, *The Game of War*, pp.138-40.

¹⁵ See Lefebvre, *Critique 1*. Two further volumes of the *Critique* were published in 1961 and 1981.

¹⁶ Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 74, p. 76.

for a transformation of existing conditions could be revealed. Lefebvre registered that *'the critique of everyday life involves a critique of political life, in that everyday life already contains and constitutes such a critique: in that it is that critique'*.¹⁷ As will be discussed further below in relation to Debord's concept of 'situation', the two men mutually influenced each other's work in ways that are still the subject of much conjecture. However, the friendship ended acrimoniously amidst accusations of plagiarism over a text on the Paris Commune (alongside several other reasons that spliced the professional with the personal). 'In the end, it was a love story that ended very, very badly', Lefebvre concluded twenty years later.¹⁸ Ultimately, Lefebvre and Debord experienced their own version of a separation. By 1967, Debord had developed a bleaker and more savage portrait of the dilemmas of alienation than that found in Lefebvre's work.

Separation in the 'commodity world' of the spectacle involves a fragmentation that obscures the totality by reinstating a version of the totality that disorientatingly unites what it separates: 'the spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world' (SS 29). Rather than actively engaging in the world, the spectator passively contemplates the objects that represent a world split – like the spectator's own divided self – by forces seemingly beyond comprehension.¹⁹ As Marx had observed, the 'enigmatical character' of the commodity form that facilitates different levels of alienation emerges as the products of labour (and labour itself) undergo other forms of separation,

¹⁷ Lefebvre, *Critique 1*, p. 92. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ 'Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International', an interview with Lefebvre conducted and translated by Kristin Ross in 1983, published in *October*, 79 (Winter 1997), 69-83 (p. 70).

¹⁹ On the ambivalence and suppressed anxieties of this division (and its consonance to the conflictual duality and imaginary sense of mastery over one's image manifest in Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage), see Samuel Weber, 'War, Terrorism, and Spectacle, or: On Towers and Caves', *Grey Room*, 07 (Spring 2002), 14-23.

splitting into use-value and exchange-value (and concrete labour and abstract labour).²⁰ Debord's opening thesis immediately establishes the coupling of modern conditions of production and consumption to the society of the spectacle where all 'that once was directly lived has become mere representation' (SS 1). Paraphrasing Marx's comments on the fetishistic structure of the commodity form, Debord stresses that 'representation' does not mean that we experience the spectacle as a collection of images: 'rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (SS 4). To imagine that Debord is merely outlining a sweeping critique of the daily media bombardment of the senses, one of the defining topoi of modernity, particularly in the visual sphere, is to underestimate the scale of the spectacle in its power to colonize every aspect of existence by strategically replacing active participation with passive contemplation.²¹ Although in this regard, it should be noted that earlier critical accounts of the media had already begun to pursue connections between modernity's technologically enhanced communication channels for the proliferation of repackaged variations of the fetishized commodity form and everyday life. In Adorno and Horkheimer's influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, completed during the latter part of the Second World War, the acerbic sentences that conclude the section on the culture industry presage Debord:

The most intimate reactions of human beings have become so entirely reified, even to themselves, that the idea of anything peculiar to them survives only in extreme abstraction: personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions. That is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry: the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false.²²

²⁰ See Marx, *Capital*, p. 165.

²¹ On the anti-ocularcentric dimension of Debord's critique of the spectacle, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 416-34.

²² Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 136.

From Debord's perspective, advertising and the media constituted a fairly obvious example of the kinds of manipulation nested amongst far more insidious agents of the dominating power structure. Conscious that capitalism has entered a new phase in which use-value has been virtually obliterated by exchange-value, Debord reworks Marx's insights into the mysterious ways that the form of the commodity reproduces social relations between people as a relation between things.²³

In the 1920s, Georg Lukács had also revived Marx's concept of commodity fetishism after a period of neglect. The powerful opening paragraph of 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' spells out his intentions: 'the problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects'.²⁴ The process of reification that Lukács elucidates builds on Marx's concepts of alienation and the fetishism of commodities. As John Rees comments in his introduction to Lukács's *Tailism and the Dialectic* – a long-lost defence of *History and Class Consciousness* written in the wake of its critics in the mid-1920s:

Lukács rediscovered the idea that a social construct, the market, appears to the actors trapped within it as a natural necessity which imposes a pattern on their lives in a manner that they are powerless to resist. In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács calls this process 'reification', the freezing of an institution or ideology created by human beings into a force that controls human beings.²⁵

²³ See Giorgio Agamben, 'Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*', in *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 73-89.

²⁴ Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 83-222 (p. 83).

²⁵ John Rees, 'Introduction' to Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. by Esther Leslie (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 1-38 (p. 13). Debord's considerable debt to the tradition of Western Marxism, and to Lukács in particular, is beyond the scope of this study. For a useful analysis, see Jappe, *Guy Debord*, pp. 20-36. See also Peter Wollen, 'Bitter

Trapped in the spectacle, the choices are stark for those about to be awakened from their reified consciousness to the apparently perfected separation underlying the totality of their alienated situation. Veering from Lefebvre's romantically optimistic account of an everyday life that periodically retains a residue of potentially revolutionary energy, Debord suggests that change cannot come from within spectacular society. Alongside the spectacular colonization of leisure time, the spectacle also commodifies acts of rebellion by recalibrating revolutionary energies for its own use. As Greil Marcus comments in his wide-ranging exploration of the links between such radical groups as the LI and SI and the emergence of punk:

If at bottom revolution was rooted in the desire to create one's own life, a wish so deep and voracious its realization demanded the creation of a new society, then the spectacle took that wish into itself, and returned it as the wish to accept one's life as it already existed, as it existed in the constantly renewing utopia of the spectacle.²⁶

Debord's theoretical arguments stress a vital need for any critical vocabulary of *separation, alienation, or reification* to stimulate more than another round of theoretical discourse. Active opposition is necessary, but problematic: 'There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle all activity is banned – a corollary of the fact that all *real* activity has been forcibly channelled into the global construction of the spectacle' (SS 27). Exposing the theoretical substrate that had guided Situationist practice, a practice that, somewhat simplified, could be described as dedicated to destroying the spectacle and reconnecting to a life lived directly, Debord was also outlining the immense scale of the obstacle to be overcome:

Victory: The Art and Politics of the Situationist International', in *on the Passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957-72*, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 20-61.

²⁶ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), pp. 103-104.

The spectator's alienation from and submission to the contemplated object (which is the outcome of his unthinking activity) works like this: the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere (SS 30).

To reclaim direct experience of the dreams and desires that had been ceaselessly manipulated and manufactured by the spectacle, the spectator had to escape the shackles of alienation, become liberated from the invisible bonds of slavery produced by a society pacified and (self) governed by the twisted logic of commodification and consumption. Although it had been abandoned as a term within Debord's theses, psychogeography originated as part of a tool-kit for this liberation. The psychogeographical traces left unnamed in Debord's theses offer a contemporaneous vision of space and society that can be productively compared both to the prehistory of Sinclair's variant psychogeography, and, more broadly, to an assessment of the convergences and divergences between certain fractious revolutionary and oppositional groups gathered in Paris and London towards the end of the 1960s.

Documenting the Counter-Culture

The publication of *The Society of the Spectacle* coincided with the emergence of an increasingly visible counter-culture to the dominant values of mainstream society. Across the globe there appeared to be an awakening of consciousness to the hypocrisies and inconsistencies that distorted the dominant culture's attitude to class,

ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. From the perspective of the counter-culture, these ideological distortions undermined personal freedom, underpinned global injustices, and underwrote the threat of potential nuclear catastrophe. While Debord's hostile assault on the capitalist totality in *The Society of the Spectacle* exhibits comparable elements of dissent to those found amongst sections of the population disaffected by the increasing alienation and banalization of everyday life in a system that perpetuates social inequalities, Debord was suspicious of the revolutionary efficacy of the kinds of psychological, sexual, and social liberation associated with the 1960s counter-culture. The umbrella term 'counter-culture' suggests a consolidated mass movement. However, instead of being *counter* to anything, as an oppositional force the counter-culture lacked political cohesion and a functioning structure (although its vague trajectory sometimes coincided with the more specific goals and organized forms of protest of other groups such as those aligned with the Civil Rights Movement).²⁷ By contrast, *The Society of the Spectacle* was shaped by the need to communicate a structured message of insurgency to an audience capable of actively responding rather than passively refusing to participate in mainstream culture. Debord argues that the spectacle is extremely adept at commodifying different aspects of rebellion as lifestyle choices to be consumed, preserving 'the old culture in congealed form, going so far as to recuperate and rediffuse even its negative manifestations' (SS 192). This statement not only suggests Debord's identification of the counter-revolutionary status of his contemporaries who displayed a naive belief in being able to drop out of the mainstream system to create an alternative lifestyle rather than construct an actively oppositional politics to the spectacle but also hints at the recuperation that had already happened to Surrealism. By the 1960s, the rebellious momentum of Surrealism had

²⁷ See Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2008).

been co-opted by advertising and canonized by museums. As an avant-garde group, the SI was heir to the early Surrealists whose subsequent assimilation into the culture exposed the dangers of recuperation by the spectacle. While Debord was preparing *The Society of the Spectacle* for publication in Paris, the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation confronted similar issues regarding liberation from the forces of contemporary alienation and commodification across the channel in London. From a speculative perspective, the fact that the Congress would highlight both the unity and the fragmentary state of the Anglo-American counter-culture (while sending a psychedelic ripple through its host building and the immediate neighbourhood), could be positioned as confirming – and perhaps intensifying – Debord’s hostile suspicions about the ‘drug addicts and idiots’ that constituted an alternative intelligentsia to mainstream culture in Britain and the United States.²⁸

When Sinclair left boarding school in Cheltenham at the start of the 1960s, rather than heading straight to university he moved to London to spend a year studying at the London School of Film Technique above a butcher’s shop on Brixton’s Electric Avenue. Reflecting on the cultural expansion he experienced in this move from the Cotswolds to ‘the unknown hills and valleys of South London’, Sinclair wryly recalls that the film school ‘had everything going for it, except any useful instruction in film-making, or opportunity to write/shoot/edit’. The lack of hands-on instruction allowed him to develop his own researches: ‘obscure poems, day-long wanderings, documentary photographs’.²⁹ Such researches would prove fruitful for his later physical and textual explorations of London.

²⁸ See Hussey, *The Game of War*, p. 211.

²⁹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 281, p. 282.

In the essay collection *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair opens a section pointedly titled ‘Cinema Purgatorio’ with the contrary remark: ‘My brilliant career in cinema was over before it began, and there was nothing brilliant about it’.³⁰ Filtered through the distorting mirror of Sinclair’s extravagantly splenetic vision, the essay’s ‘excursion’ through London cinema in the second half of the twentieth century offers a catalogue of major and minor grievances, false hopes, bloody struggles, youthful fatalities, and other punishments incurred by those misguided wayfarers who allow themselves to get involved in film. Emblematic of the rapacity and caprice of capital, the film industry appears as another in a long list of Sinclair’s satirical targets. Characteristically, the closer Sinclair is implicated in the target being satirized, the more vicious the satire becomes. As with the pugnacious fiefdoms of journalism and bookdealing, his first-hand experience of the frequently moronic randomness of the film industry generates a comically apocalyptic narrative lacerated with barbed asides:

Film is ninety-nine percent hassle to one percent fruitful accident. It’s Russian roulette with thousands of blanks and a single golden bullet. Grasp the basic equation and you might still crack it. You might be the unique individual from the four hundred who apply, brandishing their diplomas, first class degrees in media studies, connections, self-evident genius, who gets taken on, unpaid, to field the phone calls in an empty office in Barons Court, where several “in development” projects are waiting for seed money.³¹

The cinematic debut being downplayed in the essay is *Ah, Sunflower*, a youthful collaboration with the Dutch cameraman Robert Klinkert. *Ah, Sunflower* documents Allen Ginsberg’s visit to London to participate in the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation.³² Made for German television on a minimal budget, the film remained

³⁰ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* p. 279.

³¹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 279.

³² The written form of *Ah, Sunflower* used in this essay will follow the lack of an exclamation mark in the film’s opening titles. Elsewhere, the film has found an additional and curiously migratory ‘!’ that sometimes emphasizes the ‘Ah’ and sometimes the ‘Sunflower’.

virtually unscreened in the UK for forty years until it was shown at a London cinema at the start of 2007 to coincide with its first release on DVD.³³ Although sections of the film were regularly cannibalized for use in other programmes and documentaries dealing with the 1960s counter-culture (particularly footage of the panel discussions during the Congress and of the Hyde Park Dope Rally), after forty years of near-mythical obscurity *Ah, Sunflower* had the improbable distinction of making Sinclair's more recent collaborative incursions into the backwaters of the film industry with Chris Petit seem high profile.³⁴ For Sinclair buffs and Beat cognoscenti, the film was better known as the central topic of Sinclair's self-published *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*, itself only available in the limited edition print run of Sinclair's original 1971 Albion Village Press publication.³⁵

Comprised of material that prefigures Sinclair's relocation to Hackney, *Ah, Sunflower* and *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* offer fertile ground for studying a set of cultural influences that Sinclair would eventually file rather loosely under the term psychogeography. While these works reveal an early fascination with the significance and connections between specific places they also indicate an immersion in the debate around the anti-psychiatry movement regarding the potentially liberating role of madness in a society riddled with repression (and the concomitant need to dismantle the mechanisms of violent oppression attached to the label 'schizophrenia'). The lack of consideration of this aspect of Sinclair's counter-cultural heritage is partly attributable to the previous difficulties in accessing the relevant source material. But it also stems from a tendency to perceive Sinclair's work as originating in the

³³ *Ah, Sunflower* was shown at the Renoir Cinema in Bloomsbury on 28 January 2007. Sinclair gave a short introduction to the film.

³⁴ Petit and Sinclair have collaborated on a series of projects, including several experimental films since making the documentary *The Cardinal and the Corpse* for Channel 4 in 1992.

³⁵ *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* was reprinted to accompany the launch of the *Ah, Sunflower* DVD. See Iain Sinclair, *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* (London: Beat Scene, 2006).

construction of a labyrinthine system of energies flowing through various key locations in London's East End: an influential mythographic conceit that Sinclair develops only after his move eastwards at the beginning of the 1970s. The slightly earlier work demonstrates a need to balance the *geographical* bias of research into Sinclair's psychogeography with a complimentary exploration of material that could be classified (albeit uneasily) under the emotive combining form *psycho*. To contextualize such an exploration it will be useful to clarify the concept of the *counter-culture* and to sketch some of the background history to the use of the Roundhouse for the Congress.

The term 'underground', deployed to characterize specific aspects of the expanding culture of dissent that ran counter to the cultural mainstream across many parts of the globe in the mid- to late-1960s, initially emerged in the notion of an 'underground press'. Independent publications (such as the London-based *International Times* and *Oz*) built alternative networks of distribution for their reports from within the underground scene. Using a provocative mixture of non-journalistic language and often unintentionally cryptic images (the latter an experimental by-product of cheap offset litho printing and access to hallucinogenics), these publications produced a kaleidoscopic vision of an alternative society refracted through the participative position of the contributors, insiders shaping the identity of the zeitgeist while reporting from its psychedelic frontlines. From a strategic perspective, the emergent underground of the 1960s can be seen as a series of permeable cells that attempted to reconfigure a sense of resistance to the dominant ideology through a disparate movement that the influential philosopher and social theorist Herbert Marcuse termed

the ‘Great Refusal’.³⁶ The founding of an independent community forum for the dissemination of information on a global and local scale enabled the heterogeneous incarnations of an alternative culture to communicate with each other and to begin to organize themselves. Although nominally eschewing the tyranny of compartmentalizing labels, another synonym for this alternative culture materialized in the mid-1960s when the scattered elements of the underground were described as forming a ‘counter-culture’.

The social historian Theodore Roszak is credited with the coining of the term ‘counter-culture’ in relation to the unusual scale and depth of the opposition and rejection of the values of the preceding generation that characterized the latter half of the 1960s, particularly in the affluent societies of the world:

Indeed, it would hardly seem an exaggeration to call what we see arising among the young a ‘counter culture’. Meaning: a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the appearance of a barbaric intrusion.³⁷

Roszak’s breezy account of the counter-culture makes it clear that such appearances are deceptive. He argued that the apparent barbarism of disaffiliated youth offered a vital escape route ‘that might transform this disoriented civilization of ours into something a human being can identify as home’.³⁸ Roszak’s civilization that misrecognizes its hope for the future as barbarism echoes the conclusion to *One-*

³⁶ See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

³⁷ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 42.

³⁸ Roszak, p. xiii. See also thesis 115 in *The Society of the Spectacle* where Debord observes that signs ‘of a new and growing tendency toward negation proliferate in the more economically advanced countries’ as the struggles of workers and the ‘rebellious tendencies of the young generate a protest that is still tentative and amorphous, yet already clearly embodies a rejection of the specialised sphere of the old politics, as well as of art and everyday life’. *The Society of the Spectacle*, §115.

Dimensional Man, where Marcuse acknowledges the possibility that ‘the second period of barbarism may well be the continued empire of civilization itself’.³⁹ If these comments ultimately resonate with Walter Benjamin’s devastatingly succinct description of the Möbius strip relation between civilization and barbarism, the social disorientation they address chimes with Debord’s analysis of the society of the spectacle: ‘In a world that *really* has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood’ (SS 9).⁴⁰ For Roszak, writing at the very end of the 1960s, the variegated procession of an immature, ill-disciplined, and ever-changing counter-culture emerged from the crucible of a supposedly orthodox culture that proved itself ‘fatally and contagiously diseased’:

We are a civilization sunk in an unshakeable commitment to genocide, gambling madly with the universal extermination of our species. And how viciously we ravish our sense of humanity to pretend, even for a day, that such horror can be accepted as ‘normal’, as ‘necessary’! Whenever we feel inclined to qualify, to modify, to offer a cautious ‘yes ... *but*’ to the protests of the young, let us return to this fact as the decisive measure of the technocracy’s essential criminality: the extent to which it insists, in the name of progress, in the name of reason, that the unthinkable become thinkable and the intolerable become tolerable.⁴¹

As Roszak’s study shows, amongst certain sections of Anglo-American youth there had been a general recognition and rejection of the duplicitous ideological ethos that sustained the image of a nation such as the US (and, in different ways, the UK) as a relative beacon of justice, liberty, peace, in an era in which those same nations rationalized ‘thermonuclear annihilation’. Expanding on this portrait of an affluent society transfixed by violence, Roszak enumerates various social and psychical reasons for the prominence of an oppositional culture amongst the young: a population

³⁹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 257.

⁴⁰ See Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, p. 392.

⁴¹ Roszak, p. 47.

increase after the war meant that by the late 1960s the Baby Boomer generation had entered their teens; the ruthless commercialization of youth as a distinct and hugely profitable market, together with the rise of the teenager as a media construct, led to an intensification of self-consciousness amongst the young regarding their potential as a social group; and there had also been an extension of an identification with youth for many people into their early twenties – partly a consequence of an expansion of higher education (in which teenage undergraduates found themselves associating with already radicalized grad students). The middle-class Baby Boomers were also reaping the dubious benefits of coming of age in an affluent society where their creativity and self-expression were encouraged, leaving them somewhat pampered and spoiled: ‘meaning they are influenced to believe that being human has something to do with pleasure and freedom’. With economic security taken for granted, this generation built ‘a new, uncompromised personality, flawed perhaps by irresponsible ease, but also touched with some outspoken spirit’.⁴² This infantilized generation were ill-equipped when forced to adopt the demeanour of an adult after leaving school or college:

The young get told they are now officially ‘grown up’, but they have been left too long without any taste for the rigidities and hypocrisies that adulthood is supposed to be all about. General Motors all of a sudden wants barbered hair, punctuality, and an appropriate reverence for the conformities of the organizational hierarchy. Washington wants patriotic cannon fodder with no questions asked. Such prospects do not look like fun from the vantage point of between eighteen and twenty years of relatively carefree drifting.⁴³

While this context provides the immediate rationale for a rejection of the majority of the dominant culture’s values, especially the culture of violence and of the unquestioning attitude towards the necessity of work, any connections with the famous proto-Situationist graffiti ‘*Ne Travaillez Jamais*’ that appeared on a Rue de Seine wall

⁴² Roszak, p. 31.

⁴³ Roszak, p. 32.

in 1953 (an act attributed to Debord) remain vague. As Roszak explains regarding the choice to drop out of that society:

Certainly for a youngster of seventeen, clearing out of the comfortable bosom of the middle-class family to become a beggar is a formidable gesture of dissent. One makes light of it at the expense of ignoring a significant measure of our social health.⁴⁴

This leads Roszak to the focus of the bulk of his book: the presence of adult radicals as touchstones for the youthful opposition to the mainstream technocratic society. In many ways, the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation exemplified how radical ‘elder statesmen’ such as Ginsberg (in his early forties) and Herbert Marcuse (approaching seventy) could connect with disaffected youth.

By 1967 there was a growing public connection of Marcuse with the emergence amongst the young of an increasingly rebellious opposition to the violence associated with mainstream culture. As with Ginsberg and Laing (and latterly Debord), the reduction of Marcuse’s complex position to that of a counter-cultural icon proves problematic. The media simplified his ideas, largely portraying him as an anarchic instigator and champion of various kinds of ill-disciplined liberation – political, psychical, sexual, social, and so forth. Consequently, Marcuse attracted a barrage of often ill-informed criticism from both the left and the right. Barry Katz captures this aspect of Marcuse’s reception in his critical biography:

In the late phase of his career, that of the thesis of ‘one-dimensionality’, Herbert Marcuse withstood attacks from the Kremlin and the Vatican, the Minutemen and the Weathermen, the American Legion and the Progressive Labor Party, and parents, pundits, and professors of every shade.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Roszak, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Barry Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: A Critical Biography* (London: Verso, 1982), p. 162.

Understandably, Marcuse was suspicious of the implications of his newfound fame outside the academy, comprehending that his iconic position made him vulnerable to a variant of the recuperation of dissent that was evolving elsewhere in the media in relation to the commercialization of various aspects of the counter-culture. The simplification and misrepresentation of theories and practices spawned in part by a rise in media interest is an underlying theme within this analysis of Sinclair and psychogeography. But as the apologetic prefaces and confrontational introductions to commentaries on Debord and the SI demonstrate, academic interest also plays its part in an escalating process of fragmentation through specialization.⁴⁶ By the time that the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation began at the Roundhouse, such crucial issues as the continual fragmentation of focused political momentum and the strategic recuperation of dissent were already topics of self-analysis within what could be labelled, somewhat problematically, as a blossoming underground movement.⁴⁷

The Roundhouse and Centre 42

So why did the counter-culture choose the Roundhouse for the Congress? The answer lies with one of the few notable alumni to have attended the same film school as Sinclair. The playwright Arnold Wesker left the London School of Film Technique

⁴⁶ On these tendencies see the preface to Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (Routledge: London, 1992) and the preface by David A. Ross to *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957-72*, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 1991), pp. vi-vii. See also the introduction to Hussey, *The Game of War*, pp. 1-9.

⁴⁷ Coincidentally, the emergence of the 1960s underground in Britain is often traced to an event featuring Ginsberg at another circular building in London: the poetry reading *Poets of the World/Poets of Our Time* held at the Albert Hall on 11 June 1965. See Barry Miles, *London Calling: A Countercultural History of London since 1945* (London: Atlantic, 2010), pp. 144-51.

several years before Sinclair enrolled at the same institution. Throughout the early 1960s, Wesker had campaigned for the creation of Centre 42, a subsidized space that would attempt to popularize avant-garde art and theatre by making it more accessible to a wider public. The project derived its name from resolution 42 of the 1960 Trades Union Congress in which Wesker had encouraged the television engineer's union to call on the TUC to recognize its increased cultural responsibilities regarding arts provision in an era in which leisure was becoming a major issue. Elected the Artistic Director of the Centre, Wesker, after some hesitation, settled on the dilapidated and empty Roundhouse as a suitable site for the project. The site was owned by the clothing magnate and property dealer, Louis Mintz. Wesker spent eighteen months persuading Mintz – a notable patron of the arts – to give Centre 42 the remaining years of the lease (a period due to run out in the mid-1980s). With the lease finally granted, an appeal was launched to raise £650,000 for improvements to the building. But the appeal suffered numerous setbacks and frustrations and never managed to raise the necessary amount (a figure that had steadily escalated closer to £750,000 by 1969). From the total donations that the appeal secured (around £150,000) half came from a single event: a tea-party at 10 Downing Street held on 25 July 1967 by Mary Wilson, the Prime Minister's wife. As the cultural historian Jonathon Green observes, by the time that the tea-party occurred 'the Roundhouse had moved, at least culturally, elsewhere. That day it was midway through hosting the *Dialectics of Liberation*, a political outpouring many lightyears away from Wesker's homespun socialism'.⁴⁸

While campaigning for funds, Wesker was persuaded to allow other cultural events to materialize in the makeshift surroundings of the unreconstructed Roundhouse. In October 1966, the building was 'borrowed' for a party to launch the underground

⁴⁸ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-culture* (London: Cape, 1998), p. 153.

magazine *International Times* (soon to be shortened to *IT* after legal threats from *The Times* newspapers). As the *IT* ‘party’ entertainment, Soft Machine and Pink Floyd played their first major gigs, inadvertently heralding the Roundhouse’s future as a live music venue. In February of the next year, the Jimi Hendrix Experience took to the Roundhouse stage to play the songs recorded for their debut album *Are You Experienced*.⁴⁹ Released in the UK in May 1967, the album provided one of the psychedelic soundtracks to London’s so-called Summer of Love. Details of the subsequent US release of the album offer a capsule summary of the aggressive facility of capital to absorb new and potentially transformative energies. Released in the United States in November 1967, the US version of *Are You Experienced* included the three hit singles omitted from the UK version (where it was still standard ‘commercial’ practice not to include singles on albums) and came repackaged with a newly psychedelized cover to cash in on one of the current trends produced by and for youth culture. Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* was published that same month. The rapid recuperation of a psychedelic counter-culture into the cultural mainstream via the corporate pseudo-radicalism of the rock n’ roll industry highlighted several of Debord’s strategically related arguments:

Behind the glitter of the spectacle’s distractions, modern society lies in thrall to the global domination of a *banalizing* trend that also dominates it at each point where the most advanced forms of commodity consumption have seemingly broadened the panoply of roles and objects available to choose from. (SS 59)

For Debord, the increasing banalization and commodification of society was linked to the ways that spectacular consumption ‘preserves the old culture in congealed form’ including recuperating and rediffusing its ‘negative manifestations’ (SS 192).

⁴⁹ As with the missing exclamation mark in the film *Ah, Sunflower*, the title *Are You Experienced* originally appeared without a question mark.

However, less abstractly, the co-optation of the counter-culture as a negative manifestation of the cultural mainstream was facilitated in part by the diffuse perspectives it encompassed. The heated debates at the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation captured in *Ah, Sunflower* illustrate that the divisions within the counter-culture were often more fundamental than the correspondences. It is important at this point to rethink the generalities of Roszak's umbrella term. Although the 'counter-culture' suggests a consolidated mass movement, as an oppositional force it lacked organizational structure. In many ways, structure, as a systemic form that required social and political agency to maintain, was considered antipathetic to a commitment to expressions of individual freedom and shared beliefs in peace and love. Given these conditions, and the repeated mythologizing of the decade as one of rebellion, the notion of being collectively *counter* to the dominant culture needs further clarification. In her attentive reconsideration of the American counter-culture in the late 1960s, Nadya Zimmerman presents an alternative account to Roszak's problematic formulation:

Many elements of what we now refer to as the sixties 'counterculture' have had ascribed to them political and social platforms that they never embraced. Unlike the civil rights movement, for example, large portions of the 'counterculture' were far from being an organized sociopolitical community: they were not oppositional in orientation, not bound by specific agendas, and not determined to bring about major changes in the system. In fact, many parts of this sixties 'counterculture' were not, as the name implies, *counter* to anything. Yet these very parts often assume the largest share in our collective memory of the 'counterculture' because they spawned the defining cultural products – the music and the lifestyle – that came to be associated with an entire era.⁵⁰

Conservatively echoing Debord's theses, Zimmerman argues that the fatal co-opting of the counter-culture was less a consequence of the commercial absorption of

⁵⁰ Zimmerman, p. 3.

counter-cultural sensibilities than a product of the counter-culture's vulnerable 'false belief' in being able to drop out of society in the first place.⁵¹

Working within the cultural mainstream to widen access to its established institutions, Wesker recalled the campaign for Centre 42 as it stood in 1969:

I was failing to raise the money required to establish, at the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, Centre Fortytwo, the arts project to which I had given, on and off, the previous nine years of my life. The unions – whose Resolution 42 on the 1960 TUC agenda had inspired the organisation – had abandoned us; the Arts Council expressed fear of us; Robert Maxwell was our not very diligent treasurer; Jennie Lee, who had been on our board, was now Britain's first Minister for the Arts and seemed to be sabotaging our efforts. Not the most tranquil years of my life!⁵²

A forceful critique of Wesker surfaces in Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture*. Written and published in 1968, Nuttall's book offers a candid autopsy of the late-1960s underground scene from an active participant:

That Wesker, more than any other, was putting the moral cart before the creative horse became clearer than ever when he abandoned his potential as a playwright to concentrate on his Centre 42 project. No sooner had he publicized his idea of bringing art to the workers than it was put to the test when he was invited to produce a chain of arts festivals throughout the Midlands. That the festivals happened, and on remarkably short notice, is very much to Wesker's credit. Also to his credit is his truly fantastic altruism. Very little else is to his credit.⁵³

The struggle to develop Centre 42 and the six festivals that took place in the Midlands are loosely reflected in the plot of Wesker's ambitiously structured play *Their Very Own and Golden City*.⁵⁴ First performed in 1966, the play's main protagonist is

⁵¹ See Zimmerman, p. 20.

⁵² Arnold Wesker, *As Much as I Dare: An Autobiography (1932-1959)* (London: Century, 1994), p. 42.

⁵³ Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 55.

⁵⁴ See Arnold Wesker, *Three Plays: The Kitchen, The Four Seasons, Their Very Own and Golden City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 129-206.

Andrew Cobham, an architect with a radical vision of building six ‘Golden Cities’ financed co-operatively by the same people who will make the cities their collective home (complete with leisure facilities and arts centres that resemble Centre 42). As the decades unfold via the play’s fragmented timeline, the ‘Golden Cities’ project suffers numerous setbacks as Cobham compromises his vision for seemingly pragmatic reasons during negotiations with politicians from both sides of the spectrum. The play is told in a disorientating series of ‘flash-forwards’ intercut with returns to the opening scene in which the youthful Cobham stands inside Durham Cathedral. Talking to himself as he surveys the cavernous interior, Cobham delivers the opening lines: ‘I – am as big as – it. They built cathedrals for one man – it’s just big enough [. . .] Every man should have a cathedral in his back garden.’⁵⁵ These lines are reminiscent of the seminal psychogeographer Ivan Chtcheglov’s urban imaginary where ‘everyone will live in his own personal “cathedral”’.⁵⁶ But the compromises resemble a rhetorical question phrased by Debord in his short text from 1972 ‘On Wild Architecture’:

Could one not have appeased the Situationists around 1960 by means of a few lucidly conceived recuperative reforms, that is, by giving them two or three cities to construct instead of pushing them to the edge and forcing them to unleash into the world the most dangerous subversion there ever was?⁵⁷

While Debord’s hyperbole problematizes interpretation by oscillating between a knowing playfulness and a terminal seriousness, he responds to this counterfactual by registering that such a compromise would only have accelerated the SI’s subversive appetites.

⁵⁵ Wesker, *Three Plays*, p. 139.

⁵⁶ See Ivan Chtcheglov, ‘Formulary for a New Urbanism’, in Knabb, pp. 1-4 (p. 3). First published under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain, ‘Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau’, in *Internationale Situationniste*, 1 (June 1958), pp. 15-20.

⁵⁷ Guy Debord, ‘On Wild Architecture’, in Andreotti and Costa, pp. 152-3 (p. 153).

Cobham's compromises in *Their Very Own and Golden City* both reflect and anticipate the compromises, however altruistic, that Wesker was being forced to make regarding his vision of Centre 42.⁵⁸ Glenda Leeming illuminates a further aspect of the saga, addressing how an alternative future for the Roundhouse emerged from a series of events held at the venue that were initially meant to assist in its development as Centre 42:

Paradoxically, the Roundhouse, the one solid survivor of the project, became something of a Frankenstein's monster to its owners, in that the problems of financing it and the successive fund-raising efforts overshadowed and wore out the original inspiration. The Arts Council gave a few tiny amounts; the TUC as a body did not offer any money, though individual unions and branches did contribute comparatively small sums. Centre Fortytwo then began to apply to industry and other private sources for money, and in the process of making the Roundhouse earn its own living, the businessmen who figured among its trustees effectively obliterated its original function. In 1970 Wesker formally dissolved the movement.⁵⁹

As a venue for live music and other performances, the Roundhouse, in the wake of its appropriations by the counter-culture, found an alternative future that temporarily secured its economic survival over the following two decades while simultaneously establishing its fame within late-twentieth century culture.

Anti-Psychiatry and Madness

The Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation is usually remembered for featuring several leading figures of the American counter-culture. Ginsberg's participation on a fractious discussion panel that included Stokely Carmichael and Emmett Grogan, a

⁵⁸ For Wesker's confirmation of the correlation between Centre 42 and the play, see Ronald Hayman, *Arnold Wesker* (New York: Ungar, 1973).

⁵⁹ Glenda Leeming, *Wesker the Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 9.

discussion peppered by vociferous interjections from the audience, is perhaps the defining moment of the Congress (partly a consequence of the recycling of Sinclair and Klinkert's lively footage of that specific debate).⁶⁰ However, the agenda of the event was shaped and organized by the dissident psychiatrists David Cooper, R. D. Laing, Joseph Berke, and Leon Redler. As Cooper explains in his introduction to a collection of talks from the Congress, the four were increasingly concerned with radical innovations in their study of 'that predominant form of socially stigmatized madness that is called schizophrenia' to the extent of 'counter-labelling their discipline as anti-psychiatry'.⁶¹ Regarding the twenty-three year old Sinclair's relation to London's kaleidoscopic counter-culture, the arguments of the anti-psychiatry movement debated at the Roundhouse seem at least as germane to an understanding of his psychogeographical trajectory as the verbal feuding that occurred between advocates of Black Power and Flower Power at that same event.

Although Cooper readily (and influentially) applied the term 'anti-psychiatry' to his own work and to the work of other practitioners critical of mainstream psychiatric practices, the implied cohesiveness of an 'anti-psychiatry' movement is misleading. Inevitably, the psychiatrists either voluntarily or involuntarily aligned with 'anti-psychiatry' represented a broad range of attacks on the discipline from varying perspectives that also came into critical conflict with each other.⁶² For example, both

⁶⁰ Somewhat bizarrely, Stokely Carmichael appeared as a replacement for Mircea Eliade (as an authority on shamanism, Eliade's influence on the incorporation of shamanic concepts can be traced through various Sinclair texts). On the replacement of participants (and for a rare view of the Roundhouse as 'a monstrous hive-shaped relic of Victorian industrial England' rather than a fittingly reappropriated site for the event), see Erling Eng, 'Beyond Psychiatry?', *The Hudson Review*, 20:3 (Autumn 1967), 469-72 (470). For Grogan's typically immodest version of events, see Emmett Grogan, *Ringolevio* (St Albans: Granada, 1981) pp. 494-502.

⁶¹ Cooper, *The Dialectics of Liberation*, p. 7.

⁶² For an informative account of such differences, see the aptly named D. B. Double, 'Historical Perspectives on Anti-Psychiatry', in *Critical Psychiatry: The Limits of Madness*, ed. by D. B. Double (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 19-39.

Laing and Cooper developed a conspiratorial model for discussing madness, identifying ‘schizophrenia’ as a label selectively deployed by authority figures within the medical establishment to isolate those with a different form of alienation from the alienation of the mainstream, an approach directly influenced by Thomas Szasz’s sustained critique of psychiatry. However, although often labelled an anti-psychiatrist, Szasz repeatedly distanced himself from what he saw as the egotistical libertarian excesses of LSD-laced psychiatrists mimicking rock stars or gurus to consolidate their counter-culture credentials.⁶³

Interviewing Cooper inside the Roundhouse, Sinclair asks him to enlarge on the notion that emerged at the Congress that what has been conventionally labelled as madness is a necessity for actively keeping society alive. Cooper responds by affirming that madness has begun to be seen as ‘something precious; not as a diseased state of consciousness but as an expanded awareness and something that we have to learn to accompany, to go along with and not shut up. What usually happens in psychiatry is the murder of human experience and we have to know how to stop this.’ Although the film runs out in the camera, Sinclair continues to discuss psychiatric issues with Cooper, listening to him speak ‘glowingly of madness, of a man finally liberating himself after years in the prison of family, naked and howling, on a riverbank. The rest of the family awed and silent’. For Sinclair, immersed in the ambience of the Roundhouse and its immediate vicinity, this ‘image of Cooper’s burns over the gravel, the pale grass, the lounging bodies. It is a fire vision, something out of Blake’.⁶⁴

Offering a knotted variation on Cooper’s passionate plea for a recalibration of

⁶³ For an essay illustrative of Szasz’s ongoing struggle over successive decades to differentiate his position from Laing’s, see Thomas Szasz, “‘Knowing what ain’t so’: R. D. Laing and Thomas Szasz”, *Psychoanalytic Review*, 91 (June 2004), 331-46. For a contextual discussion of the ‘conspiratorial model of madness’ within Laing’s career, see Zbigniew Kotowicz, *R. D. Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁶⁴ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 28.

madness, Laing's slow sentences are intermittently transcribed by Sinclair into upper-case poetry:

it seems that *what is most realistic, most sensible, most obvious, most sane, appears to most people to be starry-eyed idealism, absolutely unrealistic, and completely crazy and mad.*

SO THOSE FEW PEOPLE
WHO REALISE
THAT THIS IS REALISTIC
AND REALISE
THAT THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE
REGARD IT AS UNREALISTIC
AND REALISE THAT THE OTHER PEOPLE
DON'T REALISE
THAT WE REALISE
THAT THEY THINK
WE ARE UNREALISTIC
ARE IN AN ABSOLUTE MINORITY.

The realism from my point of view then starts from that double-tongue of the spiral, whereby you have to mediate to them that they think we're crazy and that they think that they're sane.⁶⁵

The subtitle of the Congress was 'Towards a Demystification of Violence'. The arguments of Laing and other speakers connected the psychic alienation of an affluent society unwilling and unable to recognize its violently alienated condition with the more visible forms of violence of the era.⁶⁶ In *The Politics of Experience*, also published in 1967, Laing dramatically elaborates his position regarding the totality of alienation via the statistical production of normalcy:

⁶⁵ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 30. In a coincidence that suggests this part of London may now be unable to free itself fully from the debates initiated by Cooper and Laing, two album covers from an internationally successful local band surfaced in the 1980s: one featured the band members outside Chalk Farm Underground station (photographed from the steps of the Roundhouse) while the other featured them congregated on the 'druidic eminence' of Primrose Hill. The name of the band was Madness. See Madness, *Absolutely*, 1980, Stiff, SEEZ 29; *Rise and Fall*, 1982, Stiff, SEEZ 46. See also Marcus Gray, *London's Rock Landmarks* (London: Omnibus, 1985) p. 17, p. 66.

⁶⁶ For a sustained account of the different forms in which violence manifests, from the directly visible 'subjective' violence that can be traced to a specific agent or agents to more 'symbolic' and 'systemic' forms, see Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile, 2008).

There are forms of alienation that are relatively strange to statistically 'normal' forms of alienation. The 'normally' alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane. Other forms of alienation that are out of step with the prevailing state of alienation are those that are labelled by the 'normal' majority as bad or mad.

The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man.

Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal.

Normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last fifty years.⁶⁷

Cooper and Laing position the patient labelled as schizophrenic within a nest of interactive social contexts (from the network of the patient's family through larger institutions and organizations through to a planetary network). Rather than viewing the patient as an alienated non-person needing to be isolated from 'normal' society (and given 'treatment' via a plethora of violent practices that the administering doctors, lacking critical distance, were unable to view as barbaric acts), they repeatedly question the validity of categorizing individuals as suffering from schizophrenia. Laing insists that 'there is no such "condition" as "schizophrenia", but the label is a social fact and the social fact a *political event*'. For him, this political event annexes the rights of the person labelled schizophrenic and inaugurates that person 'not only into a role, but into a career of patient'. Madness, for Laing, 'need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death'.⁶⁸ This is not to suggest that Laing valorized madness as a condition of heightened awareness rather than seeking to alleviate the distressing combination of anxiety, bewilderment, and pain that such mental states often produced. But it is to note that he rejected what he considered to be the

⁶⁷ R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 24..

⁶⁸ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 100, p. 110.

illegitimate power wielded by the dominant treatment regimes that isolated such individuals and pathologized (and stigmatized) their mental states as if such conditions could be divorced from the complex mediations of the social relationships in which mental development and everyday experience were inherently immersed.⁶⁹

In a sensitive analysis of Sinclair's work, Simon Perril emerges as one of the few commentators to discuss Laing as a significant influence on Sinclair. As Perril suggests, Laing's notion of schizophrenia as a healing voyage away from various forms of alienation derived from a sick society equates with the voyage made by a shaman. But, as Perril also observes, Sinclair does not have to be directly aligned with such a position:

It is by no means necessary to see Laing's diagnosis as correct, for what Sinclair's shamanism inherits from him is not medical authority, but a mythological vocabulary for the discussion of social alienation.⁷⁰

In a revealing interview with the magazine *Entropy*, Sinclair concurs with the idea that almost all of his work involves a search or quest undertaken by restless characters animated by an attempt to locate a provisional cure for their particular condition. For these socially alienated characters, there is 'always a sickness that can't be located' that requires the negotiation of 'weird systems of contraries, and the attempting in a Blakean sense to achieve a balance by identifying the sickness and taking a forced march in the opposite direction'.⁷¹ Symptomatically, the sickness usually manifests

⁶⁹ For a critique of the social dimension of Laing's anti-psychiatry, particularly in relation to its lack of any sustained discussion of class and its susceptibility to being recuperated as a source for more conservative policies, see Peter Sedgwick, *PsychoPolitics* (London: Pluto, 1982). For an account of Laing's relevance to contemporary discussions of social relations, see Susie Scott and Charles Thorpe, 'The Sociological Imagination of R. D. Laing', *Sociological Theory*, 24.4 (Dec 2006), 331-52.

⁷⁰ Perril, p. 334.

⁷¹ Gareth Evans and Ben Slater, 'Unfinished Business', in *Entropy*, 2 (Late Summer 1997), pp. 12-17 (p. 13).

itself in a literal sense of *disease*, of not being at ease with the situation or space in which one finds oneself. For Sinclair's (often barely fictionalized) characters, this sense of *dis-ease* initiates a latently psychogeographical response to the kind of total alienation analyzed by Debord. However, as with Lefebvre's condensation of Marx's critical vocabulary, differentiating the experience of alienation from other partially synonymous terms such as estrangement and abandonment into the single word *alienation*, it is important to recall that several interrelated forms of alienation intersect and overlap in Debord's analysis.⁷² Influenced by Marx's penetrating inquiry into the alienated condition of the worker, Laing's Sartrean-inflected concern with psychological alienation similarly overflows its initial boundaries when responding to the disorientating totality of capitalist modernity.⁷³ Navigating the tangled chains of influence and association leading from Marx to Debord and Laing, it becomes possible to trace the wider context in which Sinclair initiates his own idiosyncratic route through the alienating environment of the modern city. As Perril intimates with his ascription of 'shamanism' to Sinclair's Laingian inheritance, unlike the vigorously downplayed irrational side to the SI's psychogeographical research, Sinclair's response to London incorporates explicitly occult dimensions. If alienation, like the commodity form, carries occulted traces of its bewitching impact on social relations within the cities of the spectacle, then it can be argued that Sinclair's turn to different forms of magical thinking and paranoid plotting is less irrational than it first appears. The ambiguity attached to Sinclair's subscription to the validity of such elements in his work further complicates their status. This complication reveals another form of splitting, one that also bears the imprint of Laing: the divided self.

⁷² On Marx's resistance to using the actual word *alienation*, see David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 109.

⁷³ See Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Laing* (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 98-104.

Guru on Primrose Hill

By documenting Allen Ginsberg's attendance at the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation Sinclair gained direct experience of an internationally renowned poet and psychopolitical figurehead self-consciously negotiating Laing's shamanistic voyage between alienation and the liberating role of madness. The opening shot of *Ah, Sunflower* features a vatic Ginsberg sat cross-legged on Primrose Hill reading a version of his poem 'Television was a Baby Crawling Towards that Death Chamber'.⁷⁴ While Ginsberg chants an inventory of telecommunications interconnectivity, immediately behind him the steep green slope of the hill drops down towards London Zoo with the low-level urban skyline in the background punctuated by the exclamatory form of the Post Office Tower.⁷⁵ 'London a small epic in the distance', writes Sinclair.⁷⁶ From a twenty-first century perspective, the Ektachrome vision of Ginsberg, sporting his familiar long black beard and horn-rim glasses, wearing a bright red satin shirt with psychedelic designs hand-decorated by Paul McCartney, gloriously fits the caricature of the Beat poet turned hippie prophet of psychopolitics. Reciprocating in kind to Ginsberg's *plein air* reading, Sinclair captured the ambience of the afternoon in a poem composed at the time:

this kindly crab
hung with his roseate
necklace of chamberpots
squats in the smoke

⁷⁴ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, pp. 41-42.

⁷⁵ The Post Office Tower was completed in 1964 for the General Post Office (GPO). The building was renamed the London Telecom Tower in the early 1980s in advance of the privatisation of the GPO's British Telecommunications services in 1984. As part of a rebranding exercise for the multinational British Telecommunications plc, the building was renamed the BT Tower in 1992.

⁷⁶ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 11.

red-shirt London
a banner to his Om-mmm

washed extremities
to earth; chanting

the bearded shadow
falls over backwards

in straining
to stay straight⁷⁷

The ambiguous ending of the poem conveys an image of the openly bisexual counter-cultural icon toppling from the physical effort ‘to stay straight’ while chanting for an enlightened alternative to the psychic and political violence perpetuated by ‘straight’ society. The different connotations of ‘straight’ reflect a broader ambiguity regarding the counter-culture’s shadowy complicity with the system of mainstream culture supposedly being *countered*.⁷⁸ In conversation with Barry Miles, Sinclair notes that in the United States there is greater awareness of Ginsberg’s ‘value as a political totem’ while in England he’s still ‘the howling madman poet’. Miles sees this ‘poetic’ version of Ginsberg as potentially beneficial, enabling Ginsberg to address a wider and more responsive audience than that delimited by his status in the United States. Miles explains that ‘Allen has been made into a Flower Person. He talks for them rather than for humanity. He shouldn’t be labelled as that.’⁷⁹ For Miles, Ginsberg’s fixation with telecommunications derives from the mental illness that left his mother, Naomi Ginsberg, regularly hospitalized in asylums. Miles explains to Sinclair that suffering from what was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenia, Naomi Ginsberg ‘eventually died

⁷⁷ Iain Sinclair, ‘Allen Ginsberg, Ignite’, in *Flesh Eggs and Scalp Metal: Selected Poems 1970-1987* (London: Paladin, 1989), p. 15. Sinclair tags the poem at the end ‘Primrose Hill, July 1967’.

⁷⁸ On Ginsberg’s representation of gender and sexuality, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, ‘Manhood and its Poetic Projects: The construction of masculinity in the counter-cultural poetry of the U. S. 1950s’, *Jacket*, 31 (October 2006) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/31/duplessis-manhood.html>> [accessed 1 November 2014].

⁷⁹ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 61.

of fear of the mass communications in her own head'.⁸⁰ By confronting the way that society labels as 'mad' that which does not conform to normative behaviour, Ginsberg attempts to disintegrate the internalized repression that Blake so memorably designated as the 'mind-forged manacles' that form beneath the apparent freedom that characterizes life in an evolving democratic society.⁸¹ Occupying the role of 'howling madman poet' allows Ginsberg to manifest his own obsessions without being permanently excluded in an asylum. From the perspective of anti-psychiatry, Ginsberg resists abdicating his ecstatic desires merely to fit in with a mainstream society unreasonably suffering from a self-inflicted sickness incubated by extraordinary levels of repression. He remains able to release his own creativity while simultaneously raising consciousness of the possibility of liberating oneself politically from an oppressive society that, for example, deploys mass communication as a form of control.

In *Landor's Tower*, the first-person character of Norton, Sinclair's fictional alter ego, recalls filming Ginsberg that summer:

As we sat on Primrose Hill, he questioned me about the building that fascinated him most in the bright spread of London: the Post Office Tower. It was a symbol, seen from this druidic eminence, of thrusting sixties' phallicism: paranoia. Barnacled listening dishes processed, as the poet saw it, all the secret voices of the western world into a single band.⁸²

The complex fusion of the tower's symbolic and technological status functions as a synecdoche of the anxieties and ecstasies associated with an era – and a city – where

⁸⁰ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 62.

⁸¹ William Blake, 'London', in *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971) p. 214.

⁸² Sinclair, *Landor's Tower*, p. 86.

sexual liberation was spliced with psychological paranoia concerning the mass media as a vehicle for thought control. In his poem ‘Wales Visitation’, written shortly after the Congress during a trip (in several senses – the poem was written under the influence of LSD) to Llanthony Valley in Wales, Ginsberg describes being ‘160 miles from London’s symmetrical thorned tower’.⁸³ It is as if the spectacular structure of the Post Office Tower marked the central hub around which symbolic visions of London spiral during the swinging sixties. Ginsberg’s fascination with secret transmission is one that Sinclair shares. Layering paranoia over the commercial redevelopment of the city into a seamless representation of itself, surveillance (and its dark shadow, stalking) persistently returns as a dominant theme in Sinclair’s work. Instead of synthesizing ‘secret voices’ into a form of surveillance mobilized by state power and corporate espionage, Sinclair attempts to redeploy these techniques and processes through a random accumulation of often overlooked or discarded source material spliced with a delirium of interpretation that wilfully establishes a parasitical cartography of connections on top of the map of the real. Ginsberg’s candidacy as an alternative source for this quasi-Surrealist compositional methodology is confirmed in *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*. Sinclair’s initial request for an update on Ginsberg’s current poetic output receives a mischievous reply that unintentionally improvises with the title of the film: ‘Ah, scribbling. That’s all’. But then Ginsberg outlines the composition of ‘Wichita Vortex Sutra’, explaining that when making tape recordings while travelling around the United States in a Volkswagen camper with his partner Peter Orlovsky at the wheel:

I include all the relevant data that comes to my attention: the car radio, whatever newspapers are lying around the car, the news broadcasts coming through, the landscapes through the window, the stops for

⁸³ See Allen Ginsberg, ‘Wales Visitation’ in *Collected Poems: 1947-1980* (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 480-82. Llanthony Valley is also a key location in Sinclair’s *Landor’s Tower*.

coffee, the plains or forests or mountains we are passing through, the thoughts going on inside my head, portions of the conversations in the car. In other words, all the simultaneous data of those instants, with the tape-recorder funnelling them, reducing them to language.⁸⁴

Such an approach matches the collagist construction of *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*. In the supplementary film *Debriefing* (made in 2006 and included on the DVD release of *Ah, Sunflower*), Sinclair elucidates how *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* reformatted diverse material and emerged as ‘a diary form of short sort of Polaroid-like portraits of my own life, transcripts of long tapes, photographs, documentary evidence that would appear randomly like found footage, telegrams’. Somewhat disingenuously, Sinclair observes that the lesson he learnt from this approach was that if you ‘put in the whole lot’ then it ‘kind of gives you a structure and a book’. He concludes wryly: ‘I’m still using exactly the same techniques forty years later’.⁸⁵

For Ginsberg, the familial obsession with combating the inherent duplicity of communications technology surfaces throughout *Ah, Sunflower*: whether stressing the artificiality of the filmed interview conducted by Sinclair that has him speaking to viewers remote in space and time (an astute *mise-en-scène* deconstruction rendered slightly redundant for a twenty-first century audience by the placement of a large microphone in the foreground of each shot) or decoding the sensationalist newspaper reports of the summer’s Hyde Park Dope Rallies. On Primrose Hill, the moments leading up to the poetry performance are sparingly situated by Sinclair: ‘We arrange ourselves on the hilltop, where instinct led us, with vague memories of Blake and of

⁸⁴ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 40. Sinclair includes another version of this conversation with Ginsberg in *American Smoke* as part of an extended discussion of the Wichita Vortex. See Iain Sinclair, *American Smoke: Journeys to the End of the Light* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013), pp. 153-55.

⁸⁵ ‘Debriefing’ section of *Ah, Sunflower*. Dir. Robert Klinkert and Iain Sinclair. Picture Press. 2006.

Bardic ritual. We flop out, looking at the city like a map'.⁸⁶ Such processes will recur and expand repeatedly in Sinclair's later texts, revealing an instinctive interaction with the myths and materiality of the city and a mapping of those places responsive to a psychogeographical approach. Blake, whose words already echo in the title of the film, emerges at this early stage as the prototype of a multitude of figures that will haunt Sinclair's densely allusive and hallucinatory representations of London (elsewhere, Sinclair labels Blake 'the godfather of all psychogeographers').⁸⁷

In its directness and spontaneity, working without a script and filming as a small two- or three-person team gathered together barely days before the shoot, *Ah, Sunflower* has a *cinéma vérité* sensibility that partially masks its amateurish aspects, the latter most dramatically manifested when Robert Klinkert shot the first few thousand feet of film with a locked shutter. When the film was processed and the filmmakers informed of the resultant black footage, they had to reshoot several interviews. Crucially, reshooting an interview with Ginsberg, they discover that since their last meeting Ginsberg's lover Peter Orlovsky had had a manic episode back in their New York apartment and had smashed all the windows in the building. Ginsberg had just been informed that Orlovsky had been temporarily incarcerated in the psychiatric wing of Bellevue Hospital. Capturing the reality of being thrown into a situation where Ginsberg is intimately involved in societal responses to behaviour categorized as madness, a situation with which he had long been familiar through his own confinement in a mental hospital and his mother's increasingly lengthy incarcerations, the film records a moment where Ginsberg's capacity to maintain a guru-like persona

⁸⁶Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 40.

⁸⁷ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 214. Blake's echo is so powerful that Ginsberg claimed to have heard it voicing the lines of 'Ah, Sunflower' from the *Songs of Experience* in a Manhattan flophouse a century and a half after his death, spectrally inducting the young Beat into a life of poetry.

suddenly disintegrates.⁸⁸ His responses to Sinclair's prompts for radical propositions that would heal the damaged state of the world mostly consist of him repeating the phrase 'I don't know'. The accident of the locked shutter had forced a repetition of an encounter that could have manifested itself as rehearsed, but, through the unfortunate circumstances surrounding Orlovsky's hospitalization, materialized as the recording of a powerful moment of mental paralysis and doubt inspired by a spontaneous concern for his beloved. Eventually, Ginsberg regains his composure and starts quoting William Burroughs, mirroring the Burroughs quote from *Nova Express* with which he began his talk 'Consciousness and Practical Action' at the Congress.

Although grateful for Ginsberg's generosity with his time, Sinclair also provides a disclaimer to this heroic portrait of the poet as counter-cultural sage. In spite of Sinclair's own publicizing of an expanding cavalcade of diverse talents that resembles Ginsberg's tireless promotion of the work of like-minded Beats (with both reminiscent, *mutatis mutandis*, of the coterie machinations of Ezra Pound), in conversation with Kevin Jackson, Sinclair recalls that Ginsberg had 'never been a hero of mine in the sense that Kerouac and Burroughs had been – I thought he was more of an operator'.⁸⁹ Sinclair's remark reflects Ginsberg's easy passage between the worlds of poetry, politics, and celebrity. A brief history of the red satin shirt that Ginsberg wears in the opening shot of *Ah, Sunflower* (vividly evident on the front and back cover of the reprint of *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*) helps to elucidate the veritable splitting of an already diffuse counter-culture. Driven to Paul McCartney's house in St

⁸⁸ In June 1949, Ginsberg was admitted to the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute in New York where he stayed until February 1950. See Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 143-44.

⁸⁹ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 53. Kerouac's imprint clearly attaches itself to Sinclair's *romans-à-clef*, the barely fictionalized accounts of everyday life in the extended Sinclair community.

John's Wood, Ginsberg finds such well-known celebrities as Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithful already there. According to Barry Miles:

As they talked, Paul had been idly opening boxes of gifts from fans. In one he found a bright red satin shirt, and began to draw paisley patterns, eyes and psychedelic designs on the front of it, using coloured magic markers. When it was time to leave, Paul reached over and gave the shirt to Allen. 'A souvenir of swinging London,' he said.⁹⁰

Was McCartney's fashioning of a 'souvenir from swinging London' an anti-consumerist gesture intended to short-circuit the machinations of capital? Or perhaps it was a type of gift-giving imitative of the ceremonies that had inspired the LI to name their newsletter *Potlatch*? A more convincing interpretation, and one more aligned to a Debordist view of spectacular society, would focus on the gift of the red shirt as a spontaneous act that implicitly conceded the star-studded gathering's complicity in the commercial recuperation of the subversive aesthetics of the psychedelic zeitgeist: an absorption and commodification of images supposedly indicative of the rebellious energies of the counter-culture. Given this context, rather than remotely disclosing a utopian hope for less alienated social relations towards objects as commodities, the knowing irony attached to the impromptu potlatch of the red shirt illuminates a pervasive sense of being implicated in the very system underpinning the mainstream culture supposedly being *countered*. On a broader level, the atmosphere of suspicion and doubt accumulating around such reference points – regarding an authentic rather than a mediated rebellion or an actively oppositional rather than compromised position regarding the political and social constraints of the *status quo* – contributed to the split between those more organized elements of the counter-culture participating at events such as the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation. As a multi-millionaire mega-star

⁹⁰ Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography*, rev. edn. (London: Virgin, 2000), p. 392. On Ginsberg and McCartney as 'the Chas 'n' Dave of the counter-culture' reunited for a duet at the Albert Hall in 1995, see Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 162.

receiving boxes of gifts regularly from adoring fans, a relationship that has absurdist parallels with the inequalities generated by capital, McCartney's lucrative complicity with what Debord delineates as the spectacle hints at another source of alienation:

The individual who in the service of the spectacle is placed in stardom's spotlight is in fact the opposite of an individual, and as clearly the enemy of the individual in himself as of the individual in others. In entering the spectacle as a model to be identified with, he renounces all autonomy in order himself to identify with the general law of obedience to the course of things (SS 61).

Should we resist Debord's wholesale condemnation of such an evacuated individual when applying the thesis to figures with provable counter-cultural connections?

Although it would be difficult for McCartney to authenticate his perceived role as a counter-cultural spokesman, the funding for *Ah, Sunflower* was based on the assumption that as an instantly recognizable representative of the counter-culture he would appear in the documentary. Understanding this micro-history, it is possible to see the 'red-shirt London' of Sinclair's Primrose Hill poem as an ironic emblem of the times. Although Sinclair gained access to Ginsberg, unlike Ginsberg he did not gain access to McCartney. The problem of not being close enough to the image rather than the everyday reality of the counter-culture nearly wrecked the project. From this angle, McCartney embodies Debord's observation that media stars are 'spectacular representations of living human beings, distilling the essence of the spectacle's banality into images of possible roles' (SS 60). While it seems bathetic to turn from McCartney's global fame to Sinclair's slow rise to a far lesser level of cultural prominence, Sinclair would eventually find himself in a position where he also had to confront the issues raised in Debord's critique of media stardom (issues with which Debord would also have to wrestle) regarding complicity with the forces supposedly being opposed.

Documenting the participative ways in which those attending the Congress were occupying the Roundhouse beyond the usual conference limits, Sinclair observed how the building was ‘discovering a function, a use. People are identifying with it. Making it their own territory’.⁹¹ By commenting on the building’s discovery of ‘a function, a use’, Sinclair intersects with the longer history of use, disuse, and re-use that makes the Roundhouse such an emblematic site of modernity.

To the Roundhouse

Completed in 1847, the Roundhouse was designed by the architect Robert Dockray and built by the prolific Birmingham-based firm of Branson & Gwyther. Initially used as a steam engine shed for housing, repairing, and turning the locomotives of the London and Birmingham Railway, its circular structure occupies the corner of Chalk Farm Road and Regents Park Road in Camden Town, approximately one mile uphill from London’s first intercity railway station at Euston.⁹² As a notable example of a mid-Victorian synthesis of architecture and engineering the Roundhouse has been given a Grade II* listing.⁹³ For the Roundhouse, this status partially reflects the distinctive aesthetic qualities of its utilitarian design: the neatly curving wall of yellow stock brick sits beneath a low pitched conical slate roof that is carried inside on

⁹¹ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 18.

⁹² See *Roundhouse: 1846-2006* (London: Roundhouse Trust, 2007), pp. 4-7.

⁹³ On advice from English Heritage, listed buildings are placed on statutory lists of buildings of ‘special architectural or historic interest’ compiled by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In England and Wales, listed buildings are graded to show their relative importance. According to the necessarily open-ended definitions that English Heritage supply, Grade II* stands for ‘particularly important buildings of more than special interest’ and accounts for around 5% of the approximate total of 500,000 buildings listed (a similar percentage to those classified as Grade I).

twenty-four cast-iron Doric columns (the spaces between the columns are defined by the width of the original locomotives) and a framework of curved ribs. In the 1950s, the building was included in the lesser known pantheon of British architecture identified by J. M. Richards and Eric De Maré as belonging to the ‘functional tradition’.⁹⁴ The functional tradition finds its fullest expression in the mills, factories, warehouses, boat sheds, sail lofts, engine houses, and other industrial constructions dating from the late-eighteenth century to the late-nineteenth century. Throughout this period, many examples of functional design were built in which the form of the structure followed its industrial use while simultaneously incorporating strong elements of architectural individuality. However, alongside its architectural interest, the Roundhouse’s Grade II* listing also reflects the cultural significance that the building has acquired over the last five decades as an arts venue.

The Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation, along with the borrowing and hiring of the space to showcase the emerging artistic and musical talents of London’s psychedelic scene, ensured that the Roundhouse became established as one of the capital’s most noteworthy counter-cultural hubs in the late 1960s. But this was not the building’s first significant change in use. Indeed, the Roundhouse is a powerful physical reminder of how technological advances can render specific programmes and functions obsolete. The engine shed was left technically redundant a few years after its completion by the widespread standardization of an increased engine length throughout the railway system. From the second half of the nineteenth century it served as a warehouse for Gilbey’s gin for almost a hundred years before falling into disuse and dereliction in the post-WWII era. Following Wesker’s acquisition of the

⁹⁴ J.M. Richards, *The Functional Tradition in Early Industrial Buildings* (London: Architectural Press, 1958).

lease of the building for Centre 42, the Roundhouse was revived by a series of psychedelic parties, gigs, and club nights such as UFO, Middle Earth, and Implosion.⁹⁵ These events, unrelated to Centre 42, found their apotheosis in the Dialectics of Liberation. After listening and debating with the scheduled speakers, browsing the alternative bookstalls, and partaking in various impromptu lectures, poetry readings, and performances, many of the gathered crowd also ate, drank, and slept within the dilapidated structure. According to one source, the event had so intrigued and entertained local children that one afternoon there was a spontaneous show of Flower Power solidarity. The children paraded around the Roundhouse handing out ‘monster holly-hocks’ liberated from a neighbourhood garden.⁹⁶ However romanticized, the image is suggestive of the ways in which the event inspired an intensity of audience participation not achieved by its scheduled use as the base for Wesker’s Centre 42. A contemporary report in *Peace News* captures the energy:

I doubt if Centre 42 will see as much real creativity in ten years as we saw in these two weeks [. . .] And I doubt if and when the Roundhouse has become Arnold Wesker’s People’s Palace of Culture, the local Chalk Farm kids will come within spitting distance of it. Or if they do, it will probably be to break a window or chalk rude words on the newly smart walls, not to recite poems and hand out flowers.⁹⁷

The reference to ‘Wesker’s People’s Palace of Culture’ echoes an earlier critique of Centre 42 that identified the Roundhouse as an inherent part of the problem.

In 1964, the architectural critic and historian Reyner Banham wrote a short essay entitled ‘People’s Palaces’ in which he argued that ‘by deciding to immure themselves in that made-over, makeshift monument from an OK period in the past’ the Centre 42

⁹⁵ See Ann Scanlon, *Those Tourists Are Money: The Rock’n’Roll Guide To Camden* (London: Tristia, 1997), pp. 44-56. See also *Roundhouse: 1846-2006*, pp. 12-19.

⁹⁶ See Green, p. 210.

⁹⁷ A. M. Fearon, reporting for *Peace News*, 25 August 1967, quoted in Green, p. 208.

committee confirmed suspicions regarding the patronizing and patrician aura of ‘a cultural soup-kitchen approach for the under-privileged’ that had attached itself to the project. In characteristically effervescent prose, the technophile Banham elaborated his concerns:

But there it is – the Camden Town railway roundhouse has the accolade of inclusion in J. M. Richards’s *The Functional Tradition* (the industrial revolution decontaminated by Georgian Group sentimentality) and its location on the ground is a perfect topographical symbol of hand-out culture: up the hill are the eggheads of Hampstead, east and south are the deprived ethnic minorities of Camden and Kentish Towns. This one could just about stand if there were striking proof that the building were rewardingly adaptable to its proposed function, but in spite of the rhetoric in the empurpled brochure, the plans drawn up by the Architects’ Co-Partnership offer a shockingly small return for an estimated outlay of 300,000 nicker. Honestly, any organisation that proposes to spend that kind of money – the brand-new Chichester theatre cost half as much – to lumber itself with a bandaged-up load of Victoriana needs its head examined.⁹⁸

Banham’s suggestion that the Centre 42 committee ‘needs its head examined’ for selecting the Roundhouse playfully foreshadows the sobering debates on madness at the Congress. But his wider concerns with ‘establishment types doing culture on the poor’ have a deeper and more psychogeographical application.⁹⁹ Banham positions the Roundhouse as a *plaque tournante* at one of the ambient frontiers of an economically and culturally divided city. Near the start of *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*, Sinclair describes his recent move with his wife Anna Sinclair from a single room in the expensive neighbourhood of leafy and lofty Hampstead down the hill to Belsize Park: ‘A drop in altitude, a plunge in real estate values. But a gain in tent space.’ The Roundhouse was located slightly further down that same slope, a further plunge into

⁹⁸ Reyner Banham, ‘People’s Palaces’, *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 105-08 (p. 106, p. 107). The essay originally appeared in *New Statesman*, 68, 7 August 1964, 191-92. The £300,000 budget for Centre 42 would more than double by the end of the decade.

⁹⁹ Banham, p. 107.

what was then a less wealthy territory. By the end of the decade, Sinclair found that there was no chance of getting ‘a footing in Hampstead or Belsize Park’ so he ended up carrying his manuscript ‘off to a communal house in Hackney’ where he decided to publish it himself.¹⁰⁰ This move to a part of London relatively unknown to Sinclair at the time would launch an extraordinary exploration of the extended neighbourhood.

In *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*, whenever his observations turn towards territorial specifics, Sinclair demonstrates an impulse that will prove to be a dominant feature of his subsequent psychogeographical surveys of London: the urge to decode the bewildering ways in which certain places seem to produce an ambience capable of recalibrating psychological reactions in those dwelling therein or even merely drifting through. Another aspect of this proto-psychogeography involves determining how an event has the capacity to imprint its mark upon a place, an imprint that a sensitized researcher will be able to decipher as a factor in the production of a specific ambience. In the case of the Roundhouse, Sinclair has discussed how the Dialectics of Liberation ‘infected’ the neighbourhood and beyond, not just for its two-week duration when local children and London’s evolving counter-culture mingled with an international crowd of political dissenters, but in its long-term affect on the immediate area between Chalk Farm and Camden Town underground stations and through subsequent counter-cultural projects that peppered the wider city.¹⁰¹ For Sinclair, the events he had documented at the Roundhouse led to the development of Camden as an ‘alternative’ area with its vibrant street market and specialist shops (including the Compendium bookshop, another important *plaque tournante* to be mapped alongside its influential

¹⁰⁰ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, p. 9, p. 70. The latter quotation regarding the move to Hackney comes from Sinclair’s 2006 postscript.

¹⁰¹ See ‘Debriefing’ section of *Ah, Sunflower*. Sinclair’s thoughts on the viral influence of the Congress were voiced forty years after the fact, standing on the mezzanine level of the foyer in the recently renovated (and ambiently sterilized) Roundhouse.

precursors from the 1960s such as Better Books and Indica – the latter featuring in *Ah, Sunflower* during Sinclair’s visit to interview Barry Miles). In his introduction to a collection of talks from the *Dialectics of Liberation*, David Cooper covered similar terrain:

I think what our Congress was all about was not the dishing up of solutions to world problems already prepared, but an opportunity to think the thing out together. This is why the ‘principal speakers’ mixed so freely and spontaneously with the ‘audience’. It is why so many young people actually took to living in the Roundhouse and then took their seminars out into local pubs, cafés and public places. This was really the founding event of the Antiuniversity of London which now functions full-time, carrying over the spirit of the Congress in what may be a permanent form.¹⁰²

Although the Anti-University did not last as long as Cooper had hoped, ‘the spirit of the Congress’ animated other ventures ranging from free schools to the spread of occupying – or ‘squatting’ – abandoned or condemned buildings across the city and beyond.¹⁰³

To return briefly to Wesker, his response to what he perceived as the libertarian usurpers that had taken over the Roundhouse was summed up in the title of his article ‘Delusions of Floral Grandeur’. Composed shortly after the conclusion of the Congress that had helped to redefine the Roundhouse as a counter-cultural hub with a radically different agenda from that of the ‘People’s Palace’ of Centre 42, the article appeared in *Envoy*, a short-lived glossy monthly (subtitled ‘An International Magazine of Leisure’). In the article, Wesker registered his scepticism regarding the integrity of

¹⁰² Cooper, *Dialectics of Liberation*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰³ On the Anti-University of London and its connection to the *Dialectics of Liberation* (and to the founding of the Compendium bookshop in Camden Town), see Miles, *London Calling*, pp. 256-61.

those who associated themselves with ‘flower power’.¹⁰⁴ In an interview with Ronald Hayman a few years later, Wesker elaborated on his desire for people to know him by his life as well as his writing:

At a time when there is so much fraudulence and personality-cultifying and a general air of dishonesty, even in the areas supposed to be free and liberated, brave and honest – by which I mean the pop areas and the hip scene – I find in myself a compulsion to try as much as possible not to cheat and to let people know about me personally.¹⁰⁵

Displaying a mixture of animosity and scepticism towards the probity of the counter-culture as well as to more mainstream political areas, Wesker appeared to be venting some of the frustration attached to the unexpected turn of events at the Roundhouse. But his criticism filtered into a growing pool of negative commentary emanating from both sides of the political spectrum in relation to the cultist tendencies and phony rhetoric associated with a faux revolutionary counter-culture.

Aside from the documentary interviews with the speakers at the Congress, *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* is populated by a motley assortment of Sinclair’s friends and associates. In his account of this group’s often uneasy interactions, Sinclair mixes an edited realism (through transcriptions of taped conversations, photographs, and stark diary descriptions of people and events) with a romantic mythologizing that positions the more self-obsessive (and recreationally self-medicated) as being poised on the edge of future brilliance in some unspecified field or else facing a rapidly violent descent into the realms of anonymity, madness, or an early death. In *Bomb Culture* (a book whose evocatively charged title compresses these matters), Jeff Nuttall expresses more direct concerns for active engagement over drop-out passivity in relation to the

¹⁰⁴ Arnold Wesker, ‘Delusions of Floral Grandeur’, in *Envoy: An International Magazine of Leisure*, December 1967, pp. 23-26 (p. 23).

¹⁰⁵ Hayman, p. 3.

prevalence of hallucinogenics in the underground scene, stating that ‘drugs are an excellent strategy against society but a poor alternative to it’. Nuttall extends the links between alienation, liberation, and violence, describing the underground scene as being ‘accumulatively negative, necessarily so, the destruction of the destroyers’. But he is also aware that this variation of a negation of negation, rather than contributing to the dialectics of liberation under discussion at the Roundhouse, remains in danger of privileging ‘a limp concern for pure spirit that is as life-destroying as square materialism’.¹⁰⁶

The debates at the Roundhouse reflected the perils of failing to emerge from a psychedelic haze of self-liberation and the dangers of such metonymic reductions as ‘flower power’ being absorbed as marketable narratives within the wider culture. Battling to maintain his intellectual and political integrity in the face of the banalizing influence of the media in simplifying his position as a major influence on the counter-culture, Herbert Marcuse began his talk on ‘Liberation from the Affluent Society’ by voicing his happiness at the presence at the Roundhouse of ‘so many flowers’.

Whether these flowers appeared in the form of locally plundered hollyhocks, small garlands worn in the hair, painted daisies and sunflowers adorning faces and clothes, or even in a more metaphorical shape in the youth planted around the building, Marcuse qualified his happiness by reminding the audience that ‘flowers, by themselves, have no power whatsoever, other than the power of men and women who protect them and take care of them against aggression and destruction’. For Marcuse ‘all dialectic is liberation’, a statement that rendered the title of the Congress tautologous: ‘in what sense is all dialectic liberation? It is liberation from the repressive, from a bad, a false system’. Marcuse explained that by intentionally

¹⁰⁶ Nuttall, p. 238, p. 241.

deploying such moral philosophical terms as ‘bad’ and ‘false’ he was attempting to locate his critique in an objective realm where the goal of liberating humanity from its enslavement to the ideological forces of capitalism had actual consequences. Marcuse argued that such an approach prepares the ground not just for the necessary social and political transformations that would negate the repressiveness of established society, but also for more fundamental changes that would enable a transvaluation of values on a qualitative level.¹⁰⁷ Critically, Marcuse differentiates between quantitative change and qualitative change. The former can alleviate intolerable conditions of existence while maintaining the parameters of established society: growth and progress can lead to reform or even revolution within that same ‘bad’ or ‘false’ system. But for such a revolution to fulfil its liberative potential it has to be conjoined with a qualitative change that necessitates a change of the very system as a whole. The problem outlined by Marcuse in his Roundhouse talk centres on the difficulty of establishing a desire for qualitative change in an affluent society in which ‘liberation is apparently without a mass basis’ (note the utopian spark in the use of ‘apparently’), a society in which the material and cultural needs are largely satisfied both at the expense of distant others and at the expense of liberating oneself from the overarching system of repression orchestrated by the social and economic structure that conditions those in the affluent society to act as consumers.¹⁰⁸ For Marcuse, the ‘Great Refusal’ that has spread around the globe linking disparate groups of disaffiliated youth rebelling in various ways against the repressive conformism *and* the recuperated radicalism of preceding generations (and their own peers), illustrates a desire within the affluent society to change the system as a whole. As Marcuse stresses, such a change has to come from within the system. But in a technocratic consumer society the initial revolutionary

¹⁰⁷ Herbert Marcuse, ‘Liberation from the Affluent Society’, in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, pp. 175-92 (p. 175, pp. 178-9).

¹⁰⁸ Marcuse, ‘Liberation from the Affluent Society’, p. 176.

agent of that change is no longer the mass of exploited workers. Rather than insurgency rising from the factory floor, Marcuse's account of the environment formed through a liberative aesthetic loosely maps onto the Situationist idea of unitary urbanism: a liberating space that transcends the subjective production of distinctions between work and play, aesthetics and politics, and other pseudo-polarities that refract a multiplicity of divisions within the capitalist system.¹⁰⁹ From this perspective, the identification and cultivation of a utopian impulse rather than a utopian plan is required to initiate a series of qualitative changes capable of overturning the alienation of a society dominated by the commodity form.

If a dialectical fix was needed to keep the fragile utopian bubbles of the Congress floating merrily in the air then it gradually became obvious that when trapped in a circular debating chamber such effervescence could explode. Although the Congress was subtitled 'Towards a Demystification of Violence', there existed a confusion (if not a clash) of perspectives between those who subscribed to the liberative philosophies of the anti-psychiatrists (and figures like Ginsberg) and those who aligned themselves with the revolutionary politics of activists such as Stokely Carmichael. In his talk on Black Power, Carmichael accused the gathered intelligentsia of 'intellectual masturbation' when it came to changing the world through a gradual shift towards a more liberated consciousness, emphasizing that the history of black experience in a white society 'demonstrates that the reward for trying to peacefully co-exist has been the physical and psychological murder of our peoples'. Carmichael reinforced the necessity for violence to combat a greater violence: 'I don't understand how the white West can ever talk against violence. They are the most

¹⁰⁹ For a critical account of Marcuse's liberative aesthetics, see Timothy J. Lukes, *The Flight into Inwardness: An Exposition and Critique of Herbert Marcuse's Theory of Liberative Aesthetics* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985).

violent people on the face of the earth. They have used violence to get everything they have'.¹¹⁰ On the question of violence, Jonathon Green sums up the situation:

the much-debated violence seems to have been romanticised, not 'demystified'; no questions had been answered, although many had been aired, and the 'mind-blowers' seemed no nearer the 'revolutionary left'. Still, for the contemporary counter-culture, the Congress would herald a definite new twist. The flower children would gradually shed their petals and start toughening up; many would make a definite move away from 'peace' and into the world of confrontation.¹¹¹

Yet, socially and spatially, the Congress was also significant as a symbol of counter-cultural unity, a meeting of minds between various key figures and the gathered crowds. Angela Davis, a radical activist and former student of Marcuse's who also attended the Congress, explained that the Roundhouse's original function as a locomotive turntable:

served as an overarching metaphor for the gathering's collective ambitions – to turn the motive power of radical intellectuals and activists in the direction of social revolution, or what Marcuse called 'qualitative change'. Many of the young participants in the two-week conference decided to set up camp in the building, turning the congress into a brief utopian experiment in collaborative theorizing buttressed by cooperative living arrangements.¹¹²

If the transformation of the Roundhouse during July 1967 offered tantalizing glimpses of an alternative way of structuring everyday life, tapping into the kinds of liberated spaces theorized by Lefebvre and Debord under the respective labels 'moments' and

¹¹⁰ Stokely Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, pp. 150-74 (p. 166, p. 169).

¹¹¹ Green, pp. 210-11. For a wider contextual account of these issues, see Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*, rev. edn. (London: Methuen, 1997), especially pp. 148-58.

¹¹² Angela Y. Davis, 'Marcuse's Legacies', in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed by John Abromeit and William Mark Cobb (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 43-50 (p. 47).

‘situations’ (a differentiation that proved to be one of the factors in their own intellectual split), it also demonstrated a veritable split in the counter-culture.¹¹³

Watching the ‘tribes drift in’, Sinclair, attuned to the juxtaposition of railways and sunflowers in beat literature, realizes that ‘the Roundhouse is a good location for this event. Big and empty. A stone circus tent. With wasteground at the back for the landscape heads. Dirty sunflowers wilting under the grit that drops from the skies’.¹¹⁴ He returns to this theme again a few days later: ‘On the wasteground, the backlot of the Roundhouse: this is the area I feel most comfortable with. Space. Sky. We are all happier in the open. We draw comfort from the brick roundness of the building itself. Like a belly. An oven for baking bread.’¹¹⁵ A flashback to such scenes in Sinclair’s *Downriver* raises a series of question marks indicative of a fluctuating uncertainty or even incredulity on the part of the narrator regarding the reliability of his memory: ‘I remember in 1967 talking with R. D. Laing in a waste garden alongside the Roundhouse. A garden? The Roundhouse? R. D. Laing?’ Disregarding, for the moment, Sinclair’s complex narrative position within the novel, the hesitant recollection of the Roundhouse quickly stabilizes into a memory of Laing’s ‘messianic intensity’ as he described an ‘artist who *chose* to live in Manhattan, because he liked feeling his lungs grind to tissue, black lips, fevers’. Contemplating Laing’s evocation of an urban environment as a catalyst for disease, Sinclair recalls how ‘remote it sounded’ in the sunlight energizing the tree-lined streets of Belsize Park and Primrose Hill. Similarly, Sinclair’s difficulty in immediately accepting the reality of the

¹¹³ See Henri Lefebvre, ‘The Theory of Moments’, in *Critique of Everyday Life Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 340-58, and Guy Debord, ‘Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action’ and ‘Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation’, in Knabb, pp. 17-25; pp. 43-45.

¹¹⁴ See Allen Ginsberg, ‘Sunflower Sutra’, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 138-39.

¹¹⁵ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, pp. 12-13, p. 27.

remembered conversation with Laing springs from an acknowledgement of how ‘remote’ that day at the Roundhouse sounded from the perspective of two decades later: ‘Are we not all, more or less now, sick? Who cling so stubbornly to the cities? Sicker on some days than others. *Noticeably* sick. Unable to stand up, retching. Sick in the head’.¹¹⁶ As a savagely comic writer contemplating the end of the 1980s, Sinclair does not have to articulate the relentless integration of the forces of capital into almost all aspects of urban life through a Debordist theory of an integrated spectacle (or through a Jamesonian conception of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism).¹¹⁷ Instead, he summons up a matching rhetoric of ubiquitous sickness that both inspires a recollection of the Roundhouse and a recognition that on a cultural level the malignant consequences of the spread of capital had fundamentally obliterated the ill-disciplined vitality of the counter-culture as it existed in the late 1960s. Laing’s description of the artist choosing to dwell in the diseased city is transcribed in *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* from the tape of the Roundhouse interview. Curiously, for a reading concerned with Sinclair’s nascent psychogeography, in the recollections that resurface in *Downriver*, Sinclair omits Laing’s explanation of why the artist, like others of his generation, felt that he had to be in the ‘hell’ of Manhattan. According to Laing, these people were ‘attempting to discover the original layout of the land under the cities. What were the sacred spots’.¹¹⁸

On his later pedestrian excursions through the varying ambiances of the city, Sinclair sensitizes himself to the ‘sacred spots’ through intensive research into the various tributaries of London’s actual and imagined histories. In project after project, walk

¹¹⁶ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 301.

¹¹⁷ See Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹¹⁸ Sinclair, *Kodak Mantra Diaries*, pp. 31-32. The artist referenced by Laing is the prolific French illustrator Tomi Ungerer. Sinclair returns to this discussion with Laing in *Ghost Milk*. See Iain Sinclair, *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011), p. 333.

after lengthy walk, this growing reservoir of information enables Sinclair to register numerous associations between his developing narrative and those already completed, a process further elaborated by research undertaken after each excursion.

Consequently, an ever-increasing number of places and events accumulate into a dense network of spatial and temporal alignments (and misalignments) with the potential to reveal layers of neglected significance. If the psychogeography undertaken by the LI and SI provides one model for this practice, and the poetics of Ginsberg and Olson provide a related model for the compositional process that accompanies this practice, it is worth reiterating that the Surrealists provide another port of entry for both.

Responding to a question on the extent of his interest in the Situationists, Sinclair has affirmed that although he ‘read about them as it was going on in the ‘60s’ it did not exactly correspond to his way of working. He was ‘more interested in Louis Aragon, the Surrealist *derivé* and all of that’.¹¹⁹ As with its initially heady impact on the conception of Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, Aragon’s influence, particularly through a work like *Paris Peasant*, is apparent in Sinclair’s documentation of the surreal juxtapositions surrounding places and communities in danger of disappearing (Sinclair’s account of the destruction of the Manor Garden allotments by the redevelopment of the Lea Valley in the lead up to the London 2012 Olympics carries resonant echoes of Aragon’s account of the Passage de l’Opéra shortly before its demolition in the 1920s).¹²⁰ However, a different Surrealist methodology can also be detected in Sinclair’s work, one with a thematic correlation to alienation, madness, and psychogeography. Sinclair’s compulsion for stitching together a web of often

¹¹⁹ See Mark Pilkington and Phil Baker, ‘City Brain: Iain Sinclair Interview, *Fortean Times*, 186 (2002), pp. 8-10.

¹²⁰ See Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, pp. 27-123. On the influence of Aragon on Benjamin’s development of his *passagenwerk*, see Benjamin’s letter to Adorno in Theodor. W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence: 1928-1940*, ed. by Henri Lonitz and trans. by Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 87-92. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1999). On the Manor Garden Allotments and the London 2012 Olympics, see Sinclair, *Ghost Milk*.

intangible associations has a paranoid-critical dimension similar to that proposed by Salvador Dali.¹²¹ By interviewing the anti-psychiatrists and filming their talks at the Roundhouse, Sinclair encountered ways of thinking through the network of alienated social relations in which madness was positioned and then split into both symptom and cure (exemplified in Laing's theory of 'breakdown' and 'break-through').

Subsequently, Sinclair's imaginative mapping of the city could be viewed as a strategically schizophrenic approach to existing representations of the territory. At times, like Dali, Sinclair revels in an interpretive delirium that *seems* like madness: a simulation that weakly echoes the hellish world of the paranoid schizophrenic.

For a brief period during the summer of 1967 the dilapidated Roundhouse became a fittingly dynamic hub where sparks of revolutionary utopian potential could be struck and visions of an alternative future could be experienced by those gathered under the banner of the Dialectics of Liberation. Admittedly, the contradictions and conflicts that permeated the Congress threaten to render such a broadly sympathetic perspective as too simplistic (if not also naïvely idealistic). In spite of its failure to produce a coherent political movement or programme, and for all its subsequent spectacular history of dereliction and use, the Roundhouse remains an example of a politically significant *plaque tournante*, a space that retains traces of a radical past, however remote those traces may now appear given its twenty-first century restoration and sterile rebranding as a leading arts venue (supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of over £3.5 million).¹²² Directly encountering the splintering utopian experiment of the Congress, Sinclair engaged with several of the leading counter-cultural activists of the period. Talking to Ginsberg, he said, gave him 'material to think about for

¹²¹ See Salvador Dali, 'The Conquest of the Irrational', in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dali*, ed. and trans. by Haim N. Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), pp. 262-72.

¹²² See *Roundhouse: Guide 1846-2006*.

years'.¹²³ But as his later work shows, it was not just Ginsberg that generated future material from those restless times. The related themes explored in this chapter, such as the different kinds of splits that find their source in the psycho-social relationship between alienation, madness, and violence in a society increasingly structured at every level by the commodity form, or the development of a psychogeographical sensitivity to the shifts in ambience between the culturally, economically, and politically resonant spaces of the restless city, become recurrent motifs in Sinclair's work over the following decades. Retrospectively, *Ah, Sunflower* and *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* illuminate the subdued beginnings of what would become a variant London psychogeography. To examine how Sinclair amplifies these psychogeographical traces, it is necessary to move, as Sinclair himself moved, from the Roundhouse to the streets of London's East End.

¹²³ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 288.

4) MAPPING THE LINES OF INFLUENCE: PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND THE URBAN LABYRINTH

London is a city split in more ways than those described by the spectacular techniques of separation analysed by Debord or by the schizophrenic alienation debated at the *Dialectics of Liberation*. Navigation, always a difficult art, increases in complexity when the field being traversed is a metropolis where a turbulent confluence of spatial and historical forces has shaped the landscape into an intricate network of streets and buildings that finds a popular analogue in the figure of the labyrinth. ‘Repeated walks, circuits, attempts to navigate – to get to the heart of the labyrinth – proved frustrating. There was no centre’, writes Sinclair in *Lights Out for the Territory* after undertaking a series of excursions across London, excursions that the fledgling psychogeographer describes as attempts to navigate ‘the secret history of the city’.¹ Historically, by separating the realms of court and government from the realm of finance, London developed not one but two focal sites around which the labyrinthine spread of the capital could be said to be ‘centred’.² However, the notable divide between the City of Westminster in the West End and the financial centre of the City of London abutting the East End is only remotely reflected in the strange cases of doubling and splitting that haunt Sinclair’s narratives and that frustrate his attempts to penetrate into the centre of the urban labyrinth. Sinclair’s mapping of the secret (and secreted) histories of London presents a divided city ruptured by various forms of cleavage that shape the differentiated microclimates of what Debord termed the ‘psychogeographical relief’ of

¹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 107.

² For a comprehensive introduction to the formative importance of the divide between the trading city and the seat of government within London’s growth as a major city, see Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *London: The Unique City*, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

the territory.³ If, on a broad scale, the river Thames supplies a tangible boundary differentiating the north and south of the city, the precise geographical divide between east and west is less clearly defined. Yet the river has its part to play in this division too, contributing to the history of geographical imbalance in London's socio-economic equilibrium. The Thames carries waste downriver, flowing from west to east.

Prevailing winds follow a similar trajectory, blowing residential smoke and industrial fumes away from the west. Throughout the Georgian and Victorian periods those with the necessary purchasing power preferred to settle in the more salubrious speculative developments of the aristocratic estates that clustered around the fashionable vortex of the West End, nestling close to the palaces of monarchs and politicians.⁴ Inevitably, such generalizations simplify the street level complexities of London's development and its socio-spatial divisions. In 1889, the philanthropist and pioneering social researcher Charles Booth began publishing his multi-volume work *Life and Labour of the People of London*, an attempt to establish an accurate description of working life in London. This massive undertaking involved Booth and a team of researchers conducting an extended study of the social and economic conditions of the city's population on a street by street basis, generating statistical evidence from data gathered by direct investigations and from the comments of a range of interviewees. Booth, a prosperous businessman, had been prompted into coordinating this innovative work of social science to prove that the estimates of other social reformers that up to a quarter of London's population lived in poverty were exaggerated. His exhaustive research revealed that the actual levels of poverty were even higher than previously estimated, with up to a third of Londoners living in what were recognized as

³ Debord, 'Theory of the *dérive*', p. 22.

⁴ See John Summerson, *Georgian London* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). For a historical summary of the causes of 'London's tilted social geography', see also Michael Rustin, 'Perspectives on East London', in *Rising in the East: The Regeneration of East London*, ed. by Tim Butler and Michael Rustin (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), pp. 1-19 (p. 2).

unacceptable conditions. In his *Descriptive Map of London Poverty 1889*, Booth memorably coded London's streets in seven colours ranging from Black (signifying 'Lowest Class. Vicious, semi-criminal') to a golden Yellow ('Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy').⁵ Although the terminology and the colour selection representing the broad class stratification of the era perpetuate their own set of prejudices and generalities, and while Booth's map and his subsequent statistical analysis indicates that although generally there was a higher level of poverty in the East End than in the West End, the spatial distribution of poverty revealed a city fissured by economic disparities that negated any simple geographical dichotomy. Booth documented comparable levels of poverty in St Giles – a West End 'rookery' – as in larger East End neighbourhoods such as Whitechapel.⁶ However, throughout the nineteenth century, the gradual industrialization of what came to be known as the 'East End' into a landscape of docks and warehouses supporting the world's most frenetic global port (and booming imperialist economy) made the area, in Roy Porter's succinct description, 'a magnet for the destitute and the displaced from all over Britain and the world'.⁷ The East End became a populous multicultural zone in which a fear of otherness, intensified by the impenetrability of the built environment, constantly threatened to erupt into localized violence. At least that was a popular conception partly perpetrated by lurid traveller's tales that revelled in depicting the East End's crumbling tenements, swarming slums, rampant crime, alcoholism, prostitution and violence: the latter elements achieving a bloody apogee in the late-Victorian era with the emergence of Jack the Ripper.⁸ Although selective redevelopment and fragmented

⁵ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 9 vols (Macmillan: London, 1892-97).

⁶ Charles Booth, 'Life and Labour of the People in London: First Results of An Inquiry Based on the 1891 Census. Opening Address of Charles Booth, Esq., President of the Royal Statistical Society. Session 1893-94', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Dec., 1893), 557-593.

⁷ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 268.

⁸ For a concise summary of 'the image and the reality' of the East End in the late-nineteenth century, see the opening chapter of William J. Fishman's *East End 1888* (London: Hanbury, 2001), pp. 1-24. See

gentrification have cosmetically altered the image of the East End in recent decades, in the early twenty-first century the borough of Tower Hamlets has remained an area with significantly high levels of deprivation including the highest level of child poverty in the UK.⁹ While some eastern areas (including the village of Hackney) retained a degree of bourgeois respectability throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rapid expansion via unregulated building and mass immigration saw those neighbourhoods located immediately east of the financial hub becoming home to successive waves of London's poorest residents.

Towards the end of the 1960s, priced out of the neighbourhoods north of the Roundhouse in which he had been living, Sinclair moved with his wife Anna eastwards across the city into a communal house in Albion Square in the relatively inexpensive neighbourhood of Hackney. In 1969, the couple bought a terraced house in an adjacent street, a purchase that was partly funded by the proceeds earned from the completion of *Ah, Sunflower*. The impact upon Sinclair's work inaugurated by these simple biographical details cannot be overestimated. Forty years later, still occupying the same house, Sinclair produced *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*. Pitched as a 'documentary fiction' that provides a personal record of his extended residency in the borough, the book is a testament to the house on Albion Drive that has been the central *plaque tournante* around which Sinclair's life has turned.¹⁰ For a writer with a weakness for compulsive associationism, the street name itself offers a

also Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2000).

⁹ See *The Well-being of Children in the UK*, ed. by Jonathan Bradshaw (London: Save the Children, 2002) and 'Child Poverty in Tower Hamlets: Research Briefing 2013' (London: HMRC, 2013). The borough of Tower Hamlets was formed in 1965 when the former metropolitan boroughs of Bethnal Green, Poplar, and Stepney were amalgamated. Tower Hamlets includes the neighbourhoods of Whitechapel and Spitalfields that border the City of London.

¹⁰ Iain Sinclair, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), p. 579.

generative collision of sources: the Miltonic and Blakean resonance of ‘Albion’ fortuitously conjoined with the Freudian ‘Drive’ as if referencing an instinctual poetic urge to map a more radical and mythical version of actually existing England. The immediate neighbourhood gave its name to Sinclair’s independent publishing venture: Albion Village Press.

Sinclair’s oppositional move eastwards can be ascribed to a combination of economic necessity (affordable housing) and the pioneer spirit habitually attached to the enterprising urban bohemian (tuning in with likeminded acquaintances to the creative potential of a culturally diverse environment).¹¹ If the move to Hackney signalled a new phase in the slow cycle of recolonization that would eventually transform many of London’s commercially neglected quarters back into middle-class enclaves, it also indicated that to sustain a degree of legitimacy in opposing the spread of gentrification and redevelopment that followed in succeeding decades, Sinclair would have to tread lightly through the labyrinth of psychogeographical associations being established from his new home. In diluted forms more palatable to the market (heritage walks, blue plaque pilgrimages, architectural tours) these associations would become implicated in the relentless commercialization of London’s lesser known zones: the Xerox principle generating distant copies of the kind of creatively paranoid theses purveyed in the experimental poetry published by Albion Village Press during the 1970s. Sinclair and his neighbouring circle of friends documented the communal life of this new bohemia in diary-like home movies that ranged from the direct logging of place to more lyrical footage inspired by the techniques of the avant-garde film-maker Stan Brakhage. Many of the characteristic formal and syntactical devices found in

¹¹ For a geographically germane discussion of how people ‘seek out people like themselves in order to reinforce the cultural and political values they have acquired during their formative years’, see Tim Butler, *Rising in the East*, pp. 81-107 (p. 101).

Sinclair's writing – superimposition, montage, single frame close-ups, rapid editing between images – migrate from this experience of experimental film-making.¹² Revealing footage from this period resurfaced thirty years later in the film *London Orbital*. Citing the opening line of Sinclair's voiceover: 'My London had been trashed, balkanised', Paul Dave contrasts the relaxed enactment of private fictions in public space expressed in the earlier images from the end of the 1960s with the subsequent loss of that capacity for a 'comfortable co-existence of the film-makers and their world' in subsequent decades when successive Conservative and Labour governments supported the deregulation of financial markets and the consolidation of a globally dominant neoliberal consensus, a process that repositioned London as a financial centre enmeshed within labyrinthine transnational networks of globalization (and implicated in the inequitable and often disastrous consequences of uneven geographical and social development across a range of scales from the local to the global).¹³ The content of the earlier images, such as a young Anna Sinclair ignoring the camera while wandering amongst the shoppers and stall-holders of Ridley Road market in Hackney – playing in the urban labyrinth – coupled with their degraded quality, represent 'the fragile processes of memory' pitched against the 'subsequently trashed space of the past'.¹⁴ Partly arising from an interest in both the Black Mountain College and the romanticized camaraderie of the Beats, but also traceable through a more explicitly utopian tradition, Sinclair's participation in a like-minded community remains a notable feature of his work, most obviously in his numerous collaborations with other artists and writers. The domestic and communal aspect surfaces in the title

¹² See Jackson, *The Verbals*, pp. 85-86.

¹³ Paul Dave, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 147-48. On the emergence of London as a global city that provides a support structure for the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century neoliberal consensus (and the multiscalar social, political, and geographical implications of that process), see Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Dave, p. 148.

and content of *Back Garden Poems*, the first of Sinclair's self-published volumes of poetry. *Back Garden Poems* includes prose vignettes that document daily life in the house and the surrounding community as well as short poems such as 'Allen Ginsberg, Ignite' discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁵ What Ginsberg helps to 'ignite' through his participation at the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation and his earlier appearance at the famous Royal Albert Hall poetry reading in 1965 is a counter-cultural explosion within the avant-garde poetry scene of poets and small press publishers that would contribute to the so-called British Poetry Revival of the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁶ Within Sinclair's oeuvre, the conjunction of the everyday with some of the more esoteric concerns of the counter-culture finds its first extended expression in *Lud Heat*.

Published by Sinclair's own Albion Village Press in 1975, *Lud Heat* can be retrospectively categorized as a prototype for later versions of London psychogeography. A series of preoccupations and processes that become increasingly associated with the psychogeographical in the 1990s, particularly in relation to Sinclair's influential work during that period, appear in nascent form in the poem. Examining these formative elements in the mapping of a series of London *plaques tournantes* within the urban labyrinth enables this study to deepen the comparative analysis initiated in previous chapters between Situationist psychogeography and Sinclair's later variant. The labyrinth, as a significant figure that surfaces both in Sinclair's work and in the work of the SI, provides an additional layer of correspondence that can be analyzed in relation to a range of navigational techniques for rethinking the city and urban experience that can be provisionally distinguished by

¹⁵ See Sinclair, *Flesh Eggs & Scalp Metal*, pp. 11-17.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive account of this period that also addresses Sinclair's position within the British Poetry Revival, see Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents, 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 35-76.

their capacity to produce maps, models, and pathways in a psychogeographical mode.

Mapping the Lines of Influence

The opening line of Sinclair's *Lud Heat* establishes a cartographic momentum: 'The old maps present a skyline dominated by church towers; those horizons were differently punctured, so that the subservience of the grounded eye, and the division of the city by parish, was not disguised'.¹⁷ These 'old maps' illustrate how the territorial balance of power relations were physically reproduced through the ecclesiastical architecture of the city. In both scale and profusion, the church towers dominated the skyline, legibly dividing the city into a series of discrete parishes. This legibility is inverted in *Lud Heat* as Sinclair begins to map what he presents as London's buried lines of influence and power. The juxtaposition of *Lud* and *Heat* in the book's title reflects this concern: *Lud*, a mythological king of Britain, is purported to be buried under Ludgate (while his name has been proposed as a possible source for the etymology of the place-name London); *heat*, for Sinclair, is a recurrent term that alludes to the different kinds of malign or benign energies that have become attached or associated with particular places through a process of historical resonance.¹⁸ This heat, although usually buried like Lud, persists through time and can be detected or disinterred by an investigating intelligence able and willing to trace the potential interrelationships between separate encounters, events, and histories that intimate its

¹⁷ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 13.

¹⁸ On the life and death of 'King Lud', and his interest in constructing new buildings in London and measuring and mapping the country, see E. O. Gordon, *Prehistoric London: Its Mounds and Circles* (London: Elliot Stock, 1914), pp. 122-27. See also John Matthews, 'New Troy: London Before History', in *The Aquarian Guide to Legendary London*, ed. by John Matthews and Chesca Potter (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1990), pp. 85-101. For a succinct introduction to the importance of 'heat' as a motif in Sinclair, see Perril, pp. 312-13. See also Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair*, p. 25, and Bond, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 117-22.

secretion. This process of detection loosely resembles Debord's description of the psychogeographer on a *dérive*, sensitized to the psychogeographical relief of the city with its 'constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones'.¹⁹ The detection of the city's heat involves recognizing physical reference points that offer a corresponding resemblance to the *plaques tournantes* hypothesized by Debord. Other parallels surface: both the SI and Sinclair strategically defamiliarize the territories they navigate in order to produce alternative mappings of the city (as will be seen below, both have produced influential 'maps' illustrative of this process). Both emphasize the politics of space, particularly through an active decoding of the ideological power relations that warp the urban imaginary and shape the varying ambiances of the city. Both are drawn towards neglected sites potentially capable of generating counter-narratives to the city's official histories. However, in a move likely to have gained Debord's lasting disapproval and derision, in the opening section of *Lud Heat* Sinclair imports a mystical dimension to his work, generating his own mythography of the city by mapping the occult alignment of 'lines of influence' that supposedly reveal the buried heat criss-crossing the urban labyrinth between key hubs. In an interview with the *Fortean Times*, Sinclair references two important sources for his fascination with the marvellous and the irrational as ways of constructing an interpretive delirium when engaging with the city. First, as addressed at the end of the previous chapter, Sinclair explains that during the 1960s and 1970s he was more interested in the Surrealists than the Situationists. Second, he emphasizes the impact upon his work of the 'earth mysteries' school who were much 'more part of the project' than any Parisian precursors. Regarding his status as a psychogeographer, he adds that by the time in the mid-1990s that he began 'using the term it was more like a

¹⁹ Debord, 'Theory of the *dérive*', p. 22.

psychotic geographer'.²⁰ In *The Verbals*, he offers further clarification of his approach to psychogeography and the city: 'I think of it, I suppose, as a *psychotic* geography – stalking the city'.²¹

In the mid-1990s, Stewart Home and the resurrected London Psychogeographical Association embarked on a puckish refunctioning of the para-academic praxis of the earth mysteries practitioners, producing an esoteric cartography with surface similarities to the imaginative mapping of the city that Sinclair had already incorporated in *Lud Heat*. This move allowed the LPA to graft a post-punk occultism onto their playful redeployment of Situationist terms and techniques. In one typical newsletter (complete with recalibrated tabloid headline: NAZI OCCULTISTS SEIZE OMPHALOS) the LPA claimed to have mapped a powerful psychogeographical ley line running from the Greenwich Observatory through the front room of the Limehouse home of Derek Beackon, a member of the British Nationalist Party. Beackon, recently elected as a local Councillor on the Isle of Dogs, was recast as 'a dedicated Nazi occultist' and 'adept of Enochian magic'.²² As Sinclair notes, unlike himself, Home and the LPA were not specifically interested in where things fell on the map:

The matter of London, the refleshing of Lud's withered hide, is exposed by doctored maps, speculative alignments, black propaganda. The revenge of the disenfranchised. Improvisations on history that are capable of making adjustments in present time. Prophecy as news. News as the purest form of fiction. Subversion in splash headlines. The most corrupt of all forms, the tabloid, can be 'turned'. The psychogeographers are operating an equivalent of James Ellroy's novel *American Tabloid*, freebasing among archetypes and video clips,

²⁰ Pilkington and Baker, *Fortean Times*.

²¹ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 75.

²² London Psychogeographical Association, 'Nazi Occultists Seize Omphalos', in *Mind Invaders*, p. 29-32 (p. 29).

speeding though the image bank. A paranoid poetic whose lies are so spectacular that they have become a new form of truth.²³

This passage is full of Sinclair's characteristic inversions in relation to the discussion of 'form': prophecy shapes the news, the news is the 'purest form of fiction'. Writers, and in this formulation all psychogeographers are a type of writer, become the paranoid medium through which lies 'become a new form of truth' by channelling (and thereby *turning*) the 'most corrupt of all forms, the tabloid'. Beyond the recuperation of the tabloid rant for radical ends, it was the inspired conjunction of psychogeography and sacred geometry as satirical weapons in the political armoury of the LPA that led Sinclair to realize that the process he had used to generate a work such as *Lud Heat* had parallels with the SI's psychogeographical practice. Like Sinclair, the SI proved to be interested in the specifics of where things fell on the map. As well as providing fuel for political satire, the production of alternative cartographies of the city had the potential to reveal the obscured influence on the urban environment of various ideological forces. As with Booth's seminal illustration of the distribution of poverty in late-nineteenth century London, a greater understanding of the forces that shape the labyrinthine form of the city can be ascertained by charting the position of things on the map and analyzing the patterns of their relations. As Franco Moretti observes regarding the literary application of maps and diagrams, deducing 'from the *form* of an object the *forces* that have been at work: this is the most elegant definition ever of what literary sociology should be'.²⁴ Such forces act upon the form (of the city, the text, the author) both from within and

²³ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 26.

²⁴ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 57. Moretti's remarks are occasioned by his reading of *On Growth and Form*, a seminal work by the mathematician and biologist D'Arcy Thompson first published in 1917 in which he argues that the form of an object can be understood as a 'diagram of forces' that are acting or have acted upon it. See D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 11.

without, an operative state that matches a less elegant but equally cogent definition of the formation of urban subjectivity proposed by Alan Robinson, in which he argues that nineteenth century Londoners:

lived in two cities simultaneously: the actual spaces of the metropolis, which can be analysed into a socially stratified and gendered topography; and an imaginary 'London', an interior world constructed from personal sensory and imaginative experience but also from verbal and visual representations, which both reflected and shaped their understanding of the 'real' metropolis and influenced their actions in this 'real' environment.

In Robinson's concise analysis, yoking together elements of literary sociology and the psychoanalytical, processes of introjection and projection produce a reality that is 'an unconscious fusion of external stimuli, mediated and structured by internalized cultural frameworks of interpretation and expectations that are to some extent susceptible of sociohistorical reconstruction'.²⁵ Again, there are diluted resemblances between these deductive processes and Sinclair's interpretive delirium: the forces that leave their mark on Moretti's forms resemble the heat that Sinclair pursues through the city; Robinson's assertion that nineteenth century Londoners 'lived in two cities simultaneously' – a perspective that this study finds applicable to contemporary London – connects to the various forms of splitting and doubling that recur throughout Sinclair's work. In their emphasis on the external and internal forces that form the split city, the different interpretations advanced by Moretti and Robinson provide valuable touchstones for what could be revised as a psychogeography of literary space. However, given the movement towards what Sinclair playfully labels a 'psychotic geography', even if one were only to focus exclusively on Sinclair's documentary work, it becomes possible to comprehend the literary space of London

²⁵Alan Robinson, *Imagining London, 1770-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. xiv.

psychogeography as a zone patrolled by a different kind of figure to either a literary sociologist or a historiographer of urban subjectivities, or even to a Situationist drifter.

For Sinclair, the ‘concept of “strolling”, aimless urban wandering, the *flâneur*, had been superseded. We had moved into the age of the stalker; journeys made with intent’. Stalking the city meant ‘walking with a thesis’ and with ‘a prey’.²⁶ Although the *flâneur* is often positioned as an antecedent or even a psychogeographical equivalent of the Situationist drifter, it is important to differentiate between these modes of navigating the city.²⁷ The *flâneur* can be historically and geographically exemplified by the primarily passive urban stroller who populates the Paris of Baudelaire’s poetry, a figure linked by Walter Benjamin to the emergence of the commercial space of the arcades as a new architectural form in the nineteenth century.²⁸ ‘The *flâneur* is the observer of the marketplace’, writes Benjamin, with a ‘knowledge akin to the occult science of industrial fluctuations. He is a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of consumers’.²⁹ Why a spy? As Susan Buck-Morss explains, *flânerie* became ‘an ideological attempt to reprivatize social space, and to give assurance that the individual’s passive observation was adequate for knowledge of social reality’. Buck-Morss continues by observing that if the *flâneur* has ‘disappeared as a specific figure, it is because the perceptive attitude which he embodied saturates modern existence, specifically, the society of mass consumption

²⁶ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 75.

²⁷ On the Situationist drifter as ‘a twentieth-century version’ of the *flâneur*, see Edward Ball, ‘The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International’, *Yale French Studies*, 73 (1987), 21-37 (p. 31).

²⁸ See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997).

²⁹ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 427 [M5,6]. For a psychogeographically informed reading of shopping as a form of drifting through real world retail environments, a reading that also appears to be ‘on assignment in the realm of consumers’ as it seeks to negate the historical antithesis between psychogeography and commodification, see *Tourism and Retail: The Psychogeography of Liminal Consumption*, ed. by Charles McIntyre (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

(and is the source of its illusions)'.³⁰ Without knowing it, observes Benjamin, the *flâneur* 'devotes himself' to the reality of the city as 'the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth'.³¹ With the construction of the boulevards by Haussmann during the Second Empire of Napoleon III, an early example of gentrification smuggled into a grander scheme of urban redevelopment, the *flâneur* moves into the street. Cast as a dandified window-licker strolling through the arcades of the mid-nineteenth century at the same speed as a fashionable pet tortoise, the *flâneur* would seem to be an unlikely precursor of the Situationist drifter. Yet, from radically different perspectives, both are detached from the phantasmagoric cycles of consumption that surround them as they wander through their labyrinths, drifting without apparent purpose (although the Situationist drifter is, at least in theory, also retrieving psychogeographical data). Sinclair's model of the stalker in pursuit of a 'prey' recalibrates the drift. Moving between specific points in the city, sensitized to 'where things fell on the map', the walk is given purpose, a thesis to test. As a template for London psychogeography, the drift now occurs in the disruptions and diversions that accumulate around these purposeful excursions.³² Sinclair is unable to resist pursuing references generated by chance encounters into unplanned territories: driven by a compulsive associationism, the psychogeographer becomes a psychotic geographer.

There is an intractable difficulty in determining the extent to which Sinclair subscribes to his own 'psychotic' mapping of the city or intends his imaginative cartography to have a practical application. As one broadsheet journalist acidly explains:

³⁰ Susan Buck-Morss, 'The *Flâneur*, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering, *New German Critique*, 39 (1986), 99-140 (pp. 103-04).

³¹ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 429 [M6a,4].

³² See Brooker, 'Iain Sinclair: The psychotic geographer treads the border-lines', pp. 226-37.

I once met Iain Sinclair a few years ago in a cellar under the City of London among abandoned boilers, dust-filled bathtubs and general creepiness. Before you could say “psychogeography” he went down a narrow tunnel that may have led to the inner sanctum of masonic mysteries or the main sewer. I asked him if he really believes Hawksmoor’s churches are aligned with arteries of power through the body of London – but I didn’t get a straight answer.³³

To begin to illuminate the basis of this uncertainty requires tracking the ways in which Sinclair’s mapping of a series of pathways through the urban labyrinth in *Lud Heat* intersects with the splitting of subjectivity within the split city. The title of the poem’s opening section, ‘Nicholas Hawksmoor, His Churches’, designates what can be retrospectively termed as the primary *plaques tournantes* that generate the heat detected by Sinclair: the eight London churches built by the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor in the early eighteenth century. Mapping the position of these variant *plaques tournantes* (alongside other significant sites within the city) enables Sinclair to scrutinize the resultant geometry formed by the junctions within the network.³⁴ As a catalyst for this scrutiny, Sinclair, the psychotic geographer, manically augments the type of unorthodox theories of ley lines and sacred geometries produced by the authors and researchers associated with earth mysteries. In the novel *Landor’s Tower*, Sinclair’s shapeshifting avatar Norton relays the following information: ‘I didn’t read fiction (didn’t write it either), but I was moderately addicted to earth mysteries, Alfred

³³ Jonathan Jones, ‘Bring me the head of the weirdest man in London’, *Guardian*, 8 August 1998, Review section, p. 4.

³⁴ *Lud Heat* includes an actual map of the alignment of Hawksmoor’s churches and other ‘lines of influence’ that invisibly criss-cross London. The map was part of a set of original drawings by the poet and sculptor Brian Catling – one of Sinclair’s regular collaborators – included in the initial Albion Village Press publication in 1975. In the Vintage paperback edition of *Lud Heat* published in 1995, the map is redrawn by the artist and graphic novelist Dave McKean and expanded to insert additional locations (such as Sinclair’s house on Albion Drive and the house on Cobourg Road in South London in which Catling lived at the time of the poem’s composition). The Granta paperback of *Lud Heat* published in 1998 attributes the map to ‘Brian McKean’. As Brian Baker astutely notes, this conflation of Catling and McKean is ‘probably accidentally, of a piece with the split and diffused subjectivities of many of the characters in Sinclair’s texts’. See Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, pp. 18-19. See also Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, p. 121.

Watkins, E. O. Gordon'.³⁵ While remaining wary of the evidential integrity that such fictional statements made by the unstable character of Norton offer in the way of insights into the methodological process of his creator, it is clear that Sinclair's mapping owes a significant debt to the early twentieth century studies of sacred geometries by Watkins and Gordon, particularly *The Old Straight Track* (where Watkins delineates his theory of ley lines) and *Prehistoric London* (where Gordon unveils her reading of the Celtic Christian or Druidic alignment of London sites).³⁶ Earth mysteries became a popular term in the 1960s and 1970s for an informal 'school' of practitioners who took a similarly holistic approach to ancient monuments and landscape. As the most recent eruption of a recursive phenomenon that John Michell, one of the most celebrated writers of the genre, termed 'megalithomania', the highly speculative theses of these independent scholars were generally treated with suspicion and self-righteous contempt by the academic establishment.³⁷ In the mid-1960s Michell owned various properties in Notting Hill and became involved with the local counter-culture, supplying a derelict basement on Powis Terrace as a venue for the short-lived London Free School where, alongside poets and anti-psychiatrists, he gave talks on UFOs and ley lines.³⁸ *Lud Heat* reflects the alignment of earth mysteries with a swelling programme of counter-cultural preoccupations:

the healing of the soul is therefore postponed yet again

³⁵ Sinclair, *Landor's Tower*, p. 310.

³⁶ See Alfred Watkins, *The Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites and Mark Stones* (London: Abacus, 1974) and Gordon. Sinclair describes Gordon's book as 'groundbreaking' in *Lights Out for the Territory* (p. 108) and 'inspirational' in *London Orbital* (p. 144).

³⁷ See John Michell, *Megalithomania: Artists, Antiquarians and Archaeologists at the Old Stone Monuments* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982). A telling example of the institutionally defensive approach to earth mysteries involves the archaeologist T. C. Lethbridge, a widely respected Cambridge scholar until an interest in sacred geometries, dowsing, and parapsychology left him routinely ridiculed and denied the kind of academic support he had received while formerly Director of Excavations for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society and for the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. See T. C. Lethbridge, *The Essential T. C. Lethbridge*, ed. by Tom Graves and Janet Hoult (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1980). Sinclair briefly alludes to Lethbridge's career in *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 123.

³⁸ See Green, pp. 162-64.

we let
 the Yoga lessons wait & the Divine Light
 remains in East Dulwich
 you mock
 at your peril³⁹

The comic tone implied by the first line (and the quotidian reference to East Dulwich as a site for cosmic enlightenment) is suspended by the warning that ‘you mock/at your peril’. Such rapid shifts between multiple and potentially conflictual positions recur throughout Sinclair’s city texts and illustrate the difficulty or even the superfluity of determining the extent to which Sinclair subscribes to the esoteric and occulted elements thematically associated with London psychogeography. However, by viewing a constellation of such source texts as *Prehistoric London* and *The Old Straight Track* through a counter-cultural lens encompassing Surrealism, the Beats, and open field poetics, Sinclair introduces into his texts vital elements that animate his paranoid-critical thesis regarding the ‘heat’ of hidden urban energies, a thesis whose recalcitrant pattern recognition is simultaneously grounded in the material realities of journeying across East London while employed in a series of temporary labouring jobs.

Although Sinclair invests Hawksmoor’s churches with fantastic physical connections and metaphysical coincidences, ricocheting from Mithraic Mysteries and Egyptology to the writings of Blake, De Quincey and the *Hackney Gazette*, he also mischievously admits that the ‘scenographic view is too complex to unravel here, the information too dense; we can only touch on a fraction of the possible relations’.⁴⁰ By disseminating this labyrinthine decoding of the city’s encrypted spaces, Sinclair initiates a ‘London

³⁹ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 92.

⁴⁰ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, pp. 17-20.

project' that will eventually position the city (and beyond) as a compendium of material and immaterial forces ready to be documented through strategies that will in later works be retrospectively classified as psychogeographical. From text to text, the dogged pursuit of Lud's buried 'heat' reveals numerous phantasmagorical patterns of significance as well as more domestic realities:

My own jobs follow the churches across the city. Cigar-packing in Clerkenwell and I cycle past St Luke, the obelisk to my right, Bunhill Fields to my left. Ullage cellars of Truman's Brewery, Brick Lane, and I front Christ Church. Garden assistant, and grass manicurist in Limehouse and I mow continually between the shifting influence of St George and St Anne.⁴¹

One possible line of enquiry would comprehend Sinclair's crazed mapping of 'energies' and of 'connections' as a form of play reminiscent of a Situationist *détournement* of available cultural material. A related approach would contextualize Sinclair's position within the faltering British economy of the 1970s, tuning in to the everyday frequencies that tend to get skipped over in the eagerness to contemplate the more baroque features of his work. The most perceptive commentators have attempted to analyze the complex interactions between these aspects of Sinclair's output. As Patrick Wright has noted, Sinclair's 'symbolic mapping of London actually follows an autobiographical logic that makes him less an abracadabra man than a poet of the Welfare State, the laureate of its morbidity and failure'.⁴² Equally attuned to the material consequences behind the occulted visions, Simon Perril observes how Sinclair's 'borrowing from the energy of conspiracy theory' is an act performed with a constant awareness that the resultant findings 'threaten to divulge as much about his state of mind as they do about the state of the country'.⁴³ Again, in an astute

⁴¹ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 21.

⁴² Patrick Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins: The Last Days of London* (London: Radius, 1991), p. 164.

⁴³ Perril, p. 311.

To return to the vocabulary of splitting underscored in the previous chapter, Sinclair has speculated that his fascination with themes of doubling and splitting stems from an attempt to synthesize the disparate elements of his Celtic ancestry: born and raised in Wales, his maternal lineage consists of ‘Welsh aboriginals’ while his paternal lineage derives from Scotland.⁴⁶ For Sinclair, the Scottish half is most fruitfully embodied in Robert Louis Stevenson’s seminal depiction of the schizoid Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Quizzed on the palpable tension in his writing between manifesting an adherent’s attraction to the spiritualized mysticism of various transcendent convictions and a tendency to display a scornful rejection of those same attributes, Sinclair explains:

By nature and temperament I’m absolutely one of those mad Welsh preachers who believes that . . . deliver the speech and you’ll change someone’s life. Or kill them. I really believe all that, but I can’t go around spouting that and survive, so I’ll adapt equally to the Scottish side of me, which is cynical, rational and cynical, and I believe in that as well [. . .] It’s Stevenson, the classic Scottish Jekyll and Hyde thing. One is really deranged and manic, the other is looking at it being deranged and manic, and commenting on it. That’s the tension.⁴⁷

Speech and language splinter, possess contrary conditions: used to invoke acts of magic and ritual, they render each ecstatic performance bogus. Residually haunted by the tone of events at the Roundhouse, the split between Sinclair’s actively manic derangement and his self-reflexive commentary becomes a dialectical performance that hinges on madness or the engineering of altered states of consciousness by other means. *Lud Heat* embodies this tension though more formal devices, splicing together sections of prose and poetry with diary entries detailing conversations and observations from Sinclair’s casual employment in various locations around East

⁴⁶ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 59.

London.⁴⁸ From his new base in Albion Drive, immersing himself in the conspiratorial matrix of local legend, Sinclair disinters the unofficial histories of this paradoxically marginal half of the metropolis, ragpicking through the buried cultural debris while labouring around the edges of the City.⁴⁹ Retrospectively, Sinclair confessed that the casual work ‘was a form of paid research’ that brought him into closer contact with the ‘consciousness’ of East London, enabling him to move from the Truman Brewery on Brick Lane with its ‘fringe-Kray, semi-gangster heavy-duty citizens who were full of all those very urban myths’ to the Parks Department where the gardeners delivered their anecdotes at a slower quieter pace: ‘You arrive at a site, you cut the grass and then you sit down in the van and roll up a cigarette and there’s an hour’s worth of good yarns on East London’.⁵⁰ Progressing through these heterogeneous ambiances, noting esoteric connections, surfing the hybrid culture formed by successive waves of immigration, Sinclair amassed a cache of promiscuous narratives that could be transfigured into poetry and later translated into psychogeography.

Inward and Outward

The poetry of Charles Olson and William Blake constituted the two major literary influences on Sinclair’s poetic output during the early- to mid-1970s, particularly Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* (which simultaneously documents the coastal town of Gloucester, Massachusetts and devises a prodigious mythography of place), and Blake’s *Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (Sinclair comments that it was

⁴⁸ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ On Sinclair’s rag-picking in relation to the much-discussed metropolitan genealogy of Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin and the Surrealists, see Skinner, pp. 169-74.

⁵⁰ See Evans, p. 13.

‘in a literal and metaphorical sense where I lived: Albion Drive’).⁵¹ There is a passage in Blake’s poem that functions as a brief pedestrian itinerary through a depopulated rural landscape on the eastern edge of London that Sinclair recites in numerous texts, most revealingly in the following description of the poetic cross-currents filtering into the composition of *Lud Heat*:

The sequence that I come back to time and time again goes:

*He came down from Highgate thro’
Hackney and Holloway towards London /
Till he came to old Stratford & thence to
Stepney & the Isle of Leutha’s Dogs, thence
thro’ the narrows of the River’s side, / And
saw every minute particular: the jewels
of Albion, running down / The kennels of
the streets & lanes as if they were abhorr’d [. . .]*

So here was a very interesting series of instructions, a particular kind of walk, and quite an eccentric journey laid out, a trajectory which is both spiritual and physical, and which suggests that the eastern portion of the city, at that time, was pretty much somnolent and well off the official charts. If it was London, London had not yet claimed it. Mills would give way to foul industries. Blake’s lines spike the energy points, the place names, and make London into a stripped body [. . .] So what was the presence of the eastern city? Well, Blake seemed to suggest that it was a figure, a sleeping giant. He imagined a figure of *inward*, an inward being. This self-forged daemon belonged, I felt, to the ground of London. It stood against the other great project influencing me at that time, the mythopoeic structure cast by the American poet Charles Olson in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Olson’s epic, *The Maximus Poems*, is dedicated to Robert Creeley as the figure of *outward*. Olson projects his odyssey as a journey through the local into the star field, going out with the tide, understanding the logistics of fishing fleets, understanding the topography that lay *under* the ocean – the mountain ranges of the Atlantic – and this push becomes a reaching into the cosmos. Launched with the minute particulars of place Blake talks about, Olson’s second movement carries you right back, a return to the human nest. The particulars have become myth. Blake, of course, is able to do both of these things at once, the outward and the inward. And for some reason the creation of buildings and structures on the east side of London seemed, prophetically, to suggest a new kind of writing and even a new kind of social, cultural, even biological,

⁵¹ See Iain Sinclair, *Blake’s London: The Topographic Sublime* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2011), p. 16. For a detailed discussion of Albion, Blake, and Sinclair, see John Kerrigan, ‘London, Albion’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013), pp. 359-83.

development.⁵²

In *Lud Heat*, the adaptive techniques derived from Olson enable Sinclair to accumulate an array of topographical minutiae and associated material through different forms of fieldwork and multidisciplinary research which are then channelled or projected outward into the high-energy construct of an open-field of text in which information-rich narrative passages are interspersed with lyric highs and disorientating fragments of poetry and prose that chart seemingly impenetrable connections between the quotidian and the cosmic. From the ‘self-forged’ pathway opened by Blake, Sinclair grafts further mythic layers onto the particularities of the landscape of his own everyday life within that densely populated ‘eastern city’ that has now risen from the stones and rocks with which Blake once communicated and navigated as a young man in the eighteenth century. At the end of the passage, Sinclair comments somewhat cryptically that the urban development of that part of the city ‘prophetically’ suggested a new kind of writing that presumably reflected the growth within Blake’s lifetime of the most populous city that the world had ever known (with the sensory stimuli of a new metropolitan modernity rewiring not just the social and cultural life of the inhabitants but also stimulating an unspecified mutation in the species that inhabits such a transformed landscape). However, the prophesy is only fully unleashed in the 1980s with the redevelopment of ‘the Isle of Leutha’s Dogs’ into the Docklands Enterprise Zone, a neoliberal model of urban speculation that will be rolled out in subsequent decades in variant forms across the city including the redevelopment of ‘old Stratford’ as the site of the London Olympics 2012. The intensive transformation

⁵² Sinclair, *Blake’s London*, pp. 16-19. The passage from Blake’s *Jerusalem* follows the lineation given in Sinclair’s text. Sinclair also cites this passage twice in *Lud Heat*, p. 100, p. 138; again in *Downriver*, p. 269; immediately after invoking Blake as ‘the godfather of all psychogeographers’ in *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 214; and as directing his ‘reading of London, anticipating every move I made’ in *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*, p. 540. See also Blake, p. 719. For an extended discussion of Olson and other American influences on Sinclair’s work, see Sinclair, *American Smoke*.

of the landscape recalibrates behaviour, thought, and even the way that people feel. Sinclair references the physical discomfort that certain parts of London induced in Blake, causing him painful stomach colds that sometimes required two or three days of convalescence.⁵³ Yet Blake, the psychotic geographer *avant la lettre*, was compelled to return to those places that repelled him, to move through those energy points of the living landscape that were physically as well as psychically introjected by his own body. These themes return Sinclair to the talks and the ‘informal and frequently heated discussions’ that circulated around the Roundhouse at the Dialectics of Liberation, and to Gregory Bateson’s focus ‘on the interplay of mind and its extension into the biological world’, a process where disturbing information can be left unresolved, never ‘forcing us to *act*’, because of the presence of a ““semi-permeable” membrane between consciousness and the natural world’. Sinclair announces an attempt to undertake a projected walk to ‘erase that “semi”’ and make the mind and the landscape as permeable as they are for Blake.⁵⁴ Sinclair draws a parallel with the affective landscape of the twenty-first century with its buried strata of contamination representing another kind of heat. When industrial pollution is reactivated by the construction of post-industrial grand projects, the implication is that the changing landscape will alter the physical and mental life of its inhabitants in comparable ways to the negative effects on the social and cultural life subsumed as part of the seemingly unstoppable commercial redevelopment process.⁵⁵ Like Blake, whole communities

⁵³ See Sinclair, *Blake’s London*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁴ Sinclair, *Ghost Milk*, pp. 168-69.

⁵⁵ For example, on the construction of the Millennium Dome, Sinclair derides the idea that ‘the carcinogenic venom of the Greenwich marshes has been painlessly neutralised’ by receiving ‘the blessing of Tony Blair’, see Sinclair, *Sorry Meniscus*, p. 23. As part of his walk around the M25, Sinclair interviews local activist Beth Pedder in Enfield Lock, one of the co-authors of a report titled *Unsafe as Houses: Urban Renaissance or Toxic Timebomb (Exposing the methods and means of building Britain’s homes on contaminated land)*, see Sinclair, *London Orbital*, pp. 59-62. In relation to the construction of the Olympic Park in East London, Sinclair meets the lawyer Bill Parry-Davies who is representing local tenants threatened by ‘the documented evidence of radioactive material, used in the manufacture of luminous watch-dials, buried in cesspits on the site’ with a potential to be disturbed and released into the air by the contractors boring deep holes nearby, see Sinclair, *Ghost Milk*, pp. 70-71.

will need a period of convalescence after being immersed in this new eastern city. And like Blake's *Jerusalem*, Sinclair's *Lud Heat* retrospectively becomes a bearer of a prophesy, a carrier of a psychogeographical virus nestling quietly in the remote cultural network of obscure experimental poetry, waiting to mutate into something monstrous.

Lud Heat is interspersed with numerous notes and quotations from other texts that indicate Sinclair's eclectic range of reading. Familiar literary names (Blake, John Bunyan, Thomas De Quincey, Robert Louis Stevenson) are accompanied by historians (Herodotus, John Stow, William Maitland), modern poets (Olson, Douglas Oliver), and more esoteric commentators on religion and mythology (H. P. Blavatsky, George Adams, G. R. Levy, Winthrop Palmer Boswell). At the end of the 1990s, reflecting on the methodology that enabled him to gather together the inward and outward sources that filter into *Lud Heat*, Sinclair recapitulates the main elements of his own direct observation of the East End:

I was thirsty for stories of the area, a good listener. A sponge. I checked out evidence, walking through accounts of notorious crimes (they contradicted each other). I eavesdropped on retired villains, challenged maps. Pedantically, I tried to fit this landscape to the visionary riffs of Blake and De Quincey. I pillaged legends, stole names (Swedenborg Gardens) back from their well-earned obscurity. Understood how men became places. How they could be recalled from the great dream, where proper humans with birth certificates mingle with immortal fictions, with Sherlock Holmes, Fu Manchu, Dr Jekyll [. . .] I cut the grass around the Hawksmoor churches and cleared shards of broken sherry bottles from beneath benches of sleeping vagrants. I was a stalker of rumours, a nark, an unsalaried spy. I actively searched out the labouring jobs that would feed my obsession with mythical geography, with potential energies locked in blighted ghettos, transitional end zones.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Lichtenstein and Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, p. 61.

This passage provides a concentrated account of the key elements of London psychogeography: walking the city as a process of becoming sensitized to the psychogeographical ambience of the shifting landscape; accumulating data through oral, textual, and visual narratives that can be psychogeographically interpreted; challenging conventional cartography by mapping subjective experience onto an expanding archive of social histories and personal memories; collaging and juxtaposing past, present, and future versions of a city where the actual and the imaginary blur and blend together. One version of the ‘great dream’ where mortals mix with ‘immortal fictions’ is Sinclair’s own genre-defying work, splicing diary entries and biographical material with occult fantasies and pulp fiction. But this great dream also relates to Sinclair’s conception of the city as a source of textual *heat* in which characters such as Sherlock Holmes ‘achieve an independent existence’ and become ‘part of the perpetual dream of the city’.⁵⁷ It is as if such characters cannot be contained within the conventional limits of fiction, their mediumistic creators articulate ‘a shape to some pattern of energy’ already present in the multidimensional palimpsest of fact and fiction dynamically layered over the city so that their creations get out ‘into the stream of time, the ether; they escaped into the labyrinth’.⁵⁸ For Robert Bond, Sinclair’s conception of ‘a *fiction* becoming manifest is predicated on his notion of the fictional text as a repository of power or textual “heat”. It is precisely the “heat” of the fictional text that powers its presences’ manifestation within the labyrinth.’⁵⁹

As a retroactive model for future psychogeography, *Lud Heat* appears to reveal to the uninitiated how to dowse for London’s buried lines of influence, energy, and heat

⁵⁷ Sinclair, ‘Introduction’, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xiii.

⁵⁸ Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, p. 129.

⁵⁹ Bond, *Iain Sinclair*, p. 120.

while identifying the invisible network of power relations operative in the social and political climate of a struggling world city caught in a global recession. However, it needs to be recognized that Sinclair's practice involves opening up pathways, creating a mobile position that dialectically splits and sutures the shifting ground of the fictional text. *Lud Heat* is non-dogmatic, resistant to closure (even as it locates enclosures). In terms of structure, as an extended poetic sequence the text maintains an Olsonian approach to an open field poetics that finds its rhythmic form by expressing the nature of place.⁶⁰ But Sinclair filters the morphogenetic Black Mountain pedagogy back into a wider pool of influences, a compositional trait that he shares with Patrick Wright. Wright is another recurring figure oscillating between fact and fiction in Sinclair's work, sometimes making cameo appearances as himself, or otherwise appearing as Fredrik Hanbury.⁶¹ Sinclair confesses that they both have a 'mutual addiction to field notes: as the residue of, and the excuse for, random expeditions. *Move, dig, notice, report.*'. In a move that matches the outward movement of Olson's approach (and the compositional techniques of 'Wichita Vortex Sutra' that Ginsberg recapitulates in *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* and *American Smoke*), Sinclair explains that 'everything goes into the stew, localized documentation, letters, bills of sale, news reports. Evidence. Until the greater vision is achieved, the cosmology of the impossible'.⁶² Such a diverse recipe includes a peppering of speculations primed to release a subsequent flavour of psychogeography: 'Each church is an enclosure of force, a trap, a sight-block, a raised place with an unacknowledged influence over events created within the shadow-lines of their towers'. *Lud Heat* proposes that Sinclair's occult investigations, moving outward and then inward to expose the hidden

⁶⁰ See Olson, 'Projective Verse'.

⁶¹ As Hanbury, the fictionalized Wright appears most conspicuously in Sinclair's *Downriver*, pp. 91-118, pp. 121-50.

⁶² Sinclair, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*, p. 206. The resonance between this compositional methodology and the structure of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* will be returned to in the next chapter.

patterns influencing the city, should be seen as one component of a larger project incorporating a disconnected series of urban explorers mapping pathways based on their own revelatory systems.

In an observation that prefigures the future franchising of London psychogeography, Sinclair asserts that the Hawksmoor churches ‘are only one system of energies, or unit of connection, within the city; the old hospitals, the Inns of Court, the markets, the prisons, the religious houses are the others. They have their disciples, aware of the older relations’.⁶³ Another explicative angle of approach to Sinclair’s mapping can be made by switching focus to the delirious correspondences that he diagnoses between two of these other ‘disciples’, albeit with the acknowledgement that both examples retain the church as their chosen connection. From the first example, it is possible to glimpse Sinclair’s extraordinary talent for extrapolating metaphysical significance from snatched conversations. In the back of the Land Rover that collects seasonal labourers for their shifts during the summer of 1974, Sinclair and Brian Catling encourage their co-worker Joe ‘under soft prompting’ to contribute unknowingly to this interconnected vision of the invisible city. The initial direction is opened up by Joe’s comments on their habit of having ‘ecclesiastical lunches, Bede picnics’: a remark that eventually leads Joe into confessing an interest in a particular church and Saint. ‘It is of St Dunstan that he speaks’, Sinclair reveals, before hyperactively expanding upon this reference, citing St Dunstan’s connection to Glastonbury and alchemy, co-opting Elias Ashmole, John Dee, Edward Kelly, Yeats, and Grail legend into a couple of short paragraphs. Typically for Sinclair, such an exercise in compulsive associationism establishes yet another occult model with a capacity to be split into a further field of connections (while providing a ‘counter’ model to that

⁶³ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 17-20.

deciphered at the start of the poem):

St Dunstan is an enclosure of light, a counter to the muddy hymns and saturnine autopsies of Limehouse and St George-in-the-East. Dunstan was only one of a number of figures who forged the polar connection between the west of England and the eastern border of this city. He carried a slower and more deeply mined time-pulse. There is a curve of optimism that he represents.⁶⁴

Aligned once more with certain alchemical resonances, St Dunstan resurfaces in the second example of one of the ‘disciples’ of the invisible connections between the city churches. According to Sinclair, John Hudson, a Vancouver-based poet and bookdealer (a familiar vocational combination that raises suspicions as to the veracity of this latest sub-plot amongst proliferating sub-plots), had constructed ‘at a distance, his own psychogeography of the City, based on a close study of the life and works of Elias Ashmole, the seventeenth-century genealogist and alchemist’. Written at the end of the 1990s, Sinclair’s account of this fellow traveller navigating a pathway through the labyrinthine arcana of London’s multiplex history is explicitly situated as psychogeographical, retrospectively defining a mode of urban research that intimately resembles the occult model of *Lud Heat* (but with a spiralling twist). Hudson’s psychogeographical thesis laid out on Sinclair’s table in Hackney reveals the ‘full monty: Invisible College, Dee, Ashmole, alchemy, Masonry, maps, graveyards, cosmic conspiracies’. Collaborating with the photographer Marc Atkins, Sinclair follows Hudson’s instructions for tracing alchemical symbols onto John Roque’s map of Georgian London:

We spiked the map, doodled on notepads. Until we grew tired of it and I fiddled the evidence to ‘prove’ what I had already guessed Hudson was suggesting. Marc’s geometry provided belated agreement. The

⁶⁴ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 98.

demonstration was wobbly, but it was visible: a line linking churches and enclosures associated with St Dunstan – who I remembered from earlier researches in Stepney as a ‘metal-worker, alchemist, & bearer of west country grail-force’.⁶⁵

The fiddling of the evidence to validate another psychogeographer’s research (whose principal elements are already present in Sinclair’s work), hints at one of the dangers inherent in the subjective nature of psychogeography: that the experiences gleaned from such activities are in danger of layering a predetermined ambience over the city.⁶⁶ To repeat an observation that Sinclair makes in a much later work: ‘Lines forged by Limehouse labourers highlight Hawksmoor churches, blue-and-yellow murder sites, decommissioned hospitals and synagogues. Geography is personalized. A walk is a floating autobiography.’⁶⁷ Reinforcing Wright’s call for a grounding of the ‘abracadabra man’ in the material realities of autobiography, Sinclair’s statement necessarily skips over the force with which his own mythography threatens to merge with those histories of London already assimilated into common experience.

To return to the ‘fiddled’ model of a psychogeographical disciple researching the invisible connections of the urban landscape, Hudson’s ‘full monty’, reinterpreted by Sinclair, opens up yet another pathway typical of the stalking approach of London psychogeography: a prospective walk between two churches, from ‘Dunstan-in-the-East to Dunstan-in-the-West, a zone within a zone; a cylinder of alchemical experimentation and manipulation of the light’.⁶⁸ Replete with signs of twins and doubles (a Sinclair staple), including the two figures on St Dunstan-in-the-West’s

⁶⁵ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 119, p. 120, p. 121. Sinclair’s final quote about St Dunstan as a ‘metal-worker . . .’ is from his own *Lud Heat*, p. 97.

⁶⁶ See Pile, p. 213.

⁶⁷ Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison*, p. 160.

⁶⁸ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 130.

clock representing Gog and Magog, the walk encompasses the remnants of London's print culture in and around its former Fleet Street home. The various commercial sites of exclusion clustered around the financial hub of the City are also encountered, enabling a foregrounding of the asymmetries of property ownership while simultaneously providing Sinclair with the opportunity to lament another set of psychogeographical misalignments. The walk, retold in characteristically lyrical and spiky prose, also equips Sinclair and Atkins with another excuse to access a different view of the city's skyline via those same church towers delineated in the opening line of *Lud Heat*. Stopping for a lunchtime pint in Bride Lane they find that the iron door to the tower of St Bride's is open, offering a rare occasion to make an unchaperoned ascent:

A panting spiral through the darkness gifted us with another of those miraculous urban prospects to which we were in real danger of becoming addicted. This interlude, a breather outside the Dunstan thesis, allowed us to let go, to glimpse the whole pattern [. . .] All the private roof gardens, the satellite receivers, gargoyles and elective monsters, the lush green corridor running north from the Temple to Gray's Inn Gardens, were opened to us. The white spine linking the twin hemispheres – Whitehall and the City of London – was radiantly exposed. Blood-lights of stuttering traffic down Ludgate Hill, Fleet Street, the Strand. Twinned principalities in a treaty of power: Gogmagog or Ronnie and Reggie Kray (the 'Other Two', as they were known to members of the Firm). The City is revealed as a naked brain, uncapped so that all its pulsing cells are offered for exploitation. The churches are needles, driven into the clay to bend the flow of current.⁶⁹

The metaphors of the split city as a brain and the relation of its inhabitants to the circulation of blood, via the red lights of braking traffic slowly moving through the main streets, will find their most compelling articulation in *London Orbital*. But beginning with a spiral, the above passage (in several senses) connects one form of progress with another: from a linear to a curvilinear trajectory. For Sinclair, the spiral

⁶⁹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, pp. 130-31.

is older and wider. As a ‘dogline’ it is ‘the contrary of the ley line’, adding another level of complexity to the mapping of the urban labyrinth that matches the improvised movements of the stalker diverted from traversing purposefully between the significant points of London’s *plaques tournantes*.

In the spring of 1995, once again accompanied on this latest ‘stalking project’ by the photographer Marc Atkins, Sinclair sets out to walk to the burial site of the recently deceased Ronnie Kray in Chingford Mount:

Instead of direct paths of light linking significant structures (spires, earthworks, mounds), the ‘dogline’ is a spiral – like the sorcerer’s *vèvè*: a stool-sniffing, circling back on itself, avoidance of the shortest way [. . .] London, we were convinced, was mapped by cued lines of energy, connecting buildings with natural geological and geographical forms; making paths available down which the more tedious laws of time could be aborted. Now there was another, wilder system in play: the improvisations of the dog. The retreats, spurts, galloping loops and pounces of the stalker.⁷⁰

In *White Chappell Scarlet Tracings* Sinclair demonstrates how the spiral can be mapped onto a circuit of three other London churches defined by their absence. Sinclair walks this specific circuit, from the ‘obelisk’ of the remaining steeple (reputedly by Hawksmoor) at St Luke, Old Street:

to the demolished obelisk of St John, Horselydown, by way of the extinguished church of St Mary Matfellow, Whitechapel. The three enclosures of ruin. Unacknowledged, but not concealed. St Luke, roofless, wild space in a border of stone; St John, a rim of the original onto which a place of business has been grafted; and Mary Matfellow, nothing, a field with a diagram in the grass, a stain only.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 85.

⁷¹ Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, p. 137.

Although St Luke and St John feature in *Lud Heat* as two-thirds of the ‘sub-system of fire obelisks’ that form an equilateral triangle when aligned with ‘London’s true obelisk – “Cleopatra’s Needle”’, in the later novel they are part of a walk that has:

nothing to do with lines of force, immaculately ruled patterns, stern geometry of will, pentagrams, grids, brass-rule control. It is older and wilder. The triple spiral, finger print, found at New Grange. The spiral that winds out of Clerkenwell into Whitechapel into Southwark. It is not precise, it can’t be measured. But it is invoked.⁷²

The labyrinthine quality of this spiral print is invoked earlier in the novel when Mr Eves, a character obsessed with the Whitechapel Murders, puts his thumb under a desktop magnifying glass in front of the narrator: ““This is the true spiral” he said, “the first map of the labyrinth””.⁷³ From New Grange to Whitechapel, Sinclair links the ancient sites that form the focus of the school of earth mysteries with a set of metropolitan sites that have their own ‘disciples’. Mr Eves will be returned to in the following chapter. But he is not alone in invoking the labyrinth in *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*. The book is littered with references to the city as labyrinth.⁷⁴

Treating his earlier thesis with a touch of ironic flippancy, Sinclair enacts his own spiralling excursion from one model of mapping the city to another, restlessly traversing the proliferating circuits that seem to connect London’s multiplicity of potential hubs: churches, in this instance, but elsewhere anything from the medieval gates of the City to the murder sites of Jack the Ripper, from East End pubs bearing the sign of birds to the asylums studded around the M25 orbital motorway, from the graffiti on the city streets to the haunts of ‘reforgotten’ writers, artists, filmmakers. In its totalizing momentum, the addictive view from St Bride’s appears to make certain

⁷² Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, pp. 137-38. See also Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 15.

⁷³ Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, p. 50.

⁷⁴ See Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, pp. 14; p. 32; 35; 50; 113; 129; 149.

patterns more clearly decipherable (for example, those of wealth and privilege: the moguls plugged into their office towers). Sinclair's navigation of the labyrinth also becomes more clearly decipherable as a dialectical movement, each urban encounter raising the repetition of certain preoccupations and forms of pattern recognition onto a higher level that assimilates the blockages and contradictions of previous iterations. But while pursuing this elevated condition it should be recalled that the cartographic vision of the aerial view, also deployed and disturbed by Debord, masks other ideological movements.

Maps, Models, Pathways

Discussing the multiple cartographies of the city in *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair warns the reader of the need:

to recognize the fundamental untrustworthiness of maps: they are always pressure group publications. They represent special pleading on behalf of some quango with a subversive agenda, something to sell. Maps are a futile compromise between information and knowledge. They require a powerful dose of fiction to bring them to life.⁷⁵

When applied to the map that orientates the opening section of *Lud Heat*, such a passage raises intriguing questions regarding the type of subversive agenda being peddled within its borders and the kinds of fiction animating its contents. The occulted pathways that Sinclair first maps in the poem open up the imaginative possibilities of a creative cartography capable of critically reflecting a psychogeographical movement between the subjective and the social within urban experience. From this perspective,

⁷⁵ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 145.

Lud Heat functions as an idiosyncratic and innovative pathway through the urban labyrinth. However, through the repetition of the same processes and preoccupations in subsequent projects, a series of imitative gestures that through a tightening circularity around recurring themes has come to define and thus delimit London psychogeography, Sinclair's pathway has become so well-trodden that it has become more accurate to describe it as a model both for himself and for others to replicate (with varying degrees of competence, complexity, playfulness).

In the mid-1950s, Debord (together with Asger Jorn) transferred a passion for maps into cartographic exercises such as those entitled *Guide psychogéographique de Paris* and *The Naked City*.⁷⁶ The Situationists redeployed techniques of mapping to disrupt and critique traditional cartographic codes that produced the illusion of a totally navigable and controllable territory (the kind of panoptic metaphorical view of the metropolis from the top of a skyscraper that Michel de Certeau contrasts with the migrational view from street-level in his much-quoted essay 'Walking in the city').⁷⁷ These maps reorientated (or disorientated) Paris using a series of arrows to connect free floating urban sectors of varying unities of ambience that illustrated the psychogeographic flow between *plaques tournantes*. Catling's map of Sinclair's London also problematizes established codes of cartographic practice. The reason to label them as *maps* rather than using the more appropriate term *illustration* is guided by the recurring notion that all maps bear traces of their ideological construction and phantasmatic production. By using cartographic techniques in an idiosyncratic manner that renders visible the selectivity behind the composition of more naturalized

⁷⁶ For a detailed and instructive reading of these maps, see Sadler, pp. 61-62, pp. 82-91.

⁷⁷ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 91-110. Situationist cartography has proved fertile ground for academics: see Anthony Vidler, 'Terres Inconnues: Cartographies of a Landscape to be Invented', *October*, 115 (Winter 2006), 13-30; see also Tom McDonough, 'Delirious Paris: Mapping as a Paranoiac-Critical Activity', *Grey Room*, 19 (Spring 2005), 6-21.

territorial representations, both Sinclair and the SI bring the perceived neutrality of mapping into question. Rather than being disinterested representations of information, Sinclair identifies that maps are a form of ‘special pleading’ that serve particular interests reflected in the presences and absences on the map itself.⁷⁸

In the opening chapter of *The Wild Places*, Robert Macfarlane provides a clear and compelling account of the commonest map of Britain that reflects these issues.

According to Macfarlane, when you pick up a road atlas ‘it can appear that the landscape has become so thickly webbed by roads that asphalt and petrol are its new primary elements’. He continues:

Considering the road atlas, an absence also becomes visible. The wild places are no longer marked. The fells, the caves, the tors, the woods, the moors, the river valleys and the marshes have all but disappeared. If they are shown at all, it is as background shadings or generic symbols. More usually, they have faded out altogether like old ink, become the suppressed memories of a more ancient archipelago. The land itself, of course, has no desires as to how it should be represented. It is indifferent to its pictures and to its picturers. But maps organise information about a landscape in a profoundly influential way. They carry out a triage of its aspects, selecting and ranking those aspects in an order of importance, and so they create forceful biases in the ways a landscape is perceived and treated.⁷⁹

Like Macfarlane and other authors associated with ‘the new nature writers’ voyaging into the wild places of Britain, Sinclair is compelled to create a prose map of his multiple London excursions that link faded features and suppressed memories.⁸⁰ For

⁷⁸ For a useful summary of this topic, see Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford, 1992).

⁷⁹ Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta, 2007), p. 7.

⁸⁰ In his introduction to a new edition of Richard Mabey’s *The Unofficial Countryside*, Sinclair describes Mabey’s book as ‘the unacknowledged pivot between the new nature writers and those others, of a grungier dispensation, who are randomly (and misleadingly) herded together as “psychogeographers”’, see Sinclair, ‘Introduction’, in Richard Mabey, *The Unofficial Countryside* (Stanbridge: Little Toller Press, 2010), pp. 7-13 (p. 11). First published in 1973, Mabey’s book anticipates the subsequent focus of both ‘the new nature writers’ and the ‘psychogeographers’ on liminal spaces that are not exclusively or officially part of either the city or the country. For later incarnations that cover similar territory, see Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*:

Sinclair, London is ‘a city of disappearances’, a sweeping conceit palpable in the numerous contributions to an anthology with that title that he edited in 2006.⁸¹ The fells, caves, tors and woods that have disappeared from the commonest maps of the country have their urban counterparts in the people and places that populate the ranks of what Sinclair classifies as the reforgotten, those disregarded components of the culture no longer registered within the official canon. This is given an explicitly cartographic expression when he remarks on his belief that ‘the official map of the culture, at any time, would always fail to include vital features’.⁸² By excavating the buried histories and submerged memories that accumulate within the urban environment and then mapping their connections, Sinclair attempts to rescue the reforgotten while generating a critique of ‘our present climate of shoulder-shrugging amnesia’.⁸³ As with landscape, the perception and treatment of the city is affected by the forceful biases produced by its maps. The standard guide to the urban labyrinth of London, the *Geographers A-Z*, demonstrates such biases when representing parts of central London at a larger scale than the rest of the city. A more compelling example of cartographic bias can be found on the back cover of the *A-Z* in the schematic map of the London Underground. Designed by Harry Beck in the 1930s, the famous map (or, more accurately, diagram) once again enlarges the space of central London, but also portrays a geographical imbalance between the over-represented west and north-west of the city (home to the majority of underground stations) and the fairly empty spaces of the east and south (the wide gaps within the latter area are often overlaid with the London Underground logo and explanatory keys to the symbols).⁸⁴ As one of the most

Journey's Into England's True Wilderness (London: Vintage, 2012), and Nick Papadimitriou, *Scarp* (London: Sceptre, 2013).

⁸¹ See Iain Sinclair, ed., *London: City of Disappearances* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006).

⁸² Lichtenstein and Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, p. 139.

⁸³ Sinclair, *London: City of Disappearances*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ For examples and an introductory history of these maps, see Ken Garland, *Mr Beck's Underground Map* (Harrow Weald: Capitol Transport, 1994).

widely circulated images used for imagining and orientating oneself within the labyrinthine space of London, the simplistic representation of the abstract space of the tube map has a significant impact on the way that the city is perceived, promoting a negative view of vast sections of the city in which one component of the transport infrastructure is lacking.

Sinclair circles around these cartographic themes in *Brown Clouds*, a poetry chapbook published in 1977 that details a visit to the ‘tin zone’ of the Penwith peninsula in Cornwall. Walking around the standing stones and the stone circles studded throughout the remote West Cornwall landscape, Sinclair registers ‘currents and cross-currents/jolted around stone terminals/lifting ecstasy into control’. Written shortly after *Lud Heat*, *Brown Clouds* displays a similar preoccupation to its predecessor regarding the alignments of sacred geometry but in this instance transposed onto a rural landscape where the megalithic remains surveyed by the earth mysteries practitioners were a more evident feature.⁸⁵ Adopting the role of being emotionally responsive to a putative network of unseen forces produced by the ancient geographical arrangement of the material environment, Sinclair inhabits a psychical as well as poetic connection to the living landscape that embraces the menacing constellation in the sky above:

to look out on a cruelly-aimed
crossbow of stars, the bolt tipped towards earth:
which is, exactly, his previous dream

always this/recognition not discovery

to be among these living metals
is to alter, reverse, the body’s polarity

⁸⁵ See John Michell, *The Old Stones of Land’s End: An Enquiry into the Mysteries of the Megalithic Science* (Port Eliot: Elephant Press, 1974).

to flutter the compass blade like a mad eye⁸⁶

Expounding on the affective qualities of the Penwith landscape on his own body, Sinclair writes: ‘The thing that struck me, immediately, was the shift in the magnetic field. The iron in the stone. Striking out, the first day, I felt quite shaky, almost sick, before the grains settled and a new energy rushed in.’⁸⁷ Recognition rather than discovery is central to Sinclair’s psychogeography, and requires an altering of perception so that the psychogeographer becomes sensitized to the shifting patterns produced by the interaction with the environment being traversed, simultaneously sparking a recognition of everyday elements that were habitually overlooked or purposefully repressed through psychological and social conditioning. How is such an alteration in perception activated? In the middle section of the poem, subtitled ‘LABRYS: Eve of Beltain’, Sinclair returns to ‘the seemingly casual/alignments of fallen stones’ whose positions, when charted across the landscape, are capable of generating labyrinthine patterns ripe for interpretation:

so the map comes into its own, as a fiction,
to be taken not as an absolute
but as a singular point of view, or
“work of art”, leaving out more than it uses,
civilised in list of amenities
and respectable rocks under generic titles

the labyrinth is realised
from the force-lines wound out
of the man in stone⁸⁸

Recognition not discovery, perception is altered through a refunctioning of the fictions through which we move: ‘thought-contours/cut spaces out of the map, which can

⁸⁶ Iain Sinclair, *Brown Clouds: In the Tin Zone Pendeen, Cornwall April/May 1977* (Newcastle: Pig Press, 1977), unpaginated.

⁸⁷ Letter from Iain Sinclair to the author, 25 January 2013.

⁸⁸ Sinclair, *Brown Clouds*.

now/be abandoned into its creases'.⁸⁹ Alternative cartographies of the city such as Sinclair's mapping of the occult alignment of Hawksmoor churches defamiliarize the urban space produced by the street atlas and tube map. Sinclair's alternative mapping illustrates a way of approaching the city that carries the potential to decondition the city dweller from existing biases and habits. Albeit that such a psychogeographical shift, if not judiciously monitored for its potential efficacy, carries the threat of replacing one set of biases and habits with another misperceived as more active or radical. Since becoming more culturally visible as a 'psychogeographer' in the late 1990s, Sinclair seems mindful of the dangers of becoming a model to passively emulate rather than being a source from which others can originate their own active decoding of the city. 'London', he writes, 'is a body kept alive, energised by complex lines and patterns that can be walked, built upon: celebrated or exploited. The reality is democratic, anyone can play. All it requires is open eyes and stout boots. Start moving and the path reveals itself.'⁹⁰ Similarly, in *London Orbital*, he urges the reader not to 'bother with my list of alternative attractions [...] discover your own. In the finding is the experience'.⁹¹ Yet, to maximize interest and lubricate the flow of everyday detail, the democratizing impulse that Sinclair references regarding walking in the city requires accumulating the kind of voluminous knowledge that characterizes his work. If you have not researched the deep topography of the landscape through which you intend to drift as intensely as Sinclair then the democratic reality may prove very dull. Put simply, the path that reveals itself may turn out to be pedestrian in a negative sense.

⁸⁹ Sinclair, *Brown Clouds*.

⁹⁰ Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison*, p. 294.

⁹¹ Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 263.

From such a perspective, the legacy of *Lud Heat* could be characterized as an example of the discord between models and pathways identified by Henri Lefebvre as ‘one of the inherent conflicts in contemporary political and scientific thought’. For Lefebvre, this conflict was reflected in urbanism itself which remained ‘an impediment because of its *models*’ that blocked ‘a view of the horizon, a path to urban knowledge and practice’.⁹² The political and cultural significance of this movement from prototypical pathway to stereotypical model within London psychogeography, a transformation often suggestive of a commercial transaction seemingly in opposition to the anti-consumerism found in psychogeographical theory and practice, loosely maps onto the discussion of literature and gentrification already introduced. However, as the tension between the two terms in Lefebvre’s own additive methodology reveals, even the general parameters of this conflict cannot be simplistically reduced to a binary opposition.

Rather than constructing models, critical reflection provides an orientation, which opens pathways and reveals a horizon. That is what I am proposing here: not so much to construct a model of the urban as to open a pathway toward it [. . .] Sooner or later radical critique reveals the presence of an ideology in every model.⁹³

The unobtrusive phrase ‘not so much to construct a model of the urban as to open a pathway toward it’ suggests that navigating between the shifting dynamics of models and pathways is always a difficult art where the mobility of the navigator intersects with the volatility of the territory being traversed. Contrary to the solidified urbanism that Lefebvre identifies as an impediment to urban knowledge and practice, an identification that can be aligned with Debord’s understanding of urbanism as ‘the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism’ that

⁹² Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2003), p. 162; p. 160.

⁹³ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, pp. 66-67.

functions as ‘the technology of *separation itself*’, a more fluid form of urbanism would foster critical reflection by registering the ongoing shifts in spatial and historical context that demonstrate across the different scales of the urban how the relationship between pathways and models is never stable, never fixed.⁹⁴ But exactly what type of ‘horizon’ would such an urbanism reveal?

Despite the fundamental untrustworthiness of cartography, reflecting (to paraphrase Lefebvre) the presence of an ideology in every map, the SI deploy cartographic techniques to assist with their complex navigation of the urban labyrinth. Both Sinclair and the SI have made alternative mappings of the city that recalibrate the urban environment through different spatial practices that interweave the psychological and the geographical, the subjective and the social, the actual and the imaginary. As detailed above, their different approaches to a creative cartography offer critical insights into the biases of more conventional cartographic practices. For the SI, the biases of most maps are hidden in plain view, a normative process that contributes to the technology and techniques of separation again detailed by Debord in his account of urbanism in *The Society of the Spectacle*. For the SI, their psychogeographical maps hypothesized the existence of *plaques tournantes*, spatial hubs that played an important role in conditioning the ambience of the different emotional microclimates of the city and that contained useful information for the construction of future cities. But the project to utilize psychogeography as part of a tool-kit for creating more liberating spaces generated potentially incompatible desires: to construct a space that enabled those within it to freely construct their own histories *and* to resist promulgating any form of prescriptive design that would condition or delimit behaviour. The conflict that arose between these aims in relation to the concept of

⁹⁴ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, § 171.

unitary urbanism led to another of the splits between various sections of the SI that can be traced throughout its fractious history.

No Playing in the Labyrinth

The city as labyrinth is a common cultural trope with a lengthy and dispersed history.⁹⁵ Navigating the spaces of the modern metropolis enables both Sinclair and the Situationists to make good use of the city's labyrinthine parallels. For the Lettrists and Situationists a warning sign outside of the actual labyrinth in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris that read 'NO PLAYING IN THE LABYRINTH' succinctly captured 'the spirit of an entire civilisation. The very one that we will, in the end, pull down'.⁹⁶ A reference to the same warning sign had appeared earlier in a manifesto for a 'new urbanism' by Ivan Chtcheglov, one of the most innovative LI theorists of the *dérive*.⁹⁷ Throughout the mid-1950s the LI remained a barely perceptible force in the fragmented milieu of the post-war Parisian avant-garde. However, during this period they published several critical articles tackling the topic of urbanism that would form a vital part of the later revolutionary programme of the SI. Most of these articles appeared in *Potlatch*. Cheaply produced, but grandly subtitled 'The Bulletin of Information of the French Group of the Lettrist International', twenty-nine issues of *Potlatch* were published between June 1954 and November 1957.⁹⁸ *Potlatch* introduced its small readership to several key terms for engaging with the everyday

⁹⁵ See Norman M. Klein, *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2004), pp. 97-115.

⁹⁶ See 'Ariadne Unemployed' in Andreotti and Costa, p. 48. The uncredited article first appeared in a triple issue of *Potlatch* (nos. 9-10-11) published in August 1954.

⁹⁷ Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', in Knabb, pp. 1-4.

⁹⁸ For more details on the appearance of *Potlatch*, see Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Verso, 2002), p. 105.

experience of the city: ‘psycho geography’, ‘*détournement*’, ‘*dérive*’, ‘situation’, ‘unitary urbanism’.⁹⁹ Responding to the mental disease of ‘banalization’ that he saw sweeping the planet, Chtcheglov wrote a seminal text on a labyrinthine city built for drifting that heavily influenced the future direction of Situationist psycho geography. Chtcheglov’s text provides an entry point for an examination of the SI’s struggle to define ‘unitary urbanism’, a radical critique of urbanism for which their psycho geographical maps were partly designed to prepare.

Written in 1953 under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain, Chtcheglov’s manifesto ‘Formulary for a New Urbanism’ was included by Debord in the first SI journal.¹⁰⁰ ‘We are bored in the city’, Chtcheglov announces, before sketching a lyrical vision of a bizarre urban landscape where the ‘principal activity of the inhabitants will be the CONTINUOUS DÉRIVE’. As a distinctively poetic attempt to initiate a ‘new urbanism’ by first breaking through the oppressive banality of the age (‘presented with the alternative of love or a garbage disposal unit, young people of all countries have chosen the garbage disposal unit’), Chtcheglov’s text deliberately collides a residual Surrealism with techno-utopian speculations. He sees an urgent need for integrating modern science into new myths: ‘Our imaginations, haunted by the old archetypes, have remained far behind the sophistication of the machines’.¹⁰¹ For Chtcheglov, a new form of flexible architecture disconnected from the typological restrictions of architectural history would enable the construction of an urban environment that could modify our habituated understanding of time and space. As ‘a means of *knowledge* and

⁹⁹ For dates of the first appearances of these terms in *Potlatch*, see Sadler, p. 168, n. 38.

¹⁰⁰ See Chtcheglov (under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain), ‘Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau’, *Internationale Situationniste*, 1 (June 1958), pp. 15-20. On Chtcheglov’s fluctuating relations with Debord and an account of his barbaric treatment in a mental hospital after being diagnosed as a schizophrenic (the type of diagnosis and subsequent violence passionately critiqued by the anti-psychiatrists), see Mension, *The Tribe*, pp. 96-102.

¹⁰¹ Chtcheglov, p. 2; p. 1; p. 4. See also Benjamin, ‘Surrealism’, p. 229.

a *means of action*', the architecture of the future city would reconnect its inhabitants to their desires and imaginations. To achieve these ends required 'experimentation with patterns of behaviour' in 'cities specifically established for this purpose'.¹⁰² In these experimental urban assemblages, Chtcheglov imagines 'rooms more conducive to dreams than any drug, and houses where one cannot help but love'. Intoxicated by technological possibilities he proposes that the districts of the city 'could correspond to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters *by chance* in everyday life'. As examples, he cites: 'Bizarre Quarter – Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation) – Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children) – Historical Quarter (museums, schools) – Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops) – Sinister Quarter, etc'.¹⁰³ With these descriptions, Chtcheglov's formulary takes an inspired and influential leap that the LI and SI would seek to bridge with psychogeography. To realize the seductive vision of a future city capable of collectively liberating the desires of individuals repressed by the alienation and banality of everyday life required undertaking groundwork in the present, collating psychogeographical data from collective drifts through the existing city. Yet, for all their hallucinatory poetry, Chtcheglov's segregated quarters carry a distinct resemblance to the type of urbanism mercilessly critiqued by the LI and SI: the supposedly functionalist urban planning based on the programmatic separation of everyday life into rationalized spaces for work, leisure, and home, most notably promoted by Le Corbusier and the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM).¹⁰⁴ For Debord, urbanism provided the technological basis for preparing the city to atomize its concentration of workers and

¹⁰² Chtcheglov, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰³ Chtcheglov, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ For a comprehensive account of CIAM, see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism: 1928-1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

perfect the separation of its inhabitants from their directly lived experiences.¹⁰⁵

Intended to be the antithesis of such an alienating urbanism, Chtcheglov's programme for a future city faces a problem that will return to haunt the SI in their quarrelsome attempts to establish a unitary urbanism that avoids replacing one system of voluntary servitude with another. How can you create an alternative city designed to revolutionize everyday life without imposing a potentially alienating programme on its inhabitants? How can you be sure that your model of liberation is not someone else's iron cage? These points become even more pressing in an age in which the SI's valorization of play and their desire to collapse the separation between art and everyday life have been steadily co-opted into new forms of capital accumulation.¹⁰⁶ To evaluate the SI's unitary urbanism, the theory and practice of constructing a city capable of transforming everyday life (by destroying all that is represented in the sign prohibiting play in the labyrinth of the Jardin des Plantes), it is pertinent to examine the background to their own attempt at constructing a labyrinth.

The second issue of the SI journal, published in December 1958, contained a series of eleven points under the heading 'The Amsterdam Declaration'. Co-written by SI members Constant and Debord, 'The Amsterdam Declaration' set out 'a minimum definition of Situationist action'. As a declaration of the future direction of the SI, the text signalled the key role to be played by unitary urbanism. As with the elusive practice of psychogeography, the accompanying definition of unitary urbanism remained widely open to interpretation (if typically gender specific): 'Unitary urbanism is defined as the complex, ongoing activity which consciously recreates

¹⁰⁵ See Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, theses 169 to 172.

¹⁰⁶ See Stevphen Shukaitis and Joanna Figiel, 'Metropolitan Strategies, Psychogeographic Investigations', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 13.6 (2013), 536-43. On the supersession of art within the theory and practice of the SI, see Jappe, pp. 45-72.

man's environment according to the most advanced conceptions in every domain'. Aside from aesthetic considerations, Constant and Debord argue that unitary urbanism had to be 'the fruit of a new type of collaborative creativity; the development of this spirit of creation is the prior condition of unitary urbanism'. 'The Amsterdam Declaration' was the outcome of Constant and Debord's mutual identification of the need to harness the cultural and technological momentum of a reconfigured collective conception of the future epitomized by what they referred to as the 'decomposition of the individual arts'.¹⁰⁷ However, the antagonism between individual and collective creation within diverse factions of their own group (spread across several European countries) would prove to be treacherous terrain for the SI to navigate over the ensuing year and a half, eventually leading to a series of exclusions that culminated in Constant's resignation. One entrance to the maze of material and commentary relating to this period in the SI's history takes the apt form of a labyrinth scheduled to be constructed in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1960. By briefly sketching the intersecting trajectories undertaken by Constant and Debord up to and slightly beyond the failed construction of this labyrinth it becomes possible to establish a clearer vision of the problems and paradoxes that surround the concept of unitary urbanism and to elucidate the reciprocal relationship between unitary urbanism and psychogeography.

In 1956, Constant attended the grandly titled First World Congress of Liberated Artists organized by future SI founder members Asger Jorn and Giuseppe 'Pinot' Gallizio in the Italian town of Alba (where Gallizio had a studio). After the Congress, Constant stayed on in Alba, creating a flexible mobile environment for a group of gypsies camped on land owned by Gallizio. This architectural experiment was a precursor of

¹⁰⁷ Constant and Guy Debord, 'The Amsterdam Declaration', in Andreotti and Costa, p. 80. First published as 'La Déclaration d'Amsterdam', in *Internationale Situationniste*, 2 (December 1958), pp. 31-32.

the labyrinthine mobile structures that Constant envisioned as provisionally forming the social space of unitary urbanism: an urban space designed to be endlessly reconfigured by the user, rather than imposing any prescriptive use. The problem of demonstrating what such a dynamic space would look like without converting that image into a static form would pervade Constant's output over the next two decades through the extended project titled 'New Babylon'. For Constant, a decisive shift from art to architecture occurred after the dissolution of COBRA in 1951. An amalgamation of various avant-garde groups that took its name from the first letters of the home cities of the participants – Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam (a triangulation that pointedly elided Paris) – COBRA was founded at the end of 1948 and had brought Constant back into contact with Jorn, the Danish painter he had met in Paris two years earlier. Constant, Jorn (then known as Asger Jørgensen), and the Belgian poet Christian Dotremont were largely responsible for directing COBRA's artistic and political activities. Importantly, COBRA had initiated a utopian project to create a new urban environment that was in opposition to the rational modernism of urban planning associated with Le Corbusier. Spending the early 1950s living in Amsterdam, Paris, and London, Constant had repeatedly witnessed the post-war reconstruction of damaged and outmoded urban infrastructures, a form of collective construction of 'mechanised technological environments' that seemed to indicate that a new phase of industrialisation was happening in which the kind of individualism associated with artistic production was in decline (the 'decomposition of the individual arts' heralded in 'The Amsterdam Declaration').¹⁰⁸ Constant's unorthodox training in architecture principally derived from his artistic collaborations with the architect Aldo van Eyck. Seven years after working with van Eyck on an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum,

¹⁰⁸ Constant, cited in Hein van Haaren, *Constant*, trans. by Max Schuchart (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1966), p. 8. Quoted in Pinder, *Visions of the City*, p. 183.

Constant was back in the museum's gallery space to exhibit around thirty new spatial constructions of his own devising. It was May 1959 and he had joined the SI.

Constant's 1959 exhibition was reviewed in a short article in the relaunched *Potlatch* (the LI newsletter had been recast as an internal bulletin of the SI's operations).

Debord strategically positions himself away from the editorial chair, a move that he had also made when publishing the original *Potlatch*.¹⁰⁹ Ostensibly, editorial responsibility lay with the Dutch section of the SI, comprising various architects under the general direction of Constant. The anonymous article on Constant's exhibition, largely composed by Debord, ends with the following observation:

These initial experiments by Constant do no more than state the problem of unitary urbanism. Nevertheless, this exhibition could mark the turning point, in the modern world of art production, between self-sufficient merchandise-objects, meant solely to be looked at, and project-objects, whose more complex appreciation calls for some sort of action, an action on a higher level having to do with the totality of life.¹¹⁰

Momentarily overlooking the individual authorship signified by such an exhibition, the move from the production of commodities by and for alienated individuals to the production of potentially liberated spaces for collective use maps onto Constant's own shift from art to architecture. Theoretically, it also mapped onto his uneasiness with the continued high profile presence of artists within the SI, an uneasiness heightened when an exhibition by Gallizio in a gallery in Munich coincided with the SI's annual conference also scheduled to take place in that city. Several letters from 1959 reveal Debord's attempts both to pacify and to recalibrate Constant's questions over these

¹⁰⁹ See Hussey, *The Game of War*, p. 103.

¹¹⁰ 'Preliminary models for a new urbanism', in Andreotti and Costa, p. 62. First published in *Potlatch*, 30 (no. 1 in the new series), 15 July 1959. For Debord's initial composition of the article see Debord, *Correspondence*, pp. 254-55. Intriguingly, the letter to Constant also includes further instructions regarding the article's placement within the relaunched *Potlatch*.

issues.¹¹¹ Another concern for Constant involved the tentative centrality of unitary urbanism within the SI. During this period, the SI's spatial focus sought to synthesize a critique of urbanism with a sustained re-imagining of the future city. At times this critique reads as if embedded within the present. At other times it gravitates towards the kind of radical techno-utopianism that places much of Constant's work throughout the 1960s in alignment with the contemporaneous utopianism found in Marcuse's talk at the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation (or, in an expanded form, the similar argument Marcuse makes throughout *An Essay on Liberation*).¹¹² As an illustration of such technophile hopes and dreams, the same issue of *Potlatch* featured Constant's essay 'The great game to come' with its optimistic conclusion:

The technical inventions that humanity has at its disposal today will play a major role in the construction of the ambience-cities of the future. It is worth noting that significantly, to date, these inventions have in no way contributed to existing cultural activities and that creative artists have not known what to do with them. The potential offered by cinema, television, radio and high-speed travel and communication has not been exploited and their effect on cultural life has been deplorable. The investigation of technology and its exploitation for recreational ends on a higher plane is one of the most pressing tasks required to facilitate creation of a unitary urbanism on the scale demanded by the society of the future.¹¹³

If, in later decades of the twentieth century, the creative use of the technologies that Constant referenced filtered into the remnants of an artistic and cultural avant-garde (to become circuitously recuperated back into the mainstream), the investigation of technology's potential for transforming society and space did not happen in the ways Constant predicted. This is not to say that there was no exploitation of technology for recreational ends, only to observe that such technological shifts followed a pathway

¹¹¹ See Debord, *Correspondence*, especially pp. 218-21; pp. 231-35; pp. 242-45; pp. 277-79; pp. 285-86.

¹¹² See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

¹¹³ Constant, 'The great game to come', in Andreotti and Costa, pp. 62-63 (p. 63).

that reflected a more Debordist outlook on the spectacle's ability to absorb potential alternatives to the reign of capital. Psychogeography (and the SI) would face a similar future. Earlier in 'The great game to come', Constant's position appears more clearly in alignment with the immediate need to experiment with a revolution of everyday life stressed by Debord. Casting the Situationists as 'explorers specialising in play and recreation', Constant explains that the preliminary gathering of information through psychogeographical interventions into the city's existing phenomena (information principally gathered through drifts) clarifies many of the problems that will be encountered in the construction of situations based on unitary urbanism. However, as the essay's title suggests, Constant still orientates his utopian notions towards a post-work future that seems more concerned with the construction of new spaces in which to liberate ludic forms of social interaction than with implanting that potential future into present realities. For him, in a phrase reminiscent of Jorn's description of psychogeography as the science fiction of urbanism, psychogeography has 'led to the creation of plans and models of a highly imaginative sort that could be called architectural science fiction'.¹¹⁴

As these intertwined perspectives on unitary urbanism emerge, it becomes clear that Debord's general agreement with Constant's insistence that unitary urbanism should be central to the agenda of the SI should not be attributed to tactical diplomacy alone, although Debord's tactical skills are much in evidence throughout this period. For example, Debord had encouraged the setting up of a Bureau of Research for Unitary Urbanism which, like the rejuvenated *Potlatch*, initially came under the remit of the SI's Dutch section. But, tellingly, throughout Debord's correspondence to Constant certain pre-existing tensions become exacerbated by this delegation of duties. Whether

¹¹⁴ Constant, 'The great game to come', p. 63.

chasing the Bureau for texts and images or urging a speedier publication of the perpetually delayed *Potlatch*, it is Debord who seeks to shape the SI's overall direction. Receiving protestations from the Dutch section about a perceived resistance to fully focusing on unitary urbanism, Debord responds by outlining those theoretical areas in which his position converges with their proposals and by clarifying where and why he sees divergences occurring. A key point involves what he comprehends as an arbitrary separation between unitary urbanism and the Situationist movement, a separation embodied by the Dutch section addressing themselves as 'members of the Centre for the study of unitary urbanism'. 'I believe that I myself am also a member of this Centre', declares Debord. Adopting a global perspective, he states the urgent need for activating a social revolution that does not exclusively rely on first stimulating the technological conditions for a spatial revolution:

I believe capitalism incapable of dominating and *fully* employing its productive forces, incapable of abolishing the fundamental reality of exploitation, and therefore incapable of peacefully making way for the superior forces of life called for by its own material development. What you say about the 'abolition, for the working class, of grim material poverty' has actually occurred over the last fifty years in some Western European countries and in America. It has been paid for by the colonial slavery of the rest of humanity, and the atrocities of two world wars.¹¹⁵

Agreeing with the Dutch section's observation that what unites the current avant-garde is 'the revolt against existing cultural conditions' and the necessity of 'practical work', Debord explains that the difficulty of advancing beyond this point stems from 'the fact that the revolt against existing cultural conditions cannot stop at any of the artificial divisions of bourgeois culture, within culture, or between culture and life (because then we would have no real need for a revolt)'. Debord ends by reasserting his position

¹¹⁵ Debord, *Correspondence*, p. 232, p. 233.

on the operative use of unitary urbanism as a means towards constructing the necessary milieu for enabling more egalitarian ways of living to emerge on their own terms:

Unitary urbanism is not a conception of the totality, and must not become one. It is an operational instrument constructing an extended setting. Unitary urbanism is 'central' to the extent that it is the centre of a general construction of a milieu. Neither this theoretical vision nor even its intended application will allow us to think about determining or dominating a way of living. That would be a kind of unrealistic dogmatism. Reality is more complex and rich than that, and includes all the links between these ways of life and their settings. This is the only terrain equal to our desires today. The terrain where we must intervene.¹¹⁶

Composed at the start of April 1959, two weeks before the Third SI Conference in Munich, Debord's response advances the centrality of unitary urbanism while firmly grounding the SI's activist practice in the terrain of the real. For Debord, a commitment to unitary urbanism required the resistance of any fantasies regarding the modelling of the future. The dogmatism inherent in such fantasies had the power to corrupt the SI's vision of a liberated society. Following the conference, and Gallizio's 'coincidental' exhibition at the Van de Loo gallery in the same city, Constant maintained his unease at the SI's internal contradictions. In their correspondence, Debord attempts to appease Constant by politically aligning himself and those Situationists based in France with the Dutch section, explaining that the Munich Conference had clarified that their minority sections now controlled 'the debate of ideas in the SI, and thus its propaganda'.¹¹⁷ However, as Constant's repeated concerns insinuate, for all their alleged minority unity, Amsterdam often seemed to be controlled by Paris. In yet another letter written to Constant that April shortly after the

¹¹⁶ Debord, *Correspondence*, pp 234-35.

¹¹⁷ Debord, *Correspondence*, pp. 242-43.

Munich conference, Debord returns to the issue of the name of the centre for studying unitary urbanism run by the Dutch section:

I prefer, speaking for myself and without having the time to ask anyone else's opinion, the term *Bureau of Research* for Unitary Urbanism, because that seems to me a little more modest (for people outside), and because that risks less confusion (within the SI) over the notion of a 'centre', of domination [. . .] The word 'centre' smacks a bit of the idea of distinction and hierarchy. And you saw in Munich how these minute details could be inflated by the remnants of personal artistic vanity.¹¹⁸

And so the 'Centre' became the 'Bureau'.¹¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, Constant persisted with his own research agenda, testing the potential of those aspects of the Amsterdam Declaration that originated in the version of unitary urbanism closer to his own model. Retrospectively examined through the ensuing splits and exclusions, the Amsterdam Declaration, as Simon Sadler perceptively notes, remained 'a brave attempt to summarize the principles of unitary urbanism, though for all the certainty of its tone it was a rather schizophrenic document'. As a split text, the declaration revealed various tenets whose emphasis could be traced either to Constant (striving to perfect spatial construction, radically fusing art and science) or to Debord (initiating collective creativity as part of a revolutionary transformation of everyday life).¹²⁰ Constant's vision for unitary urbanism was post-revolutionary, Debord's vision was one of permanent revolution.

Mainly comprising architects, the Dutch section were given much of the responsibility

¹¹⁸ Debord, *Correspondence*, pp. 245-46.

¹¹⁹ Such manipulations frame Debord in the kind of light shone most harshly by Stewart Home in his ongoing interrogation of the SI legacy. 'Guy Debord isn't the only corpse to make a career out of situationism. All those who've composed texts on the subject are guilty of this crime' explains Home in his 'Introduction' to *What is Situationism? A Reader*, ed. by Stewart Home (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), pp. 1-2 (p. 1). See also Stewart Home, *Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), pp. 161-62; and Home, *The Assault on Culture*, pp. 41-44.

¹²⁰ Sadler, p. 121.

for producing sketches and plans of the labyrinth scheduled to be built for the SI exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in 1960. The labyrinth was intended to be a circuit connected to the greater labyrinth of the city so that two hundred metres could theoretically expand to three kilometres. The labyrinth in the gallery incorporated variable ceiling heights that switched from five metres to a more claustrophobic crawlspace of just over a metre. Artificial atmospheric and thermal effects (such as rain, fog and wind) would combine with sound interventions provided by a battery of tape-recorders. A 'system of unilateral doors (visible or openable from one side only)' would lead to a series of rooms psychogeographically designed to attract or repel. The whole construction was organized for micro-drifts, to increase occasions 'for getting lost'.¹²¹ The exhibition was to be coordinated with a three-day drift through Amsterdam. However, as the opening date drew nearer, problems emerged that led to the abandonment of the entire project. According to the SI, in March 1960 the director of the Stedelijk Museum, Willem Sandberg, revealed two 'sudden reservations' after approving the 'definitive plan' for the exhibition. The first reservation concerned allowing the Amsterdam Fire Brigade to approve potentially dangerous aspects of the labyrinth.¹²² The second reservation involved the SI finding part of the funding for the exhibition from external sources outside of the museum. The SI's instant dismissal of these requests led to a decision not to exhibit at the Stedelijk Museum, allowing unitary urbanism and the construction of situations to remain at a level of ambiguous generalization.¹²³

Countering the elusiveness of the SI's reluctance to produce concrete examples of

¹²¹ 'Die Welt als Labyrinth', in Andreotti and Costa, pp. 96-99 (p. 98). The unsigned article 'Die Welt als Labyrinth' was first published in *Internationale Situationniste*, 4 (June 1960), pp. 5-7.

¹²² 'Die Welt als Labyrinth', p. 96.

¹²³ See Sadler, p. 116.

their theoretical pursuits, whether through an actively mobile resistance to being reduced to a static form or to a genuine lack of internal agreement as to what such forms should take, Constant remained independently engaged on the ‘New Babylon’ project, producing various maquettes, maps, photomontages, sketches, and paintings. Exhibited in such static forms, ‘New Babylon’ crystallizes some of the complex practical challenges that the SI labyrinth in Amsterdam would have had to negotiate. How to produce working plans of a flexible non-prescriptive structure intended to be permanently in flux? How to ensure that the form did not impose a framework of control over the social processes it wanted to make autonomous? At its most technocratic, ‘New Babylon’ formally resembled earlier utopian projects by Le Corbusier as well as more contemporary manifestations such as Yona Friedman’s ‘Spatial City’.¹²⁴ Constant’s fascination with such issues as the technological flexibility of the space-frame proved to be a significant influence on the megastructural projects that flourished throughout the 1960s.¹²⁵ Inevitably, and this is where Debord’s evasiveness regarding the production of concrete examples of unitary urbanism can be diplomatically positioned, the political focus of Constant’s radical designs were often misread or elided in those projects directly influenced by New Babylon.¹²⁶

The failure to construct a labyrinth at the Stedelijk Museum opened the way for Debord to instigate a set of power plays that led to the exclusion of most of the Dutch section, the resignation of Constant, and the expulsion of Gallizio (principally expelled

¹²⁴ On Constant’s association with Friedman, in particular with the Groupe d’Etudes d’Architecture Mobile (GEAM), see Sadler, pp. 128-29. See Busbea, pp. 62-73.

¹²⁵ For a lively introduction to post-Second World War megastructures, see Reyner Banham, *Megastructures: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

¹²⁶ See Busbea for a plentiful supply of French examples. See also the science-fiction architecture of Archigram in their self-edited anthology *A Guide to Archigram: 1961-74* (London: Academy, 1994).

for eagerly exhibiting his artwork in the rooms in the museum left vacant by the SI).¹²⁷ With the collapse of the SI in Holland, Debord transferred the Bureau of Research for Unitary Urbanism to Brussels. Responsibility for the bureau now rested with Attila Kotányi, ably assisted by a new recruit to the SI, Raoul Vaneigem. In the sixth issue of the SI journal, published under the heading ‘Elementary program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism’, Kotányi and Vaneigem set forth ten points that indicated a shift towards a more ‘living critique’ for the SI’s research into urban phenomena.¹²⁸ The ‘Elementary Program’ clarified what Debord had always insisted, that unitary urbanism was not ‘a doctrine of urbanism but a critique of urbanism’ (a point restated in the unsigned article ‘Critique of Urbanism’ penned by Debord in the same issue).¹²⁹ For the SI, rather than manifesting in the form of a labyrinth in a metropolitan gallery, this new direction, or, more accurately, this recalibration of the same revolutionary impulse, eventually made its presence felt in the Parisian streets during *les événements* of May 1968.¹³⁰

The Amsterdam drift had been heralded in an article titled ‘Unitary Urbanism at the end of the 1950s’ in the third issue of the SI journal published towards the end of 1959.¹³¹ The article was accompanied by an aerial photograph of the centre of Amsterdam paired with a seventeenth-century map known as *Carte de Tendre*. The map was an engraving by François Chauveau from 1654 produced as an illustration for the first volume of *Clélie: Histoire Romaine*, a novel by Madeleine de Scudéry.

¹²⁷ For further details on the exclusion of the Dutch section see Mark Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam: 010, 1998), pp. 31-36.

¹²⁸ Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem ‘Elementary program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism’, in Andreotti and Costa, pp. 116-18 (p. 117).

¹²⁹ ‘Critique of Urbanism’, in Andreotti and Costa, pp. 109-15 (p. 109).

¹³⁰ For an insider’s account of *les événements* from a member of the SI, see René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May ’68* (New York: Autonomedia, 1992).

¹³¹ ‘Unitary Urbanism at the end of the 1950s’, in Andreotti and Costa, pp. 83-88 (p. 86).

Debord had been obsessed with the map for several years.¹³² The architectural historian and critic Anthony Vidler has argued that the vociferous force of the LI and SI's polemics against the most visible forms of Modern Movement urbanism have 'obscured the extent to which their call for a new architecture and a "unitary urbanism" relied deeply on the professional approaches to which it was nonetheless opposed'.¹³³ Vidler's essay pays specific attention to Debord's use of maps and aerial photographs. Reflecting on Debord's relationship with the *Carte de Tendre* and images depicting urban topographies, Vidler argues that rather than viewing the *détournement* of such images as part of a purely oppositional strategy, Debord's use of cartographic and other territorial representations negotiate a more subtle and incorporative relationship.¹³⁴ The aesthetic, cultural, and political negotiations between Debord's re-use of aerial maps and their initial use by architects and urbanists metonymically signals the more labyrinthine negotiations that haunt the debate on unitary urbanism and the theory and practice of psychogeography.

I saw a tattered labyrinth (it was London)

Across a series of essays collected in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson charts the interpenetrating genealogies of an anticipatory utopian programme and an immanent utopian impulse, differentiating between the reactionary pitfalls of blithely

¹³² See Vidler, pp. 13-30.

¹³³ Vidler, p. 13.

¹³⁴ One of the key examples upon which Vidler focuses is Debord's conflictual relationship to the work of the geographer and ethnologist Paul Chombart de Lauwe, see Vidler, pp. 25-27.

subscribing to utopian form and the more radical possibilities inherent in deploying utopian desire as a tactical basis for transforming one's experience of the urban environment.¹³⁵ Crudely simplified, in this latter sense utopia equates with what could be characterised as 'spaces of hope' constructed through an awakening of a revolutionary subjectivity capable of rupturing the alienating systems of coercion and control that regulate everyday life in the city. From a psychogeographical perspective, Paris provides a profusion of models for such a romantic coupling of utopian theory and practice: whether through the bloody insurrections that have punctuated the capital's history (the storming of the Bastille in 1789, the rise and fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, the *soixante-huitards* barricading the rue Gay-Lussac), or through the poetic actions of various avant-gardes (from the early years of Surrealism through the Situationists to urban interventions by the coalition of clandestine groups known as UX), or through seminal works of critical urbanism largely composed in the city (by Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord). In Jameson's discussions of utopia, the twin engines of utopian programme and utopian impulse have been aligned through design: the former iterated through urban planning, the latter through individual buildings.¹³⁶ By simplifying the subtleties of his argument into a neat schematic that opens up yet more questions regarding autonomy and the role of models and pathways, architecture becomes identified as an experimental engagement with different scales of partial utopias, each with a different totalising potential to turn pathological.¹³⁷ Jameson's arguments evolve from his extended engagement with the

¹³⁵ Several of Fredric Jameson's essays on utopian themes have been collected together in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005). For a compelling application of this utopian dichotomy in relation to the twentieth-century city, see Pinder, *Visions of the City*.

¹³⁶ See Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 4.

¹³⁷ For an exploration of the constitutive potential of architecture as a partial utopia and its totalising capacity to turn pathological, see Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005).

‘spatial turn’ that precedes and partly encompasses the more localized ‘psychogeographical turn’ of the 1990s.

‘The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space’, speculated Michel Foucault in a text based on a lecture he had given in March 1967.¹³⁸ The movement towards the spatial identified by Foucault reflects the start of an attempt to rectify a relatively unperceived bias, particularly in academic discourse, towards a temporal historical perspective.¹³⁹ As if confirming Foucault’s observation, over the remaining decades of the century a range of figures from a variety of disciplines engaged with the neglected concept of space, producing an intellectual maze of spatialized interpretations of history, culture, and everyday life. For interdisciplinary theorists of the postmodern such as Jameson and Edward Soja, the city appeared as one of the primary topics for comprehending the emergent complexity of the spatial in a globalized era of rapid technological shifts under a regime often labelled as (and here the spatial gives way to the temporal) ‘late capitalism’.¹⁴⁰ Jameson, reflecting on ‘the predominance of space in the postcontemporary era’, recognized the debt that such a spatial turn owed to the work of Henri Lefebvre. For Jameson, while Lefebvre had emphasized the increasing importance of the urban for an understanding of contemporary life (and the new globality of late capitalism), he had also ‘called for a new kind of spatial imagination capable of confronting the past in a new way and reading its less tangible secrets off the template of its spatial structures – body, cosmos, city’.¹⁴¹ The work of Soja also addressed the significance of uncovering the

¹³⁸ See Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 22-27 (p. 22).

¹³⁹ See Edward J. Soja, ‘Taking Space Personally’, in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 11-35.

¹⁴⁰ See Jameson, *Postmodernism* (particularly pp. 154-80, pp. 409-18), and Edward J. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

¹⁴¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 364, pp. 364-65.

secrets that are secreted in space:

We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparent innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology.¹⁴²

These aspects of the spatial turn, first comprehensively addressed by Lefebvre in a series of spatial studies that spanned a period from the mid-1960s to the publication of the influential *The Production of Space* in 1974, have distinct connections with the speculative psychogeographical research undertaken by the LI and SI. As noted in the previous chapter, Lefebvre and Debord shared an interest in the disregarded and occluded aspects of an everyday life increasingly colonized by commodification and structurally permeated by alienation. For the SI, theory and practice were to be dialectically charged via strategies of defamiliarization intended to disalienate participants from the alienation that had been perfected by the complex of capitalist forces that Debord would later call the spectacle. As indicated by the LI's focus on psychogeography, Debord's arguments had already taken a spatial turn by the mid-1950s.¹⁴³ Through their focus on the space of the city and through the reciprocal relationship of intellectual exchange established between Debord and Lefebvre, the critique of urbanism found in the texts and practice of the LI and SI both prefigure and influence various strands of the spatial turn in late twentieth-century theory and culture. Like impecunious artists who move into a rundown neighbourhood only to find that their presence subsequently encourages the arrival of property developers, the LI and SI's radical move into 'space' has been succeeded by the arrival of the more rigorous and conservative analyses of accredited academics. Thirty years before

¹⁴² Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 6.

¹⁴³ See Pinder, *Visions of the City*, pp. 164-70.

Jameson or Soja, psychogeography was already being used to decrypt the coded inscriptions of power located in the supposedly neutral realm of space. Lefebvre's turn to the politics of space became crystallized through his close interaction with the SI during this period.¹⁴⁴ For Lefebvre, although the everyday was the site of alienation it also produced the *lived* space where disalienation could occur. This disalienation arose within the spontaneity of what he theorized as *moments* where a shift from one mode of being to another suddenly offered glimpses of an alternative way of living. By scrutinizing the contradictions at play within the everyday, Lefebvre's critique opens up a pathway towards an understanding of everyday life and urban experience capable of registering moments charged with emancipatory possibilities and revolutionary energies.¹⁴⁵ Psychogeography, as theorized and practiced by the LI and SI, was designed to accrue a similar knowledge that could be used as the basis for making the city a site of permanent revolution. If Sinclair's defamiliarization of the city through a paranoid mapping of its occulted lines of influence appears less politically dynamic or romantically utopian, as a strategy that deploys a microanalytical approach to the materiality of the urban while simultaneously deriving (or *dériving*) imaginative connections from that same materiality, it carries its own strain of resistance and dissent. Like his psychogeographical precursors, Sinclair rejects both the visible and invisible signs of prohibition and keeps playing in the labyrinth.

From the perspective of the psychogeographer drifting between *plaques tournantes* within the split city, the relationship between totality and pathology that Jameson identifies in the multi-scalar assemblages of architecture and urbanism is given a directly cartographic dimension in his theorizing of cognitive mapping. Jameson

¹⁴⁴ See David Harvey's 'Afterword' to Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, pp. 429-430.

¹⁴⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. II*, pp. 340-58. See also Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday*, p. 67.

recalibrates the concept of cognitive mapping from its initial focus on the mental maps of the city that each individual carries with them as a way of orientating themselves within the urban environment to a far broader scope that encompasses ‘that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled form’.¹⁴⁶ For Jameson, in an age of late capitalism, individual subjects are inserted ‘into a multidimensional set of discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself’. For the individual nested within these frames, the global and social totality becomes unrepresentable, imaginary, and yet remains to be cognitively mapped. Jameson argues that the thematic omnipresence of paranoia manifested by the production of elaborate conspiracy plots could be described as:

the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content.¹⁴⁷

Could Sinclair’s paranoid stalking of the city’s secrets be a pathological case of a failed cognitive mapping of the social totality? Or does the ambivalence that Sinclair displays towards his alternative cartography suggest that his findings are of less critical significance than the process he uses to produce inconclusive conspiracies? As Jameson points out in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s conspiracy theories were a conspicuous feature of the novels of Thomas Pynchon and the films of Alan Pakula. *Lud Heat* can be historically embedded within this flowering

¹⁴⁶ Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, pp. 277-87 (p. 282). For a critique of Jameson’s cognitive mapping, see Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁴⁷ Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, p. 286.

of conspiratorial texts.¹⁴⁸ However, as with the work of Pynchon and Pakula, the conspiracy being plotted is only part of the theme and content and can both generate and be subjected to multiple interpretations that sustain contradictory meanings. A more productive approach to *Lud Heat* involves comprehending how the representation of any degraded or desperate conspiracy theory is grounded in the material (and increasingly immaterial) everyday. From this angle, *Lud Heat* offers another compelling example of a conspiratorial text, that, to cite Jameson:

whatever other message it emits or implies, may also be taken to constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality [. . .] Nothing is gained by having been persuaded of the definitive verisimilitude of this or that conspiratorial hypothesis: but in the intent to hypothesize, in the desire called cognitive mapping – therein lies the beginning of wisdom.¹⁴⁹

In their variant cognitive mapping of Paris and London, both Situationist psychogeography and Sinclair's mid-1970s prototype imaginatively hypothesize the everyday connectivity that links the psychological to the physical and the social through a network of interrelations to an invisible totality. From the revolutionary perspective of the SI, psychogeography is intended to reveal how such a labyrinthine totality can be mapped so that a radical refunctioning of its collective potentiality can be set in motion. Although Sinclair's counter-cultural credentials align him with the utopian spirit of a fading era, the process of psychogeography that will become his preoccupation over subsequent decades sets in motion a revolution that remains more local than total, opening up pathways that solidify into models that can be mapped

¹⁴⁸ A pertinent example of a conspiratorial text more prominently in the mode of critical urbanism is *Delirious New York* by the architect Rem Koolhaas first published in 1978. Like Sinclair in *Lud Heat*, Koolhaas focuses on a series of significant urban sites while conducting his paranoid-critical inflected analysis of New York. See Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (Rotterdam: 010, 1994).

¹⁴⁹ Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 3.

onto the urban labyrinth, a generative process that opens up yet more pathways through the multidimensional set of discontinuous realities of the social and global totality within which Jameson proposes the city and its citizens are positioned.

Offering a summary of the films of his occasional collaborator Chris Petit, Sinclair observes that each film was ‘another version of the Petit labyrinth’.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, *London Labyrinth* is the name of one of Petit’s films. Compiled from an array of secondary sources that feature different aspects of the city, *London Labyrinth* can be categorized as an intertextual and psychogeographical city symphony akin to those found in the multiple versions of the Sinclair labyrinth. Petit’s introductory voiceover provides a suitably minimalist orientation to the ensuing *détournement* of extant images:

London is finally unknowable. Secret and secretive, a city of closed doors. What the Argentinian writer Borges called a tattered labyrinth. It is both mythical and surreal. A city where each house, however innocent in appearance, hides the possibility of its own crime. Many try to understand or control it: Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty; Fu Manchu; Jack the Ripper; Margaret Thatcher. London eludes the grasp. And yet for every stranger arriving in the city it is there for the taking.¹⁵¹

Several figures referenced by Petit will return in the next chapter as this study tracks Sinclair’s path through the tattered labyrinth of London via the dark heritage of Whitechapel and the deviant trajectories of the urban Gothic that spiral around the hub of Hawksmoor’s Christ Church.

¹⁵⁰ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 315. As with Debord’s participation with Jorn on the production of psychogeographical maps and texts, it is worth reiterating that a significant amount of Sinclair’s work has been grounded in collaborative projects.

¹⁵¹ Petit’s *London Labyrinth* has distinct similarities with the film, or ‘map of images’, compiled by the title character in his debut novel *Robinson*. See Christopher Petit, *Robinson* (London: Cape, 1993), p. 164. See also Christopher Petit, ‘The Tattered Labyrinth: A Selective A-Z of London Cinema’, in *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, ed. by Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (London: Wallflower, 2008), pp. 226-33.

5) A STUDY IN SCARLET TRACINGS: PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND LONDON GOTHIC

‘There is a spectre haunting Europe, nay, the world. The spectre of psychogeography’.¹ These opening lines, resonating with the ghostly echoes of their influential nineteenth-century predecessor, are from an article by the London Psychogeographical Association published in 1996. The LPA’s mischievous homage to the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto* deserves further *détournement* through another turn of the geographical screw.² Rather than a global or European phenomenon, this chapter identifies the spectre of psychogeography as a spatial practice with which Sinclair navigates the spectral city of London, a focal point for representations of the urban Gothic. This chapter will chart the Gothic components that haunt London psychogeography by tracing how Sinclair filters specific examples of the urban Gothic through the distorting lens of his speculative analyses and intertextual appropriations. But before pursuing the spectralized thread of the Gothic as it weaves between the closing decades of both the nineteenth and twentieth century, another narrowing of geographical focus is necessary to connect its emergence with the previous chapter’s discussion of the labyrinth. One of the primary ways in which Iain Sinclair prepares the ground for a London psychogeography in *Lud Heat* is

¹ London Psychogeographical Association, ‘Why Psychogeography?’, in *Mind Invaders*, pp. 136-38 (p. 136). This brief text was first published in *Electric Schizoo*, 1, May 1996.

² ‘A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism’. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Samuel Moore (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988 [1848]), p. 78. In his monograph on Sinclair, Brian Baker cites this phrase from *The Communist Manifesto* in relation to Derrida’s hauntological reading of Marx in *Specters of Marx*, noting that amongst others, the ‘London Psychogeographical Association’ (given the context, this appears to be a typo for the London Psychogeographical Association) deploy a variant of the same phrase in their texts ‘indicating their Marxian lineage’. If the deployment of a phrase was so simply indicative of such a lineage then Sinclair’s shapeshifting position on the political spectrum might prove easier to determine. See Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, p. 24.

through a delirious mapping of the topographical alignment of Hawksmoor's London churches and other associated sites across the city. To contextualize a set of preoccupations that surface within Sinclair's imaginative interpretation of the patterns formed by these alignments, this chapter considers the psychogeographical resonance of one of Hawksmoor's churches in particular, Christ Church, Spitalfields, a hub around which another set of turbulent sites are distributed: the locations of the Whitechapel murders of 1888. Sinclair's engagement with the proliferating conspiracies engendered by this grisly topic involves a renegotiation of Gothic themes and processes with which the murders and the neighbourhood are associated. The emphasis on Whitechapel in relation to London as a space within which a specifically urban efflorescence of Gothic flourished in the late-Victorian period brings Sinclair's first novel *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* firmly into the foreground (supplemented by sections from the twelve tales that form his subsequent book *Downriver*). As with *Lud Heat*, the preoccupations and processes that flow through these texts have proved influential in the development and dissemination of a *fin-de-millennium* London psychogeography. These texts are also haunted by the spectre of earlier Gothic incarnations (much as the available lexicon for interpreting the Gothic is itself haunted by a Gothicized rhetoric that threatens to contaminate scholarly attempts at achieving critical distance).³ In Sinclair's work of this period (*White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* was published in 1987, *Downriver* in 1991), the spectral references supply illuminating evidence of various intertextual debts. By addressing the specific spatial and temporal contexts in which such Gothic references and representations have emerged, this chapter attempts to navigate the contested borderlands between textuality and territory (and the conflicting critical perspectives that circulate around

³ On the 'curious collocation' of critique and subject matter when addressing the Gothic, see David Punter, 'Introduction: the Ghosts of History', in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 1-9 (p.3).

hauntological and historicist interpretations of the urban Gothic and its spectralized others) in order to continue assessing the political efficacy of London psychogeography as a spatial practice.⁴ As Sinclair's work progressively shifts from the counter-cultural margins to the cultural mainstream, a shift that mirrors the geographical movement of certain Gothic trajectories, a related question arises once again in a variant form: to what extent has the psychogeographical version of urban Gothic that Sinclair pursues as a form of resistance to prevailing market forces and the conservative restrictions of heritage culture become a commodity to be purveyed?

Baker Street, 1887

In his introduction to an edition of Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* – a novel first published in 1887 – Sinclair outlines what appears to be an extravagant case for the prophetic tendencies of late-Victorian fiction, claiming that towards the end of the nineteenth century a cluster of novels were published whose 'plots, settings and principal characters continue to haunt the psychic biosphere of London'. From the emergence of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1886 to the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* just over a decade later, Sinclair argues that a selection of Gothic texts have profoundly influenced the development of the urban imaginary, creating 'the myths by which the late-Victorian period can still be accessed'. Additionally, he suggests that the 'key Victorian fictions overlap, shadow each other, until their lead characters achieve an independent existence: they are part of the perpetual dream of the city'. The uncanny interrelationships of these

⁴ See Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic'.

London shadow-works prompt Sinclair to elaborate on the qualitative ways in which they invert the rational processes that underpin the linear flow of history:

These works are prophetic; through them we can see what will happen, what *must* happen. Speculative scenarios run ahead of mundane facts: political and social reality is always secondhand. It has been explored and exploited, road-tested by imaginative authors operating in those zones that are only acknowledged by compendium reviews in the humblest corners of the broadsheets.⁵

Viewed through the clairvoyant lens of this speculative perspective, this variation on Sinclair's Xerox Principle proposes that the violent traces of psychological and physical turbulence embedded within imaginative and marginalized fictions have a spasmodic capacity to coalesce, anticipating or even generating a Gothic ambience that shapes the political and social life of the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis as the words leak from their pages into the streets, black tributaries of printer's ink coagulating into blood and flesh, amalgamating into brick and stone. This aggregative and proleptic process, and within this context it is useful to consider the Gothic as a process that is applied to the city, continues to impact upon the repetition of Gothicized representations of London throughout the next century and beyond.⁶ If the visionary elements could be subtracted from this line of reasoning, the result might serve up what could be construed as a more palatable sociological commentary, one that resembles a variation on the standard argument that the cultural consumption of material containing violent scenes risks causing a corresponding outbreak of actual violence in society. Indeed, a version of this conservative argument had been deployed almost two centuries earlier as one of the weapons in the critical attacks that targeted

⁵ Sinclair, 'Introduction', *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xxii; p. xii; p. xxiii; p. xii.

⁶ In the introduction to his valuable historicist geography of the Gothic, Robert Mighall argues that the 'Gothic is a process, not an essence; a rhetoric rather than a store of universal symbols; an attitude to the past and the present, not a free-floating fantasy world.' See Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xxv.

Gothic fiction in the 1790s (a decade that saw the publication of a series of phenomenally successful Gothic romances by Ann Radcliffe as well as the notoriously deviant *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis).⁷ The growing popularity of the Gothic raised fears that not only was the nation being intellectually weakened by this female-oriented fashion for light reading but also that the excesses that gave the narratives their sensational capacity to shock and delight threatened to overwhelm any overarching moral message. At the end of the eighteenth century, such transgressive energies became smoothly aligned with the radical excesses of the French Revolution, increasing English anxieties regarding the revolutionary currents set to roll across the Channel.⁸ A century later, a series of texts redeployed the contrary tendencies that make the concept of the Gothic so difficult to fix in place or to define, giving expression to another wave of fears and anxieties through an updated and urbanized configuration capable of registering and partially manufacturing the Gothicized duality of the modern metropolis.⁹ It is within the context of this latter eruption, the late-Victorian proliferation of ‘prophetic’ works of urban Gothic fiction, that Sinclair endorses the irrationality of the visionary elements of his assessment, emphasizing the mediumistic role of the writer as a conduit through which certain aspects of the future are created and manipulated.

Sinclair had previously rehearsed this strange case of late-Victorian prophetic fiction in *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*. The main plot of one of the novel’s three interlinked narratives involves the discovery by a trio of bookdealers of a variant

⁷ Radcliffe and Lewis have become emblematic figures of a contentious split between ‘Female Gothic’ and ‘Male Gothic’ within Gothic studies. For a valuable survey of this topic, see Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, ‘Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic’ in their edited collection *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-11.

⁸ See Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 21-24.

⁹ See Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde, Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

edition of Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* that predates other editions. The narrator, a Sinclair avatar ambiguously labelled as 'the Late Watson', deciphers the text as a coded message, blacking out the majority of the text to release those key words that appear to anticipate the Whitechapel murders. Sat in a pub on the edge of the city on a Midsummer's night in the mid-1970s, pints newly deposited on the table, the narrator of another narrative strand, again bearing a distinct autobiographical resemblance to Sinclair, plunges without preamble into the following thesis:

Accepting the notion of "presence" – I mean that certain fictions, chiefly Conan Doyle, Stevenson, but many others also, laid out a template that was more powerful than any local documentary account – the presences that they created, or "figures" if you prefer it, like Rabbi Loew's Golem, became too much and too fast to be contained within the conventional limits of that fiction. They got out into the stream of time, the ether; they escaped into the labyrinth. They achieved an independent existence.

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, together with Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, escape into London's late-Victorian labyrinth from the fictions of the two writers that Sinclair's narrator nominates as chiefly responsible for shaping certain Golem-like 'presences' capable of spectacularly transcending their conventional limits. These fictional characters not only achieve what Sinclair repeatedly calls 'an independent existence' by becoming a part of the collective imagination (or, in Sinclair's typically more spatialized term, the 'psychic biosphere': a space in which conscious and unconscious processes collectively circulate around shared and inherited concepts of London, a delimited zone haunted and partially regulated by the cultural legacy of the city's innumerable ghost versions of itself) but also enter into a synchronic relationship with another 'presence' that slips between representations of the actual and imaginary city: Jack the Ripper.

The writers were mediums; they articulated, they gave shape to some pattern of energy that was already present. They got in on the curve of time, so that by writing, by holding off the inhibiting reflex of the rational mind, they were able to propose a text that was prophetic.¹⁰

The mediumistic status of the writers shaping a ‘pattern of energy’ represents both a peculiarly Gothicized intertextuality where the rational agency and presence of the author defers to the spectral presence of a text mysteriously writing itself and to the equally perplexing sense that the text generates its own agency, animating the events that it describes into being.¹¹ Sinclair’s narrator explains that Conan Doyle ‘encodes the coming sacrifices’ of the Whitechapel murders and that ‘Stevenson’s *Jekyll & Hyde*, in that predetermined Calvinist language, describes what is almost at hand – the escape of the other, the necessary annihilation of self’.¹² In this cyclical scenario, the ‘rational mind’ is suspended so that the authors of these fictions can become minutely sensitized to the slightest shifts in the fickle fabric of the zeitgeist, psychically registering the signs and symptoms of emerging fears and desires before presciently retransmitting those same fears and desires as coded fictions that consolidate their increasing consonance with the tenor of the times. The urban Gothic provides a suitably phantasmagoric vehicle for such projections. As with the haunted houses that form one of its many tropes, the Gothic is *pre-occupied*. When it rematerializes in the late-Victorian era the diversity of its psychological and geographical legacies carry complex traces of past *preoccupations*.¹³ The sensitized reading of ‘some pattern of

¹⁰ Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, p. 129.

¹¹ See Brian Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 63-64.

¹² Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, p. 128, p. 129. Newspaper reports from September 1888 onwards referenced the split character of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in relation to the Whitechapel murders. See Walkowitz, pp. 206-07. See also, Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 67-94.

¹³ On psychology’s debt to the ‘uncanny haunted houses of Gothic fiction’, see Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, ‘Introduction’, *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19 (p. 11).

energy' already present but usually left unseen or disregarded in the everyday life of the city is clearly comparable to the sensitized mode of Sinclair's psychogeography.

Crossing back into fiction, this pattern recognition also closely resembles the detecting of infinitesimal clues and the uncovering of obscured connections that the character of Sherlock Holmes has trained himself to put into practice when confronted with a crime scene: 'I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me', comments Dr Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* as Holmes searches for potential clues to a perplexing murder in Brixton.¹⁴ Throughout the narratives that relate his various cases, Holmes characteristically sharpens his practice by applying his principles of deduction to more everyday encounters in the quieter interstices of the more sensational elements of the plot. In a captivating essay on clues and scientific method, Carlo Ginzburg outlines a compelling analogy between Sherlock Holmes, Sigmund Freud, and the art historian Giovanni Morelli. The latter argued that a correct attribution of a painting could be made by concentrating on minor details: 'earlobes, fingernails, toes'.¹⁵ Freud described Morelli's method of inquiry as 'closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis. It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap [. . .] of our observations'.¹⁶ Noting that Conan Doyle, Freud, and Morelli had all been trained as doctors, Ginzburg aligns their interpretation of clues with 'symptomatology', a discipline which permits diagnosis 'on the basis of superficial symptoms or signs',

¹⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 28.

¹⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: clues and scientific method', in *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading*, ed. by Tony Bennett (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 252-76 (p. 253).

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'The Moses of Michelangelo', in *Collected Works*, Standard Edn, vol. XIII, pp. 211-38 (p. 222).

though ‘the disease cannot be directly observed’.¹⁷ Curiously, Ginzburg does not reference Conan Doyle’s much-quoted confession that his former medical school professor at Edinburgh University, Dr Joseph Bell, provided a principal source for the deductive methodology deployed by Holmes: ‘I thought I would try my hand at writing a story where the hero would treat crime as Doctor Bell treated disease’.¹⁸ Moving beyond the scientific purview of this shared medical background, Ginzburg traces the roots of his conjectural model back to a world of hunters literally tracking the clues left by a prey they cannot directly observe. In a supplementary move that could be mapped onto Walter Benjamin’s enigmatic essay ‘On the Mimetic Faculty’, Ginzburg aligns this conjectural model with the magical correspondences detected by diviners reading the future through the entrails of animals or the stars in the night sky. As delineated in Benjamin’s compressed analysis, which touches upon language and script as archives of ‘non-sensuous similarities’ that have almost imperceptibly migrated from occult practices ‘to the point where they have liquidated magic’, there is a creative rather than merely reproductive dynamic to the mimetic faculty.¹⁹ When used to search the archive of the everyday world (a total archive where that which is observed and rationally rejected as rubbish may prove most revealing), Ginzburg suggests that this conjectural paradigm ‘can perhaps help us to go beyond the sterile contrasting of “rationalism” and “irrationalism”’:

In a social structure of ever-increasing complexity like that of advanced capitalism, befogged by ideological murk, any claim to systematic knowledge appears as a flight of foolish fancy. To acknowledge this is not to abandon the idea of totality. On the contrary: the existence of a deep connection which explains superficial phenomena can be

¹⁷ Ginzburg, ‘Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes’, p. 257.

¹⁸ Quoted in Allen Eyles, *Sherlock Holmes: A Centenary Celebration* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 11. Doyle dedicated the first collection of short stories featuring Holmes to ‘My old teacher Joseph Bell, MD’. See Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Mimetic Faculty’, in *One-Way Street*, pp. 160-63 (p. 163).

confirmed when it is acknowledged that direct knowledge of such a connection is impossible. Reality is opaque; but there are certain points – clues, symptoms – which allow us to decipher it.²⁰

The meteorological metaphor of fog that Ginzburg tellingly associates with ideology is a prevalent feature in London Gothic. Obscuring visibility, limiting certainty, fog creates an aura of unknowing that is an ideal device for developing a Gothic atmosphere of terror. Yet this obscurity that conceals danger, also intimates the unseen possibility of that danger: the fog-bound corners of the city become sites of threat through the potential presence of that which the fog makes impossible to directly observe. As Ginzburg implies, in comments that echo Jameson's account of cognitive mapping, the fog's obscurity also reflects the ideological status of the modern citizen for whom it is impossible to acquire a complete knowledge of the social totality or of the city, the emblematic space of modernity and advanced capitalism. Holmes exists to protect such citizens from the criminality that threatens to overwhelm them, securing the existing system through his seemingly preternatural facility for penetrating the fog that obscures the connections between superficial phenomena. Although often typecast as a model of scientific rationality, it is the construction of Holmes's extraordinary character that also problematizes any easy separation between the rational and irrational. For example, Richard Lehan touches upon this problematic when he spends several pages compiling various fragments of evidence that demonstrate how Holmes typifies rationality before concluding his interpretation by acknowledging that the cocaine that the great detective regularly imbibes 'overpowers the rational' suggesting that 'the irrational is a realm that we cannot fully escape as it works its will within Sherlock Holmes and the somber city that Doyle has given him to protect'.²¹ While

²⁰ Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes', p. 252, p. 273.

²¹ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 84-91 (p. 91).

supremely logical in his investigative methods, the irregularity of that extraordinary logic combined with certain decadent eccentricities alienate Holmes from the society he protects.²² Pathologically susceptible to boredom, the systematized networks of his logician's brain pulse to the scandalous rhythms of a bohemian temperament. It is partly this divided aspect that Sinclair identifies when he characterizes the great consulting detective in the following terms: 'With his sense of theatre, his eccentric studies, his urban peregrinations, Holmes is the perfect model for the metropolitan poet, the psychogeographer.'²³ Holmes, like Sinclair, has a highly developed knowledge of the city grounded in urban peregrinations. When conjoined with eccentric studies, such knowledge provides the requisite tools for accessing (through recognition rather than discovery) an expansive archive of potential correspondences that would otherwise remain obscured. Umberto Eco once classified Jorge Luis Borges as a 'delirious archivist' whose eccentric studies enabled him to recognize startling correspondences between fragments within the total archive of culture.²⁴ In fiction and in fact, Holmes and Sinclair are delirious archivists of the city.

Shortly after arranging to share rooms with Holmes at No. 221B, Baker Street, another doctor, John H. Watson MD, the principal narrator of *A Study in Scarlet* and the subsequent Holmesian case histories, summarizes his first impressions of his new acquaintance:

Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after

²² See Scott McCracken, *Pulp: Reading popular fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 59-63.

²³ Sinclair, 'Introduction', *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xx.

²⁴ Umberto Eco, 'Borges and My Anxiety of Influence', in *On Literature*, trans. by Martin McLaughlin (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005), pp. 118-35 (p. 121). Eco explains that if someone had described Borges as inventing fictional correspondences, he believes that Borges 'would have replied: "No, no, it was already there, it already existed"', (p. 122).

ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the city. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.²⁵

Far from being ‘regular’, the habits that Holmes reveals to his new companion already split and segment into bipolar states of frenzy and inertia, states that will soon turn out to be even more habitually deceptive as Watson discovers the ‘work’ that Holmes is engaged upon. But the distinguishing characteristics that Sinclair describes as giving Holmes the qualities of a psychogeographer are already present at this early stage. Holmes as the ‘metropolitan poet’ voyaging into the less salubrious quarters of the city inhabited by a different class of Victorian could be viewed alongside Benjamin’s version of Baudelaire as a traumatophile *flâneur*, immersing himself in the psychic and material shocks generated by urban modernity.²⁶ However, Sinclair stresses a fundamental difference between Holmes and the aimless poetics of *flânerie*:

Conan Doyle realizes, right at the start, that his subject is energy, volition: the survival of individual consciousness against the crushing entropy of the city. London was still, just, knowable. Holmes, like a psychogeographer, disappears into the map. Crime is the motivation, the motor force that gets him up from his chair. Unlike his Parisian contemporaries, he is no *flâneur*: he is a purposeful stalker.²⁷

From a genealogical perspective, Holmes carries a defining trait of London psychogeography. His actions herald ‘the age of the stalker’ that Sinclair identifies in *Lights Out for the Territory*: ‘The stalker was our role-model [. . .] This was walking

²⁵ Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 15.

²⁶ See Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, pp. 117-20.

²⁷ Sinclair, ‘Introduction’, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xix.

with a thesis. With a prey.²⁸ As a ‘purposeful stalker’, the figure of Holmes criss-crosses an epistemological threshold between possessing a systematic knowledge of the urban totality and illuminating encounters with the entropic forces of its illimitability. Sinclair implicitly identifies his variant psychogeography with Holmes, although the London beyond the pages of Doyle’s fiction is no longer ‘still, just, knowable’. The mode of purposeful stalking differentiates London psychogeography from that practiced by the Situationists (Sinclair’s own version of the ‘Parisian contemporaries’ of Holmes). While examining the function of Gothic in *fin-de-siècle* London literature, Alexandra Warwick also distinguishes between the urban experience encountered by the individual inhabitant in Paris and in London, arguing that ‘London does not produce the *flâneur*, the man in easy mastery of his surroundings, but rather his negative double, the person in paranoid relation to his environment’. For Warwick:

Paris offers views, allows ordered ways of seeing the city, awareness that there is plan and design; London crowds confirm the isolation of the single walker while simultaneously reminding him of his inescapable part in a pattern of which he cannot make sense. He is aware of loss and incompleteness, and the patterns that he perceives are oppressive and threatening rather than liberating and empowering.²⁹

The difference between London psychogeography and the Parisian equivalent theorized earlier by Debord is more subtle than the difference between Holmes and the *flâneur*. But Sinclair is no Debordist *dériviste*, at least, not in merely allowing himself to drop his ‘usual motives for movement and action’ so that he can purposelessly drift

²⁸ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 75.

²⁹ Alexandra Warwick, ‘Lost Cities: London’s Apocalypse’, in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*, ed. by Glennis Byron and David Punter (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 73-87 (p. 83). Warwick’s analysis is in danger of representing a version of Paris that is too simplistic. As Henri Lefebvre warns: ‘There is a trite Paris, a Paris that is easily available. For tourists? Not only for them. Many Parisians take on trust a conventional representation of their city: the acceptable, presentable and therefore “normal” and “self-evident” Paris’. See Henri Lefebvre, ‘The Other Paris’, in *Key Writings*, ed. by Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleanore Kofman (London & New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 151-59 (p. 151).

through certain parts of the city ‘drawn by the attractions of the terrain’.³⁰ The criminal mysteries that motivate Holmes into rising from his chair to stalk the city for clues have a more multiplex correspondence in the seemingly disparate mysteries, ranging from the esoteric to the everyday, that motivate Sinclair into a state of compulsive associationism that requires a move into the streets. In a sense, Sinclair’s usual motives for movement and action are already purposefully psychogeographical, ensuring that his drifts are less a response to the ambience of the terrain than a directed form of information gathering, relentlessly testing and expanding multifaceted theses by tracing specific routes through a landscape that features existing and emerging *plaques tournantes*. On such walks, Sinclair generates the kind of data that Debord felt would ‘permit the drawing up of the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of the modern city’ that would illustrate the existence of *plaques tournantes* as ‘psychogeographical pivotal points’.³¹ However, rather than walking with a Situationist thesis, where a psychogeographical survey of the city could provoke a radical reimagining of the politics of space and social relations, it is the importation of the recurring theme of mysteries to be solved or resolved (and a related preoccupation with the city as a site of criminality and violence) that gives London psychogeography a set of role-models that licence a form of urban walking as if stalking a ‘prey’.

Whitechapel has become a key site of London psychogeography, especially through its Gothicized association with the mystery of Jack the Ripper. In this context, the vocabulary of stalking and prey carry disturbingly problematic echoes. For Sinclair, these echoes already resonate in the prophetic plot of *A Study in Scarlet*. The

³⁰ Debord, ‘Theory of the *dérive*’, p. 50.

³¹ Debord, ‘Theory of the *dérive*’, p. 53.

mysterious nature of the ‘work’ upon which Holmes is engaged prompts a comparison with the composite murder suspect being hunted by the police in Whitechapel less than a year after Conan Doyle’s novel was published. As Martin Wills has suggested:

Just as Jack the Ripper was – by various police, press and public sources – thought to be an addict made violent by drug use, a madman, or a medical man pursuing gruesome research, so Sherlock Holmes is, in turn, associated with violent medical investigations, significant personality change and addiction.³²

Wills proposes that the Whitechapel murders were a motivating factor for the shift in characterization that occurs in Conan Doyle’s portrayal of Holmes between his initial appearance in *A Study in Scarlet* (published in December 1887) and his second appearance in *The Sign of the Four* (published in February 1890). From the latter novel onwards, Holmes is depicted as less amoral and violent than in his full-length debut. He becomes more rounded, less of the caricature sketched by a relatively uncomprehending Watson early in their relationship, most famously in Watson’s ‘*Sherlock Holmes – his limits*’, a twelve-point tabulation of those areas of knowledge where Holmes tends to score ‘Nil’ (such as Literature, Philosophy, Astronomy) or demonstrates a range of cognitive eccentricities:

Knowledge of Geology: Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.³³

Arguably, Wills places too much emphasis on a single issue when claiming that Conan Doyle recalibrated ‘what had been a misalignment of his detective with the most

³² Martin Wills, ‘Jack the Ripper, Sherlock Holmes and the narrative of detection’, in *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, pp. 144-58 (p. 147).

³³ Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 18.

notorious criminal of the later nineteenth century', although the vocabulary of alignments and misalignments resonates with the preoccupations and processes of London psychogeography (as do fragments of Watson's list such as the territorially decoded trouser splashes).³⁴ For Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* had been an experiment in the increasingly popular genre of detective fiction. He had followed this experiment with a sensational melodrama, *The Mystery of Cloomber*, and a lengthy historical novel, *Micah Clarke*. When offered the opportunity of publishing another long story that reprised the great consulting detective from *A Study in Scarlet*, a move that meant reaching a wider audience and possible serialization, a nexus of commercial and creative factors necessitated the introduction of a fuller and more sophisticated version of Holmes. The offer of a sequel was made to Conan Doyle by Joseph Marshall Stoddart, managing editor of *Lippincott's Magazine*, at a now legendary dinner at the Langham Hotel in London which Oscar Wilde also attended as another potential contributor to the magazine.³⁵ Sinclair's capsule summary of the event is framed to reinforce his thesis concerning the 'prophetic' nature of certain late-Victorian fictions:

Wilde and Conan Doyle dined together, when they were courted by a representative of *Lippincott's Magazine*, who successfully commissioned *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Sign of Four*. Wilde expressed his admiration for Conan Doyle's *Micah Clarke*. But Conan Doyle, in his turn, had preempted Wilde's languid men about town by setting up Holmes and Watson in their cosy bachelor apartment.³⁶

³⁴ Wills, 'Jack the Ripper, Sherlock Holmes and the narrative of detection', p. 148. Wills is more persuasive when arguing that there had been an accompanying shift in Doyle's characterization of London during that same period. The 'great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained', as Watson initially describes the city is given a more positive spin in subsequent stories, defusing its status as a murder capital. See Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 8. See also Smith, *Victorian Demons*, pp. 127-41.

³⁵ For more details of both the dinner and the publication history of Doyle's second Sherlock Holmes story, see Christopher Roden's insightful 'Introduction' to Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1890]), pp. xi-xli.

³⁶ Sinclair, 'Introduction', *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xiii.

Commenting on Sinclair's description of the dinner, Alex Murray cogently explains that such biographical facts are included by Sinclair 'not to explain fiction [. . .] but to fracture that very logic: to present the "facts" of literary history as an afterthought to the creative process'. Murray argues that Sinclair's introduction to *A Study in Scarlet* delivers 'a detailed, yet irreverent account of the production and publication of Conan Doyle's story' where biographical facts are given an ambivalent authority by the fictional tone of Sinclair's prose style so that the 'effect is not to disregard the biographical detail of the text's construction, but instead to allow those details to remain part of a productive and active literary history by incorporating them into a new literary practice'.³⁷ As well as anticipating the relationship between men that 'Wilde alludes to in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "More than an acquaintance, less than a friend"', Sinclair also pronounces upon the relationship that Conan Doyle's novel has to another recurring theme found in London psychogeography and urban Gothic:

As with the creation of Holmes and Watson (the division of a single being), the notion of splitting and doubling, rational mind and dark unconscious, haunts Victorian fiction. Jekyll and Hyde are an extreme manifestation of the conflict between the domestic and the unrepressed, the William Morris drawing room and the savage alley. 'Man is not truly one, but truly two,' says Dr Jekyll.³⁸

Jekyll's pronouncement anticipates elements of the debate on violence, madness, and schizophrenia documented by Sinclair at the Roundhouse in July 1967. Before examining the key roles that both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll*

³⁷ Alex Murray, *Recalling London: Literature and History in the Work of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 114, p. 113.

³⁸ Sinclair, 'Introduction', *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xxiii. See also Stephen Heath, 'Psychopathia Sexualis: Stevenson's *Strange Case*', in *Futures For English*, ed. by Colin MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester University, 1988), pp. 93-108.

and Mr Hyde play in *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (a title that bears a literal trace of Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes case), it will be helpful to imitate the example of Holmes and leave the agreeable lodgings of Baker Street and the West End to take a long walk into the 'lowest portions of the city', a journey to the East once more, back towards Christ Church and the streets of Whitechapel in the autumn of 1888.

Whitechapel, 1888

From contemporaneous illustrations in the popular press to the 'East End' of twentieth- and twenty-first century cinematic fantasies, successive cultural representations of London as a labyrinthine late-Victorian metropolis wreathed in fog and plagued by outbreaks of demonic violence have made the city a generic site of the urban Gothic. The conventional *mise en scène* functions as a scripted space prefaced with the same establishing shot: *Exterior. Night*. 'Here it is always 1888 and things are inevitably repeated as they must be repeated' writes Clive Bloom, recording a representative collection of such settings from a century of posters, genre fiction, comics, and film: foggy nocturnal alleyways lit by flickering gas-lamps; a shadow of a top hat upon a wall, followed by a knife flashing like lightning in the darkness; a warren of streets populated with stereotypical characters whose main protagonists stem from the more sensational literature and events of the period, particularly those key figures of the *fin de siècle* who populate a realm that Sinclair describes as 'the perpetual dream of the city'.³⁹ Although there are variations in the density of fog and the height of top hats within these generic (and oneiric) representations of urban

³⁹ Clive Bloom, 'Jack the Ripper – A Legacy in Pictures', in *Jack the Ripper and the East End*, ed. by Alex Werner (London: Chatto & Windus, 2008), pp. 239-67 (p. 240). See also Sinclair, 'Introduction', *A Study in Scarlet*, p. xxiii.

Gothic, when the location is specified as ‘Whitechapel, 1888’ such images disclose a more sinister dimension, distortedly reflecting the ferocious murders of five prostitutes – Mary Ann Nicholls, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, Mary Jane Kelly – by an unknown murderer given the menacing title of Jack the Ripper in contemporary newspaper reports.⁴⁰ The sites represented through the urban Gothic filter of these cinematic (and cinematically-informed) images allow an audience to identify with the repetition of a recognizably late-Victorian location without becoming dangerously immersed in or distracted by the shocking circumstances of the actual events. Repetition, in this instance, is triggered for the playful purposes of entertainment rather than steeped in the work of trauma with its processes of repression, retrieval, and recovery. As Bloom explains in relation to the cinematic versions of this eternal 1888:

History therefore has to be turned into a pastiche so that it too may act as a trope of itself. The problem is how to ‘recreate’ the 1880s with sufficient information but without the messy actuality. History must become other than itself and conform to a narrative order that it never had at the time. True history has no neat storyline with a beginning, middle or end, nor a convenient denouement to leave the audience happy. The true history of Jack the Ripper is one of frustration, because the story has no closure. It is a tale full of hopelessness that has led criminologists and historians, storytellers, quacks and fraudsters, and those looking for a quick buck, to *claim* the solution – the final solution – that only a fiction may offer. History and film are therefore antithetical, aiming as they do at different ends by different means. History provides the raw material of film, and film provides a psychic geography for audiences to play within.⁴¹

⁴⁰ As with the identity of Jack the Ripper, the precise number of murder victims is another subject of speculation both in the disputatious field of Ripperology and in more general histories of London. For the purposes of this chapter, the number will follow the five ‘canonical’ victims that are referenced by Sinclair. As Sinclair also notes, there are ‘other versions’ of this total, see Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, pp. 49-50. For example, six victims are named in the entry for ‘Whitechapel Murders’ in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 956-57.

⁴¹ Bloom, ‘Jack the Ripper’, pp. 246-48. Bloom also provides a useful history of the fictionalization of the Whitechapel murders alongside ‘true crime’ investigations published by amateur sleuths in his chapter on ‘The Ripper Writing’ in *Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996) pp. 159-77.

Bloom advances several interconnected points in this passage, particularly regarding the consoling and controlling recreation of the ‘messy’ chaos of historical actuality as an ordered narrative capable of providing reassuring closure (additionally, by referencing pastiche as one of these recreational strategies, Bloom raises a more recently dispatched ghost that will also reappear below in the shape of a revenant postmodernism.)⁴² The perceived need for narrative closure intersects with the emergence of the detective story as a distinct genre during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a popular development that registers a desire for the fiction of systematic resolutions capable of rendering the everyday mysteries of metropolitan modernity more legible and less threatening. From this viewpoint, the fictional exploits of a character such as Sherlock Holmes offered not only a momentary escape from the disturbing uncertainties and ambiguities that permeated *fin-de-siècle* society but also the possibility that the messy actuality of the London labyrinth contained a coherence that could be revealed with the right application of knowledge and experience. As Bloom indicates, similar strategies litter the trail of London Gothic recreations that lead from 1888 to the present, a trail that also testifies to the potential of making ‘a quick buck’ from such an enterprise. As well as attempting to provide an ordered narrative from the minimal information that could be gathered about the Whitechapel murders, this commercial aspect of the urban Gothic was also inherent in the media invention of Jack the Ripper during that deadly autumn.⁴³ From a twenty-first century perspective, there is plentiful evidence that the commercial potential of

⁴² On pastiche and postmodernism, see Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 16-19.

⁴³ See Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), pp. 191-228. Ripperology, the term for the predominantly para-academic study of the Whitechapel murders, has also resulted in the publication of numerous enterprising books and articles on Jack the Ripper. By contrast, Walkowitz’s scholarly account of the role of the media in the events of 1888 (and at other times throughout the late-Victorian period) provides an invaluable introductory resource to the topic. See also the essays collected in *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, ed. by Alexandra Warwick and Martin Wills (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

London Gothic has been exported from literature and film into the spectacular consumption of the city itself. From Jack the Ripper walking tours to the costumed attendants directing visitors to the London Dungeon, from chartered Ghost Buses to the waxworks in the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's, a range of activities given a theatrically Gothic inflection point to the profitability afforded by mining emotionally disinfected versions of such horrifying and terrifying sources as the events of Whitechapel, 1888. Such activities give substance to Alex Murray's scathing characterization of the idea of London Gothic as 'a pathetic fabulation of tourist operators, a deluded illusion of novelists and film-makers, the preserve of capitalism in its most vulgar and insubstantial forms'.⁴⁴ In this regard, it is also worth noting that the phrase 'the final solution' – cautiously isolated between dashes by Bloom – alludes to the bestselling account of the Whitechapel murders written by Stephen Knight in the mid-1970s. Knight's book, *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, asserts that the murders involved a late-Victorian conspiracy theory encompassing the Royal family, the highest orders of the Freemasons, the medical establishment, and the Metropolitan police.⁴⁵ Weaving between fiction and biography, Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* is in part an elaborate rewiring of the tabloid currents that flow through Knight's improbable thesis. Those elements of Sinclair's novel that brush against the mystery genre subvert the usual desire for narrative closure in order 'to reverse the conventions of detective fiction' so that the excess of Ripper candidates and theories 'can *all* be right'.⁴⁶ Rather than merely positioning Sinclair as an irreverent postmodernist playing with the metafictional components of the metaphysical detective story, this counter-movement to the conventional search for a final solution

⁴⁴ Alex Murray, "'This Light was Pale and Ghostly": Stewart Home, Horror and the Gothic Destruction of London', in *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination*, ed. by Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 65-79 (p. 65).

⁴⁵ Stephen Knight, *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (London: Grafton, 1977).

⁴⁶ Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, p. 61.

in the singular seeks to dismantle the veneer of closure and certainty found in those works that Bloom identifies as providing a more palatable ‘psychic geography’ for an audience than the messy actuality of the urban environment.⁴⁷ Sinclair addresses a variation on this theme in *Lights Out for the Territory*, arguing that those films that reproduce such scripted spaces as ‘riverside Ripper alleys’ constitute part of the marketable repertoire of ‘the London of dark heritage’.⁴⁸ In spite of their often macabre content, these images are pre-digested, easily assimilated, designed to peddle a popular synecdoche of London Gothic that simplifies the complexities of their cultural and geographical inheritance, reinforcing rather than interrogating the existing conceptions of the city that they partially illustrate and partially deform. This is a process that predates the late-Victorian period in which the rapid assimilation of the Gothic ambience of the Whitechapel murders was transformed into a profitable spectacle for public consumption even as the crimes were being committed. As David Cunningham has perceptively argued, there was already an established tradition in London of using abstract representations of public space as ‘a feature of exhibitions designed to edify, as well as of profit-driven spectacularizations of the aberrant or abhorrent’. This tradition:

already depends, to some degree, on the elasticity of touristic space – an abstraction of historical events that allows them to float free from their ‘original’ geographical coordinates – nonetheless the primacy of the ‘authentic’ site continues, simultaneously, to exert its own particular centrifugal pull; underwriting the economic value of the simulations.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For a reading that positions Sinclair’s *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings* alongside such postmodern ‘metaphysical detective stories’ as Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum* and Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, see Wilhelm Emilsson, ‘Iain Sinclair’s Unsound Detectives’, *Critique* (Spring 2002), 43, 271-87.

⁴⁸ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 301.

⁴⁹ Cunningham, p. 162.

Cunningham views the ‘slashing grounds’ of Whitechapel as a model for the emergence within land and real estate speculation of the more abstract value of ‘so-called *symbolic* capital’ overlapping with the concrete value of location in terms of proximity to transport links or the availability of other key services. He also considers Sinclair as ‘almost unique’ in recognizing how the act of producing counter-narratives to the effacement of the past and the homogenization of place by commercial redevelopment and regeneration programmes involves not just an act of resistance but also an element of complicity with the profit-driven aestheticization of historical authenticity and geographical specificity that constitutes such symbolic capital.⁵⁰

The Sorcerers, directed by Michael Reeves in 1967, is one of the films that Sinclair views as recreating the ‘riverside Ripper alleys’ of dark heritage. Through its focus on the bizarre invention of a maverick scientist (an ageing Boris Karloff plays a discredited professor of medical hypnosis who has invented an experimental machine for remotely possessing minds in order that vicarious sensations can be directly experienced via thought transference), *The Sorcerers* channels late-Victorian Gothic tropes concerning mesmeric trances and telepathic mind control into a psychedelic London setting.⁵¹ Like the ‘Stevensonian fable’ – presumably the Gothic tale of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde – to which Sinclair claims it resembles, *The Sorcerers* was assembled in a rush.⁵² The ‘distant influence’ plot, an obvious analogue of the cinematic experience itself, rapidly escalates towards the murder of a young female singer in a narrow dimly-lit riverside alleyway (later in the film the same singer is casually remembered by the murderer as ‘that tart’, adding a further referential echo to

⁵⁰ Cunningham, p. 167.

⁵¹ Making the connection explicit, the initial surname of Karloff’s character, Marcus Monserrat, was Mesmer. See Benjamin Halligan, *Michael Reeves* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 66.

⁵² Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 300.

the Whitechapel murders).⁵³ For Sinclair, the budgetary demands of a frenzied shooting schedule are the root cause of the film's failure to engage with 'the psychogeography of the city'.⁵⁴ But what of Sinclair's own blend of urban Gothic psychogeography? By presenting an explicit engagement with the territory of the city as well as the city as text, the interactions with urban Gothic found in Sinclair's work exhibit a number of consistencies and contrasts with this model of dark heritage, suggestively demonstrating how this model can be both augmented and critiqued by London psychogeography. As the tangential glimpses of what is being variously described as Gothic or urban Gothic or London Gothic begin to accumulate, from the psychic geography of a fog-bound alleyway to psychic possession by a mesmeric hypnotist, a fuller terminological explication of Gothic trajectories is required.

From the disorientating and disturbing space of the labyrinth to the recurring figure of the double, various tropes associated with the Gothic haunt London psychogeography. The Gothic components of Sinclair's psychogeographical explorations are illuminated by his emphasis on the impact that a number of late-Victorian texts continue to have on representations of London. Significantly, in these texts the Gothic becomes envisioned as an increasingly urban phenomenon. Typically, eighteenth century Gothic romances were set in a vaguely medieval past and in exotic landscapes featuring remote castles and abbeys, partly reflecting a legacy of hostility and suspicion towards Catholicism. In the last decades of the nineteenth-century a new wave of Gothic fiction depicted the labyrinthine spaces of the densely populated

⁵³ In the first book-length study of the short career of Michael Reeves, Benjamin Halligan describes the alley in which the murder was committed as an 'apt Jack the Ripper setting'. See Halligan, *Michael Reeves*, p. 81. For an intriguing summary of the theme of 'distant influence' as a Gothic trope in the late-Victorian period, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 204-13. Luckhurst's account of 'remote control Victorians' also provides more suitable analogies amongst a range of late-Victorian texts – including George Du Maurier's *Trilby*, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – than those located in Stevenson's work.

⁵⁴ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, pp. 300-01.

metropolis as the site of bloody deeds and uncanny occurrences. If the Gothic could be given a figurative equivalent to the supernatural powers that populate its narratives then it would be a volatile shapeshifter, metamorphosing and multiplying between momentarily fixed forms, parading an array of contrary positions that disarm any conclusive definitions that dare to attach themselves to the term. However, in spite of this restless mobility, it is possible to trace a broad history of the changes and continuities of its signification. The term Goths designated the Germanic tribes that invaded and destroyed civilizations when they swept south at the end of the Roman Empire. In the Protestant England of the eighteenth century, the term acquired a more general application to signify all kinds of uncivilized and barbarian people. Consequently, the Gothic described that which could be opposed to the rational thought and neoclassical tastes of the age of the Enlightenment. From this prejudicial perspective, the Gothic functioned as a pejorative term for other times as well as other spaces. From one set of geographically specific binaries, the term undergoes an associative reversal within the narratives of eighteenth century novels so that instead of signifying northern barbarians the Gothic broadly signifies the Latin cultures of the Mediterranean. Appropriately for this chapter, the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor can be introduced into this capsule summary to provide a perspective that argues for a more nuanced understanding of the Gothic. In a letter to the Dean of Westminster, a communication that develops into a virtual lecture on architectural history, Hawksmoor complains that those censorious critics who label his new works and repairs to Westminster Abbey as ‘Gothick’ fail to comprehend the historical intricacies of the term.⁵⁵ Hawksmoor references James Ralph, a critic who had disparaged his city churches – particularly Christ Church – as ‘mere Gothique heaps of stone, without

⁵⁵ Kerry Downes, *Hawksmoor*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980), pp. 255-58.

form or order'.⁵⁶ For Hawksmoor, his detractors, like 'Mr Rafe the Critick' use Gothic 'vulgarly' to 'signifye every thing that displeases [. . .] as the Greeks and Romans calld every Nation Barbarous, that, were not in their way of Police and Education'.⁵⁷ With their emotionally heightened tales of transgression and excess situated in the brutish medieval past or in remote regions associated with the superstitious extremes of a despotic and dissolute Catholicism, the first wave of Gothic romances that peaked in the 1790s partially relied on correspondingly vulgar oppositions that signified displeasure with those nations that were not in the English 'way' of doing things while establishing a literary tradition that retained its popularity into the first decades of the nineteenth century. But in the manner of their telling, these narratives also refracted those oppositions back into the seemingly enlightened present so that the modern era appeared to be threatened by the reanimation of more primitive forces. However, as Hawksmoor's position intimates, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a contrapuntal movement that sought to establish continuity between the past and the present by casting the Gothic in a more positive light. For example, this continuity emerged in the Victorian era as a turn towards traditional 'craftmanship' as part of the Gothic Revival, an architectural movement that was in part a reaction against the dominant neoclassical values of Georgian aesthetics *and* the mass production practices of the industrial revolution. Such a brief history begins to outline the antipathetic qualities of the Gothic that demand to be situated in their multiple cultural and historical contexts.

The play of oppositions found in Gothic fiction produces a dynamic ambivalence that

⁵⁶ James Ralph, *A critical review of the public buildings, statues and ornaments in and about London and Westminster* (London: 1734), p. 6.

⁵⁷ Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 255. The orthographic changes – 'Gothique', 'Gothick', and 'Gothic' – supply yet more examples of the term's shapeshifting propensities.

tests the permeable boundaries between limit and transgression. While ostensibly obsessed with establishing and policing borders, by imagining outlandish forms of transgression the Gothic also repeatedly contests the effectiveness of their administration and design. As with the threat to the stability and progress of the present from the residual ghosts of the past, the Gothic seems to demand that any contaminating agent should be vanquished and that any deviant act should be punished. But this restorative drive is counterpoised by a compulsion to relish the seductive portraits of such contamination and transgression. As Roger Luckhurst comments, it ‘is difficult sometimes to decide if a Gothic text is conservative or subversive for it is often both, simultaneously’. Luckhurst tracks the inversion of values that congregate around the term Gothic in the increasing industrialization of the nineteenth century. As the repetitive processes of the factory floor lead to greater regulation and disenchantment, ‘the Gothic could take on a positive valence of everything that was being lost: passion, belief, spirit, individual eccentricity, craft’.⁵⁸ In the mid-nineteenth century this inversion was most visibly manifested in the architecture of the Gothic Revival championed by such combative aestheticians as A. W. N. Pugin and John Ruskin.⁵⁹ In both religious and secular buildings, the composite characteristics of the Gothic style, specified by Ruskin as savageness, changefulness, naturalism, grotesqueness, rigidity, redundance, were contrasted with the more rigorously neoclassical proportions of the architecture of the preceding Georgian period.⁶⁰ The physical revival of the Gothic, one of a multitude of styles that gave a distinctive shape to the Victorian landscape in an era of much architectural cross-

⁵⁸ Roger Luckhurst, ‘Introduction’, *Late Victorian Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. ix-xxxii (p. xi).

⁵⁹ See A. W. Pugin, *Contrasts, or a parallel between the architecture of the 15th and 19th centuries* (London: 1836) and John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ed. by J. G. Links (New York: Da Capo, 1960).

⁶⁰ See Ruskin, p. 157. Inevitably, the neat contrast between Georgian and Victorian Gothic architecture becomes more complex and inconsistent when viewed from an urban scale. For a corrective vision of this contrast in relation to London, see Summerson, pp. 339-46.

breeding, transformed the skylines of industrial cities such as Manchester and London. Could a parallel be made between the trajectory of the Gothic in architecture and the transition of its literary namesake from the distant past of the Middle Ages and the margins of the Mediterranean towards the contemporary heart of the imperial metropolis?

Fortuitously, for the purposes of this compressed history, there are various passages and scenes within the work of Charles Dickens that provide examples of transitional moments in which Gothic flourishes are interleaved with other novelistic traditions. Dickens is representative of the ways in which Gothic traces are diffused (and even domesticated) in mid-nineteenth century fiction, working their way from the margins of the city into its centre. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens depicts the labyrinthine slums of outcast London as a Gothic zone restlessly traversed by characters ‘chosen from the most criminal and degraded of London’s population’. As with the journeys that Holmes undertakes into the ‘lowest portions of the city’ to rifle through the rubbish-heap, digging for clues amongst the habitually disregarded refuse of society, Dickens also recognizes that ‘there lay festering in Saint Giles’s as good materials towards the truth as any flaunting in St James’s’.⁶¹ Dickens does more than juxtapose the penurious rookeries of St Giles’s with the wealthy quarter of St James’s, though it is characteristic that his example is geographically precise; by asserting that there were as many insights to be gathered in the former location as in the latter, Dickens begins the process of unearthing buried connections between classes. The ‘truth’ found in the submerged relations of these juxtapositions and connections, although often plotted

⁶¹ Charles Dickens, ‘The Author’s Preface to the Third Edition’, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. liii-lvii (p. liii). Written by Dickens in 1841, the preface refutes accusations that his characters are unrealistic and distances his novel from the popular ‘Newgate Novels’ of the same period that were critically disparaged as melodramatic romances that glamorized crime (echoing, *mutatis mutandis*, earlier criticisms of Gothic romances and future critiques of London psychogeography).

through arbitrary coincidences and abrupt revelations, attests to the transformation of the city by increasing commercialization and commodification, a more complex division of labour, and intensified urbanization: a network of interrelated factors supplying Dickens with fertile source material to shape into a new type of fiction.⁶² A similar set of submerged connections haunt the shuttling between country and city (and eventually a more global context) that occurs in Dicken's later novel *Great Expectations*. In an admirably condensed reading of Victorian Gothic, Alexandra Warwick argues that a traditionally Gothic character such as Miss Havisham represents an earlier mode of the form that the narrative promises then denies. Warwick gives a name to the spectral force that drives the Gothic into another dimension:

Money is the ghost in *Great Expectations*: possessed of an absent presence, mysterious in origin, its influence governs all social and narrative relations and [. . .] hollows out their specificity. The Gothic form of the eighteenth century is similarly hollowed out in Dickens's text, but in place of those essentially feudal relations is a new Gothic, of urban capital, where the spectral form is money. Dickens compounds the Gothic relations of urban capitalism by representing them as secrets embedded in the city, in the papers of its law courts, the letters, tokens and documents hidden by individuals.⁶³

In a brief aside that connects her discussion of Dickens to the analysis of capital and the commodity form by Marx (another mid-nineteenth century writer with a tendency to strategically deploy Gothic traces in his work), Warwick notes that if 'money is the abstraction of social relations then the metropolis is the spatial equivalent of that

⁶² On the ways in which these qualities in Dickens's fiction capture 'a new kind of reality [. . .] essentially it is the reality of the new kind of city', see Williams, *The English Novel*, pp. 31-32. Williams examines this new kind of city in relation to the problem of 'knowable communities', a problem that could be productively mapped onto Ginzburg's analysis of clues and symptoms cited above. See also Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 165-81.

⁶³ Alexandra Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic', *The Routledge Companion to the Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 29-37 (p. 33).

abstraction'.⁶⁴ As Debord observes in *The Society of the Spectacle*, urbanism supports the spectacular system in which such abstractions hollow out the specificity of social and narrative relations, severing individuals from each other and from their own lives.⁶⁵ Again, in *Bleak House*, it is the Gothic relations of capital and the support structure of its subordinate institutions that find an atmospherically Gothicized correspondence in the celebrated fog that accumulates at the beginning of the novel.⁶⁶ The split narrative shuttles between both rural and urban Gothic locations (much as it moves between different narrators, a device that fragments narrative perspective: a familiar technique in Gothic texts and one that Sinclair utilizes in *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*), establishing comparisons that reveal that when the setting is the alienated landscape of urban modernity the Gothic can carry a social charge that amplifies its capacity for producing powerfully grotesque forms that instill fear and loathing, mystery and obscurity.⁶⁷

Christ Church, Spitalfields, 1714-

Also designed to carry a social charge in the reverence and subservience demanded by its architectural impact, Hawksmoor's Christ Church began to rise above the neighbourhood of the western edge of Whitechapel in 1714 (the church was consecrated in 1729). Although closer to the City than any of the place-names (those 'energy points' in Sinclair's interpretation) found in Blake's invocation of an 'eastern city' in *Jerusalem* later in the century, Christ Church occupies a marginal zone beyond

⁶⁴ Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic', p. 33. See also Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*.

⁶⁵ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, §171.

⁶⁶ See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁶⁷ See Allan Pritchard, 'The Urban Gothic of Bleak House', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1991), 432-52. On the ways in which *Bleak House* consolidates the emergence of urban Gothic, see Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, pp. 69-77.

the official territory bounded by the surviving City walls.⁶⁸ Sinclair's recognition of the affective qualities of Christ Church can be positioned within a longer tradition of critical reflection on the often uncanny response generated by the architectural composition of its exterior and interior as well as its threshold position between the City and the East End. 'We feel in or before most of Hawksmoor's buildings that our emotions are being directly attacked', observed the architectural historian Kerry Downes, adding that an encounter with the west front of Christ Church leaves 'an emotional charge which is powerful even for us, and of which the taste of the eighteenth century could make no sense at all'.⁶⁹ Writing in the mid-1960s when the building was under threat of demolition, the architectural critic Iain Nairn described Christ Church as:

transmuted somewhere right down in the blood so that the whole building becomes a living idea [. . .] Locked up whilst money is collected for a restoration; if the Church lets it fall down it might as well present a banker's order for thirty pieces of silver. For here *is* the faith, manifest'.⁷⁰

Nairn also noted how the transition from the City to the nearby streets around Christ Church was 'as violent as the medieval sequence through the town gate to the country outside'.⁷¹ Better known as an iconoclast and arch provocateur, Nairn's compressed interpretations of Hawksmoor's churches demonstrate a particular sensitivity to what could be described as the psychogeographical effects of their construction on believers and non-believers alike. Standing in the interior of Hawksmoor's St Mary Woolnoth, he writes:

⁶⁸ Sinclair, *Blake's London*, pp. 16-19.

⁶⁹ Downes, p. 46, p. 183.

⁷⁰ Iain Nairn, *Nairn's London* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 168.

⁷¹ Nairn, p. 41.

It feels like being on the hot end of a burning glass, and it is all done not by overpowering ornament but in purely architectural terms, through solidity of space and resilient depth of carving. Space, here, is made so tangible that you can experience, for the price of a bus ticket to the City, the super-reality of the mystics or mescaline, and even be able to see how this marvellous man achieved it [. . .] The real focus of the church is yourself, wherever you are standing. If the Sainte Chapelle or Die Wies transports outwards, this forces inwards, quintessentially Protestant. You are forced in through yourself, and this is not a romantic view but the strictest spatial analysis.⁷²

Much of Nairn's summary of St Mary Woolnooth has a wider applicability to the manipulation of space and subjectivity found in all of Hawksmoor's city churches.

When combined with his polemical attacks on urbanism, the shifting registers of Nairn's architectural praise and criticism filter into another tributary of influence in the formation of London psychogeography and other coincident writing on the city.⁷³

More recently, in an approach that views Hawksmoor's city churches as a coherent unit whose connections are explicitly architectural rather than occulted, Pierre De La Ruffinière Du Prey argues that in the transition from the classical portico to the pointed obelisk of the spire Christ Church reflects 'Hawksmoor's interpretation of history as a continuum' with the 'classical tradition and the Gothic flowing into one another'.⁷⁴

Amongst the continuum of references to the emotional and intellectual responses solicited by encounters with the building it is necessary to add a key work of London psychogeography *and* London Gothic (in a neo-Victorian late-twentieth century form).

Written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Eddie Campbell, the graphic novel *From*

⁷² Nairn, pp. 25-26.

⁷³ See the essays collected in Gillian Darley and David McKie, *Iain Nairn: Words in Place* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2013). At a talk at the London Review Bookshop in Bloomsbury on 11 March 2009, Sinclair described having a conversation with a neighbour where it transpired that they had been under the mistaken impression that Sinclair was Iain Nairn.

⁷⁴ Pierre De La Ruffinière Du Prey, *Hawksmoor's London Churches: Architecture and Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 104.

Hell incorporates Christ Church into the bloody heart of its cultural autopsy of the Whitechapel murders. At least one image of Hawksmoor's church occurs in twelve of the graphic novel's sixteen chapters. At times the building becomes the primary focus of the narrative, elsewhere it consistently signifies more than merely a convenient visual landmark lurking in the background to aid a cognitive mapping of the neighbourhood. As Moore notes in his appendix to Volume One, 'all contemporary theorizing as to the *meaning* of Hawksmoor's architecture can be traced back to the pioneering and visionary work of London poet, author, bookdealer, and Necronaut Iain Sinclair'.⁷⁵ *From Hell* occupies a psychogeographical interzone between the contemporary theorizing of the *meaning* of Hawksmoor's London churches in *Lud Heat* and the conspiratorial theorizing of the *meaning* of Jack the Ripper in *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*. More broadly, *Lud Heat* has gained notoriety both for Sinclair's influential hypothesis concerning the occult alignment of Hawksmoor's churches and for being the inspiration behind Peter Ackroyd's bestselling novel *Hawksmoor*. In Ackroyd's shrewdly commercial repackaging of Sinclair's more outré ravings, the name of Nicholas Hawksmoor is given to a senior detective in 1980s London engaged upon an investigation into a series of murders that have occurred on the sites of a familiar set of eighteenth century churches:

And it did not take any knowledge of the even more celebrated Whitechapel murders, all of them conducted in the streets and alleys around Christ Church, Spitalfields, to understand, as Hawksmoor did, that certain streets or patches of ground provoked a malevolence which generally seemed to be quite without motive. And he knew, also, how many murders go undetected and how many murderers remain unknown.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See 'Appendix to Volume One', in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell, *From Hell: Being a Melodrama in Sixteen Parts* (Northampton, MA: Mad Love, 1991).

⁷⁶ Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), p. 116.

In the novel's closing acknowledgments, Ackroyd expresses his 'obligation to Iain Sinclair's poem, *Lud Heat*, which first directed my attention towards the stranger characteristics of the London churches'.⁷⁷ In *Downriver*, Sinclair satirizes the totemic status that Ackroyd's novel acquires amongst the upmarket residents diligently restoring dilapidated Georgian townhouses in the streets around Christ Church. Finding 'six mint copies of a celebrated "bestseller" that attributed the most peculiar properties to the local churches' in the house of an actor restoring one such property, Sinclair's narrator adds:

The critics promised your money back if you did not die of terror as you read it. Many of the New Georgian squatters kept a copy in the close chamber, though privately decrying the thing, as a calumny on the disinterested aesthetics of Baroque Architecture. But even as a talismanic icon, I felt that six units was stronging it.⁷⁸

The phenomenon of the particular form of gentrification through conservationist campaigning associated with those that Sinclair teasingly portrays as 'New Georgian squatters' has been well documented.⁷⁹ At the end of the 1970s, the Spitalfields Historic Building Trust was founded as a property company with charitable status that sought to preserve the surviving buildings in the neighbourhood and to refurbish (with an obsessive attention to the period detail of the eighteenth century) those buildings that had suffered from neglect, decay, or unsympathetic redevelopment. As Patrick Wright has outlined, in the early stages of the pursuit of this vision 'the thrill of unlikely coexistence' with the penurious and ethnically diverse residents of the neighbourhood was a part of the attraction to living in the area for the New Georgians:

⁷⁷ Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor*, p. 218.

⁷⁸ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 98.

⁷⁹ See Charlie Forman, *Spitalfields: A Battle For Land* (London: Shipman, 1989); and the chapter on Spitalfields and the relationship between diaspora, dwelling, and place, in Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 70-102.

‘At the roughest edges of this scene it became positively virtuous not to have electricity or running water’.⁸⁰ But by the start of the 1990s, the Spitalfields Trust found themselves priced out of the area by the rapidly escalating property prices that they had been partly responsible for initiating as their zealous programme garnered various newspaper reports, magazine articles, and other publications and radio and television broadcasts.⁸¹ Retrospectively, the emergence of London psychogeography in the 1990s out of a combination of preoccupations already present in Sinclair’s work, annexes Sinclair as another unintentional contributor within this gentrification process. If the urban Gothic represents a synthesis of conservative and subversive forces that generate a perplexing tension in its narratives and in its architectural forms, then a similar case can be made for London psychogeography. As with the New Georgians, the ‘thrill of unlikely coexistence’ animates the new breed of psychogeographer who uses the unsteady lens of the Gothic both to expose the historical elisions and social injustices perpetrated by the spectral relations of urban capital and to combat the homogenizing forces of urban planning and heritage that strive to neutralize the messy actuality of city life in the past, present, and future. Operating in this mode, psychogeography perpetuates variations on the kind of binary divisions that are the staple of the Gothic. In this vision of the city, Christ Church sits in the gentrified borderlands. Immediately to the west lie the high-rise office blocks and street level chain stores of a rapacious capitalism emblematic of a technologically advanced civilization. Immediately to the east is Banglatown, a deprived area with a large Bangladeshi population whose low-rise social housing and neighbourhood shops are under threat of recolonization by the dominant and superior force of an expanding City. While Sinclair’s work produces subversive counter-narratives that challenge the

⁸⁰ Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins*, p. 106.

⁸¹ See Alexandra Artley and John Martin Robinson, *The New Georgian Handbook* (London: Harpers & Queen, 1985).

rationalist discourse of global capitalism through a remapping and remythologizing of what he has called ‘the floating Gothic principality of Whitechapel’ as a zone where past inequalities and terrors continue to have a malevolently radioactive effect on the contemporary landscape, these counter-narratives also reinforce the spatial division between the City and an adjacent space signified as other, as socially, economically, and culturally marginalized.⁸² Consequently, the sense of unease provoked by Christ Church articulated in architectural criticism and psychogeographical narratives partly repeats and reinforces the late-nineteenth century vision of the East End as an unknowable space with uncanny characteristics, bordering on barbarism.⁸³ Rather than co-existing or even engaging with the social and cultural life of the current local population of this site of otherness, London psychogeography responds to the territory in ways that Paul Newland has argued appear ‘to operate as a symptom of unconscious bourgeois fears’.⁸⁴ It is this aspect of London psychogeography (and its accompanying sense of holidaying in other people’s misery) that has also been criticized by the artist and writer Laura Oldfield Ford. In an introduction to the collected edition of Oldfield Ford’s *Savage Messiah*, Mark Fisher comments that ‘superficially, the obvious tag for *Savage Messiah* would be psychogeography, but the label makes Ford chafe.’ He quotes Ford directly:

I think a lot of what is called psychogeography now is just middle-class men acting like colonial explorers, showing us their discoveries and guarding their plot. I have spent the last twenty years walking around London and living here in a precarious fashion, I’ve had about fifty addresses. I think my understanding of the city is very different to theirs.⁸⁵

⁸² See Sinclair, *The Firewall*, p. 10.

⁸³ See Newland. See also McLaughlin.

⁸⁴ Newland, p. 178.

⁸⁵ See Mark Fisher, ‘Always Yearning for the Time That Just Eluded Us’, in Laura Oldfield Ford, *Savage Messiah* (London: Verso, 2011), pp. v-xvi (p.xiv).

Sinclair's long-term residence in the same mid-Victorian house in Albion Drive is an implicit target of Ford's critique. The 'middle-class men acting like colonial explorers' summons up a late-Victorian counterpart in those well-to-do voyagers crossing the capital into darkest London, the labyrinthine streets and alleyways of the East End, searching for a Gothic experience in the wake of Jack the Ripper (a revealing historical repetition that points to a class bias partly submerged but still operative in the contemporary equivalent of such encounters).⁸⁶

In *Lud Heat*, Sinclair asserts that the 'whole karmic programme of Whitechapel in 1888 moves around the fixed point of Christ Church'. Describing the 'unacknowledged magnetism and control-power, built-in code force, of these places', he charts the position of the final victim of the Whitechapel murders, Mary Jane Kelly, before turning to an earlier example of multiple homicide that occurred in the shadow of another Hawksmoor edifice, the church of St George-in-the-East:

I would now specify . . . the ritual slaying of Marie Jeanette Kelly in the ground floor room of Miller's Court, Dorset Street, directly opposite Christ Church . . . the Ratcliffe Highway slaughter of 1811, with the supposed murderer, stake through heart, trampled into the pit where four roads cross to the north of St George-in-the-East.⁸⁷

Two decades after *Lud Heat*, Sinclair repeats the gory details of the execution and burial of the Ratcliffe Highway murderer John Williams (still described as the 'supposed murderer') in *Lights Out for the Territory*, noting that although Williams's

⁸⁶ Sinclair's generally positive review of Ford's book includes an oblique riposte both to her precariat status and to her different understanding of the city when identifying the 'awkward relationship' that such a 'glossily repackaged' volume has with the samizdat zines that Ford initially self-produced. See Sinclair, 'Savage Messiah', *The Guardian*, 22 December 2011, p. 22. For a more explicit targeting of Sinclair as a class-bound contemporary equivalent of 'the Victorian writers who acted as guides, for their genteel readers, through London's Dickensian labyrinth', see Jah Wobble, *Memoirs of a Geezer: Music, Mayhem, Life* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2009), p. 311.

⁸⁷ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, pp. 21-22.

heart was staked ‘his skull went missing’ and had become a trophy ‘under the counter of some pub, implicated in Masonic or occult ceremonies, fondled as a totem of power by gangsters’.⁸⁸ The speculative conjunction of the criminal and the occult, resonating around the themes of violence and power in relation to specific objects and territories, is another characteristic trait of London psychogeography. The Ratcliffe Highway murders were sensationally recounted by Thomas De Quincey in a lengthy postscript to his 1827 essay ‘On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts’, a morbid bouquet of satirical *pensées* purporting to present one of the monthly lectures read before The Society of Connoisseurs in Murder.⁸⁹ Sinclair detects a discrepancy in De Quincey’s postscript. Unlike the authoritative descriptions of Oxford Street and Soho in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (a narrative that focused the attention of the Lettrists and Situationists onto nineteenth-century London as a psychogeographical space), De Quincey’s failure to register the presence of Hawksmoor’s St George-in-the-East leads Sinclair to voice his suspicion in *Lud Heat* that the essay was ‘assembled at a distance’ rather than from ‘direct observation of the ground – so that the major visual clue was missed’.⁹⁰ As with Olson’s social and scientific immersion in the daily life of his seaport town in Massachusetts, with all its concomitant folklore and local history, it is through a sustained ‘direct observation of the ground’ that Sinclair accumulates visual clues that can be integrated into other forms of research. This research enables him to decode the scripted spaces of the urban Gothic and to reconfigure them in relation to specific sites such as Hawksmoor’s churches within his emerging London psychogeography. In this way, Sinclair seems to be advancing on two fronts: possessing the facts of local history, literary associations, and a host of

⁸⁸ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 332. Sinclair attributes a similar fate to the skull of Emanuel Swedenborg, a ‘bagged trophy’ whose possession ‘conferred power’. See Sinclair, *Radon Daughters*, pp. 137-38.

⁸⁹ See Thomas De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (London: Penguin, 2015).

⁹⁰ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 23.

other cultural clutter; but also possessed by the polyvocality of the spaces through which his 'direct observation' proceeds as the writer becomes a medium channelling actual and imaginary events and encounters into texts.

Retrospectively, Sinclair's mapping of the alignment of Hawksmoor churches has become emblematic of a variant psychogeography that interfuses occult theories with urban wandering and local history in both its quotidian and more sensational instances. In Sinclair's wake, there has been a resurgence of interest in carrying out similar (or subordinate) psychogeographical investigations of the city. Through characteristic self-parody, Sinclair has attempted to demystify the circumstances that cast him in the role of London's chief psychogeographer. But in text after text, he supplies future practitioners with informational fragments that read like excerpts from a psychogeographer's instruction manual:

Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself.

Much like the malleable city through which the walker purposefully drifts, the everyday becomes a zone of potential transformation. For this transformative potential to be tapped, Sinclair observes that the walker should be interested in 'noticing *everything*':

Alignments of telephone kiosks, maps made from moss on the slopes of Victorian sepulchres, collections of prostitutes' cards, torn and defaced promotional bills for cancelled events at York Hall, visits to the homes of dead writers, bronze casts on war memorials, plaster dogs, beer mats, concentrations of used condoms, the crystalline patterns of glass shards surrounding an imploded BMW quarter-light window.⁹¹

⁹¹ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 4.

By detecting the patterns secreted within this fragmented catalogue, Sinclair's walker begins to imaginatively recalibrate their subjective relationship with the everyday city. In terms of the franchising of psychogeography, this technique has allowed Sinclair to upgrade what has slowly proved to be a profitable compositional methodology. Yet far from noticing *everything*, in this passage Sinclair's walker appears to be attracted to certain neglected and discarded objects that carry a particular semiotic charge. For those familiar with Sinclair's texts, the connotative description of each item detonates associative chains across the network: from the telephone kiosks (representing a now outmoded delivery technology) aligned like everyday versions of Hawksmoor's churches to the Ballardian juxtaposition of condoms and car crashes.⁹² Rather than the impossible task of noticing *everything*, it is the increasing facility for shaping various forms of pattern recognition into an ever more detailed narrative of the city – one endlessly open to other intersecting and overlapping narratives – that leads to the revelation of what Sinclair describes as 'the fiction of an underlying pattern'. But what are the practical uses of this paranoid-critical pattern recognition? How does the registration of purportedly fictional correspondences and elective affinities map onto a politics of space within the actual city? As a form of purposeful stalking, a heightened facility for pattern recognition enables the psychogeographer to question accepted versions of events and speculate on the occluded meaning of various elisions within the cultural and historical framework of the territory being traversed. In Sinclair's case, it also leads him back to key hubs such as Christ Church around and through which the next tangential phase of a speculative thesis can be threaded, weaving an ever more intricate web of associations and connections that can be traced onto the

⁹² See Sinclair, *Crash*, pp. 76-80.

city between the nodes of his *plaques tournantes*. To clarify this point, I'd like to return to the figure described by Sinclair as a perfect model of the psychogeographer: Sherlock Holmes.

Shortly after the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr Watson settles in to the rooms he has agreed to share with Holmes in Baker Street. Watson, assessing a magazine article with the 'somewhat ambitious' title 'The Book of Life', explains to Holmes that the article 'attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came his way'. Watson then cites a section of the article at length:

From a drop of water a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known wherever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study, nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it.⁹³

Slapping the magazine down, Watson declares the article 'ineffable twaddle' and suggests to his companion across the breakfast table that it was 'evidently the theory of some armchair loungeur who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. It is not practical.' At this point his companion wryly explains that he himself had written the article and that the theories are 'so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese.'⁹⁴ Thus Dr Watson is introduced to the theory and practice of everyday life according to Mr Sherlock Holmes. Alongside 'The Book of Life', Doyle ascribes to Holmes several other publications including a monograph on

⁹³ Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 20. On the correlation between the deductive theories that Conan Doyle invests in Holmes via 'The Book of Life' and various Victorian precursors, see Lawrence Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: the Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 133-53.

⁹⁴ Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 21.

cigar ash. Holmes's ability to identify different ashes, like his ability to extrapolate clues from discarded cigarette-ends, waste paper, or puddle-splashed trousers, reveals an extraordinary aptitude for the practical deployment of a field of knowledge based on things commonly overlooked or rejected as rubbish. Conan Doyle's great detective is frequently bored by what he calls the 'dull routine of existence'. When unravelling the mysteries that temporarily release him from the tedium of routine, Holmes tends to find a solution by applying his Science of Deduction and Analysis to clues that other characters habitually ignore. By demystifying the irrational elements of each case, Holmes begins to communicate how the everyday comes to be shot through with mystery. Sadly for Holmes, each time the self-contained mysteries are ingeniously revealed as commonplace, he is once more confronted with an overwhelming sense of ennui that he proceeds to combat with a violin and a seven-per cent solution of cocaine. When the case is closed, the potential to trace the thread of the resolved crime or explicated mystery to a wider pattern of political or social conditions eludes Holmes.⁹⁵ Unlike Sinclair's walker-as-stalker, the unemployed consulting detective is unable to reconfigure the space of the city as a means of liquidating the 'dull routine of existence' that threatens his health and sanity. Like Chtcheglov, Holmes suffers from the banalization sweeping the city, if not the planet. In the world that Conan Doyle has Holmes inhabit, a fictional space that has extensively leaked into our own, when the tale has been told there is no playing in the labyrinth and no place for a revolution of everyday life. From this perspective, by assigning Holmes as the perfect model of the psychogeographer Sinclair partially justifies Keiller's critique of 1990s psychogeography as merely a prelude to literature and gentrification. But as a less than perfect model of the psychogeographer himself, Sinclair opens up pathways to more

⁹⁵ See Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 220-39.

radical visions of literature and urbanism. While the concentrated methodology of Sinclair's psychogeography has parallels with the deductive analysis practiced by Holmes, as a spatial practice for navigating the alienated, labyrinthine, and spectral environment of the split city it resists closing the cases it opens and refuses to settle for a final solution.

Dark Heritage and Double-Dealing: The Right Kind of Rampant Schizophrenia

In a short essay published in 2003, Phil Baker notes that 'anyone reading recent usages' of the term 'psychogeographical' would discover that it signified: 'Jack the Ripper, ley lines, why tower blocks are bad, Hawksmoor churches, the places we remember from earlier in our lives, landscape gardening, Stonehenge and the Kray twins'.⁹⁶ Baker's eclectic inventory appears to reinforce Debord's description of the 'pleasing vagueness' of the adjectival form of psychogeography. However, to scrutinize the ways in which this recent variant of psychogeography is modelled on a series of preoccupations located in Sinclair's work it is worth considering the interconnectedness of this inventory more fully. As evidenced by *Lud Heat*, the influence of the earth mysteries and the material realities of Sinclair's temporary employment as a 'grass manicurist' help to clarify the inclusion of 'ley lines', 'Stonehenge', and even 'landscape gardening' on Baker's 'psychogeographical' list (and point towards the centrality of Sinclair's work to its contents). Apart from Stonehenge, all the proper names give Baker's inventory a definite London accent. Baker book-ends his list with Jack the Ripper and the Kray twins, representative

⁹⁶ See Phil Baker, 'Secret City: Psychogeography and the End of London', in *London: From Punk to Blair*, ed. by Joe Kerr and Andrew Gibson (London: Reaktion, 2003), pp. 323-333 (p. 323).

figures of terror that indicate how London psychogeography tends to drift towards disturbing material. The ongoing equation of London psychogeography with an unhealthy interest in the conspiracies attached to the Whitechapel murders not only demonstrates a susceptibility to outlandish and paranoid theories but also a distressing fascination with violence against women. This latter issue can be linked to less immediately obvious or visible forms of violence such as the various ways in which social and economic forces have imposed restrictions on both the behaviour and the free movement of women in the city.⁹⁷ One articulation of the argument that in the modern era women have been generally denied the same access to the metropolitan streets as their masculine counterparts can be found in the conceptual differentiation of the *flâneur* from the *flâneuse*, a contentious discussion that intersects with the historical context of both generic and specific psychogeographical precursors in Paris and London.⁹⁸ Another angle of approach emphasizes the representation of the city as a passive feminine space that the psychogeographer can actively possess, a process correlative with the recolonizing impulse behind urban drifts undertaken by middle-class white male psychogeographers through exoticized quarters of the city where the ethnic diversity of the population is often glossed over.⁹⁹ As with the critique directed at contemporary psychogeography by Laura Oldfield Ford, and the censorious diatribe self-reflexively levelled at Sinclair by his own character 'Bad News' Mutton, such elements open Sinclair's version of London psychogeography to accusations of a

⁹⁷ See Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1992). See also Žižek, pp. 122-25.

⁹⁸ See Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 34-50. For a fuller analysis, see Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a critical perspective that attempts to rethink the potential relations between psychogeographical practice and gender, see A. J. Bridger, 'Psychogeography and Feminist Methodology', *Feminism & Psychology*, 23.3 (2013), 285-98.

⁹⁹ See Keith Bassett, 'Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some Psychogeographic Experiments', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 28.3 (2004), 397-410. See also Elizabeth Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* (London: Continuum, 2012).

privileging of the white male gaze (and also need to be addressed in relation to the SI).¹⁰⁰ While these accusations highlight the need for a more sustained analysis of the causes and consequences for the lack of political and cultural engagement with these aspects of metropolitan diversity within Sinclair's psychogeography, it also suggests that any simplistic demands for such an all-encompassing vision of the city threatens to misread the social and cultural contexts of Sinclair's work and the autobiographical factors behind his forging of a psychogeographical franchise.¹⁰¹

Although the Whitechapel murders occupy pivotal roles in Sinclair's first two novels, *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings* and *Downriver*, in the earlier *Lud Heat* Sinclair resists foregrounding those events, merely incorporating them into a 'brief and nervy synopsis' that references several other murders. The concentrated attention on narratives of violence unfolding within the labyrinthine streets of the metropolis also points towards the ways in which London psychogeography interpenetrates with several of the key tropes of the urban Gothic that populate Sinclair's work, particularly through the figure of the double: from the mysterious double life of the elusive Ripper, an absence that becomes an iconic presence in London's dark heritage, to the biological doubling of the Kray twins. In a similar vein, as the last entry on Baker's list signals, the alignment of London psychogeography with an interest in the Krays, pivotal figures in the world of organized crime of the 1950s and 1960s, each eventually imprisoned for murder, attests to an emphasis on violence and villainy that threatens to glamorize the gruesome subject matter by mythologizing the world of the murderous gangsters. As Sinclair mockingly observes while witnessing the funeral

¹⁰⁰ Rumney recalls the SI as 'extraordinarily anti-feminist in practice' with the women there 'to type, cook supper and so on'. See 'The Situationist International and its Historification: Ralph Rumney in Conversation with Stewart Home', in *What is Situationism?*, pp. 134-39 (p. 138).

¹⁰¹ See March-Russell.

cortège of Ronnie Kray as it passes along Bethnal Green Road in 1995, the Krays ‘had long since moved into the realm of mythology; youngsters aping their dress code and hairstyles, thought that they were contemporaneous with Jack the Ripper’.¹⁰² This confounding of the reality of gangland violence with the model image of gangster chic was a process already in play during the 1960s, exemplified when the photographer David Bailey published his *box of pin-ups* in which prints of the Krays were controversially included alongside other celebrities including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Michael Caine, Jean Shrimpton, and Andy Warhol.¹⁰³ However, as Sinclair clarifies, rather than concentrating on their role as ill-advised style icons, the psychogeographical significance of the Kray twins lies in the malevolent influence that they exerted over the physical and social space of the city. Regardless of which aspect of the mythology is being entertained, the same criticism is applicable. As the poet Douglas Oliver observed in a letter to Sinclair written in 1979 in response to *Suicide Bridge*, ‘to let one’s imagination flow out towards [. . .] the Krays of the world carries with it always an implication of at least some prurience (and prurience *is* a fault)’.¹⁰⁴ By including the letter in *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, Sinclair implies that the novel can be partially viewed as a delayed and rather elaborate response to Oliver’s comments and questions. Oliver recalls asking Sinclair why he yielded ‘creativity into bad vortices’ such as those reductive narratives of the banal and depressing crimes associated with the Krays, and he also recalls Sinclair responding that he did not really know but felt that he had to ‘trust the process’. Oliver explains that Sinclair’s reply ‘almost entirely satisfied me’, adding generously:

¹⁰² Sinclair, *Lights Out*, pp. 71-72.

¹⁰³ David Bailey, *David Bailey’s box of pin-ups* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1965)

¹⁰⁴ Sinclair includes Oliver’s letter in *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, pp. 159-64 (p. 159). Sinclair incorporates the Krays into *Suicide Bridge* as the characters of Hand and Hyle who ‘build a crimson lake dynasty/of iron & blood knuckle’, reviving the eldest sons of Albion as part of a contemporary reworking of the mythography of Blake’s *Jerusalem*. See Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 167.

To call your book a dabbling with demons would be to relegate the poetic process to a nothing: I'm only interested in this central question: can the poetry effect the resolution of good and evil into the coincidence of contraries? We live a news story and enter its present state effected by event and mood: a phantasmic world does arise, *is* appropriate and exact, is even phenomenal for us, rather as a ghost would be. Here, there's a crucial difference between bad poets and good. Any fool can know these things by reading about them; any fool can construct surrealistic or fantastic visions and, having worked them out, can even see them. But the good poet, working in such fields of knowing, doesn't necessarily "want" to see what he sees; he just sees it, impelled necessarily upon him by circumstance and mood and by his trust in those, his willingness to speak whether gripped by horrors or by beatitudes.¹⁰⁵

Spliced into Oliver's discussion of the expansive and liberating potential of good and the socio-physical constraints and psychological diminution of evil is an accompanying differentiation between good and bad poets. Oliver suggests that Sinclair's associationism is compulsive, that as a good poet he is impelled towards the bad vortices of the more repulsive *plaques tournantes* of the city in a bid to resolve 'the coincidence of contraries' rather than to voyeuristically or vampirically exploit the capacity that the history of such locations contain for the construction of prurient visions. As with Sinclair's uneasy acknowledgement of the ways in which a monstrous psychogeography that he helped to unleash has become unwillingly complicit in the alienating and divisive processes of gentrification and property speculation, the surface of Sinclair's Gothic narratives display a similarity to the kinds of exploitative texts that Oliver attributes to bad poets, texts that dwell on isolated incidents of subjective violence rather than trace the coincidence of those incidents with the systemic violence perpetrated by the dominant ideology. The Krays, like Jack the Ripper, situate London psychogeography within the more geographically specific location of the East End. But it is to a different kind of doubling that this study now returns.

¹⁰⁵ See Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, pp. 159-60.

If one were to subscribe to Brian McHale's well-rehearsed differentiation of modernism and postmodernism as being marked by a paradigm shift from epistemological to ontological concerns, then Sinclair's hybrid texts could be aligned with the bifurcating output of several notable twentieth-century literary predecessors demanding to be classified in both categories.¹⁰⁶ As with the work of James Joyce and Thomas Pynchon, a tentative argument could be made for a chronological split within Sinclair's oeuvre between an earlier modernist phase (the self-published poetry) and a later postmodernist phase (the self-reflexive prose). But Sinclair's densely interwoven oeuvre is not so easily bisected: the poetry is produced alongside the prose, and the prose oscillates between journalism, documentary and fiction – all three (or four) periodically fusing and splitting within representations of the same motif or event. Moreover, as with Joyce and Pynchon, the reductive strategies involved in constructing arguments for Sinclair's inclusion or exclusion from one category or another are frequently rendered futile by a critically uncontainable exuberance that outmanoeuvres attempts at classification. Perhaps it is from this position that Julian Wolfreys repeatedly declares Sinclair as 'unreadable'.¹⁰⁷ For Wolfreys, Sinclair's representations of London become problematic 'because no critical language is adequate to Sinclair's excessive texts'.¹⁰⁸ The texts reflect the city in that there is

¹⁰⁶ See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 9-11.

¹⁰⁷ Wolfreys, *Writing London Volume 2*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁸ Wolfreys, 'Iain Sinclair's millennial fiction', p. 195. Wolfreys declares at the outset that 'I do not propose to offer anything amounting to a reading'. Admirably pursuing the problem of addressing this critical adequacy, Wolfreys has subjected Sinclair's 'unreadable' texts to repeated attempts at an adequate critical analysis. For an earlier admission that through the ungovernable excess of London itself (and the length limitations of the scholarly essay), 'it will be impossible, in so short a space as this, to pretend to a "reading"' of a writer such as Sinclair, see Julian Wolfreys, 'Undoing London or, Urban haunts: The Fracturing of Representation in the 1990s', in *Imagined Londons*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 193-215 (p. 196).

‘always a mysterious supplement that escapes signification’.¹⁰⁹ This position emerges dramatically for Wolfreys in Sinclair’s occulted interpretation of Hawksmoor’s churches, an interpretation that focuses ‘both the seductiveness and frustration of Sinclair’s writing as well as the equally endless appeal and disappointment of the city for Sinclair’.¹¹⁰ It would be superficial (perhaps aptly, given the above depiction of Sinclair’s excessive textual surface) to question why Wolfreys has written and published extensively on an author he carefully deconstructs as unreadable, as the impossibility of producing a reading surely becomes integral to the allure. However, there remains a danger that a purely textual reading will fail to illustrate the multifarious ways in which Sinclair’s psychogeographical preoccupations exemplify an approach to the city that accommodates an expansive interaction between the actual and the imaginary, the material and the immaterial, the text and the territory. Where Wolfreys concentrates on the problem of Sinclair’s (un)readability as being analogous to the city as an elusive and excessive text, other critics have taken issue with a purely textual approach to such literary representations of the city (explicitly contrasting their readings with those by Wolfreys). As noted in the previous chapter, Alan Robinson makes a compelling argument that Londoners inhabited a double city, one where the exterior physical space of the metropolis with its accompanying social stratification and gendered topography co-existed with an imaginary space constituted by and from interior projections and introjections that both mirrored an individual and collective understanding of the actual city and influenced emotions and behaviour in the urban environment.¹¹¹ Such an imaginary space with actual consequences on the everyday life of the city corresponds to Sinclair’s discussion of the psychic biosphere of

¹⁰⁹ Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998), p. 8. For a critical account of the ‘crisis of representation’ argument in relation to Wolfreys and Sinclair, see Luckhurst, ‘The contemporary London Gothic’.

¹¹⁰ Wolfreys, ‘Iain Sinclair’s millennial fiction’, p. 196.

¹¹¹ Robinson, *Imagining London*.

London. Similarly, citing Sinclair's notion of the city as a model for 'the exploratory role of fiction and the symbolic imaginary as it uncovers alternatives within present realities', Peter Brooker confesses that 'I see the "imaginary" and the "actual" as existing in a constitutive dialogue and therefore depart from recent post-structuralist accounts of the entirely discursive or written city'.¹¹² While producing, yet resisting, a reading of Sinclair's city texts, Wolfreys uncharacteristically simplifies the subtle intricacies of his poststructuralist approach when he reduces Sinclair's complex engagement with the urban to an oscillating attraction and repulsion. In binary terms, both polarities spark with the heat and energy of Blakean contraries. By embracing both simultaneously, Sinclair's work exhibits, in Ben Watson's trenchant phrase, the 'right kind of schizophrenia' capable of generating a sinister lucidity that cuts through the confusion surrounding the troublesome inauguration of a right 'reading' loosely defined as a 'more or less coherent translation' of the text itself.¹¹³ Intriguingly, for Wolfreys, the Gothic tracings of Sinclair's spectral turn indicate how 'the spectral nature of the metropolis collapses any neat distinctions or oppositions between the real and the textual, the historical and the literal, walking and writing, witnessing and remembering'.¹¹⁴ Neither living nor dead, the spectral transgresses such categorical determinations. By registering the reciprocal correspondences between the material reality of the labyrinthine cityscape and the spectral city as an interactive site of projections and introjections, by opening itself to the double bind of recuperation within the dominant narratives of the system it resists, and by producing Gothicized counter-narratives that attempt to articulate the messy and fragmented actuality of the psychical and social space of urban experience, Sinclair's psychogeographical

¹¹² Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis*, p. 1.

¹¹³ See Ben Watson, *Art, Class & Cleavage: Quantulumcunque Concerning Materialist Aesthetics* (London: Quartet, 1998), pp. 133-38.

¹¹⁴ Julian Wolfreys, *Deconstruction: Derrida* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 148. For a discussion of spectrality in relation to Wolfreys and Sinclair, see Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 62-64. On the identification of a 'spectral turn', see Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic'.

‘schizophrenia’ also transgresses the limits set by considering his texts as merely a postmodernist prelude to literature and gentrification. However, the right kind of schizophrenia creates more radical confusions in the process: ‘*Either I am two people or somebody else*’.¹¹⁵ If the urban Gothic is radical *and* reactionary, subversive *and* conservative, then Sinclair’s incorporation of the Gothic personifies the spectral presence of those same splits within his work.

From both an epistemological and ontological perspective, identity is in a permanent state of crisis in Sinclair’s work. Examples abound: in a section of *Lud Heat* titled ‘In the Surgery of the Sun’, the protagonist (a figure who resonates with multiple biographical echoes of Sinclair), suffering from sunstroke after labouring outside on a hot London day, confesses to ‘Jekyll dreams, Limehouse nightmares’ that leave him hesitantly sympathetic to the dissociative qualities that emerge within Stevenson’s febrile condition:

We stumble into the realisation of a *doppelgänger* principle. The feeling was already present, of a secondary personality developing [. . .] ‘Not quite myself today;’ I am host to motivations that cannot be understood. Stevenson again: ‘. . . and now suffering from what was loosely diagnosed as malaria, he had convinced himself that he had *altogether changed into another character*.’¹¹⁶

Compulsively associative even when discussing dissociation, Sinclair positions this passage next to a fleeting reference to the cult film *Performance*. The jarring recognition of a split personality becomes a ‘*Performance* retake’, an excessive mirror image that fails to match the spectacular boundaries of what had formerly constituted reality. Directed by Donald Cammell with cinematography by Nicolas Roeg (the

¹¹⁵ Sinclair, *Radon Daughters*, p. 449.

¹¹⁶ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 109. For a perceptive analysis of the representation of dissociation and multiple selves in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* that assiduously situates Stevenson’s text within its late-Victorian context, see Jill L. Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 160-91.

film's authorship has also split in the subsequent retelling of its tortured post-production history), the majority of *Performance* was shot in 1968.¹¹⁷ The actor James Fox plays Chas, an East End gangster from a milieu inspired by the brutal paradigm of the Kray twins (Ronnie taking precedence over brother Reggie: a violent character enmeshed in clandestine homosexuality and episodes of mental illness as a model for the fictional gangboss Harry Flowers). Fox's character becomes interfused with the excesses of an insular millionaire rock n' roll circus in West London embodied by Mick Jagger as the aptly named 'Turner', a psychedelic hermit ensconced in Powis Square, Notting Hill. *Performance* can be aligned with Sinclair's interest in the merger of personalities and with London as a city split by geography and class – both splits exemplified by the mixing of the capital's villainous underworld and counter-cultural underground.

The problem of identity is also central to *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*.

Interweaving three narrative strands, the polychronic text shifts between a satire of the Thatcherite creed of self-reliance through free-market individualism in the ludicrous entrepreneurial antics of a group of peripatetic bookdealers in the 1980s (that have a corollary in the entrepreneurial side of Sinclair's practice as both a bookseller and a writer attuned to the 'psychogeography of retail'); the strangely urban idyll of casual labourers in and around Brick Lane in the 1970s; and an occulted recapitulation of the macabre mythology connected to the Whitechapel murders in 1888.¹¹⁸ Does Sinclair occupy both late-twentieth century narrative strands as the novelist-as-narrator? Or are both narrators fictional variants that have split from the novelist to achieve independent identities within the narrative? Such uncertainty maps onto the third

¹¹⁷ For an informative history and insightful analysis of the film, see Colin MacCabe, *Performance* (London: BFI, 1998).

¹¹⁸ See Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 21.

narrative strand, in which speculation concerning the identity of the Ripper generates multiple conspiracies.¹¹⁹ The perplexing question of narrative identity haunts all of Sinclair's work whether filed under poetry, fiction, or documentary. As an extended attempt to write the self in all of its multidimensional appropriations and memorial digressions, Sinclair's oeuvre can be considered as a form of autobiography saturated by the affective qualities of place: an autobiopsychogeography.¹²⁰ As an ongoing and incomplete process, the self-reflexive mobility of autobiography evades capture by the rules and laws of literary genre and the ontological delimitation of literary character.¹²¹

Sinclair's *Downriver* (a work whose multifaceted narrative structure and use and abuse of fictional and documentary components revolts against being reduced to such a generic classification as a novel) also intersects with questions of identity. The penultimate tale includes a caustic satire on the literary magazine *Granta* under Bill Buford's editorship and ownership. In Sinclair's version, Bull Bagman, the American editor of *Butts Green*, commissions the opening tale of *Downriver* and insists on line-editing the text:

Pencilled comments speared the margins: a messianic tutorial. 'Who is "I"?' was the first controversy. An existential dilemma that stopped the present writer dead in his tracks. On that single incisive challenge the whole schmeer hangs. 'Who is "I"?' Answer that riddle or get out of the maze. The slippery self-confessor, the closet De Quincey (I, Me,

¹¹⁹ See Emilsson. Concentrating on *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*, Emilsson categorizes Sinclair as a postmodernist.

¹²⁰ In an article on Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room*, Christopher C. Gregory-Guider classifies Sinclair's work as 'autobiogeography'. For the purposes of this study, the addition of 'psycho' to that description clarifies the psychogeographical momentum of Sinclair's autobiographical drive. See Christopher C. Gregory-Guider, 'Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room* and the Art of Autobiogeography', *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London* 3.2 (September 2005) <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2005/guider.html> [accessed 12 January 2015]. See also *Reconstruction*, 2.3 (Summer 2002), ed by Matthew Wolf-Meyer and Davin Heckman, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/023/TOC.htm> [accessed 12 January 2015] a special journal issue on autobiogeography.

¹²¹ For a comprehensive introduction to this theme, see James Olney 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1980), pp. 3-27.

You, He), speaks of ‘the Narrator’, or ‘Sinclair’: deflects the thrust of the accusation. The narrator exists only in his narration: outside this tale he is nothing.¹²²

Bagman’s request to clarify identity threatens to destabilize the narrative by either constructing or collapsing distinctions between the author and a nest of potential narrators. Richard Bradford’s polemical review of British fiction argues that although the author-in-the-text ‘was once the badge of avant-gardism and warned of serious questions regarding the nature of representation’, it had now become a ‘hoary routine’ found ‘even in the diaries of Bridget Jones’. Accused of domesticating such concepts, Sinclair is also redefined as one of the ‘New Postmodernists’ whose ‘radicalism tends to be attuned towards the marketplace’.¹²³ Bradford trivializes Sinclair’s preoccupation with splitting and doubling (an associative preoccupation that extends far beyond questions of narrative identity or genre: *Downriver*, for instance, bifurcates into a ‘grimoire of rivers and railways’ while also recognizing that ‘above this shamed city is a bright twin’).¹²⁴ For Sinclair, these matters function as more than a well-worn metafictional conceit designed to reassure the reader of their navigational skills in negotiating the stream of post-ironic traffic between the real and the imaginary (a self-deceptive strategy from the start). Both Sinclair’s self-referentiality and his incorporation of urban Gothic need to be aligned with modernist as well as postmodernist designs.¹²⁵ On one narrative level, the narrator of *Downriver* who occupies the position of the ‘present writer’ in the penultimate tale is also the earlier narrator, despite implications of otherness by the use of the attributive ‘present’, a conundrum partially solved by the ‘present’ writer’s confession that at least in one

¹²² *Downriver*, p. 352.

¹²³ Richard Bradford, *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 243, p. 67.

¹²⁴ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 375, p. 56.

¹²⁵ See also Perril, p. 312.

instance the editorial marginalia was acted upon: ‘you will notice if you check back to the first tale that I have, in fact, acted on Bagman’s excellent advice and rejigged the sentence’: a confession that would seem to be voiced by both (or possibly more) Sinclairs. As (at least one) Sinclair states: “Sinclair” is a tribe’.¹²⁶ In the maze of the text (and the hideous critical labyrinth that it spawns), the riddle of ‘*Who is “I”?*’ remains productively intact. For Sinclair, the business of representation ignites both an atavistic and prophetic sense of the diabolical.

If the trepidation that returns whenever Wolfreys begins to decipher his encrypted version of Sinclair can be read as a fear of systematizing texts that escape systematization, then Ben Watson’s dialectical approach, more attuned to the ways in which a radical work can improvise a resistance to systematization, offers a more productive encounter. ‘Radical art uses schizophrenia to collapse representation, to restore to actuality its claim to truth’ observes Watson. After deriding Derrida and the school of ‘scholastic mystification’ that admits its projects ‘can never be achieved’, Watson continues:

In contrast, the schizophrenic twist in the modernist artwork is an indication of the human malleability of the world. It emphasises the constructed nature of human reality in order to invite a change. In toppling its codes the artwork aspires to be something more than reflection, representation or entertainment. This is the aesthetic moment that deserves the name of Cleavage. Seeking to ‘systematise’ this moment – to institutionalise it – is its recuperation, and places bureaucratic bars around its radical democracy. The point is to perpetrate the moment and unleash the reader’s psyche on the world.¹²⁷

Studying the hyperbolic energizing of an era – the 1980s under a Thatcherite government – that subscribes to a casual schizophrenia in Sinclair’s *Downriver*,

¹²⁶ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 352. The ‘rejigged’ sentence occurs on p. 11.

¹²⁷ Watson, *Art, Class & Cleavage*, p. 122, p. 126.

Watson registers a specific aesthetic agenda emerging through the revelatory rubbish that resides in the cracks of the psychic biosphere of literary London: ‘Sinclair’s schizophrenic art tears up the contract of novelistic realism in order to lay bare a reality that scotches the liberal “we”, inviting instead a prurient, voyeuristic, guilty gaze’.¹²⁸ Sinclair demonstrates that it is not enough (or perhaps too much) to depict directly the fear and loathing that lurks within the city’s celebration of wealth and glamour or to anthologize the greed, misery and shame concealed within the shadows of unremarkable everyday experience by tracing the rise and fall of a series of representative Londoners. His mode of engagement is deliberately more hyperactive. His texts are explosively exaggerated, detonating doubts about their own purposefully paranoid design. Simon Perril notes that Sinclair’s ‘characters are never sympathetically drawn, heroic martyrs to the regime that oppresses them. Rather, they are grotesque holograms, bristling with the virulence of the moral disintegration that is projected upon them’.¹²⁹ Again, it becomes a question of systematization. Sinclair dissolves genres by blending aspects of poetry, fiction, documentary, autobiography, biography, travelogue, journalism, film, photography, performance, and art. The often collaborative nature of these practices adds to the categorical decomposition. Added to this, the comedic cleaving of narrative expectation and of conventional literary representation enables Sinclair to inhabit (as Wolfreys indicates) a seemingly depthless zone ripe for a fusing of genres and self-reflexive pastiche. But attempts to systematize these components as emblems of a postmodernist paradigm or a psychogeographical franchise (even from within Sinclair’s texts themselves) ignore other significant components that resist such recuperation and institutionalization. Through a radical collapse of representation and a disorientating negotiation of the

¹²⁸ Watson, *Art, Class & Cleavage*, p. 138.

¹²⁹ Perril, p. 335.

actual and imaginary, Sinclair's work propels the reader into schizophrenic encounters that sponsor and spawn their real-life counterparts. The sculptor Brian Catling regularly appears in Sinclair's texts as 'Joblard'. In *Downriver*, Catling appears in one tale as a version of himself, but this version seems to be a figment of his fictional analogue: 'It struck me that Joblard had reversed Stevenson's polarity, Hyde had succeeded in manufacturing his own doctor, in the form of Professor Catling'. In the schizophrenic rush of the novel's final tale, Sinclair asks Catling to take over the narration. While ostensibly inhabiting Sinclair's version of himself as Joblard, Catling plans to further implode 'this dreary post-modernist fraud' by writing 'my version of him writing as me'.¹³⁰ Through this deadpan specimen of a rational mind mediating its reception as irrational by existing standards of rationality through a perverse redeployment of the types of textual uncertainties and decentred subjectivities of the poststructuralist era, Sinclair galvanizes a fraudulent postmodernism into servicing the rebellious spirit of anti-psychiatry, producing volatile material that the techniques of separation deployed by the dominant ideology usually exclude as a form of madness or excrete as a form of waste. It is from this position that Peter Brooker's split-screen portrait of an unreconstructed Sinclair retains a degree of validity:

Sinclair does not provide us with a politically correct cognizance of the newly differentiated multi-ethnic global city. He does, however, represent, if there is a core to his position and politics, the spectre that haunted Margaret Thatcher, of a 1960s counterculture, in all its white, masculinist imperfections from one perspective, and all its provocation, permissiveness and anarchic disturbance from another.¹³¹

The schizophrenic twist of Sinclair's spatial and textual practice resurfaces in *Liquid City*, a book composed with the photographer Marc Atkins, a regular confederate in

¹³⁰ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 256, p. 380.

¹³¹ Brooker 'Iain Sinclair: The psychotic geographer treads the border-lines', p. 227.

Sinclair's London project. Sinclair contrasts his working methods with those of his collaborator. Where Atkins 'waits, waits, waits' for the right moment to shoot, Sinclair thrives 'on movement, drift':

I wanted a single sentence to contain everything I knew. I suffered (exposure to Jack Kerouac at an impressionable age) from that impulse to sketch, note, improvise, revise, double back, bifurcate, split like an amoeba. My rampant schizophrenia expressed itself in the act of transcribing the speech of dogs, watching cloud-streets advance across the mouth of the Medway, listening to the shapeless buzz of cafés, trains, supermarkets – until I arrived at that nanosecond where the pattern was revealed, before it vanished forever.¹³²

The final phrase resonates both with a romanticized sense of the writer actively rescuing memory from oblivion and with a more fatalistic acknowledgement that any transcendent 'nanosecond' of pattern recognition will succumb to the inexorable force of that oblivion. Unleashed on the Gothicized territory of London's East End, the 'rampant schizophrenia' expressive of Sinclair's counter-cultural roots provocatively connects with the need for 'movement, drift', powerfully recombining the two terms that compose psychogeography – the psychological and the geographical – in new ways that necessitate new splits.

As a provisional coda on the Gothic, the need for movement, for drifting purposefully, informs Sinclair's reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, another of those prophetic late-Victorian fictions from whose pages the title character has transgressed in order to achieve an independent existence. Like Sinclair's own works, *Dracula* is a collection of diverse texts: diaries, letters, telegrams, newspaper articles, medical reports, phonograph recordings, all edited within the parameters of the novel by the character of Mina Harker, scrambling authorial perspective and authority while simultaneously

¹³² Sinclair, *Liquid City*, p. 8.

representing narrative as if authoritative. But the narrative scaffolding is not Sinclair's primary concern. His reading identifies Dracula as 'the original psychogeographer' forging a franchise, speculating on property in the badlands of the city's inner and outer quarters.¹³³ For Sinclair, Stoker's text becomes a prophetic vision of future real estate deals, of expanding property portfolios, of *possession* (a term in Sinclair's work that regularly oscillates between overlapping significations of control and ownership, from the possession of objects to being in a bewitched or enchanted state, a movement that intersects with Marx's discourse around commodity fetishism and vampiric capital).¹³⁴ Coupling the circulation of traffic with the circulation of blood, Sinclair nominates distribution and storage via the ownership of property and commodities as the driving force of the novel.¹³⁵ Avoiding more familiar literary critical accounts of the dominant role of sexuality, repression, invasion anxieties, or tropes that spin around degeneration, Sinclair claims that '*Dracula* announces the coming age of the estate agent'.¹³⁶ Identifying Dracula's Carfax Abbey as a site in Purfleet on the periphery of the city near to the M25 orbital motorway, Sinclair registers how a novel written at the end of the nineteenth century maps onto what will become the expanded field of psychogeography in his work on either side of the millennium.

¹³³ Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 404.

¹³⁴ For an innovative reading of the figure of the vampire in Marx's work, and one that functions as a corrective to the hauntological emphasis on the spectral, see Mark Neocleous, 'The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires', *History of Political Thought*, 24.4 (Winter 2003) 668-84.

¹³⁵ See Sinclair, *London Orbital*, pp. 403-10.

¹³⁶ See Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 403. For a brief but influential article on *Dracula* and sexuality, see Christopher Bentley, 'The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Literature and Psychology*, 22 (1972), 27-34. On the novel in relation to invasion anxieties and degeneration, see Stephen Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: "Dracula" and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization', *Victorian Studies*, 33.4 (Summer 1990), 621-45.

6) COUNTER-NARRATIVES IN THE CITY OF DISAPPEARANCES: PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY IN AN EXPANDED FIELD

When aligned with the retrieval of radical energies and subversive currents within the twenty-first century global city, Sinclair's psychogeography retains a capacity to brush against the grain of the mainstream media and other institutions that acquiesce into a position of passive neutrality or otherwise lend tacit support towards the marginalization of dissenting voices, the privatization of public space, and the erosion of liberties under the duplicitous imperatives of state security and economic prosperity. From this perspective, rather than a depoliticized practice, psychogeography becomes a tool for the production of counter-narratives to dominant formations of culture and history under the social and political consensus of a rapidly naturalized neo-liberalism. In 2006, Sinclair edited *London: City of Disappearances*, an 'anthology of absence' that circulates around the topic of the city as a site of amnesia, dispossession, and loss, where the wreckage of enforced forgetting and involuntary oblivion reconfigures personal and historical memory as well as the cultural and physical landscape.¹ In Sinclair's twenty-first century work, the theme of disappearance becomes inseparable from his earlier appropriation of psychogeography as a way of describing a methodology for recovering that which has disappeared. Walking purposefully through the city and trawling deliriously through the archive of London, Sinclair recovers the fading histories of reforgotten figures, of abandoned locations and neglected spaces, of lost objects and buried cultural treasures. As noted

¹ See Sinclair, *London: City of Disappearances*, p. 2.

above, Sinclair insists that ‘the official map of the culture, at any time, would always fail to include vital features. Too many good writers are left out of the canon’.²

Sinclair rehearses this argument in an introduction to *Conductors of Chaos*, an anthology of experimental poetry that he edited in the mid-1990s. With a familiar attention to the paradoxes and problems of his own re-enactment of the position that he criticizes, Sinclair elucidates how anthologies are ‘a closing down, the suppression of a more radical and heterodox body of work’ into a compendium edition. The works that are omitted are under erasure from the culture:

What is published is taught. No other texts are available. The secret history of what Eric Mottram referred to as ‘the British Poetry Revival of the 1960s and 1970s’ is as arcane a field of study as the heresies and schisms of the early Church. The plethora of original pamphlets and chapbooks cannot be located without a team of private detectives and a hefty bank balance. The point being that the whole episode was strictly off-piste, unnoticed; a cottage industry inspired and operated by the poets themselves.³

Scarcity becomes an institutional by-product of the selectivity of canon formation and anthological practices. When Sinclair tunes the engine of his prose into such histrionic states it is typically a sign that he is writing from personal experience. After setting up Albion Village Press at the start of the 1970s, Sinclair published both his own work and that of other poets such as Brian Catling and Chris Torrance as part of the cottage industry of the British Poetry Revival.

Poet-publishers like Sinclair directly confronted the materiality of the page in relation to technical and economic conditions of production. If such an active approach to the production process has a parallel with the proliferation of online publishing in the

² Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, p. 139.

³ Iain Sinclair, ‘Introduction: Infamous and Invisible: a Manifesto for Those Who Do not Believe in Such Things’, in *Conductors of Chaos*, ed. by Iain Sinclair (London: Picador, 1996), pp. xiii-xx (p. xv, p. xiv).

digital age (and resonates with the ancient echoes of William Blake's self-published visionary combinations of image and text), both models raise intriguing variations on the issues analyzed by Walter Benjamin in his 1934 essay 'The Author as Producer'. For Benjamin, the question 'What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?' is better substituted by asking 'What is that work's *position* within those relations?'⁴ Benjamin argues that to generate social change, the author of a work should also gravitate towards being a producer, a more interactive position from which it is collectively possible to engineer a functional transformation of the technical apparatus of production. Much like the conditions surrounding online authors who produce electronic texts via proprietary software and operating systems that screen the user from the coded performance of their computers, the extent to which Sinclair's period of self-publishing positions him as a refunctioning author-as-producer in a Benjaminian sense remains open for further study. On an economic level, what can be noted is that rather than transforming the production process, the production process transformed Sinclair's finances. At the beginning of the 1970s, for an outlay of fifty pounds it was possible for Sinclair to produce 200 copies of a book. As *Lud Heat* exemplifies, these distinctively designed objects often integrated photographs, maps, and illustrations. However, by 1979, the publication of Sinclair's *Suicide Bridge* left him £2000 in debt. 'Money', he writes, 'that would be paid off inch by sorry inch, through years on the road, bookdealing'.⁵ By the mid-1980s, Sinclair had stopped producing Albion Village Press titles and started preparing cheap booklets as Hoarse Commerce. The title of this new publishing venture proved to be an appropriate pun. The booklets usually consisted of a couple of folded pages of A4

⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', trans. by Edmund Jephcott, in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. by Brian Wallis (Boston, MA: Godine, 1984), pp. 297-309 (p. 298). See also the essays collected in *Engineering Culture: On 'The Author as (Digital) Producer'*, *Data Browser* 02 (2005), ed. by Geoff Cox and Joasia Krysa <http://www.data-browser.net/02/> [accessed 12 January 2015].

⁵ Sinclair, *The Firewall*, p. 9.

bearing fragmented observations on various book-hunting tours around the road and rail networks. They were photocopied for print runs that dwindled from twenty-one to twelve to ten copies, all given away to a diminishing target audience of friends and fellow poets. Rather than viewing this minimal production as a lost period, Sinclair has commented that he had ‘happily disappeared into the quasi-writing activity of being a book-dealer’.⁶ In *Edge of the Orison*, he writes:

I enjoyed my lost years as a book scout [. . .] I abandoned my attempts to construct pseudo-epics that mingled (without distinction) poetry and prose. Bookdealing, I consoled myself, was a form of authorship: my Thursday stall at Camden Passage Market could be viewed as an exhibition of chosen texts. A modernist collage of found objects. Perfect-bound quotations to take home for cash.⁷

While collecting and collaging together an idiosyncratic mixture of passions and preoccupations accumulated throughout the various periods of his writing career for commercial purposes, Sinclair divines an alternative canon not fixed or globally positioned on the official map of the culture. It is only when Sinclair produces a series of London novels and then returns to an amplified version of the documentary mode of his first book *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* that he begins to achieve moderate commercial success and critical recognition, moving from the realm of the reforgotten author-as-producer into the popular franchising of psychogeography.

During each of these phases, Sinclair has remained generous with his enthusiasms for collaborating with other artists and writers, an enthusiasm with which he seeks to construct a small community around his own presence as a conductor of chaos, a mobile *plaque tournante*: walking, writing, receiving, transmitting, modifying, and

⁶ Jackson, *The Verbals*, p. 101.

⁷ Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison*, p. 93.

repeating. For Robert Sheppard, this model of Sinclair's cultural politics derives from the early years of his 'poetic practice' and 'reveals a brave but risky strategy': by becoming the 'slave of what is discoverable' (although 'what is recognizable' would be a more accurate description) through his empirical explorations of a culture whose official guides (for a combination of reasons) cannot be trusted, 'what Sinclair finds are his artist-friends and immediate associates'. Sheppard notes that Sinclair's *London Orbital* 'encodes this sense of building a community around itself at localized levels too', both in the rotating cast of Sinclair's fellow walkers and in the particular communities with which Sinclair engages during his circumnavigation of the city's outer edge.⁸ The strengths and weaknesses of such explorations are reminiscent of Sinclair's own acknowledgement that lines 'forged by Limehouse labourers highlight Hawksmoor churches, blue-and-yellow murder sites, decommissioned hospitals and synagogues. Geography is personalized. A walk is a floating autobiography.'⁹ While autobiographically floating around the edgelands of the M25, Sinclair invariably documents sites that sediment more layers to his alternative canon. At Shenley, in the graveyard of St Botolph's, Sinclair locates the burial site of Hawksmoor. 'St Botolph's was certainly a sacred place', he writes. 'Hawksmoor's grave, along with Temple Bar, were the beacons of our walk: heavily freighted memorials that had been allowed to pull away from the centre'.¹⁰ The topic of Temple Bar – a monumental arch designed by Christopher Wren – will return again below. But it is not only Hawksmoor's grave (and Wren's arch) that pull away from the centre. 'Time after time, urban obsessions would be resolved at the very point where London lost heat, lost heart, gave up its clotted identity', he explains during a discussion of Rachel Lichtenstein's long quest to locate the grave of David Rodinsky, a site that she eventually found near to Waltham

⁸ Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair*, pp. 18-19.

⁹ Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison*, p. 160.

¹⁰ Sinclair, *London Orbital*, pp. 131-32.

Abbey, the starting point for Sinclair's counter-clockwise drift around the circumference of the expanded field of the city.

Where Sheppard praises Sinclair for documenting the cultural scene 'firsthand, unofficially, without the pre-existent social valuations inherent in any field of cultural production', other critics have raised conflicting concerns.¹¹ Rod Mengham, for example, observes that it is 'canonicity that disqualifies buildings, works of art and texts from serious consideration by Sinclair'.¹² From this perspective, when a potential focus of attention acquires any degree of social valuation that makes its cultural status official then Sinclair will tend to discount its significance, assuming that the interests invested in its official status have ensured that any residual currents of radical energy have been drained or diverted from the source. While this critical stance accurately portrays Sinclair as a territorial figure, paradoxically rejecting the canonical in order to construct his own alternative canon, it elides the collision of compatible and competing canons within Sinclair's work. While recovering the reforgotten, Sinclair also engages with the canonical figures of Sherlock Holmes and Dracula. While chasing the ghosts of obscure novelists such as Robert Westerby or Roland Camberton, Sinclair also places canonical writers such as William Blake and Joseph Conrad as central presences within certain texts.¹³ While promoting his artist-friends and immediate associates, Sinclair also references the work of high profile authors

¹¹ See Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair*, p. 92.

¹² Rod Mengham, 'The Elegiac Imperative', *The Kenyon Review*, 23:1 (Winter 2001), 173-77 (p. 177).

¹³ Sinclair has provided introductions to new editions of Robert Westerby, *Wide Boys Never Work* (London: London Books, 2008) and Roland Camberton, *Scamp* (Nottingham: New London, 2010). Blake is a reference point throughout Sinclair's work. See Sinclair, *Blake's London*. Conrad and his work feature heavily within Sinclair's novel *Dining on Stones* and in his documentary *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*.

such as Don DeLillo and Roberto Bolaño.¹⁴ While highlighting Hawksmoor churches, Sinclair also spotlights Jack the Ripper and the Whitechapel Murders. If canonicity does not exactly disqualify people and places from Sinclair's consideration, it certainly raises his suspicions. Yet Sinclair's complex interplay with both the canon and the reforgotten also open his work to further charges of complicity with the dominant global ideology reshaping the contemporary city through oppressive and divisive conditions of domination and control.

Rodinsky and the Zone of Disappearances

Rodinsky is a key figure within Sinclair's work, particularly in relation to the topic of disappearance. In a chapter of *Downriver* entitled 'The Solemn Mystery of the Disappearing Room', Sinclair launches another iteration of a narrative that he began in an earlier article in *The Guardian* and that he will return to and develop in several subsequent books. The chapter title refers to the attic room above a dilapidated former synagogue in Princelet Street, Spitalfields. The previous resident of the room was the mysterious Rodinsky, a 'Polish Jew from Plotsk or Lublin or wherever' who had 'perched under the eaves, a night-crow, unremarked and unremarkable – until that day in the early 1960s when he achieved the Great Work, and became invisible'.¹⁵ By the end of the 1990s, the derisive 'wherever' in that sentence will have been replaced by a more expansive record of Rodinsky's personal history as his narrative burns brighter in the constellation of Sinclair's shifting preoccupations. This shift already begins to

¹⁴ On DeLillo, see Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 44, p. 166 and *Ghost Milk*, p. 376. For Sinclair's more extensive engagement with Bolaño, see *Ghost Milk*, pp. 145-47 and *American Smoke*, pp. 55-57, pp. 92-95.

¹⁵ Sinclair, *Downriver*, p. 134. The same phrases are found in the earlier article on Rodinsky, see Iain Sinclair, 'The Man who Became a Room', *The Guardian*, 17 August 1988, p. 37.

occur within *Downriver* when Sinclair quotes from reputedly authentic letters by Ian Shames, the ‘last surviving son-in-law of the [. . .] shamash of the Princelet Synagogue’ who remembers the Rodinsky family, including the ‘pasty-faced’ David.¹⁶ Rodinsky’s room was rediscovered at the beginning of the 1980s. The contents of the room had remained untouched since Rodinsky had disappeared two decades earlier. Adopting the guise of Sinclair the narrator, Sinclair explains that he had been alerted to the myth of Rodinsky’s disappearance by Fredrik Hanbury, the alias that he deploys for the writer Patrick Wright. Influenced by Jack Kerouac’s loosely fictionalized representations of friends like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs in several Beat novels, Sinclair’s fiction includes recognizable versions of real people – such as Wright and Catling – who reappear in Sinclair’s documentary works under their proper names. Aside from this nominal shift, there is minimal difference between the ways that Sinclair portrays their fictional and factual selves. So while the documentary mode ostensibly becomes Sinclair’s preferred medium from *Lights Out for the Territory* onwards, his cast of characters are always depicted in a narrative style that fuses the fantastic and the real. As the previous chapter demonstrated, there is nothing exclusively postmodern in producing such a fusion. Sinclair is a knowing contributor in a long tradition in which the act of writing involves the interpenetration of real and imaginary worlds when recollecting or representing actual events. By carving up the still warm corpses of fact and fiction and reassembling their putatively separate parts within his gonzo cartography of the split city, Sinclair invests his hybrid citizens with a Grand Guignol capacity to demonstrate the messy ways in which such leaky categories as the actual and the imaginary subjectively bleed into each other, contaminating enough of the forensic textual evidence to ensure that the variegated stains of his work resist being resolved back into such objective or definitive

¹⁶ For transcripts of the letters, see Sinclair, *Downriver*, pp. 148-49 (p. 148) and pp. 302-04 (p. 303).

distinctions. The real Wright had referenced Rodinsky and his room in a review of Sinclair's *White Chappell Scarlet Tracings* that appeared under the title 'Rodinsky's Place' in the *London Review of Books* in 1987:

Earlier this year I went back to visit the disused synagogue at 19 Princelet Street – a rather dilapidated building now owned by the Spitalfields Trust and leased out as a 'heritage centre' concerned with the local history of immigration. Above the tiny synagogue is the room of David Rodinsky, a Polish Jew of increasingly mysterious reputation. Latterly described as a translator and philosopher, he is said to have lived here in some sort of caretaking capacity. One day in the Sixties Rodinsky stepped out into Princelet Street and disappeared for ever. His room has since become fabled: a secret chamber still floating above the street just as it was left. Caught in a time-warp of the kind that property-developers are quick to straighten out, it has become the new Spitalfields version of the *Marie-Celeste*.¹⁷

In *A Journey Through Ruins*, Wright extends this *LRB* review into a sustained account of the shapeshifting political aesthetics of the wave of 'New Georgians' moving into Spitalfields to buy and conserve its historic buildings. The literary appreciation of Sinclair's work that formed the second half of Wright's *LRB* review resurfaces in another chapter of the book.¹⁸ In terms of revising previously published pieces into a documentary narrative that engages with London's secret histories, Wright's book is a notable forerunner of *Lights Out for the Territory*. Like Sinclair, Wright develops an immersive understanding of both the official and unofficial histories that cluster around the topography of the places with which he engages. Wright also shares many aspects of Sinclair's compulsive associationism, replacing the more *outré* elements of London psychogeography with a microanalytical gaze that reveals a different kind of occulted material. Wright's restless probing of received opinions is grounded in specific encounters that suggest to him that over-simplifications have become attached

¹⁷ Patrick Wright, 'Rodinsky's Place', *London Review of Books*, 29 October 1987, 3-5 (p. 3).

¹⁸ See Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins*, pp. 97-111, pp. 162-65.

to accepted versions of events, lives, objects, even phrases. By rigorously dismantling such formulaic conceptions, Wright's densely erudite essays produce counter-narratives that reveal more complexity and confusion than authorities on those topics care to admit.¹⁹ The acknowledgements to Wright's book indicate explicit as well as implicit connections. Wright expresses his special thanks 'to Iain Sinclair with whom I have shared a succession of East London locations over the last few years, and who has contributed a number of choice items to my growing bibliography of Dalston Lane'.²⁰ Both writers thank Neil Belton who worked as the editor on *A Journey Through Ruins* and *Lights Out for the Territory*.

As the appropriation of the Rodinsky narrative in *Downriver* intimates, Sinclair's work from the 1990s onwards demonstrates an increasing preoccupation with the psychogeographical ramifications of various kinds of disappearance. Visiting the fictional version of Wright, Sinclair explains that he was:

beginning to see the "zone of disappearances" in a new light – as a focusing lens by which everything that was vague, loose, indistinct, was made clear; given an outline and an identity. Whitechapel created beings who were so much a part of where they were that outsiders – murky in motive, and greedy to do good – could not see what was being put in front of them. They wanted something that simply was not there, and – not finding it – insisted that it must have vanished [. . .] streams of the dispersed, the scattered and unhoused, processed through the Minorities, or Mansell Street, into the indifferent grasp of the labyrinth: within its protection their old markings were erased. 'Disappearance' is what we *wish* on them, so that we can expose what they never were. We can dump our ruin in the space they vacate.²¹

¹⁹ For persuasive examples of this process, see Wright's interrogation of the ideas of 'heritage' and 'history' in the essays collected in *On Living in an Old Country* and also his assiduous pursuit of the convoluted genealogy of the phrase 'iron curtain' in *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007).

²⁰ Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins*, p. 287. Wright also offers special thanks to Douglas Oliver, the poet whose letter to Sinclair regarding *Suicide Bridge* is included as part of the text of *White Chappell Scarlet Tracings*.

²¹ Sinclair, *Downriver*, pp. 145-46.

By registering the precise psychogeographical parameters of the absence and erasure of which Rodinsky's disappearance is mysteriously emblematic, the "zone of disappearances" is brought more clearly into focus so that its general ('vague, loose, indistinct') function as a default representation of loss (or of 'otherness') can be questioned in relation to the complex material histories of place.

Sinclair's adoption of the local mystery of Rodinsky as material to incorporate into his own London mythography develops throughout the 1990s from the article in *The Guardian* to a chapter in *Downriver* to the full-length book *Rodinsky's Room*, co-authored with the artist Rachel Lichtenstein. Using Rodinsky's annotated copy of a London A-Z, Sinclair also walked a series of routes through the city, an act that became another publication, *Dark Lanthorns: David Rodinsky as Psychogeographer*. As the title clarifies, Sinclair casts Rodinsky as a psychogeographical precursor, another obscure figure to supplement an expanding directory of the reforgotten. Sinclair labels Rodinsky a 'secret scholar'. Presumably, the scholarly detritus of Rodinsky's attic room, the assorted books and papers that intimated ongoing research in ancient languages and theological mysticism, aided his recruitment to the ranks of more established voyagers into London's *terrae incognitae* such as William Blake, Thomas De Quincey, and Arthur Machen. In *Downriver*, Sinclair describes Rodinsky as 'the caretaker and resident poltergeist of the Princelet Street synagogue'. However, as in *Lud Heat*, the marvellous is connected to the stuttering momentum of economic realities. Rodinsky, says Sinclair, will 'be resurrected only as "a feature", an italicized selling point, in the occult fabulation of the zone that the estate agents demanded to justify a vertiginous increase in property values'.²² Sinclair's culpability in laying part

²² Sinclair, *Downriver*, pp. 134-35.

of the groundwork for this process of ‘occult fabulation’ by adopting Rodinsky as a feature within his own psychogeographical franchise is implied rather than explicit.

Produced as a scaled-down version of Rodinsky’s totemic *Geographers’ A to Z of London*, Sinclair’s *Dark Lanthorns* retains the typeface and distinctive red, white and blue colour scheme of the cover of the original street atlas.²³ Rodinsky used a red biro both to mark routes in his *A-Z* and to circle specific buildings and neighbourhoods.

Scrutinizing these marks, Sinclair proposes that Rodinsky:

was a taxonomist, breaking down the overwhelming mass of information into categories that excited his attention: prisons, asylums, burial grounds, children’s homes, hospitals. These markings become a projected autobiography, a Dickensian fable of abandonment, destitution, and incarceration. That is how Rodinsky reads the world: a wilderness of unknowing, punctuated by dark places. Reservoirs of pain that solicit the heat of his red nib.²⁴

Sinclair depicts Rodinsky’s nascent psychogeography as a cognitive mapping that breaks down the city’s overwhelming mass of information into a series of typological hubs. Could this subjective charting of metropolitan institutions carry echoes of the Situationist hypothesis of *plaques tournantes*? Are such ‘privileged buildings’ charged sites around which it is possible to detect specific modulations in the emotional microclimates of the urban environment?²⁵ Or does this psychogeographical enterprise only present dim correspondences with the profane illuminations of those ambulant Parisian drifters? During the first of the three walks, Sinclair finds himself rambling through ‘drowsing suburbs’ in the far reaches of north-east London, ‘ducking and

²³ Nested within related projects, *Dark Lanthorns* was published in the same month – June 1999 – as *Rodinsky’s Room*. It is also an addendum to an artist’s guidebook by Rachel Lichtenstein devised as part of a larger project by Artangel entitled *Inner City*. See Rachel Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky’s Whitechapel* (London: Artangel, 1999). Sinclair’s walks through Rodinsky’s *A-Z* were recorded on camera and shown on screens around Whitechapel also in June that year.

²⁴ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 11.

²⁵ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 11.

diving through Essex baronial estates'. He confirms a growing conviction that he is literally following in Rodinsky's footsteps. Unlike De Quincey's account of the Ratcliffe Highway murders, the routes Rodinsky coloured into the street atlas are evidence of actual journeys through the territory. 'The apparently random swerves and jerks of Rodinsky's red biro' he writes, 'are not a form of automatic writing, a spirit-guided script, but a direct and sensitive response to the lie of the land'.²⁶ The hub around which the first walk pivots proves to be the tower of the former Claybury Mental Hospital, where Rodinsky's sister Bessie spent most of her life. Sinclair returns to Claybury in a later walk as part of the circumnavigation of the M25 in *London Orbital*. With suspiciously fortuitous timing, he arrives at Claybury 'on the day when bulldozers were moving in'²⁷. He discovers that the secluded site is to be redeveloped as a gated residential community. Despite the parallels between the late-Victorian masterplan for the gated asylum and the twenty-first century masterplan for the gated community – both supply recreational facilities: a gym, a swimming pool, private parkland – local history is under erasure. Claybury is to be renamed Repton Park. Standing outside the gates, Sinclair watches as hospital records are burnt in skips. The site is being primed to obliterate the violent memories of its past, but Sinclair's timely interruption stirs up historical echoes. As a *plaque tournante*, Claybury still seeks to repel unwanted visitors while conditioning prospective residents through the copyrighted promises of property brochures.²⁸ The erasure of history as a form of negating any cultural or social context that does not fit in with the commercial vision of property developers and their bureaucratic counterparts becomes a recurring motif in *London Orbital* as Sinclair and assorted companions traverse the marginal spaces

²⁶ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 22, p. 21.

²⁷ Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 137.

²⁸ Claybury is one of the mental hospitals that had a 'mosquito room' where inmates were deliberately infected with malaria in an experiment to bring them 'back to sanity'. See Sinclair *London Orbital*, p. 290. See also Sinclair, 'Sickening', p. 265.

distributed around the urban periphery. Claybury is an isolated version of the more intricate gentrification of parts of the inner city and inner suburbs such as Hackney, where a steady erasure of disruptive energies attempts to secure a less volatile atmosphere within an area still broadly characterized by diverse combinations of class and ethnicity, wealth and poverty. In general terms, gentrification begins to project the equivalent of a gateless gated community, restrictively self-regulated via the security-conscious behavioural dictates of those who populate the newly renovated streets and parks. As the unrest in Hackney and other parts of the capital and other cities within the UK emphasized during the summer of 2011, when the glaring economic divisions within these urban environments converge with a sense of particular communities being repeatedly targeted by institutions such as the Metropolitan Police and particular social groups being repeatedly typecast as a criminal underclass by the media then the fragile adherence to the ascendant law of property rights rapidly disintegrates.²⁹ The material realities of class struggle resurface not only in the potentially inflammatory tension between these two states but in the lack of tension too. In an essay on London in the early 1990s, Patrick Keiller quotes from an interview with Paul Gilroy featured in *Twilight City*, a short film by the Hackney-based Black Audio Film Collective. Gilroy reflects that during the last decades of the twentieth century an extraordinary change has happened in the city so that ‘people are able to inhabit the same space, to be physically proximate and yet to live in different worlds’. For Keiller, Gilroy is confirming an idea that ‘the actual attainment of a cosmopolitan London was

²⁹ For a useful summary of the urban unrest within London during the Summer of 2011 and its context within a longer tradition of insurrection, see Clive Bloom, *Riot City: Protest and Rebellion in the Capital* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

somehow restricted, despite the heterogeneity of its population, either by spatial characteristics – or something else’.³⁰

The second walk in Rodinsky’s footsteps takes the form of a red box that circumnavigates ‘the ancient village of Dagenham’. The focus on schools and parks reminds Sinclair that the red route being taken connects to Rodinsky’s own childhood in temporary exile from the family home in Whitechapel. Initially, Sinclair confesses that the streets through which he moves on this second walk lack resonance. He is accompanied by Chris Petit, one of his long-term collaborators. Heading north up Heathway towards Great Eastern Avenue, Sinclair worries that he will not be able to pitch this project successfully to Petit: ‘I couldn’t find any way to connect this mediocrity of low-rent shops and survivalist tat-brokers with Rodinsky’. Then, suddenly salvaging a dull walk, he notices a street name: ‘Pettits Place’. Quickly followed by ‘Robinson Road’. ‘This was uncanny’, he writes, ‘*Robinson* being the name of Chris Petit’s most autobiographical novel. It was almost as if Rodinsky had set the walk up, as if he had anticipated the particular pair of brogues that would tiptoe across his grave’.³¹ Does Sinclair protest too much at the merest coincidence? Petit’s *Robinson* opens with an epigraph from J. G. Ballard: ‘Deep assignments run through all our lives; there are no coincidences’.³² Duly sensitized, but remaining doubly sceptical, it is worth recalling that even more than ‘Rodinsky’, the proper name ‘Robinson’ is another enigmatic hub around which the psychogeographical franchise has been productively forged. The third walk passes from Liverpool Street Station to

³⁰ Patrick Keiller, ‘London in the Early 1990s’, in *London: From Punk to Blair*, ed. by Joe Kerr and Andrew Gibson (London: Reaktion, 2003), pp. 353-61 (p. 357). As an essay film that combines documentary and fiction to scrutinize the cultural and political state of London, *Twilight City* is an unacknowledged precursor of Keiller’s debut full-length feature *London* as well as Sinclair’s documentary fictions.

³¹ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 30, p. 31.

³² Petit, *Robinson*, p. 5.

Regent's Park. In contrast to the Dagenham Circuit, Sinclair argues that this excursion through Central London offers 'too many displacements, too many of our own memories to dull the purity of Rodinsky's songline'. Once again he is accompanied by Petit, and once again Rodinsky's narrative gets usurped by Petit's own. Gently rambling through Fitzrovia the pair give Rodinsky 'ghost-passage through a host of other revenants' as Petit speaks of the area's former literary denizens and cinematic associations (and even makes a brief detour 'to pay his respects to Newman Passage and the opening sequence of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*').³³ For his part, Sinclair also co-opts other writers into the walk. In a Shoreditch bookshop he picks up a copy of Emanuel Litvinoff's *Journeys Through a Small Planet*, an effusive East End autobiography with which to plug Rodinsky's lacunae. 'The two poets of the ghetto would travel together in my rucksack', Sinclair remarks, 'Litvinoff's childhood retrievals pressing against Rodinsky's map'.³⁴ The route of this walk includes Montague Place where Rodinsky had red inked both the south end of Senate House and the north end of the British Museum. Following the trail, Sinclair and Petit pause by the 'quasi-Vorticist stone lions' on the museum's north side. As they settle 'on a low wall to watch the tourists', Sinclair has a kind of banal epiphany. 'We fit in,' he registers. 'Everybody has a camera in their hands and a map spread out across their knees'.³⁵ This scene suggests that everybody is a potential psychogeographer and echoes Sinclair's comment that 'London is a body kept alive, energised by complex lines and patterns that can be walked, built upon: celebrated or exploited. The reality is

³³ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 39, P. 42. See also Christopher Petit, 'Newman Passage or J. Maclarenc-Ross and the case of the Vanishing Writers', in *The Time Out Book of London Short Stories*, ed. by Maria Lexton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 185-95. On Petit and the psychogeography of Newman Passage, see Henderson Downing, 'Fitzrovia Phantasmagoria: Notes for a Newman Passagenwerk', *AA Files*, 67 (Winter, 2013), 92-96.

³⁴ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 40. Continuing the correspondences, Patrick Wright contributes a lengthy and informative introduction to the most widely available version of Litvinoff's book. See Emmanuel Litvinoff, *Journeys Through a Small Planet* (London: Penguin, 2008).

³⁵ Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, p. 41.

democratic, anyone can play.³⁶ Sinclair also concedes that the scope for urban play and pattern recognition is limited by the prejudices and preoccupations already present before the walk begins: the way in which geography – and psychogeography – becomes personalized, autobiographical. To maximize interest and lubricate the flow of everyday detail, the democratizing impulse that Sinclair references regarding walking in the city requires accumulating the kind of voluminous knowledge that characterize his own compulsive associationism. If you have not researched the deep topography of the landscape through which you intend to drift as intensely as Sinclair then the democratic reality may prove very dull. Put simply, the path that reveals itself may turn out to be pedestrian in a negative sense. As if to test the validity of such a charge, after completing the Rodinsky project, Sinclair's next preprogrammed route involved a series of walks that followed in the acoustic footsteps of the M25.

From the Millennium Dome to Hackney Confidential

1999 was an impressively prolific year for Sinclair. By the time that his two works on Rodinsky were released in June, he had already published *Crash* and *Liquid City*. *Crash* was part of the ongoing BFI Modern Classics series produced by the British Film Institute in which notable film critics, academics, and novelists each select an individual film as the focus of their analysis, exploring the production and reception of the film within the context of an argument about its cinematic and cultural significance. Unlike the standard operating procedure of the series, Sinclair's analysis of David Cronenberg's adaptation of J. G. Ballard's seminal novel *Crash* dwells more on Ballard's fiction and its relation to other films (and other recurring preoccupations)

³⁶ Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison*, p. 294.

than on an assessment of Cronenberg's film. *Liquid City* reunites Sinclair with the photographer Marc Atkins. Their collaboration reconfigures the successful *Lights Out for the Territory* format, curbing Sinclair's prolixity into a series of short textual fragments while allowing Atkins more pages to populate with atmospheric black-and-white images that document both the illuminative and lugubrious affects of light and weather on various excursions around the city. Shortly before the publication of *Liquid City*, Sinclair produced the second of two lengthy articles in the *LRB* relaying his pedestrian trips to the site of the Millennium Dome. These articles were reworked into the final book that Sinclair published in 1999: *Sorry Meniscus: Excursions to the Millennium Dome*. Including photographs by Atkins from one of the excursions, *Sorry Meniscus* again adapts the successful strategy of *Lights Out for the Territory*, principally through Sinclair's revision of recently published material into an extended single essay rather than into an individual chapter of a wider ranging collection.³⁷

In *Sorry Meniscus*, Sinclair launches a sustained critique on the folly of constructing what was then the world's largest covered building (with a kilometer circumference) on the polluted tip of the East Greenwich Peninsula formerly known as Bugsby's Marshes.³⁸ Sinclair satirizes the tightly controlled management of positive rather than negative representations of the Dome, particularly in relation to the gap between the 'delirious fictions' of its promotional images and the reality of its heavily-protected location:

The East Greenwich Peninsula as Cape Canaveral; a launch pad for a range of super-celestial blues. Toxic marshlands, the residue of defunct

³⁷ The two *LRB* essays are Iain Sinclair, 'Mandelson's Pleasure Dome', *LRB*, 2 October 1997, pp. 7-10; and Iain Sinclair, 'All change. This train is cancelled: The Dome', *LRB*, 13 May 1999 14-18.

³⁸ For an informative, if conspicuously uncritical, account of the Millennium Dome, see *New Architecture*, 4 (January 2000), 64-103, a special issue titled 'UK2K: British Architecture into the Millennium'.

gas works, transformed by the click of a mouse to Florida. I hold up the promotional photograph against its pale twin. And realize that this is how the whole millennium scam should have been worked. The 'computer-generated realisation' produced by Hayes Davidson for the New Millennium Experience Company, is better, grander, more visionary than anything New Labour will achieve by dumping something close to a billion pounds into the deadlands.³⁹

Sinclair's acerbic account of the alienating sterility of these 'deadlands' is supplemented by the serial frustrations he experiences when trying to access the site. 'How could you acclaim a people's park that was guarded like a penal colony?' he asks.⁴⁰ Eventually, he arrives at a profanely comic illumination of the psychogeographical significance of this seemingly negative *plaque tournante*:

In a sense it was very perceptive of the New Millennium Experience promoters to nominate Bugsby's Marshes as the site for their monumentally expensive folly. Where better to greet the millennium (even if the nominated date is meaningless) than this ravished swamp with its history of plague, pestilence and pillage? The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, appearing against the sunset on the rise at Woolwich Road, would look like refugees from a donkey derby on Margate Sands. The millennium is nothing to do with bemused civilians, badgered into celebration and rehearsed spontaneity, being shepherded through zones sponsored by multinational pirates. The millennium is fire and terror, the rising of the dead, judgement before revelation. How tactful of the government planners and their commercial allies to shift the Dome site downriver, away from centres of population, contacts with culture. How cunning to nominate a place that is impossible to reach by any existing means of traffic, other than the crawl through the Blackwall Tunnel.⁴¹

In the spatial dialectics of London's *plaques tournantes*, the Millennium Dome functions as a kind of anti-Roundhouse (circa the Summer of Love, 1967). At this stage in its brief but controversial history, rather than establishing itself as a welcoming hub that attracts visitors and allows them to occupy its space in new ways

³⁹ Iain Sinclair, *Sorry Meniscus: Excursions to the Millennium Dome* (London: Profile, 1999), p. 10; pp. 7-8.

⁴⁰ Sinclair, *Sorry Meniscus*, p. 24.

⁴¹ Sinclair, *Sorry Meniscus*, pp. 51-52.

that emphasize active participation, the Dome repels those who approach its heavily protected site with a series of barriers and check-points designed to severely control the flow of movement before validating each permitted entry. This appears to be a fitting prelude to the opening of the Dome as a tourist destination where visitors pay to wander through the corporate sponsored zones under its vast roof (and also to its subsequent sale to the Anschutz Entertainment Group in 2005 and rebranding as ‘The O₂’ in 2007). *Sorry Meniscus* establishes a productive template for Sinclair in which the walker-with-a-thesis is thwarted from accessing his destination, the physical space of the redevelopment site for a grand project spectacularly promoted and phantasmagorically projected by a commercial and political cartel of interests with a limited comprehension of the existing landscape and community that will be uprooted when the virtual is translated into the actual. *Sorry Meniscus* anticipates in a compressed form Sinclair’s more extensive excursions and digressions around the Lea Valley as the future site for the London Olympics 2012, a series of purposeful walks that generate a series of polemical texts in *Ghost Milk*.

A tendency to articulate established interests in such reference points as occult London or urban Gothic emerges in Sinclair’s work from *Sorry Meniscus* onwards as part of a grander project to caricature, challenge, and interrogate the dominant narratives and discursive practices associated with neoliberalism. Whether as a direct witness or as a medium for those voices habitually excluded from representation in the media, Sinclair gathers together fragments of memories and histories that begin to recover people and perspectives in danger of being forgotten in the managed maelstrom of urban regeneration. Inevitably, given the intratextual momentum that accumulates within Sinclair’s London project, multiple traces of this trajectory are already present in earlier works. *Downriver*, in particular, contains a variety of narratives that fit this

model: from a sober recognition of the reforgotten poet Nicholas Moore exiled in St Mary Cray to satirical fantasias on the theme of the controversial regeneration of the Isle of Dogs into Docklands. In Sinclair's later work, the spatial practice of 'walking with a thesis' introduced in *Lights Out for the Territory* undergoes various reiterations that can be interpreted as formulaic (hence the parodic self-critique in *Dining on Stones*), but also provides Sinclair with a tested procedure for continuing to identify the gains and losses attached to various forms of cultural, social, and political amnesia, and for identifying a spectrum of victors and victims that such processes attempt to render invisible, to disappear.

Alert to correspondences that evade more casual observers, Sinclair's autobiographically-inflected interpretations of London are animated by an ever-increasing network of elective affinities. With the rich mixture of debris and detritus from each walk dutifully documented through a variant psychogeography salvaged from a radical avant-garde threatened with wholesale recuperation by various strands of the culture industry, Sinclair's idiosyncratic blend of paranoid-critical cultural materialism provides an elastic framework within which encrypted narratives proliferate. As with all such crypts, the profuse delirium contained therein constantly threatens to leak. The publication of *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report* in 2009 was accompanied by a minor scandal when the local council banned Sinclair from launching the book with a series of readings at libraries in Hackney. Sinclair's hostile chronicles of the 'Olympics scam' had gone off-message regarding the jubilant reception being peddled around the forthcoming spectacle of London 2012.⁴² At a talk rescheduled for the London Review Bookshop, Sinclair commented

⁴² See Iain Sinclair, 'The Olympic Scam', *London Review of Books*, 19 June 2008, pp. 17-23.

that the source of the sub-title of the book came from a film by Orson Welles. In

Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire, he offers a matching explanation:

For me, this was a detective story. I knew where the body of our poor borough was lying and who had killed it, but I didn't know why. The previous history of the corpse was a blank. Conflicting versions of the same episodes would have to be investigated. I thought of an Orson Welles film I'd seen, years ago: *Mr Arkadin* (aka *Confidential Report*). A ludicrously bearded and putty-nosed tycoon hires a burnt-out hack to investigate his past. Witnesses, having related their part of the story, are bumped off. My interviews, however tactfully pitched, were still interrogations: to discover the rules of engagement. You start with lies, evasions, and you uncover a shape. For months, taking on anything and everything to fund my research, I gathered old Hackney books, chased references, collected news cuttings, ran old films, hounded suspects. Like Arkadin I wanted to know who I was and where I had been hiding.⁴³

Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire is a documentary fiction, transcripts of Sinclair's interviews and interrogations with a wide range of past and current residents of the borough are edited and shaped into composite forms, merging discrete identities. Sinclair, like the burnt-out hack in *Mr Arkadin*, shifts between witnesses, sounding 'lies, evasions', charting the outline of a recognizable shape or the fiction of an underlying pattern, meditating on conflicting versions of events as a way of opening up new lines of research: devious and deviating strategies that enable the autobiographical momentum of Sinclair's compulsive associationism to accelerate. At the London Review Bookshop, Sinclair held up the latest issue of the *LRB* and explained to the audience how he had been intrigued by the fortuitous reference to *Mr Arkadin* in an article by Hal Foster reviewing the English translation of a first volume of Guy Debord's correspondence. Foster concluded his review by observing that Debord had used a scene from *Mr Arkadin* to conclude his own film version of *The*

⁴³ Iain Sinclair, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), p. 32.

Society of the Spectacle.⁴⁴ As noted in previous chapters, both Sinclair and Debord strategically defamiliarize the urban territory being navigated in order to produce alternative mappings of the city that open up pathways for a potential transformation of the space of everyday life into something other than that experienced under the imperatives of capitalism. However, it would be foolish to push this comparison too far when addressing more specific aspects of their work. While Debord sought to unite theory and practice in a revolutionary project that aimed to destroy what he identified as the society of the spectacle, Sinclair's project has proved considerably, at times even *spectacularly*, less politically ambitious. Yet since his documentation of the Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation at the Roundhouse, traces of a vaguely utopian counter-cultural idealism have persisted in different ways throughout Sinclair's work. In later decades these traces are filtered through his savagely satirical dissection of the ways in which the fragile vitality of an oppositional counter-culture has been successively recuperated and transmogrified by Thatcherism and New Labour. Again, certain elements of Sinclair's move towards the cultural mainstream – promoting expensive limited editions of his relatively mass market publications, appearing in advertisements for Audi, designing a deluxe brand of 'psychogeographical' watches – problematically match aspects of this recuperative momentum.⁴⁵ However, by excavating traces of a submerged and potentially more

⁴⁴ Hal Foster, 'Crack Open the Shells', *London Review of Books*, 12 March 2009, 6-8 (8). Sinclair gave the talk at the London Review Bookshop on 11 March 2009 and read the final paragraph of Foster's article to the audience. As an extension of the analysis of Sinclair's psychogeographical franchise, it is worth noting that page 32 of the same issue of the LRB featured a half-page advert for a London Review Bookshop limited edition of *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire* – 45 specially bound, signed and numbered copies were on sale at £140.00 per book; 5 other copies described as a 'very special edition' were on sale at £550.00 per book. The standard hardback cost £20.00.

⁴⁵ In 2009, Sinclair and Chris Petit participated in an advert promoting a £60,000 sports car on the Audi Channel. 'I don't think any of us have much time anymore [*sic*] for "Audi Sinclair"', writes 'Norma Nomad' in a reputedly guerilla piece of misspelt publishing 'sneaked in late at night' to the book *Mythogeography* without the permission or knowledge of the authors or publishers (as a vehicle for comedic auto-critique, Norma Nomad functions in much the same way as 'Bad News' Mutton does for Sinclair), see Smith, *Mythogeography*, p. 157. Sinclair designed the 'Compass Road' watch in collaboration with Mr Jones Watches. According to the company's website, the surnames of 'eight

subversive London than that found in the guide-books of canonical culture, Sinclair has continued to generate counter-narratives to official versions of heritage and history, notably regarding the negative social and environmental impact of the preparations for the 2012 Olympics on the communities and the landscape of East London. Although these counter-narratives are themselves split between Sinclair's movement towards a materialist history and the pull of a more transcendental mode, do they retain enough of Debord's conception of the pleasingly vague aspect of the psychogeographical to justify the bastardized connections that this study makes between Sinclair's London and the Situationist's Paris?

Comparing Sinclair's variant psychogeography with the theory and practice of psychogeography formulated by Debord still risks ridicule even when the sponsorship of luxury cars and limited watches is provisionally parked to one side. Like his long-term residency in the same house in Hackney, the repetitive qualities of Sinclair's work reveal a rather static position on the turbulent topic of London. For those familiar with his oeuvre, each new book appears to rely on a series of recurring themes and motifs that emerge with a predictable regularity from well-established preoccupations and an inclination to recycle previously published fragments in a revised form. This creative stasis is compounded by a sense that his critical acuity diminishes whenever he strays beyond the sixty mile radius described by a compass point from the

writers and visionaries are positioned around the dial, each according to their geographic link with London. A pattern on the hour disk causes names to fade in and out of view as the time passes, a visual expression of Sinclair's interest in uncovering forgotten layers of the city's history'. John Clare is North, Gerald Kersh is North-East, Bram Stoker is East, Joseph Conrad is South-East, William Blake is South, H. G. Wells is South-West, J. G. Ballard is West, and Louis Ferdinand Celine is North-West. Released in a limited edition of one hundred pieces, there were eight still available when accessing the website on January 23 2015. <mrjoneswatches.com/compass-road>. The division of London into territorial zones associated with particular writers is a conceit that Sinclair introduces in *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 142.

posthumous triangulation of Blake, Bunyan, and Defoe in Bunhill Fields.⁴⁶ Yet beneath the surface repetitions and the curious mixture of self-aggrandizement and self-parody, the psychogeographical components of Sinclair's spatial and textual practice equip him with a peculiarly sensitized radar for tracking the ways in which the more arcane, chthonic, or illegitimate aspects of historical and contemporary sites of absence, exclusion, or violence reveal the demented logic of capital accumulation as the driving force of the capital city. The different iterations of this recurrent feature within Sinclair's work makes a contextual realignment of London psychogeography with the more radical politics of its Parisian precursors less a ridiculous comparison to be instantly rejected than a potential opportunity to plunge into a weird reservoir of contrary material relating to the modern metropolis.⁴⁷ Such a pursuit attempts to reconsider the loss of political ambition and the drift towards depoliticization within the kind of psychogeographical model that Keiller identifies as usually functioning as an excuse for literary exercises and a supplement to gentrification. For all its flaws and failures when quixotically perceived as bearing a coherent political strategy, could this psychogeographical material relating to late-twentieth and early twenty-first century London still offer surprising or even shocking conjunctures for comprehending the updated conditions of possibility for a collective transformation of social relations as well as urban experience? It is time to turn to one last *plaque*

⁴⁶ For an example of this diminished acuity, see Iain Sinclair, 'Listening for the Corncrake', *Corridor* 8, 2 (2010) 48-73. Sinclair walks around the major thoroughfares of Manchester in the wake of De Quincey and W. G. Sebald, recognizing that it was 'too late' to engage in his recommended mode of psychogeographical drift because 'the story was too rich, I would not live long enough to fix my bearings', p. 54.

⁴⁷ 'More than ever, well-developed psychogeographic investigations are needed to comprehend the shaping of the metropolis and the possibilities this offers for political action', argue Shukaitis and Figiel in 'Metropolitan Strategies, Psychogeographic Investigations'. They cite Sinclair's figure of the stalker as a suitable candidate to initiate a psychogeographical upgrade (that also incorporates the autonomist concept of the city as 'a kind of metropolitan factory'), see Shukaitis and Figiel, p. 537, p. 540. Niall Martin also argues that Sinclair's use of psychogeography is 'less a retreat from the political than an attempt to formulate a new, dissensual model of the political whose mode of expression is spatial', see Martin, p. 75.

tournante, a canonical building that Sinclair describes as ‘the most important of the city’s focal points’ but one with which he has rarely engaged.⁴⁸

St Paul’s Cathedral

In *Lights Out for the Territory* Sinclair argues that maps ‘require a powerful dose of fiction to bring them to life’, that old maps ‘with all their fictions intact, are lying around like so much out-of-copyright nineteenth-century literature’. Outlining John Hudson’s construction ‘at a distance’ of ‘his own psychogeography of the city’, Sinclair focuses on the sites aligned with St Dunstan.⁴⁹ As detailed above, a St Dunstan-based alignment is already present in *Lud Heat*. Like the interconnected Hawksmoor churches, St Dunstan is presented as one unit of connection in a proliferating network: ‘only one of a number of figures who forged the polar connection between the west of England and the eastern border of this city’.⁵⁰ Walking to St Dunstan-in-the-West on Fleet Street with Marc Atkins, Sinclair reflects that the ‘cycle of familiar names recurs, as the cargo shifts, as the balance of psychogeographical elements is shunted’.⁵¹ As with the prior references to St Dunstan in *Lud Heat*, further excursions two decades later animate these imaginative mappings, but now under the banner of psychogeography. The sites dedicated to St Dunstan are only minor chords in Hudson’s psychogeographical symphony of the city. The climax of Hudson’s thesis occurs when the St Dunstan alignment is revealed to make a North-

⁴⁸ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 120.

⁴⁹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 145, p. 211, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Sinclair, *Lud Heat*, p. 98.

⁵¹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 123.

West passage through St Paul's Cathedral. Interestingly, Sinclair experiences a sense of unease regarding St Paul's:

the humpbacked dowager is too grandiose and self-satisfied, dominating the heights of Ludgate Hill like a baroque power-point. St Paul's is contaminated by ill-conceived ceremony: the Royal Wedding, Charles and Diana, a marriage made in hell to take the heat away from civic dispute, riot in the streets. A sugary public rape of the last aristocratic virgin, soft porn on an epic scale. War celebrations, the clinking of petty potentates in operetta uniforms and self-awarded medals [. . .] Flags and drums and necrophile marble, the rhetoric of the charnel house. And security personnel in ecclesiastical drag manning the cash registers, hooking out fare dodgers. Staying faithful to the free-market flag of convenience under which Old St Paul's always sailed. In less queasy times moneychangers had to get up very early to secure their pitch at the side of the nave, where domestics touted for hire, commercial introductions were made, harlots cruised for trade, and runners plucked at the sleeves of potential punters they hoped to lead to a nest of pornographic bookshops. St Paul's was the Thatcherite temple: the blue and the grey, the arms deal struck in a congregation giving thanks for victory. The ultimate heritage operation.⁵²

Rather than as a bastion of religious fervour, Sinclair's transhistorical routine portrays the cathedral as an exhibitionistic emblem of patriotic and commercial zeal, 'contaminated' by its paradoxical function to pacify insurrection and facilitate war-mongering, and perverted by the ambient penetration of its perimeter by forces aligned with sex and violence. This section of *Lights Out for the Territory* interrogates a 'policy of deliberate misalignment' instigated by the economic interests of businesses and corporations that violate 'the integrity of the City's sacred geometry; leaving [. . .] regimented anonymity – a climate in which corruption thrives'.⁵³ Could the speculative links – or leaps – that Sinclair makes between the alignment of the physical space of the city and the economic and corporate production of a climate of corruption be interpreted as evidence for James Wood's accusation that Sinclair's thinking is often

⁵² Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, pp. 126-27.

⁵³ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 117.

faulty and lazy, his political judgments immature, his privileging of conspiracy and irrationality perverse? To address these accusations somewhat indirectly, this study will briefly examine how Sinclair's description of the violation of the 'sacred geometry' of the City intersects with Alan Moore's neo-Victorian mapping of a star-shaped pentacle across the wider expanse of the capital in *From Hell* and how Sinclair's conclusion that St Paul's is the 'ultimate heritage operation' overlaps with Patrick Wright's analysis of the role of heritage in suppressing active historicity.

Expanding the alignments of Sinclair's Hawksmoor thesis, Moore represents the historical figure of William Gull – Queen Victoria's esteemed physician psychopathically rewired as Jack the Ripper, a demented Masonic agent at the heart of a state-sanctioned conspiracy – leading Netley, his coachman, on a tour of the city's *plaques tournantes*. Under instruction from Gull, the magical symbol is traced by Netley on a map of Victorian London that is hastily spread out on the flagstones of St Paul's Cathedral. St Paul's is revealed to be at the centre of the pattern.⁵⁴ Sinclair comments that for Moore's Gull, the 'fantastic criss-crossing journey between the needle-points of London's energy mantle' position the cathedral as 'the nexus around which any explanation (or exploitation) of the City must be constructed. It is the dark hotel, the library of malign potentialities'.⁵⁵ Gull reveals to Netley that the 'dark business' of their immediate project to silence the five Whitechapel prostitutes who have threatened the stability of the imperial state with a tawdry blackmail plot is 'only a fraction of my work that's visible above the waterline. The greater part's an iceberg of significance that lurks below'. The lurking significance involves the wider

⁵⁴ See Moore and Campbell, *From Hell*, Chapter 4, p. 19. For an analysis that views Gull's conspiratorial mapping as immersed in the production of a post-imperialist landscape, see Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*.

⁵⁵ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 129.

suppression of the lunar feminine side of the city. In Gull's symbolic vision, the architecture of Wren's St Paul's realigns a sacred site historically associated with the worship of Diana, the moon-goddess, so that the power emanating from such a pagan shrine is shackled, 'the soul of womankind bound in a web of ancient signs, that woman might abandon useless dreams of liberty . . . accept that she exists only to reflect the harsh male brilliance of the Father Sun'.⁵⁶ It is as if Gull has become a grotesque example of someone who fits Sinclair's cautionary description in *London Orbital*: 'The person who undertakes research into the city's history, minutiae, and odd particulars, will become unbalanced. Identification with London's biography is too intense. The familiar mental bonds tighten'.⁵⁷ Moore's deliriously and deliberately ludicrous narrative locates the violent attack on the 'dreams of liberty' of Victorian women at a resonant historical juncture: London during the Whitechapel murders of 1888. While the plot that centres on an ancient patriarchal conspiracy reflects, in a hackneyed yet suitably melodramatic fashion, the broader oppression of various disenfranchised majorities by dominant forces throughout history, the territorial mapping of the spatial distribution of that oppression connects more concretely with the project of London psychogeography and the idea of the city as a site of disappearances, particularly in relation to the subjugation of those spaces with the potential to illuminate the city in such a way that prompts a recognition and an attempt to materialize the absent 'dreams of liberty'.

Sinclair's version of St Paul's as the 'ultimate heritage operation' that represents a nation state wedded to the free market can be advanced as an example of the abstraction of history that Patrick Wright diagnoses as a characteristic of national

⁵⁶ Moore, *From Hell: Volume Two*, p. 33, 35.

⁵⁷ Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 171.

heritage. Wright argues that history as ‘the idea of historical significance and potential’ undergoes a perceptual transformation and generalization through its extraction ‘from a denigrated everyday life and its restaging or display in certain sanctioned sites, events, images and conceptions’. Arguably, the substantial entrance fee charged to gain access to St Paul’s reinforces the idea that for most people the place is primarily a tourist destination rather than a site of worship. Entrance is free for those wishing to pray in St Dunstan’s Chapel – situated on Hudson’s alignment immediately next to the entrance lobby – and to those attending services, but, as Sinclair notes, Cathedral staff (‘security personnel in ecclesiastical drag’) are trained to ensure that any pre- or post-service sightseeing is discouraged. St Paul’s fulfills Wright’s idea of the ‘unifying spectacle’ of an officially sanctioned site ‘purged of political tension’ where history has become heritage. As with the cathedral’s role in the suppression of the ‘dreams of liberty’ in *From Hell*, Wright’s analysis portrays the redeployment of history as heritage in such sites as St Paul’s as a means of denying ‘active historicity – the possibility of any historical development in the present which is not simply a matter of polishing old statues with ever increasing vigour’. This is history as a spectacular process in which time and space are bewilderingly petrified. But, in a language close to Sinclair’s discussion of London’s energy mantle, Wright also understands that the mass appeal of heritage cannot be dismissed as merely a negative phenomenon, that in its production of an alternative version of the national past it bears a superficial resemblance to more radical re-imaginings of the future:

Like the utopianism from which it draws, national heritage involves positive energies which certainly can’t be written off as ideology. It engages hopes, dissatisfactions, feelings of tradition and freedom, but it tends to do so in a way that diverts those potentially disruptive energies into the separate and regulated spaces of stately display. In this way, what much utopianism has alluded to or postulated as the challenge of history – something that needs to be brought about – ends up behind us

already accomplished and ready for exhibition as ‘the past’. Where there was active historicity there is now decoration and display; in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in historical fancy dress.⁵⁸

The complex staging and synthesis of alternative visions of reality has a utopian dimension that has a corollary in the radical dreams of liberty whose potentially transformative energies are immobilized by heritage. So is it possible to position Wright and Sinclair – and others operating along tangential lines in their spatial practice such as Patrick Keiller – as being actively engaged in a pleasingly vague psychogeographical project to identify those sites of memory where immobilized energies of potential disruption can be retrieved? If so, is this a different (and less politically ambivalent) lineage of London psychogeography to that preoccupied by the city as an urban Gothic labyrinth? One way of attempting to answer this question is to juxtapose the above reading of St Paul’s with the high profile occupation of the entrance to the site by activists from the Occupy movement between June 2011 and February 2012. However, to get a fuller perspective on this juxtaposition, a further psychogeographical detour needs to be made in relation to the adjacent space of Paternoster Square.

At St Dunstan-in-the-West, Sinclair is prompted by the theme of misalignments to include a brief mention of ‘the removal and reassembly of Wren’s Temple Bar arch in Theobald’s Park, Cheshunt’.⁵⁹ Later in *Lights Out for the Territory*, investigating a web of associations filtered through Rachel Whiteread’s *House*, Sinclair muses on the process of transformation that constantly recurs across the map of the city: ‘Sacred markers (stones, statues, gates, obelisks) were being stolen from the centre,

⁵⁸ Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, pp. 65-66, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 123.

reassembled in the suburbs – reversing polarity: so that Temple Bar finds itself banished from Fleet Street to a scrub wood in Theobald’s Park’.⁶⁰ In 2004, a week after the completed transportation of Wren’s Temple Bar back towards the centre of the city to the new office and retail development of Paternoster Square adjacent to St Paul’s Cathedral, Sinclair was interviewed by the architectural critic and journalist Ellis Woodman in one of the development’s new cafes. Woodman gives his readers some selective background context, explaining that after a thirty year campaign: ‘Temple Bar had been restored and returned to London. Judging by the messages from round the world on the project website – 1 million hits and counting – it’s a scheme that has met with universal support. Except, that is, from Iain Sinclair.’ The universal support for this scheme is obviously a rhetorical exaggeration on Woodman’s part, but it sets Sinclair’s dissenting voice in opposition to the consensus view. This enables Sinclair’s interpretation and evaluation of the scheme to acquire the characteristics of a psychogeographical counter-narrative that resists joining the chorus celebrating the conservation and relocation of Wren’s structure by presenting an alternative history of its occulted ritualistic function. Woodman introduces Sinclair as a ‘psychogeographer’ who seeks to identify ‘the occult forces that he believes resonate through Londoners’ daily lives’. Sinclair argues that when Temple Bar was cut off from London by the M25 it had a similar ‘relation to the energies of London’ as it did when it originally stood cut off from the City by the Fleet river. In Theobalds Park, the audible surf of motorway traffic made the decaying structure feel ‘like an energy gate to the M25’.⁶¹ This is an observation that Sinclair first makes after visiting the site during the walk around the M25 undertaken for *London Orbital*. The relocation of Wren’s structure to this parkland setting on land once owned by the millionaire brewer Lady Meux (but

⁶⁰ Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, p. 238.

⁶¹ Sinclair quoted in Ellis Woodman, ‘Temple of Doom’, *Building Design*, 19 November 2004, p. 34.

now divided by the Tesco Country Club and the Abbey National Centre of Excellence) reinstates Temple Bar ‘as an energy gate, a switch, a consciousness junction’.⁶² As with Wood, Woodman’s perspective on Sinclair as a demented magus of the city quickly arises (after the interview): ‘Ah, yes,’ he writes dismissively, ‘an energy gate’. For Sinclair, the restoration project has ensured the loss of the ritual significance of the original location of Temple Bar as a gateway between Fleet Street and the Strand. In its new position the structure is ‘neutralised and rendered meaningless’. (Sinclair’s complex relationship to the mainstream is again in evidence here. For all of Woodman’s scepticism, Sinclair is given space in a national publication to voice his opinion, as if it is not just the admirable prose style that warrants attention but something more nebulous regarding his ability to combine magical thinking with historiographical sound-bites in order to communicate a commercially acceptable counter-narrative whose radical energies might also be neutralized and rendered meaningless). Recast as set dressing for the ‘development scam’ of Paternoster Square, Temple Bar has become ‘a defensive structure that can protect retail units instead of providing an energy passage and a sight line’. Sinclair confesses that even in its original site, Temple Bar – completed in 1672 – was a much later addition to the original Roman system of gates around the City. It is a seventeenth century version of ‘a kitschy heritage number’ that gained a ritualistic energy through use as a threshold between two key London thoroughfares (running along a major leyline in Gordon’s *Prehistoric London*). When asked by Woodman whether the building ever had a functional role, Sinclair responds with a comedic aside imitative of the urgency of revolutionary nihilism:

⁶² Sinclair, *London Orbital*, p. 90. See also Lichtenstein and Sinclair, *Rodinsky’s Room*, pp. 277-78.

“Well, it performed a functional role in that you could stick the heads of people on it when they were beheaded [. . .] I suppose, if they stick the heads of Tony Blair and Ken Livingstone on it, then it will have justified its purpose.”⁶³

Seven years later Temple Bar became a key site in the development of a more collective counter-narrative. In June 2011, protestors from the Occupy movement sought to occupy Paternoster Square whose main tenant was the relocated London Stock Exchange. The protestors were denied access to establish a camp in the square because it was a privately owned development. As Sinclair had intimated, Temple Bar had become a defensive structure, a gateway that not only protected retail units but also marked a blocked port of entry into the private world of finance. In a high profile move, the protestors relocated to the adjacent space outside of the West front of St Paul’s Cathedral where they remained until evicted by the police in February of the following year. Superficially, there is no overt connection between Sinclair’s psychotic geography of St Pauls’s Cathedral and Temple Bar and the sustained protest by Occupy. A cursory comparative analysis would reveal a conspicuous gulf between interpreting the city and attempting to change it through new forms of political disobedience.⁶⁴ However, while Sinclair’s work partially validates Patrick Keiller’s critique of the psychogeographical turn as merely a preliminary to literature and gentrification, it also points towards a psychogeography that can be strategically deployed by an oppositional politics to map possible sites of resistance within the contemporary production of capitalist space. Sinclair’s counter-narratives of the city

⁶³ Woodman, ‘Temple of Doom’, p. 34. Sinclair’s comments need to be viewed in the context of the fractious relationship between Blair and Livingstone. Outmanoeuvring Blair’s attempt to block his candidacy by successfully standing as an independent candidate, Livingstone served as Mayor of London from 2000-2008. On Livingstone as ‘a mayor who lambasts global capitalism’ while presiding over a city that is ‘a seat of neoliberal globalization’, and how the political climate of this position differed from his previous leadership of the Greater London Council in the early 1980s, see Massey, pp. 1-24, pp. 81-94 (p. 11).

⁶⁴ For an introduction to the activism of the Occupy movement, see W. J. T. Mitchell, Bernard E. Harcourt, and Michael Taussig, *Occupy: Three Inquiries into Disobedience* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013).

have the potential to open pathways capable of bridging the gulf between the singular practice of psychogeography and collective political activism. The need to open such pathways, like the corresponding need to build a bridge between imagination and reality demanded by the Situationists, reveals a gap between the latent and manifest possibilities of psychogeography as a navigational technique for locating the new zones of disappearance and the upgraded techniques of separation that continue to make London a city fractured by multiplex circuits of inequality and oppression. When repoliticized rather than depoliticized, psychogeography can contribute to a refunctioning of the political and social landscape so that the legacies, if not the severed heads, of career politicians like Blair and Livingstone (or David Cameron and Boris Johnson, their Conservative counterparts at the time of writing) can be spiked onto the contemporary equivalent of Temple Bar within an emerging network of *plaques tournantes* that illuminate the split city.

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