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Stalking the East End:
Iain Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* and *Lights Out for the Territory*

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Abstract

A new school of London literature has emerged in the 1990s as a response to the neo-modernist regeneration of London's East End in the 1980s by the Thatcherite Conservative government. Using the spatial and literary density of London as their subject, these new urban writings juxtapose the present with the past, presenting a cityscape of heavy fragmentation, elusiveness as well as dynamics. Of these, Iain Sinclair's work stands out as "our greatest guide to London," and "the most distinctive voice among an array of lyricists-cum-satirists of *fin-de-siècle* British life." Sinclair has made a vocation of excavating the hidden, the lost or erased spatial configurations of London's cultural marginalia, in order to construct an oppositional space on the material and everyday level against the official historical and spatial discourse of Thatcherite corporatism. Sinclair practices a method of psychogeography, where the city and subject collapse into one, and the city becomes a psychological entity and a shifting character. Walking the streets of London has in particular become a recurring theme and metaphor. This paper examines two of his most famous works, his breakthrough novel *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987) and *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997), a non-fictional prose work on London. It focuses first on the spatiality of London's East End, which is the primary territory of Sinclair's psychogeography, and then on his mode of spatial investigation, that of the walker/stalker. The paper then seeks to point out the limitations inherent in such a mode, its assumption of privileged knowledge and voyeuristic power, and its inevitable selectivity due to an exclusive interest only in the erased past and a denial of any redemptive quality in the present. The dark energies thus unearthed, despite their resistance to the dominant spatial discourse, are no less a form of canonization, albeit an alternative one.

Keywords: Iain Sinclair, contemporary London literature, East End, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings, Lights Out for the Territory*

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Introduction

London's cityscape as a brooding presence and even a mythic character has always distinguished the literary writings of such authors like Blake, De Quincey, and Dickens.[1] It is historically a cityscape of great heterogeneity, combining reckless expansion with sporadic centralized efforts at planning and coordination.[2] The city's inheritance of a dense, meandering and labyrinthine urban spatiality has thus always lurked beneath and often side by side with a spectacle of modernized thoroughfares. This combination of tradition and newness has given rise to a spatial and textual density that has constantly been (re)inscribed upon, yet ever changing and resisting closure. A new wave of London literature has recently emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, partly as a response to a flurry of urban regeneration efforts in London in the 1980s by the Thatcher government that seeks to rebuild a conservative sense of British national identity through special revitalization. Reflecting the newly heightened interest, this new literary work often juxtaposes the present with the past, uncovering a plurality of fluid traces and London's subterranean, meandering spatial images, thus weaving a cityscape often in implicit opposition from the official inscription (Wolfreys 1: 199).

Of these recent London writings, no one has quite paralleled Iain Sinclair in the centrality of London as the persistent subject of almost all his work. A little known poet and rare book dealer moving in the "underground"[3] London art scenes

1 For more on these writers' imagination of the London cityscape, see Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text From Blake to Dickens* (1998), and *Writing London: Materiality, Memory, Spectrality* (2004).

2 For London's uneven and reckless expansion particularly in the 19th century, and its contrast with the centralized urban planning and modernization of European capitals like Paris and Vienna, see Robert Bocock and Kenneth Thompson (eds.), *Social and Cultural Forms of Modernity* (1992), pp. 438-44. Also Donald Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (1986). Linda Nead writes in *Victorian Babylon* (3) that Victorian attitudes to London were always ambivalent: the image of the straight new thoroughfare was permeated with the presence of the meandering alley, and the aesthetics of glass and iron were compromised by lath and plaster and crumbling old houses. An 1862 article admits that "most of the streets are narrow, crooked, and running in every possible direction" (4). The modernization of London was partial and uneven, driven mostly by private commercial interests, as the city did not have a centralized municipal government until 1855, with the creation of the Metropolitan Board of Works (5). This board, however, proved mostly ineffective largely as a result of conflicting private interests, and thus generally adopted a laissez-faire attitude.

3 The word "underground" here refers to Sinclair's loose affiliation to a neo-modernist

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throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Sinclair made his breakthrough to a big readership and mainstream acclaim quite suddenly during the 1990s, and, as the poet Michael Hofmann notes, "with very little compromise".[4] Sinclair privately published his first two poetry collections *Lud Heat* and *Suicide Bridge* through his Albion Village Press, and it was not until the publication of his first novel *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987), which contains the recurrent themes of his subsequent works and went on to be the sole runner-up in the 1987 *Guardian* fiction prize, that he started to attract attention. Two subsequent novels *Downriver* (1991) and *Radon Daughters* (1994) solidified his reputation in the 1990s. It was particularly the publication of *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997), a non-fiction work on London's myth, history and cityscape in collaboration with another underground artist Marc Atkins, that sealed his position as "our greatest guide to London," who has written "quite simply one of the finest books about London."[5] Further collaborations with other artists followed, *Liquid City* (1999) again with Marc Atkins, and *Rodinsky's Room* (1999) with Rachel Lichtenstein. A new work *London Orbital* came out in 2002. All these fiction and non-fiction works, as well as his essays and anthologies, are now printed by mainstream publishers, and Granta has recently republished his earlier writings, too.

Since his early poetry work, Sinclair's recurrent theme and metaphor has been London, its space, history and people, presented in an intensely experimental style of fragmentation, ellipsis, and a tangled multi-generic hybridity encompassing fiction, poetry, history, biography, essay and criticism. In *London Orbital* (38), he admits to writing "the same book, the same life, over and over again." Obsessively fascinated by the lost, erased, or what he calls "the reforgotten," his work performs a geographical and historical excavation of the city surface for erased urban symbols, and for the repressed and the sinister which he regards as the true face of the city. His favorite London landscape is the East End, a secret labyrinth and the sinister heart of the city, around which he builds his imaginings as the magus of the

poetic grouping centered round Cambridge since the late 1960s and 1970s. The members are known for their independence, hostility to public attention and insistence on a social character by treating writing as a civic production that solicits readers' participatory labor. This is reciprocated on the part of literary critics by a lack of critical attention and failure to include these poets among mainstream poetic anthologies. "Underground" here denotes a defiant and subversive attitude to stay out of the literary canon. For more on Sinclair and the neo-modernists, see Robert Bond, *Iain Sinclair* 4-15.

4 See Hofmann's review of *Lights Out for the Territory*, entitled "Tired of London?" published in *The New York Times*.

5 The line is taken from *Spectator*, and printed as endorsement on the cover page of Penguin's 2003 paperback edition.

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metropolis. His favorite mode of such spatial investigation is that of a walker and psychogeographer, wherein the city and subject collapse into one, and the city takes on psychological dimensions. A strongly magical vision informs his London projections, evidenced in a belief in the occultist meanings and dark energies that the hidden landscape and history shrouds over. As such, his delving into the repressed and erased details lends itself to the construction of an oppositional space on the material and everyday level against the dominant spatial discourse of Thatcherite corporatism, and thus has an added political dimension.

This paper starts first with a discussion of Sinclair's East End, the primary spatiality of his London psychogeography. It then moves on to an analysis of Sinclair's mode of urban investigation, its magically informed and historically evocative nature, the politically subversive project such a mode inherited from Sinclair's underground stage, and finally its inherent limitations. *White Chapell, Scarlet Tracings* and *Lights Out for the Territory*, two of Sinclair's most famous works, will serve as the main texts for analysis.

The Spatiality of London's East End

White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings is the first full-blown work where Sinclair weaves a mythopoetic account of the rhythms of modern urban life through everyday details, and of how the present is deeply and inevitably shadowed by a turbulent past. Past and present are juxtaposed, while London as myth and magic is interwoven with London as real and lived space by ordinary people on an everyday basis.

In Sinclair's work the line between fiction and non-fiction is always a porous one. This first fiction is, in Alex Murray's words, "an autobiographical novelized non-fictional fictionalization" (1: 59), including fiction, history, biography, and criticism, all revolving around the dark energies emanating from East End's turbulent criminal past and its Ripper mythology, as well as around Sinclair's own days as a rare book dealer in London in the 1970s and 1980s. The whole plot, narrated in a spiraling and associative process, is divided into four lines loosely connected by the characters' seedy life in contemporary London, their concern with late Victorian literature, with London in the 1880s and the Ripper murders in Whitechapel. In the first plot, an unnamed and very remote narrator using the pseudonym "the Late Watson" travels with three other bookdealers up and down the whole country in search of rare books. A first edition of Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, about the Ripper murders, was found, uncovering a link to the 1880s. The plot ends halfway with a jealous assault on the bookdealer in his East End flat by gangsters

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which ended in the destruction of Doyle's book. This first plot then ends abruptly in the middle of the narrative, like a dead end in an East End labyrinth. The second plot then takes over to introduce a narrator named Sinclair and his friend Joblard, who walk the East End sites of the Ripper murders in a frustrated attempt "to get to the heart of the labyrinth" (106), invoking literary figures like De Quincey and Blake. Again references to the spiral and the labyrinth recur in the walks. A third plot line takes the form of a number of scenes and letters that interposes their walks, in which the author Sinclair uses the help of Doyle's first edition to name Victorian surgeons William Gull and James Hinton as the real Ripper murderers, thus adding his bit to a long tradition of speculations and theories on the Ripper mystery. A fourth line, though much more sporadic, contains self-conscious contemplations by the author on his own writings and the nature of history and criticism in general.

The labyrinthine and multi-diegetic nature of the narrative structure is hence made obvious. Doyle's Watson is a character and narrator that both participates in and records from a distance Holmes' many adventures and particularly, in this first Holmes story, the great detective's exploration of the Ripper mystery. Doyle's book, wherein Watson and Holmes move in a fictitious world, is found and then lost one hundred years later by the London bookdealers, who are themselves characters in Sinclair's book, observed by a narrator called "the Late Watson," whose narration is then seen from a distance by the second narrator named Sinclair, in a book written by the author also named Sinclair. When the narrator Sinclair in the second plot physically walks the East End sites of the Ripper murders, echoes to similar walks by the fictitious Holmes in the first plot's first edition book are certainly made, though numerous narrative levels and boundaries have to be straddled over, crossed and collapsed by the reader. The naming of the first narrator is not a coincidence, and "the Late Watson" thus becomes a recorder not of his friend Holmes' direct adventures, but rather of author Doyle's recording of Watson's recording of Holmes. An interesting situation wherein characters in a way take on authors, turning authors into characters or narrative elements, is thus produced, and a dense juxtaposition of hybrid narrative levels as well as a multiplicity of layered perspectives on the Ripper mystery takes place.

In many ways the novel is also a detective story, with its central investigation of a series of horrendous murders, its weighing of competing stories over the true identity and motives of the killers, and the investigators' physical traversing of the murder scenes hunting for hidden clues and traces. Yet the novel also fundamentally reverses the linear structure of the generic detective story, wherein a crime starts the story, and all seemingly meandering clues finally point to one true solution. Instead, in Sinclair's novel, "[o]ur narrative starts everywhere" to form interlocking webs; all clues are assembled, all can be right, finally "until the point is reached where the

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crime can commit itself" (*White Chappell* 51). Sinclair himself admits in a 2002 interview that the only "dull" thing he finds in detective fiction, which he normally thinks "very interesting" particularly in the way it "sets itself up" and "fragments all the mysteries," is when things "click into place" and resolve in "a single solution." He likes what he calls a "cubist" version of the detective story, "which you can look at any which way" and "can't ever be put together" in a smooth way (Wigginton 12).

Such a "cubist" version seems more akin to the postmodern metaphysical detective story which replaces narrative closure with spiraling webs of interlocking clues that frustrate interpretation, and which, through this endless chain of forever deferring signifiers, seeks to foreground the nature of language, narrative and reading (Merivale and Sweeney 7). In the novel, the bookdealers act like part-time detectives and part-time criminals in their frantic, violent and legally dubious searches up and down the country for a final prize, the big kill, the rare, expensive book. When the prize text (Doyle's first edition) is finally landed, instead of laying quiet mystery and chaos, more dust is stirred and more crimes follow. A greater evil seems to be unleashed by the prized Doyle book, whose Ripper murder content dooms whoever holds the book and haunts the holder with crime and murder. Yet the Doyle book itself does not contain an ultimate solution to the Ripper mystery, pointing merely to more clues and bringing the investigator/narrator Sinclair to another Ripper book, Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (1976), one of the many self-claimed "definitive" answers to the Ripper murders written by latter-day Ripper fans. Yet again, the assumed prize text turns out to be one more key text only, as Knight's book is far from being the "final" say amid a legion of competing theories and speculations. The murder still remains a mystery. The murderers bear traces of the victims and the investigators bear traces of the murderers, in an ongoing chain of dizzying signification. The narrator Sinclair then gives his version of the "true" identities and motives of the real killers. But even this unraveling points to the fact that the murders are just part of a bigger evil that emanates from the very landscape of the East End. Such an evil is behind all these major and minor crimes (including the assault on the bookdealer) erupting now and then in this doomed territory. At its final level, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* as a book tries to move from the Ripper murder to a tackling of East End's greater brooding presence, but the author Sinclair cannot ultimately pin it down, beyond a convulsive extension of the same quest, "over and over again," in more subsequent books for ever more clues. The final truth is thus forever deferred in an endless game of signifiers.

In the novel, the year 1887 is a "magic date" (17), because Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* was published in that year; exactly one hundred years later, this first edition

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was found by the London bookdealers, thus unleashing a series of crimes and investigations in the subsequent plots of Sinclair's novel. Thus the mundane and seedy activities of the bookdealers provide the everyday point of entry through which the forgotten mythical past of London's East End is "magically" conjured up to exist side by side with the present. Such a past is evidently still impacting on and darkly shaping the present. Doyle's 1887 book is a contemporary textual response to and recording of the gruesome murders and investigations taking place in East End's spatiality, yet in a way its rediscovery one hundred years later also unleashes and reactivates the forgotten dark forces. Textuality and spatiality are thus shown to be highly interactive and mutually productive. This is further seen when the narrator Sinclair and his friend walk the East End streets hunting for lost manuscripts, forgotten scripts, half-erased graffiti, as well as ignored spatial ruins, and randomly encountered statues or tracks, blending textual traces and spatial icons.

A question arises here and lingers in the reader's mind. Why this particular and persistent interest in a darkly haunting past? What overt purpose does it serve? In this novel, the date 1887 seems not be accidental, as the text apparently seeks to stage, through the juxtaposition of past and present, an encounter between the turbulent *fin de siècle* of the late 19th century and the no less foreboding *fin de siècle* of the late 20th century, one hundred years later, both revolving around the crucial spatial symbolism of the East End. Such an encounter aims to impress upon the reader the continuing and indelible impact of the past on the present, as well as an awareness of the uncanny similarities between the two seemingly different *fins de siècle*. Using his knack for the tell-tale detail, Sinclair first evokes the 19th century past through a phantasmagoria of scenes: disease and death as the East End was worst hit by the two London choleras, vultures flapping round Farringdon Road near the bodies of the hanged criminals, bulls led to be slaughtered in the open-air meat-market at Smithfield, shrieks of pain and horror from the back streets and slums, prostitutes and devilish pleasure luring passers-by, horrendous murders and mangled bodies, all in this "red, this silken, rim of hell" (73).

The spatiality of the East End is presented as a body, and the bodies of the slain Ripper prostitutes mark its boundary, "given limits by the victims of the Ripper" (27). The Roebuck and Brady Street are the farthest eastern edge where the victims' badly mangled and cut up bodies — thus giving rise to speculations that the killer must have had medical knowledge of human anatomy— were found, Mitre Square forms the West line, the Minories the farthest southern edge, rounding up the darkest heart of Whitechapel in East End. The novel's title, as Sinclair later explains in *Lights Out for the Territory* (107), is a "faithful tracing of the blood running from the side of a tormented animal." It is also as much the blood of the murder victims,

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overflowing the labyrinthine lanes and mazes of Whitechapel. Yet again it is also the blood of the East End itself, as Sinclair's investigators cut open the body of the cityscape to perform an autoptic analysis of the evil and crime lurking underneath. The legally dubious means the fictional investigators sometimes have to resort to, the inevitable immersion in and contamination by the dark, criminal forces of the place as the investigation cuts deeper into East End's gangland labyrinths, the hunting and digging for only seedy clues in that part of East End's spatial body where sex trade is plied, the obsessive tracing and sniffing as it were of the victims' blood and gore, the furtive biding for the best chance to hit, and the increasingly morbid and palpable excitation as the final goal, "the big kill," is getting near, all seem to point to uneasy resonances with the murderer, obsessed as he was one hundred years ago with the prostitute victims and the mangling of their reproductive, sexual organs. A notion of a spiraling and repetitive pattern of events casting its shadow over the course of history is thus stressed.

The East End is also the sinister heart of London. As the polarized half of the East End – West End divide that constitutes London's spatial image, East End as the dark slum came into being in the first half of the 19th century when London's reckless expansion following rapid industrialization first began. The place was since sporadically subject to voyeuristic investigations by Victorian social planners and writers. Images like George Gissing's "nether world" and the Victorian social investigator Charles Booth's "Outcast London" cling to the area, as it remains the most obvious symbol of the labyrinthine, an elusive and hazardous side of the London cityscape, largely excluded from the city's modernization projects that focused on the West End. Yet despite the prosperity of the West End and its much lauded and written about status as the face of London, the East End still holds the key to the city's darker, subterranean underbelly which increasingly threatens to resurface and prevail as the century draws to a close. Late 19th century worries over disease, prostitution and poverty in the East End feed into Victorians' anxiety about the general decline and degeneration of the English national identity, and of England's future as an imperial power. In Sinclair's novel, a more specific reason is offered as the Ripper murders were performed in order to "bur[y] one threat" (133), a threat and shame believed to be directed against the monarchy because the prostitutes had witnessed the secret marriage between one prostitute and the crown prince Albert Victor, and were blackmailing the royal family. The killer-surgeon, Dr. Gull, a Freemason, was "all tuned to the millennial flare, the century dying, the erosion of imperial certainties" (128). And the five murders, themselves acts of violence and terror, are committed to contain and control evil in hopes of regeneration, —"[m]ade sacrifice that the new century could be born(133).

In the new *fin de siècle*, similar feelings of degeneration dog England after

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decades of symbolic and literal postwar dilapidation. London has irrevocably declined from its modern status as *the* world capital of imperial strength and cultural ferment. The city's population plunged from 8,196,000 in 1951 to 6,393,000 in 1991. An ever-rising percentage is unproductive and unemployed, what Charles Booth would have called "problem people." The unemployment rate stood at 17% citywide and 25% in the East End boroughs (Porter 3). When the Thatcherite Conservative government came to power in 1979, corporate capitalism became the new religion as the government vowed to shake up the anemic welfare society and reshape a conservative, middle-class, capitalism-embracing British identity. London's East End became the trumping ground in the 1980s for Thatcherite ambitions of national revitalization through neo-modernist urban planning under the aegis of corporate capitalism. This is particularly epitomized by a flurry of furious entrepreneurial developments in the East End's long derelict and abandoned Docklands, where the place's dark, dragging and labyrinthine past is completely wiped out to give way to a sleek, shining, free-for-all capitalist playground teeming with corporate skyscrapers, yuppie loft apartments, up-market pubs and National Heritage sites, a virtual "Manhattan rising out of swamp land" (Wolfreys 2: 157).

To Sinclair's first-person narrator, the drastic realignment of London's cityscape and its rewriting by the dominant forces of politicians, capitalists and planners is a gesture of violence that seeks to blindly exterminate the dark energies and histories of the East End. Similarities between the new *fin de siècle* and the old one a hundred years earlier are made clear. Both are plagued by fears of degeneration and frantic efforts at redemptive regeneration. Both stages witness an unusual tension between the wild, unruly, labyrinthine forces underlying East End's spatiality and the no less violent human attempts at taming, ordering and confining such forces. By emphasizing the spatiality of East End as a material body, very much alive with its labyrinthine undercurrents of scarlet blood and sensitive nerves, and by juxtaposing the bull-dozing, leveling and erasing acts of Thatcherite spatial reconstruction with the earlier *fin de siècle*'s Ripper ritual of sacrifice, the text powerfully drives home an awareness of the uncannily brutal similarities between the two. Thatcherite reinscription driven by force and money is thus no less violent and evil than the Ripper murders, and no more effective toward real regeneration.

This political dimension becomes more pronounced in Sinclair's subsequent writings, particularly *Lights out for the Territory*, a non-fictional work of reminiscences, observations and travelogues, where he lambastes present London as a collective Amnesiaville, and conducts carefully planned walks to uncover the city's hidden past and socio-cultural margin by recording and retrieving graffiti and other neglected urban traces. Thatcherite spatial reinscription of the East End is an erasure of memory, purported to construct an ideology of progress, an eulogy to the

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mythic power of capitalism that, within the short space of a decade, completely turns around a place mired in centuries of poverty and crime into a glittering spectacle of capitalist paradise. It is also a rewriting and taming of the past, as the government's National Heritage program, promoting a glorified and sanitized simulation of a proud British past, commodifies historical streets in the East End as commercially lucrative Heritage sites for mass tourist consumption. It is against this blatant spatial erasure and such insulation of the present from the past that Sinclair's obsessive excavation of the hidden and the repressed is to be understood. Sinclair earnestly believes that the dark, labyrinthine energies of the hidden and the subterranean can never be fully subordinated. Willfully neglected or forced, its dark energies will resurface in violent eruptions that will shatter and dwarf any human efforts at control and exact huge human costs.[6] To avoid and redeem such tragedies, Sinclair's work thus takes the form of a quest, a mission, a project of decoding, to disclose in meticulous detail the ignored, suppressed or displaced accounts of the past that are buried or half-erased in forgotten tracks, ruins, corners and other material, spatial and historical traces. Such a project demonstrates an acute awareness that the most influential version of history is rarely the most revealing, as well as an urgent desire toward an oppositional use of historical and spatial materiality, reflected in his meticulous recording of all marginalized details, against the abstracting and erasing dominant discourse. As such, Sinclair's archaeological project is more than a mere registration of history; it is also an act of rectification, of writing an alternative history. As the narrator Sinclair contemplates aloud in *White Chappell*, "[u]ntil we can remake the past, go into it, change what is now, cut out those cancers – we are helpless. We are prisoners, giving birth to old faults, carrying our naked grandfathers in our arms" (102).

6 Sinclair's view has particular poignancy in view of the 7 July London bombings, one of which was located in Whitechapel. Sinclair has always viewed the New Labor government under Tony Blair as just a "slimy" and "more chaotic" (Wigginton 13) version of Thatcherite conservatism and its courting of corporate capitalism. The building of the Millennium Dome, also in the East End, to celebrate British technological advance in the new millennium, is to him a spot of "unthinking malignancy" and "the most tainted spot on the map of London" (*London Orbita*l). In view of the Blairite government's ongoing efforts to turn London into a "corporate city" where developers and capitalists are determined to wipe out the old London, "Blake's Jerusalem", and to "cover every cultural shift and marker," Sinclair writes in the *London Review of Books* one month after the bombings: "the events of 7 July can be seen as the inevitable consequence of our refusal to remember, our communal amnesia….[It is] a repeated pattern of sacrifice deriving from our refusal to recognise the originating myths of this spurned site" (August 18, 2005).

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Walking, Stalking and the Born-Again *Flâneur*

How is this hidden London that is almost swept away, this alternate cartography, to be resurrected? Sinclair's answer lies in the careful and meticulous excavation of spatial ruins and forgotten texts, in those randomly encountered graffiti, unnoticed details, lost or displaced scripts, covered over rivers and tracks and forgotten ruins. The past lies hidden, and it is also ephemeral, half erased and threatened by the dominant forces. The spatial and textual ruins are on the point of extinction, but it is only during this moment that they offer a glimpse into the hidden and real past.

By this stage, links between Sinclair and Walter Benjamin's oppositional historiography of the city are made obvious. A vital theme in Benjamin's cityscape has always been his critique of the construction by the dominant powers of an illusory and deceptive vision of the urban past, and his aim is to reveal the hidden, different past through an archaeological salvation of objects and traces that modern society threatens to destroy (Gilloch 13). In his *Arcades Projects*, Benjamin has further posited that it is only when the arcades are in a state of ruin, in "such moments of the extinct" (1001), that illusion withers and truth becomes manifest, and the fleeting moments of the afterlife revealed. Gilloch defines Benjamin's urban historiography as informed by three main models: the archaeological, the memorial (opposing modern amnesia by retrieving lost memories of struggles and sufferings), and the dialectical (the dialectical image wherein both the past and present, the illusory and the genuine, are crystallized) (13). Quoting from Ernst Bloch, he also points out that Benjamin's approach is distinguished by a "sense for the peripheral," a "unique gaze for the significant detail" and the "individual things…which do not fit in with the usual lot" (8-9).

In both the first two models and the attention for the peripheral detail, similarities between Sinclair's urban vision and that of Benjamin can clearly be detected, but a significant difference seems to lie with the third model. Benjamin's view of the relationship between the past and present is more dialectical. "It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (*Arcades Projects* 462). Past and present, for Benjamin, are engaged in mutual recognition and mutual illumination, just as the arcade as spatial ruin is both crystallization of deceptive illusion and genuine truth. Sinclair's vision, however, seems to be less dialectical; the past is what obsesses him while the present is viewed much more negatively; the past is to impact powerfully on the present, yet the present, too much loaded with dominant inscription, is an

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object to be redeemed, with very little redemptive function of its own. This is a point we shall return to later on.

Similarly, other aspects of Sinclair's urban vision bear important links to Benjamin's while also making different, diversifying claims. Foremost among these is Sinclair's proposed mode of urban investigation and past excavation, the metaphor of walking. Walking is the central medium in Sinclair's spatial tactics to conjure up the buried memory and spatial traces of the urban past. Exercised through the moving agent of the walker who is also actively remembering and imaginatively weaving the past with the present and is thus inevitably a writer, walking is the symbolic medium by which the two forces of history and spatiality converge and come into life. In a typical self-conscious analysis of his own spatial and textual tactics, Sinclair writes: "Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city.… Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself…noticing *everything*…. Walking stitches it all together: the illicit cocktail of bodily exhaustion and a raging carbon monoxide high" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 4; emphasis in original). Walking takes on a magical dimension as it links up the isolated spots into symbolic lines of energy, till hidden images and meanings are awakened and the self is catapulted, shaman-like, into the past. When walking, "[y]ou allow yourself to become saturated with this solution of the past, involuntarily, unwilled, until the place where you are has become another place; and then you can live it, and then it is" (*White Chapell* 31).

Such an "asphalt-tramping," "reverie"-embracing and detail-noticing walker makes obvious allusions to the high-modernist, asphalt-botanizing Benjaminian *flâneur*,[7] but Sinclair himself anticipates and quickly subverts any such simple

7 The Benjaminian *flâneur* is used because of its focus on the walker's mental fantasy, the walker's observing and spectating mode, the relationship between the walker and the spatial images observed, as well as the impact of walking on the construction of the self. Benjamin's main ideas on the *flâneur* are set out in his two essays, "The *Flâneur*" and "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (Benjamin 2: 35-66, 107-154). In the first, Benjamin mainly adopts Baudelaire's idea of the *flâneur* as the man of the crowd, both detached from the crowd, trying to maintain individuality, and also attracted to and intoxicated by the crowd. By the second essay, which is a revision of the first upon criticism from Adorno, Benjamin emphasizes the alienation and reification of the bourgeois subject by explicitly pronouncing that the *flâneur* is not the Baudelairean man of the crowd; such a *flâneur* seems to point more likely to the detached observer seeking objective penetration of the urban text from an elevated position. Such ambivalence also runs through his *Arcades Projects*. Benjamin's vision is based on the bohemian/literary observer tradition that is set out in Baudelaire as well as in other literary works tackling the theme of the metropolitan

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equation. Instead of the last "*fin-de-siècle* decadence," this walker is the "born-again *flâneur*," who is "a stubborn creature…less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces…than in noticing *everything*" (emphasis original); the born-again *flâneur* is "not dawdling," "not browsing" or aimlessly strolling, but "walking with a thesis"; it is the "purposed hiking" of a stubborn "stalker" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 4).

How is this stalker different from the modernist *flâneur*? In many ways the traces of the modernist predecessor are heavy, but equally manifest is this desire to make a distinction, to claim a departure. It is as if Sinclair's text, while instinctively rooting for the position of the *flaneur* and all the symbolic endowments that come with it, is also painfully aware of the many circumscriptions compromising this position in the late twentieth century urban ambience. Sinclair's London walking is, for instance, both carefully planned and randomly executed. Like the *flaneur*, the stalker stands and speaks from a position of margin and "periphera" (Gilloch 9), both alienated by and critical of the cityscape. In *Lights Out for the Territory* (1), Sinclair's first-person narrator makes nine walks across East London's cityscape starting from East End's Hackney, where Sinclair himself lives. From Hackney to Greenwich Hill and back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount, the walks and footsteps are purported to "cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city," whereby he plans to deliberately rupture the rationality of modernist planning and "vandalise dormant energies" through this "act of ambulant signmaking," this almost magical blazing of a walker's trail, all the while recording and retrieving the urban graffiti which "parod[ies] the most visible aspect of high capitalist black magic" (1).

Yet the narrator also realizes that the route is "near-arbitrary" (1) and "far too neat" (5), and hopes for some last-minute accidents to revise it. Almost gratefully, he finds it by rummaging through the chaos of his desk and accidentally discovers a long forgotten invitation to visit an art installation by Richard Makin at the University of Greenwich in South London. Makin's artwork, "sponsored graffiti of the most elevated kind" that reflects "premeditated spontaneity" (6), is a fitting subject for the walk since the visit itself, randomly decided at the last minute and

and the observing artist (both "The Flaneur" and other parts of "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" are littered with references not just to Baudelaire but also to other 19th century writers on urban themes like Charles Dickens; see Benjamin 2: 9-106), but he gives the literary tradition a theoretical rigor, as well as a conditioning of the neo-Marxist sociological framework. The perception of the Benjaminian *flâneur*, especially that set out in the second essay, as the dominant modernist mode of observing and walking the urban scene, is perhaps strengthened by the debate among feminist urban cultural critics in the late 1980s and early 1990s on whether the female *flâneuse* is possible in urban modernity. See Chen.

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temporarily sidetracking from the pre-planned route, is itself the product of the premeditated and the spontaneous. The linearity of straight routes and firmly-set agendas is increasingly distrusted and cast in self-doubt, as the stalker needs the contingent and the random to buttress him up and to complete the mission.

In many ways Sinclair's narrator still demonstrates an essentially modernist veneration of the magic of walking/writing and its socially redemptive power. The walker is both visionary and critic of the contemporary city, a witness to the increasingly threatened and erased urban past. Walking is the only means of intuitively harnessing the energies of the place and of engaging in acts of affirmative resistance. Writing, especially poetry of the inaccessible and difficult kind beyond the mainstream, among which he obviously locates his own work (especially his earlier poetry), is the "hard stuff," the "flame in the dark" that exposed the "Thatcherite free-market nightmare" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 131).

Yet already a strong feel of hesitancy, of self-suspicion and failure has crept in. The hidden energies often prove unwieldly and overwhelming, and the self, though aspiring to active possession, is much less assured. That is why the narrator is grateful for the interception of the random, and is obsessed with noticing "everything" as if he does not know where to look and is fearful of missing anything. Obsessively yet blankly, the narrator preoccupies himself with the collection of ever more accidentally encountered clues which only lead on to more clues, hoping for a moment when the clues could probably speak for themselves, and the "crime can commit itself" (*White Chappell* 51). The ability of the walker/writer to plan things, to decide a goal, to actively decipher meanings and eventually to impose order, is obviously compromised and cast in doubt.

Attuned to the peripheral, the obsolete, the underground and the easily neglected but significant detail, Sinclair's work painstakingly records the seedy East End alleys, gangland folklore, venomous graffiti and half-forgotten events. The mundane details seem to be sought for their own, as Sinclair zigzags around the fringes, detouring this way and that, always starting other walks, always engaged in a spiral, and always in an effort to avoid a final resolution or goal. Sinclair associates the method of the spiral to a "dogline," which he defines as "stool-sniffing, circling back on itself, avoidance of the shortest way"; "the retreats, spurts, galloping loops and pounces of the stalker" are thus like "the improvisations of the dog" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 85). Sinclair's own writing style, which radically blends the real and the imaginary and oscillates between factual and fictional forms, is similarly engaged in a retrospective structuring that incorporates both pattern and contingency, and progresses in what Heike Hartung defines as "loops, anecdotes and spiraling digression" rather than by linear and logical connections (22).

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Yet nor is Sinclair's stalker, as Peter Brooker points out, a postmodern nomad engaged in aimless rambling (99). The stalker is more focused and bent on a prey, and the prey turns out to be the cityscape itself. The stalker also keeps coming back to the point of departure, though always instantly going away again for new walks, spiraling and moving and never resting. A crucial trait is its speed of walking. Always in a hurry and never dawdling, close on the scent of a secret and on the heels of its prey, hunting the city relentlessly, Sinclair's stalker oscillates somewhere between a modernist *flaneur* and a postmodern nomad. Because of its very name, the stalker also has a dubious criminal resonance. A stalker is often a victimizer, and Sinclair's stalker resorts to speculative, secretive, relentless and sometimes morally dubious means of hunting the marginal and the debris, which in turn seems to taint the hunter himself, implicating him in mutual complicity.

Much has been written about the subjective self in Sinclair's walking, whether it is rational, non-split or unproblematic, a refuge of reason posed against the externalities of an irrational and unnatural society (Potter 42), or whether it is a voyeuristic position, a pair of prying eyes, doing, as so many other 19th century writers of East End have done before him, a kind of slum-tourism and not participating in the collective unconscious (Wright 7). Certainly elements of both the two charges can be detected in Sinclair's text. In *White Chappell*, for instance, the narrator Sinclair claims that "I am witness" (81), but it is a witness that is often standoffish, his own self not the object of observation and problematization. If too disgusted by the morbid and sinister, "[t]he narrator closed his eyes, to shut out the plague of street names…he could swallow no more detail"(81), a luxury certainly the involved participant could not afford. In *Lights Out for the Territory*, the walking narrator subjects the Thatcherite cityscape and its official discourse to a scathing critique, but it is obvious that the narrator himself is uncontaminated, and removed from the scene.

But then again to say that his walker is no more than that is over simplistic. As demonstrated in the above passages, despite his modernist aspirations, moments of self-doubt, of suspicion and hesitancy, and of self-conscious irony are not rare in his work. An additional and very significant trait with Sinclair's walker is the sense of being compelled, of being pulled along as if in an unwilled trance by a larger force, over which the self feels no control except awe and submission. This is a very distinctive part of Sinclair's urban vision, and this element of the magical sets his urban walking, his so-called psychogeography, apart from the French Situationist model where the word is often traced. Duncan Campbell sees a close affinity between Sinclair's psychogeography of the perimeter and the Situationists, who first uses the term to refer to the study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals (6).

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Robert Bond also writes that the Situationist *dérive*, a new form of *flânerie* that is defined by Guy Debord as "a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances" (Debord 50), while the walker is dictated by unconscious, subjective currents and vortexes, is invoked by Sinclair and resonates throughout his work (Bond 121-22). Sinclair's psychogeography is indeed a means of negotiating the chaos of London, of writing oneself into the city, internalizing the urban space while constantly subjectively invoking and associating. The London revealed in *Lights Out for the Territory* is both an unfamiliar territory of the hidden and repressed, and a subjective imagination that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, a scrawled-upon palimpsest that is, like a deeply imprinted mind, always revolving and redeveloping. But Sinclair's psychogeographer seems to be summoned by a larger, more magical force; the degree of awareness of and unwilled submission to the magic of the place, the particular spatiality, seems to be greater. In a recent interview Sinclair himself disclaims the Situationist connection, too, and acknowledges "much more" the influence of John Dee, a small-time late 19th century geographer, with his "magic possibilities" (Wigginton 11). Sinclair's stalker seeks to hunt the cityscape relentlessly, but the East London spatiality emanates a dark energy and magic that in turn sucks in the walker, leading him on almost trance-like. It is not always the walker who could consciously weave a pattern into the urban scrawl, but the place can write itself. Steeped in a long past of buried energies that goes back to pre-historical times, and using as it were the walker as its agent, the place can "spell out the letters of a secret alphabet," an "alternative reading," a "subterranean, *preconscious* text capable of divination and prophecy," which has "a life of their own, quite independent of their supposed author" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 1; emphasis added).

This is a mental state of consciousness quite similar to the De Quincey type, a presence that is often felt in Sinclair's work. In his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey charts London's labyrinthine underside in a psychogeographic journey and celebrates its anarchic energy in an opium haze. Vision is established and the lost memories of earlier youth are retrieved only when the self is subject to a larger mythically opiate force; led around as if in a trance, the mind navigates and imagines an opiate, labyrinthine and palimpsestic London, blurring the realistic space of the streets into the inner space of reverie, and finally reaching a deeper, fresh illumination into the city's marvelous, unruly energy.[8] This

8 In the section "The Pleasures of Opium," De Quincey writes that under the influence of opium the opium-eater is able to shed his ordinary self, that of the middle-class self, and is able to mingle and mix with the low-life of London. He would visit the poor people's markets, eavesdropping on family negotiation and on the poor people's wishes,

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new illumination under the opiate influence is, as Cuojati writes, "mobile, self-expanding and archaeological," where rationality and linearity turn into "entanglement, depth and multidimensionality" (5). Sinclair's celebration of the hidden past and dark energies is in a way like De Quincey's use of opium; without it, the city cannot really be understood. All you see is curtailed vision masquerading as rationality, linear yet shallow surface and even blindness, the "short-sightedness of human desires" (De Quincey 175), which in Sinclair's interpretation refers specifically to Thatcherite urban rationalization that seeks to impose an alien ambition while blind to the city's real truth. This obsession with the buried anarchic energies matches Sinclair's own energetic and also inaccessible writing style, which often lacks linear narrative organization and switches wildly from history to fantasy, reality to hallucination, echoing De Quinceyean moments of stylistic manipulation to project the labyrinth and the impassioned rhythm of the city.

Cartography of the Alternative

So what is the exact nature of this larger magical force which is the object of Sinclair's obsessive, compulsive urban excavation? What, eventually, is he lambasting the official discourse for ignoring and suppressing, while engaging all his works to write about, over and over again? The answer is not easy, for like the prize text sought after in *White Chappell*, the buried truth Sinclair seeks about London is elusive, and often just leads on to more clues. But a grouping of the clues that he seeks, the dark secrets, criminal edges and bloody stains whose scent his walkers are always after and whose greater truth than mainstream reality is constantly avowed, seems to suggest a preoccupation with what can only be vaguely described as dark evil. This would be a preoccupation that is more sinister and darker than De Quincey's, and points specifically to evil of a primordial,

difficulties and opinions and sympathizing with their pleasures. Deborah Nord points out that this stance is different from the typical middle-class social investigator or reform-minded novelist who also deal with the poor, for the opium-eater, born and bred of middle-class origin, is able to mingle unrecognized with the poor, cloaked in the incognito of the classless stroller, and identifies with their problems whilst free from the constraints of bourgeois life (43). Whilst there are similarities between De Quincey's vision and that of Sinclair, an interesting difference is that De Quincey's opium allows greater familiarity with and insight into the ordinary life of working-class people, but Sinclair's obsession with the past actually comes with a somewhat negligence of the ordinary experience of the present-day, working-class Bengali inhabitants of London's East End. See later for more.

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"preconscious" kind. The Ripper murder is an act of evil, but it is predestined to be committed, and is just a recent example in a long stretch of repeated patterns of evil including the earlier Ratcliffe Highway serial murders and the more recent Kray Brothers mafia crimes, because the place they all took place in, London's East End, itself emanates sinister evil that needs repeated blood sacrifices. The cityscape of East London, built on lands that used to be pagan sacrificial mounds where "the hell shrieks at night," the baying of sacrificial animals, "helpless, pointless, already dead" are always heard (*White Chappell* 113), is teeming with dark energies that successive human attempts at subordination and rationalization will prove futile. Neither the Hawksmoor churches built there in the 18th century, which forms a sort of a code or metaphor to impose religious order on the turbulent site,[9] nor the latest Thatcherite redevelopment of glass and steel "sepulcher towers" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 41) that tries to tame and bury the place's dark ghosts can wipe out this sinister energy.

The Hawksmoor churches, built from 1712 to 1731 by Christopher Wren's student Nicholas Hawksmoor, which often invoke feelings of gloom, weight, and mystery, have been a favorite subject for Sinclair ever since his early days in the opening prose-poem "Nicholas Hawksmoor, His Churches" in his poetry collection *Lud Heat*. Sinclair's ideas about the malevolent energies of a place are connected to his occultist belief about primordial, archetypal fears and yearnings that link up places like old London to Egypt or Aztec America. Both the Hawksmoor churches as well the extinguished St. Mary Matfellon Church in *White Chappell*, which gave the alias name White Chapel to this East End district, are religious attempts to impose order in an unruly and evil place, but the White Chapel was burned down, and the Hawksmoor churches become an "urban apocalypse," where the river rises to "sweep away all the potentialities of Nicholas Hawksmoor's baroque overview," and the grass covers over the "pretensions of stone," reducing the churches to "an Aztec desolation" and destroying Hawksmoor's "ordered mapping…before it could be articulated" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 187). The latest Thatcherite planning which has made a new religion out of capitalism, whose glass and steel towers make "an astonishingly obvious solicitation of the pyramid, a corrupt thirst for eternity" (41), will prove just as futile, for the primordial evil and unruly darkness is the only truth of the place, and the only truth that lasts.

9 Sinclair's prose poem on Hawksmoor in *Lud Heat* later inspired *Hawksmoor*, a best-selling novel by the fellow London writer Peter Ackroyd. These two have helped to solidify the churches' image, with its limestone steeples and huge interiors inspiring feelings of weight and gloom, as related to the malevolent energies of the place that have yet to be laid to rest. See Bond 43-8.

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By this stage, questions about Sinclair's approach to this dark evil are inevitably raised. If this dark evil is "older and wilder" (126) and if ordering, mapping and control are the wrong way, what is the right way? An unconscious surrender to, awed worship of, involuntary identification with, or even complicity with the dark forces? On this question, Sinclair's response again proves ambivalent. On the one hand, the narrator anticipates and partially admits to such charges in *White Chappell* – there is "a sort of sucking in towards evil in the text" (149), "something inherently seedy and salacious in continually picking the scabs of these crimes, peering at mutilated bodies, listing the undergarments, trekking over the tainted ground in quest of some long-delayed occult frisson" (57). Yet on the other hand, the author also vigorously offers a rebuttal by including in the novel, rather bizarrely and self-consciously, a letter addressed to Sinclair himself by a real-life artist friend Doug defending Sinclair's perceived predilection for evil. Calling any charge that sees Sinclair's work as a "dabbling with demons" a relegation of the "poetic process to a nothing," the letter sees Sinclair's work as essentially poetic, which has sublimated evil into a higher state (145-49). The purpose of the letter seems dual. On the one hand Sinclair achieves more persuasive objectivity by using the defense of a third party; on the other, the letter, penned not by the author himself but by a real-life critic, more eloquently sets forth Sinclair's own "Blakeian sense" (148) of good and evil as utterly interdependent dynamically and not arbitrarily contrary, and his belief in the need to know the phantasmic forms and ghosts of the self in order to recognize the true self, the need to explore the cosmology on its dark side to make our vision unflinching and accurate.

Here the influence of Blake's idea of good and evil is worth exploring. Blake gives good and evil a meaning which is not just opposite to their usual moral connotations—i.e., opposition or energy is seen by him as good, passivity as evil—, but more importantly, he denies completely the conventional use of such dualism. Therefore the upsurge of desire in the body whose energetic appearance frightens the self into the conviction that it must stem from an external hell, appears evil or dark only because it will seem so to followers of the Christian tradition of moral dualism, which sets the body's energy as evil against the soul's reason as good (Bloom 4). "Dark" energy, a term favorite to Sinclair, thus envelops us all and produces eternal creative conflicts. If Sinclair's obsession with dark energy is to be seen in this light, then he should indeed be exempt from the charges of "dabbling with demons" and "obsession with evil." Critics like Ken Worpole, who reprimands Sinclair for failing to be "humanistic," and views his preoccupation with dark energy as "suspect" and "distasteful," "the literary equivalent of collecting Third Reich militaria or shrunken heads" (188), may be misreading Sinclair through the lens of conventional moral dualism, for Sinclair is certainly refuting such categories of good

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and evil altogether. Yet a contradiction with Sinclair is that, if the Blakeian Devil is energy, and creative, dynamic opposition and conflict, Sinclair's own vision of the dark energy betrays a somewhat reductive single-mindedness that falls short of the always dynamic, always flowing, changing and interdependent nature of such "devilish" energy. To criticize Sinclair for being "devilish" would be missing the point, but to claim that he is perhaps too selective and fixed, that he narrows the scope of the Blakeian concept, is more accurate. His work, for instance, seems to be only interested in what conventional moralism would define as the marginal and the criminal, a place where conflict and opposition certainly abounds but not exclusively so. This would seem to suggest that Sinclair himself, however much he refutes the constraints of fixed moral categories, is still very much bound by them, since he only goes for the reverse of the conventionally good.

This advocacy of only the marginal, the sinister and the unofficial seems to affect other dimensions of Sinclair's urban vision, particularly where his attitude toward the cultural and social mainstream is concerned. Sinclair seems to view the mainstream as a seamless block of ideological manipulation. Anything that is tainted by official endorsement or belongs to mainstream culture has to be rejected. Official memorials "are a way of forgetting" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 9), public sculptures like Henry Moore's bronzes "do not so much affect memory as displace it" (265), and the sooner these symbols of collective amnesia are "disposed of," the better (239). Such a more or less sweeping denunciation of the commodity culture and whatever is present and mainstream, and a refusal to see therein any positive residue other than a saturation of the official spatial discourse, would seem to fall short of a more dialectical vision of the dynamically changing urban spatiality. In such exclusive vouchsafing of the greater truth of the hidden and the dark and nothing else, Sinclair would actually risk imposing a rather fixed interpretation on the spaces of the city, a canonization of the uncanonical and the sinister, that threatens to be no less arbitrary and selective than the Thatcherite official space mapping. Julian Wolfreys claims that the essence of Sinclair's work lies in a deconstructionist act of writing under erasure which reflects the ineffability of the contemporary city (2: 144, 147, 148). Yet Sinclair is obviously not just interested in recording the ephemeral, the fleeing and the dynamic, but exclusively in the sinister part of that urban ephemerality and energy; in thus doing, he really risks building an alternative domination, an alternative paradigm.[10]

10 Wolfreys has written several important pieces on Sinclair and has even singled out Sinclair in his 1998 work on Derrida, as a literary exemplification of the deconstructionist approach. However, while Wolfreys seeks to point out the basic ineffability of London's urban space, that its illusive and ghostly traces always defy any attempt at fixed or

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This risk of complicity because of a lack of a more dialectical vision can also be seen in another example. Sinclair's walking, for instance, is championed by him for its material, physical and emotive nature and its meticulous recording of every detail in order to counteract the erasing and abstracting nature of official mapping. But materiality itself, as Alex Murray points out, can also be exploited by the establishment to convey a conservative ideology (2:1). Thatcherite National Heritage industry and conservationism, for instance, also promote detail-packed Heritage walks along designated streets as the most physically and emotionally immersive means for tourists to evoke and remember the local past and instill a nationalist sense of pride. Walking with your own legs, as opposed to traditional tourist means of commuting in the car or on the bus or underground, is here promoted as offering more empathy with the magic of the place, a turn of phrase that Sinclair himself might find alarmingly familiar. To drive the irony deeper home, Sinclair's own East End walks, recorded with often mind-blowing detail and covering only the forgotten and the repressed, have themselves become, after the books' success, popular tourist pilgrimages marketed by entrepreneurs to the occult-minded, the mystery seekers, and the ever expanding public bored with the usual routes. Formerly anonymous chapels now flaunt plaques on doorsteps with quotations from Sinclair's works, obviously banking on his celebrity to attract more tourists and increase revenue. The commodification of this Other London and of Sinclair's own vision[11] is not unaware by Sinclair himself. In *Lights Out for the Territory*, the narrator laments the "imposition of camera crews and the vulgarly curious, guided by onto [the] territory by best-selling gothic fictions." Even the homeless vagrants got "weary of media exploitation," moving elsewhere to avoid being woken by "lunatics" and "psychogeographic journalists taking their own editorials too literally" (243). This certainly shows that a position of complete

ultimate representation, it must be pointed that Sinclair's writings actually betray a departure from that approach. In tirelessly seeking to unearth what seems to him to be the forgotten, erased part of London's space and in vouchsafing for that part's greater truth, Sinclair seems to believe in a certain version of the ultimate truth (albeit an alternative one), quite different from the deconstructionist denial of any such certainty.

11 Apart from making a point of praising his friends' work in his own work and reviews, many of Sinclair's later works (Mark Atkins provided the illustrations in *Lights Out*, again in *Liquid City*, and Rachel Lichtenstein co-wrote *Rodinsky's Room* with Sinclair) are collaborations with little-known artist friends, which also boosted the latter's status. Other instances of mutual inspiration and mutual promotion can be seen in Peter Ackroyd, another erstwhile underground writer, who acknowledges the inspiration of Sinclair's early poetry *Lud Heat* on his own bestseller *Hawksmoor*, and has later generously reviewed the works of other occultist London writers.

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uncompromising opposition is itself problematic and subject to appropriation, in the same way that what is reifying and commodified may not be totally without a potential of being otherwise appropriated as well.

A second significant limitation in Sinclair's urban vision is the problematic nature of the stalker's spectatorial position. Sinclair's walker/stalker is also the writer, recording and remembering the buried dark energy. This linking of walking and writing and spatial rhetorics echoes the arguments of recent urban theories, but it is important to point out that this walking is not just the everyday mundane walking of De Certeau's citydweller,[12] but is highly symbolic and more enlightened. Despite the constant admission of involuntary compulsion by a larger, magical force, Sinclair's work portrays his walker as the one with a deeper inkling of such compulsion. Though not the modernist walker with a superior knowledge of the city and the crowd, Sinclair's stalker possesses knowledge that pertains not to the exact nature of this larger urban force, which constantly defies understanding, but rather to the awareness of the unwieldly nature of such dark energies and of the limitations on any human agency which seeks to control and shed light but is, actually, being controlled. A line in *White Chappell* states, "Do we slowly begin to understand only because we are about to become performers in the same blind ritual?" (58) The stalker has this knowledge, while still being involuntarily compelled by this larger, manipulative force. But it is this knowledge, however limited and impotent, that elevates Sinclair's stalker one step above the mundane crowd walking the streets in amnesia and unconscious slumber. As such, Sinclair's stalker is a member of the more initiated few, over and above the mundane urban crowd.

In that small community of the initiated, Sinclair places earlier writers like De Quincey and Blake, whose writings on London he constantly invokes and remembers to form the palimpsestic nature of his own London cityscape. Echoing these other texts, Sinclair's work seems to establish a sense of a small community across time whose contributions and insights certainly transcend the short-sightedness or amnesia of the present society. Also looming large is his immediate circle of artist friends, the underground poets and artists with whom he has been closely associated since his earlier days. The Ripper-investigating narrator

12 De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* sets out an influential theory for everyday tactics by ordinary urban dweller to sidestep or appropriate, often below the table, dominant spatial discourses, and weave their own meanings and resistance on an everyday, material level into their lived urban space. The importance set on walking, the perception of walking as writing and as spatial inscription, and the emphasis on resistive use of the material and the everyday against official mapping are common links between De Certeau and Sinclair, but Sinclair's urban vision seems more sinister and more elitist.

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in *White Chappell* is accompanied in this pilgrimage by the character Joblard, who is modeled on Sinclair's sculptor friend B. Catling.[13] Sinclair's friend Doug writes that important letter of support that establishes Sinclair as the misunderstood poet that really sees deeper and higher. The narrator in *Lights Out for the Territory* makes a symbolically charged journey to Richard Makin's art installation, and other artist friends like Aidan Dun and Gavin Jones make favorable appearances both in the text and in the photo pages, their artistic eccentricity and shamanship – "Shamanism of Intent" being the caption to Jones's photo[14] — shown to best advantage. Shaman is indeed a word Sinclair often uses to describe this small community of the initiated, pioneering artists who refuse contamination by the mainstream and is the medium into truth and knowledge for contemporary society. "The health of the city and the culture depends upon the flights of redemption of these disinherited shamans" (*Lights Out for the Territory* 131).

Yet such a posture, though uncompromisingly oppositional, does open itself to the charge of self-involved elitism. The psychogeographer may be physically one of the mundane crowd walking the back streets of London, but mentally, it is still a position of elevation and privilege. However limited that elevation may be, the stalker's voice is still raised above the urban din, above the dialogic, buried voices and traces that Sinclair always claims to uncover in order to counteract the monologic imprinting of official discourse. An example of such dialogic yet buried voices, for instance, would be the urban graffiti that Sinclair claims to be always looking out for in his walks. But graffiti, as public, activist and anonymous art, transgresses many key socio-spatial divisions, particularly the idea that art is the product of individual geniuses and is appreciated by well-educated people in rarefied or private spaces. Graffiti's trait as rebellious art that cannot be bought may bear affinities with Sinclair and his underground artist friends, but graffiti as public and anonymous art, there for all to see in the open spaces of the everyday and with the author always already absent and erased, is obviously not in the line of Sinclair's reclusive geniuses.

The somewhat privileged and elevated nature of the stalker's spectatorial

13 For that connection, see Bond 298, footnote 19. Joblard and his real-life counterpart Catling both become characters in Sinclair's later novel *Downriver*.

14 *The Shamanism of Intent, Some Flights of Redemption* is actually a separate essay published by Sinclair in 1991, where he advocates a form of aesthetics as opposed to commodified reification, and lists a number of male underground artists whose art bears an insightful relation between geographically specific natural elements of the place and the witnessing human body. These shamans are the only true force for the self-understanding of contemporary society.

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position also explains its limitations in the dimensions of gender and race. His initiated shamans, for instance, are always male and white. Women figure in the stories but mostly as victims and passive creatures of man's sexual fantasy. In a work like *White Chappell* which deals with the Ripper murders wherein all victims are women, the voices of the female victims are significantly left out. Sinclair's avowed opposition to Thatcherism also lacks a more open awareness of racial diversity. London's East End has been occupied by successive generations of immigrant populations since the early 20th century, first the Jews, then the Turks, and later the Afro-Caribbeans. Such earlier presence is acknowledged in his later novel *Downriver*, but the East End is now overwhelmingly taken over by Bangladeshi immigrants, which gives the place a new name Banglatown. As Peter Brooker points out, this present human geography is "invisible" (103) and almost never treated in Sinclair's many obsessive walks around East London which claims to miss no detail and clue. Perhaps the Bangladeshis, being a part of the present, does not qualify as clues to a hidden and more authentic past. Or perhaps what does qualify as clues, being only of the past and the almost forgotten, cannot gaze back and contradict, safer for his mind to be projected on. Sinclair may attack the Thatcherite development of the East End which he feels has erased or selectively wiped out the dark energy of the place, but just like the Thatcherite reshaping of a conservative British national identity based on a selectivity that ignores race or class, Sinclair's London, constructed to counter the dominant discourse, may also be guilty of a similarly selective or privileging strategy. The Bangladeshis occupying the present spatiality of the East End, as the racial Other of the Thatcherite Englishness, and as such an overwhelmingly obvious part of East End's everyday reality, do merit more than silence and neglect in Sinclair's work, especially since this work makes its very aim the resistance to Thatcherite amnesia and erasure.

Conclusion

It would thus be proper to argue that Sinclair's overall work has residues of a modernist stance, despite the fact that such a stance is plagued by self-doubt, irony, and awareness about its unfeasibility. In terms of execution and practice, Sinclair's writing claims a deliberate departure from such a stance and experiments with techniques and perspectives that demonstrate his familiarity with postmodern writings. But emotively, there is still attachment to the transcendence, however limited, that is being claimed for these initiated shamans, and to the redemptive power of walking and writing, even though that writing is also simultaneously and self-consciously foregrounded and examined. This largely unresolved tension seems

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to tilt a bit in his later, more recent works, as the self-doubt and even self-mockery becomes more pronounced and the earlier stance is increasingly questioned. The insistence on both the pattern, the pre-planned as well as the contingent, the accidental, and the unexpected, already manifest in *Lights Out for the Territory*, seems to veer more toward the accidental. In *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (2002), his most recent substantive work, even the ultimate meaning of walking is questioned and seen to lead to, as Duncan Campbell puts it (5), lunacy or failure—"The M25 goes nowhere; it's self-referential, postmodern, ironic" (*London Orbital*). The walk becomes an incessant voyage around the fringes, frantically zigzagging round and round, leading to nowhere, and refusing ultimate closure. Increasingly, Sinclair seems to demonstrate a greater awareness of the fluxes and pulsation of the city, and the inefficacy of any exclusive representation, dominant or anti-dominant, of the urban spatiality. If we return to the earlier method of viewing his work as detective stories, then Sinclair himself, much as he proclaims such a desire and makes it his life-long mission, probably cannot really countenance the possibility of a real past and hidden London that can be ultimately found and located. Just as the Doyle text is found and then has to be lost again, Sinclair has to make his goal forever inaccessible so that he could carry on his mission/search, and forever engaged in walking and waiting and mocking. By the end, the detection and gathering of key information itself, or reading and interpretation itself, rather than the ultimate object or meaning, becomes the desired prize object. In that sense, Sinclair's searched-for object, the buried dark energy which is the true London, the missing body in this detective story, must remain forever an absence, so the walker/writer/detective can keep the game on, forever on the lookout for something and anything.

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盯梢東區

——伊安辛克萊的《白教堂、紅血跡》、《騰出疆域》

陳 音 頤*

摘 要

英國九十年代的世紀末，文壇出現一批對倫敦新市景極度敏感、以倫敦的空間及文本綿密性為題材的當代倫敦文學，其中以辛克萊最受注目。辛克萊筆下的倫敦，過去和現在並存，文類跨界，真實和虛擬共舞，他以「心理地理」（psycho-geography）方法，挖掘倫敦被遺忘與被擦拭的空間邊緣意象，以行走倫敦街道為一再出現的主題和比喻，建構一個抗拒柴契爾主流空間論述的反對空間。本文探討其最為著名的兩部作品，一九八七年的成名小說 *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* 和一九九七年的 *Lights Out for the Territory*。首先探索作為辛克萊倫敦「心理地理」首要場域的倫敦東區空間意象；其次討論他空間調查的行走模式——潛伏盯梢；最後指出這種行走觀察模式的內在限制，它以建構抗拒空間意象為號召，但本身就自居於某種優越知識和窺視能力的位置，這種對過去被抹滅記憶的全然投入及全然肯定，和對當今所有既存現實的全然否定和漠視，與建構某種另類的真理無異，無法挑戰二元架構。

關鍵詞：伊安辛克萊 當代倫敦文學 倫敦東區 白教堂 紅血跡 騰出疆域

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