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Psychogeography Reimagining and Re-Enchanting the Smart City

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Introduction

I begin this chapter with a very brief outline of what is meant by the smart city. My aim here is to treat the smart city as a starting point, something that is integral to the assumptions and imperatives upon which our ideas of the modern city are based. To do this means subjecting urban regeneration, as it is defined and justified by ideas of the smart city, to a different type of critique. In his work on visual culture, Jenks (1995: 144) argues that that ‘dominant views and appropriations of space have become taken for granted and have, in turn, enabled routine human organisation and governmentality’. He also talks about a lack of ‘critical theoreticity’ in the social sciences together with a need to explore ‘alternative geographies’ (Jenks 1995: 144). With this in mind, I want to ask whether or not psychogeography can be used to provide a timely critical intervention in relation to the smart city. There is a strongly political edge to this project, which involves being able to somehow reimagine what a city might look like in the face of powerful neo-liberal forces that have come to condition every facet of our existence. Here, I will show how philosophical currents dating back to surrealism and the situationist movement have been used to critique both the urban space and its inequalities.

The smart city

The smart city embraces a number of intersecting areas and prerogatives; these form an important background to the discussion of a specific locale that I am

1 looking to develop here. Many of these have resulted with the advent of digital
2 technology and the emergence of big data. There is not space to catalogue all of
3 these in detail or deal with the many ramifications of new technologies here. There-
4 fore, I want to offer a wide-ranging discussion that locates the notion of 'smart'
5 within a set of broader structural forces. Here, I take the position that we increas-
6 ingly inhabit a world of particulars: new technologies, concepts and ideas that
7 have entered our orbit so quickly that they have become naturalized. Philosopher
8 Graham Harman (2005: 268) notes:

9
10 For the most part, we deal with objects by taking them for granted, by silently
11 relying on them as we direct our attention elsewhere. At any given moment, we
12 invisibly make use of numerous tables, computers, blood cells and steel girders, not
13 to mention atmospheric oxygen and the rotation of the earth. By and large, we live
14 in a world in which things withdraw from awareness, silently enabling our more
15 explicit deeds.

16
17 At a philosophical level, and drawing upon Heidegger's distinction between
18 objects and things, this is to acknowledge that 'things are what they are by
19 virtue of their relation to everything else' (Rorty 2005: 274). Adam Greenfield
20 (2017: 48) has suggested that this need for a critique of things becomes even
21 more urgent at the broader level of the smart city, 'a place where the instru-
22 mentation of the urban fabric, and of all the people moving through the city, is
23 driven by the desire to achieve a more efficient use of space, energy and other
24 resources'. With this in mind, we would do well not to presume that 'smart'
25 is, of itself, efficacious but rather that the way in which it relates to other phe-
26 nomena, in often complex ways, requires proper scrutiny. My contention here
27 is that a psychogeographic approach can help generate much-needed alternative
28 perspectives on 'smart'. I want to explore this possibility via a subjective account
29 of a specific locale close to my home in South London: Burgess Park. There are
30 several reasons for providing this topographical focus. First, I want to ask, in
31 practical and subjective terms, how this urban environment impacts upon the
32 individual (me). Second, I want to suggest that it serves as a metonym: the par-
33 ticularities of its ongoing evolution as an urban space can speak more broadly
34 to the modernity, environment and neo-liberalism in which it is embedded. By
35 offering a subjective account I want to adopt a Sinclairian strategy that has to do
36 with reclaiming 'place'. Here, by foregrounding the notion of cultural memory
37 I too hope to 'counter the "vampiric logic" of neo-liberalism' (Martin 2015: 149)
38 and to interrogate the ways in which 'smart' might be viewed as complicit rather
39 than neutral in political terms.

Psychogeography

One of the main purposes of this chapter is to ask how psychogeography might offer a set of critical tools with which to interrogate the emergence of the smart city. I will argue here that a particular style of writing and approach to the city has emerged across the twentieth century, which deals specifically with modernity and offers a voice that is both timely and critical in relation to our built environment.

Psychogeography finds many of its antecedents in key debates within philosophy. Here we could even go as far back as Plato and Aristotle in order to trace the possibility of an ideal realm beyond the reach of our senses, which we have yet to connect with or have lost touch with. Indeed, this notion of the ideal was later integral to the work of Hegel (Hopkins 2004: 105), Kant (noumenal), Schopenhauer (the world as will and representation) and Nietzsche. The latter's *Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche 2000) suggested precisely that a world of primal energies and irrational impulses (Dionysian) had been lost in the world of art via a Socratean quest to sanitize it: art had come to mean contemplating life rather than truly participating in it. Here, following Plato, was an allusion to the possibility of transcendence and oneness. The dualism referenced here has continued to play out at the level of culture, a kind of dialectic between science/positivism and something more mystical/animistic/occulted; forces or aspects of our existence that cannot be so systematically explained. I want to suggest here that psychogeography forms part of this dialectic, a timely foil to both the rational and the scientific.

Surrealism

Before moving on to consider modern psychogeography I want to talk about two of its chief tributaries: surrealism and, its predecessor, dadaism. Surrealism is characterized by the assertion that there is a kind of greater reality to which we do not routinely have access. Here, there is a sense of the 'noumenal', which extends not only to the inner psychic life of each of us but also into the 'concrete' world of objects (Young 1995: 191). The precise nature of this world, to which we do not have access, is referenced by the surrealists in variety of ways: the marvellous, the eternal, the infinite, the inconceivable, the heavenly, the transcendent. All of these allude to a form of secular mysticism and the possibility of energies and intuitions not routinely available to us. At the same time, and by implication, it seeks to criticize our blind faith in systems of knowledge that claim to explain everything. The pursuit of the marvellous alluded to here becomes increasingly difficult in an age where science can account for so much phenomena in the outside world. There is even a sense in which the marvellous has been displaced, that

it now resides in the particular: the affordances of all the gadgetry and technology that we now use on a daily basis. As such, all of our amazement and wonder is potentially subsumed within a digital world that is both personal but also transparent, subject to total scrutiny.

Surrealism concerns itself then with the way in which the effects of the marvellous have become lost to us; there is clearly a comparison to be made with romanticism's response to enlightenment ideas of logic, rationality and secularity (although the surrealists were anti-romanticism) and, most strongly, the more pietistic strains of Christianity. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* concerned itself too with the ways in which a culture might be divested of its access to primal energies; his ideas formed an important tributary for the surrealists. He symbolized this dynamic via the contrasting contradictory qualities of particular Greek gods: Apollo and Dionysus. Similarly, and central to the surrealists, was a metaphysical quest for transcendence, a state of self-realization where such contradictions would ultimately cease to exist (Hopkins 2004: 105). The very barriers to this concern the way in which we interact with the concrete: the hard logic and rationality of science. Again, and like romanticism, surrealism meant the search for 'a force that would break the cold, clinical fetters of rationalism and instrumental approaches to knowledge' (Negus and Pickering 2004: 7). Here lay the belief that the order with which we had been conditioned to perceive the outside world could only be countered by embracing disorder. Imposed order, symbolized by Nietzsche in the form of Apollo (the god of order and beauty), could be disrupted via orgiastic drunken rites where 'the effort, in brief, was to stun the rational faculties and the moral inhibitions, to break down the boundaries between selves, until, at the climactic moment, the god himself made himself present to his celebrants' (Danto 1981: 19). The surrealists didn't, to the best of my knowledge, engage in such practices, although there were clearly parallels.

While the relationship with psychoanalysis is not always straightforward, there was a sense for the surrealists in which the marvellous resided beneath the level of consciousness but it could be glimpsed in terms of the collision between wish and reality that took place in dreams. The thinking here was that dreams often produced surreal imagery as certain wishes failed to successfully emerge into consciousness: unspoken desire would necessarily become distorted. Such a collision between conflicting psychic impulses offered a certain primacy to ideas of disorder/hazard/chance/contingent. As Aragon (1987: 217) was to write:

Reality is the apparent absence of contradiction. The marvellous is the eruption of contradiction within the real. Love is a state of confusion between the real and the marvellous. In this state, the contradictions of being seem really essential to being.

Wherever the marvellous is dispossessed, the abstract moves in.

1 The deliberate pursuit of these would be a strategic means of unlocking or feeling
 2 the effects of the marvellous as part of the ultimate quest for transcendence, a
 3 way in, a means of reconnecting. To open the doors of perception meant deliber-
 4 ately unsettling those ideas and practices that had become normalized. From this
 5 account of the surrealists emerges an important pursuit of psychogeography that
 6 I think can best be described as a sense of wonderment. This could be found vari-
 7 ously in the mind, through love, but also in the common place: 'In everything base
 8 there is some quality of the marvellous which puts me in the mood for pleasure'
 9 (Aragon 1987: 50).

10 As a final note on the surrealists, it is also important to mention that many of its
 11 leading figures were progressive city dwellers, natural heirs to Charles Baudelaire's
 12 idea of the modern artist as *flâneur* (Hopkins 2004: 60). Louis Aragon's *Paris*
 13 *Peasant* (1987) in many ways is a proto-psychogeographic piece. Its focus upon
 14 two Paris locations prefigures much of the later psychogeographic writing. Here,
 15 a poetic resonance derives from the elegance and seediness of a Parisian arcade.
 16 The commentary is both rich in personal material and detail, which sketches out
 17 the full spectrum of human activity from cafes to a '*maison de tolerance*', which
 18 Aragon clearly knew well. Ultimately, it was destroyed as part of Haussmann's
 19 reforms and the creation of wide boulevards; a rebuke to the medieval, organic
 20 and disordered city topography that had been blamed for facilitating civil insur-
 21 rection. Perhaps of critical importance here is more literary/imaginative than sci-
 22 entific; it is the sense of wonder that the built environment can confer upon us if,
 23 that is, we are open to looking beyond its harsh utilitarian surfaces. It also serves
 24 as warning that the rationalization of city spaces, in any era, can also be tied up
 25 with ideas of surveillance and control.

26 *The situationists*

27
 28
 29 The notion of psychogeography begins to take shape more formally with the emer-
 30 gence of the Situationist International. The situationists drew inspiration from the
 31 ideas of the surrealists, not least the 'sense of a world hidden beneath the commer-
 32 cial banality of the city' (Jordan 2016: n.pag.). While a critical perspective had been
 33 important to the surrealists, the situationists more formally embraced a revisionist
 34 Marxism, situating themselves as part of a critical tradition that has in its sights the
 35 dislocating and alienating effects of both modern life and capitalism. Guy Debord
 36 (2005), a key figure in the movement, wrote about the 'society of the spectacle'.
 37 Such a society had normalized a set of surface appearances that informed all social
 38 life and from which it was difficult to achieve any kind of critical distance (Jenks
 39 1995). However, he also acknowledged the possibility that our environment can
 40 impact upon us in very real but also subjective ways: 'Psychogeography could set

_____ 1 for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical envir-
_____ 2 onment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individ-
_____ 3 uals' (Debord, cited in Coverley 2010: 88–9).

_____ 4 Such ideas about the city raise the question of agency: what an individual
_____ 5 can do to overcome or resist its strictures and structures and their effects upon
_____ 6 consciousness. Here, the idea of walking occupies a privileged position in the
_____ 7 psychogeographic strategic arsenal. This is to attribute far greater signifi-
_____ 8 cance to the activity than simply getting from A to B or just going for a stroll.
_____ 9 Continuing the work of the surrealists, Debord developed the idea of 'the
_____ 10 derive' by deliberately introducing the notion of chance or disorder into the
_____ 11 urban activity of walking. Derives, he wrote, involved 'playfulconstructive
_____ 12 behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite
_____ 13 different from the classic notions of journey or stroll' (Debord 2006: 62).
_____ 14 This was a deliberate assault on the rationality of the Cartesian prescription
_____ 15 to 'always walk in as straight a line as possible' (Descartes 1998: 14). There
_____ 16 was also something mildly shamanistic or spiritual about this process: get-
_____ 17 ting in touch with and penetrating one's environment in a way not normally
_____ 18 possible. In a sense then, employing such tactics was deemed a deliberate
_____ 19 strategy to reclaim lost individuality and to frustrate the very rationality of
_____ 20 the urban. This meant mapping it in an entirely different way with refer-
_____ 21 ence to a fresh set of coordinates. In essence then, walking is about looking
_____ 22 to uncover something else; this can only be achieved by traversing the city-
_____ 23 scape in a disinterested way. It also hints at a kind of connectivity or totality
_____ 24 between walker and landscape that a normal map cannot capture. As Jenks
_____ 25 (1995: 154) notes:

_____ 26
_____ 27 The city begins, without fantasy or exaggeration, to take on the characteristics of
_____ 28 a map of the mind. The legend of such a mental map highlights projections and
_____ 29 repressions in the form of 'go' and 'no-go' space. These positive and negative loca-
_____ 30 tional responses claim, in their turn, as deep a symbolic significance in the orienta-
_____ 31 tion of space as do the binary moral arbiters of 'purity' and 'danger' or the 'sacred'
_____ 32 and the 'profane' in relation to the organisation of conduct. Such an understanding
_____ 33 propels the *flâneur* towards an investigation of the exclusions and invitations that
_____ 34 the city (as indeed the state of [post] modernity) seems to present.
_____ 35

_____ 36 To explore the city then in this way alludes to a covalence or unity between city
_____ 37 and mind. The city mirrors the contradictions of the human psyche together
_____ 38 with the way in which we symbolically order our lives. Within such a reading or
_____ 39 mapping, the city is always much more than just a set of coordinates. There are
_____ 40 similarities here with the way in which structuralism alludes to 'myth' in a very

Freudian way in terms of the unconscious mind, as a working out of conflicts in the human psyche.

This significance of walking is worth developing with reference to the work of Michel de Certeau. He argued that the city, in a Foucauldian sense, was complicit as part of a wider set of disciplinary power structures or a micro-physics of power to which the individual is subjected. For de Certeau, walking became an act of protest, a creative means of shrugging off the effects of spaces that were designed to impose power upon, scrutinize and contain the individual. As Jordan (2016: n.pag.) notes:

De Certeau was explicit in understanding his 'itineraries' as transgressive forays across what he saw as an oppressive and hegemonic 'urbanistic system'. The city was an extension of socio-cultural power structures, a vast system for the regulation of its citizens. The walk was therefore an opportunity to create a 'network of an antidiscipline', de Certeau stating that his book was merely showcasing the tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'.

De Certeau explains this idea via his distinction between voyeur and walker. Within this dichotomy, and with particular reference to New York, the city offers contrasting experiences. Here, height becomes reminiscent of Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*, where control over the city is exercised over a mass of workers by a small elite who live high above street level. Walking in this context, in contrast to voyeurism,

emphasises the democratic importance of the street-level perspective to be gained from walking the city and reconnecting with individual life. In the light of this distinction it is clear how the simple act of walking can take on a subversive hue, abolishing the distancing and voyeuristic perspective of those who view the city from above. For the totalising gaze of the voyeur, who sees the city as a homogenous whole, encompasses an anonymous urban space that sees no place for individual or separate identities and which erases or suppresses the personal and the local.

(Coverley 2012: 32–33)

Like Debord, de Certeau sees walking as both productive and performative. Pushing this metaphor even further, he suggests that the city was analogous to speech (de Certeau 1984: 98). Rebecca Solnit (2001: 347–48) develops this point, warning that 'if the city is a language spoken by walkers, then a post-pedestrian city not only has fallen silent but risks becoming a dead language, one whose colloquial phrases, jokes, and curses will vanish, even if its formal grammar survives'.

These different views of the city are linked by the idea that the human environment and subjectivities are dialogic. If speech in this context becomes constrained then its limitation is caused by particular imperatives that condition the modern age: 'The rationalist grid, so favored by modernist urban planners, enforced an instrumental rationality that was based on increasing both productivity and consumption. Creativity and individuality were replaced by and for the capitalist state' (Shortell and Brown 2014: 4).

In his discussion of globalization Zygmunt Bauman (1998) suggests that the two stages of modernity (modernity and then postmodernity) are both characterized by production and consumption. However, consumption in this latter context 'is linked not only to a global system of production, but also is the result of time-compressing technology' (Shortell and Brown 2014: 4). Rather presciently Baumann (1998: 81–82) remarks:

That all consumption takes time is in fact the bane of consumer society – and a major worry for the merchandisers of consumer goods. There is a natural resonance between the spectacular career of the 'now', brought about by time-compressing technology, and the logic of consumer-oriented economy.

He goes on to suggest that 'the needed time-reduction is best achieved if consumers cannot hold their attention or focus their desire on any object for long; if they are impatient, impetuous and restive, and above all easily excitable and equally easily losing interest' (Bauman 1998: 81–82). These observations generate questions about how the modern city might be different and, in particular, the ways in which the imperatives of a consumer society in turn impact on the way the urban environment is planned and inhabited. Indeed, when we factor in how data, the product of continuous surveillance, is now a commodity, sold precisely with a view to providing in-depth predictions about our routes and routines, we begin to understand why Google introduced the term 'for-profit city' (Zuboff 2019: 435). As Han (2017: 21) notes, 'persons are being positivized into things, which can be quantified, measured and steered'. It is for this reason that walking holds such significance in modern psychogeography.

Psychogeography (Iain Sinclair)

Most modern psychogeographic writing is concerned with place, history, walking and the possibility of presences that cannot always be rationally accounted for. In what follows I attempt to give the reader a brief sketch of what has become a broad field and that for some writers has become too generalized. When I first

interviewed him back in 2013, Iain Sinclair was keen to emphasize that the subversive, anti-capitalist nature of the psychogeographic movement had partially been lost: ‘There is a hardcore term of essential meaning which has now dissolved into a generic thing that has to do with pretty much anything to do with walking, cities, concepts of geography/space’ (Sinclair 2013: n.pag.). In a later exchange of e-mails he remarked that he was weary of the demands of the ‘burgeoning field of psychogeography which seems to have moved from a lazy mainstream brand to an academic discipline. When, if it goes anywhere, it should try to reclaim its subversive roots’ (Sinclair 2020: n.pag.). With this in mind, my own overview seeks to focus upon the subversive potential of psychogeography. This is a recurring theme that goes back as far as William Blake. As Coverley (2010: 41, 42) notes:

Blake remaps the city as he walks its streets but, if the city is to be rebuilt as Jerusalem, then it must first be destroyed and his poems abound with apocalyptic imagery that is shaped, not merely by an anti-rationalism and anti-materialism, but also by a strong sense of political radicalism that stands in opposition to authority of every kind.

Sinclair’s work forms part of this legacy; a through-line connecting Blake, Baudelaire, Surrealism, the situationists and modern psychogeography. His work foregrounds particular elements that might be used to critically remap the city and mitigate against the tyranny of rationality. This contributes to a strongly political critique of the contemporary London landscape based at least in part on the idea that it is the city’s imperfections that go to triggering the form of ‘possession’ that he describes in what follows. His work makes many references to the ways in which commercial imperatives have exerted a topographical pull on the landscape. In what follows I want to briefly locate Sinclair within the tradition of psychogeographic writing before offering my own personalized vision of Burgess Park.

More walking

As I have already indicated above, walking has been a critical element to the situationists and psychogeography. For Sinclair too, this is an essential part of his writing process. In an interview with the *Fortean Times* in 2001, Sinclair described the method of his historio-psychological approach to documenting London:

The way I work, it’s largely coming from place, my system has always been to meditate on certain areas or structures, then to visit them and walk about until I get into some kind of slightly mediumistic contact with the story. If it’s going to work you

find that your intuitions are usually pretty good [...] It is a form of mild possession when it works and the care comes in revising it. But certainly that's how it operates. (Sinclair 2001: n.pag.)

This emphasis on walking suggests a kind of active dialogue or compact with the past, via the retelling and curation of stories and history: 'Only when we walk with no agenda does the past return' (Sinclair 2018a: 44). It also stresses the defining nature of the environment we make to live in and how our relationship with it is contingent, organic and mutually constitutive:

I had my own defensive magic in place, the routine of walking unresolved problems out into the city, eavesdropping on random incidents, forcing connections, and carrying annotations and photographs back to the house in which I had lived for fifty years. If we are to sustain a relationship with the buildings that precede us, we must solicit their tolerance of our intrusion. Structures ripped down leave a cloud of active dust. New builds are hungry for narrative. When that equation falters, we sicken, and search for scapegoats among the developers and architects. But the buildings and their interior spaces, bedrooms, corridors, kitchens, become evolving self-portraits, visions of how we see our better selves. Working or resting, we shape who we are, and are shaped, in exchange, by the walls that contain us. Some of the older tribes on this earth, indigenous peoples able to convert time into space, flow with the seasons, with their seminal rivers. Shelters are made and abandoned. Ancestors are always in attendance.

(Sinclair 2019: 25)

Buildings then offer powerful reminders of the lives of those who have gone before, they signify absence, disappearance, but most importantly they confer narrative upon place. The advertisements for new blocks of flats that appear online often attempt to tap into the energy that Sinclair alludes to, the 'active dust' of the past. In some instances, especially converted buildings, like the ex-headquarters of the London Fire Brigade or the gas holders at Kings Cross, the city's industrial past becomes integrated into the lived experience of these dwellings, creating a version of Auge's 'non-place'. However, two-bedroom flats in these blocks are beyond the reach of most Londoners forming part of a broader global narrative of exclusivity. As Jonathan Raban (2008) notes:

The densely populated inner-urban honeycomb – what Henry James, writing of London, once called 'the most complete compendium in the world' – has become so expensively reconstructed, so tarted up, that only people with a merchant banker's income will soon be able to live there, outside of the steadily diminishing supply of low-rent public housing.

The irrational

Sinclair's work has been described as 'occult psychogeography' and it is useful to unpack this term a little and consider why his alternative perception of the city might be of importance. The above quotation suggests that architecture is both defining and ephemeral; buildings remind us of the lives of those who have inhabited them (the ancestors), that we are merely passing through spaces and structures that will easily outlive us. Underlying this is a collective presence made visible by traces of the past, which reveal that which is hidden. This occult dimension is expressed using a vocabulary of analogous terms that allude to a kind of unseen historical continuity – spectral, haunting, ghosts and revenants. As Bond (2005: 17–18) remarks, 'Sinclair's interest in occultism, for instance, indicates his concern with the irrationality which is buried away in the nooks and crannies'. It is precisely this contingent aspect of the city that requires a particular methodology in order to reveal its secrets. As Wolfreys (1998: 140) notes, the 'psychogeography which Sinclair traces raises spectres which are always already there, revenants of the city, endlessly recalled through walking, memory and writing'. This goes some way to explaining Sinclair's role as shaman or medium: connecting with place by means of a particular, immersive process. Such a methodology responds to a city where the irrational rationality of capitalism necessitates what Adorno had identified critically as an occultism, 'a second mythology or reborn animism' (Bond 2005: 18). This is not a literal reference to headless Tudors or floating white sheets, but rather an openness to particular presences and forces that do not normally register as part of the city experience. In this context, 'to be haunted by a phantom is to remember something you've never lived through; for memory is the past which has never taken the form of presence' (Derrida cited in Wolfreys 1998: 149). Haunting here then is a reference to the effect of all those elements (histories, stories, forgotten lives) that can be uncovered via a psychogeographic mode of enquiry. The significance of this type of experience resides in its potential to disrupt or provide contradictory experiences of the city. As Wolfrey (1998: 139) notes: 'Ghosts return to disturb the idea of structure. To understand the city is to acknowledge a form of haunting, its being-spectral'. Here, a focus upon 'occultist irrationality' in Sinclair's work enables him to marshal these processes as part of an anti-capitalist critique. So, there is an added significance to Sinclair's interaction with the city, one that seeks to criticize the political or structural forces involved in reshaping the landscape but with reference to the past.

For Sinclair, the landscape of modern utopianism is largely to be strenuously resisted, especially the notion of 'the grand project'; most famously the 2012 Olympic site at Stratford. Registering that resistance can involve negotiating

space in different ways. In *Ghost Milk* (2011), Sinclair documents his own history of Stratford Park, stalking the blue exclusionary fence that surrounded the Olympic site; trespassing when possible. A slightly different tactic involves the remapping and reimagining of space. This is not to glibly accept the stark logic of the map with its accuracy and measured certainty. Rather, it involves writing one's own shapes and structures on to the map in order to tease out the occult. In *Lights Out for the Territory* (2003), Sinclair imposes a triangle on London comprising the coordinates of Charlton, Chingford Mount and Abney Park. The territory is not read using a map but rather by collecting graffiti en route. In an earlier work (*Lud Heat*) Sinclair (2012) uses the locations of Hawksmoor London churches, imposing two triangles into the form of a pentagram on to a map of London. This is an attempt to uncover something more psychic, providing a resonance with a lingering doubt over the architect's rumoured occult sympathies. Bond (2005) remarks that these, perhaps playful, surrealistic gestures can be understood as a sacralization of place or a means of reenchanting the landscape. When I interviewed him in 2013 I asked Sinclair about the significance of triangulation:

ME: What is the essence of the triangulation?

SINCLAIR: I don't know that there is any logical explanation [...] it's a subjective feeling, putting shapes on to maps [...] I mentioned the triangle, shaping triangular things to make a narrative between three points. The point of *Lights Out for the Territory* was a decision to actually walk it, in that version of psychogeography rather than, as earlier, perhaps just looking at maps and working things out: physically to do these things and in that case was recording lines of graffiti, beginning to feel that you could read the city by how the graffiti changed, which it dramatically did over the course of that geography.

A complementary tactic to walking, triangulation forms part of Sinclair's process; a means of accessing the city's occult energies and facilitating an alternative interpretive framework.

A changing London

Important to this chapter, and psychogeography more generally, is a sense that London has changed in the current era; that history speaks to a certain continuity, unity or defining essence that is under threat. Other writers have expressed a similar sentiment:

1 In journeying about the capital, of London's rich antiquity, it is possible, surely, to
 2 believe that we have, in quite recent times, entered a phase which is completely new.
 3 The history is there, hidden like the lost rivers, but in all effective senses it has been
 4 obliterated by what London in the last half century has done to itself.

(Wilson 2005: 9)

7 Andrew Wilson (2005) further develops this point with reference to another
 8 aspect of London's uniqueness. Here, he talks about the first great historian
 9 of London, John Stow (1525–1605), remarking that 'he saw London as being
 10 steadily wrecked by overpopulation, overbuilding, and the greed of developers,
 11 city men, and speculators' (Wilson 2005: 27). The suggestion here is that history
 12 evidences an ongoing tension between a planned and an unplanned London: 'one
 13 of the characteristics of London has always been its degree of architectural
 14 anarchy, the fact that it has never submitted itself to a single overall plan or
 15 planner' (Wilson 2005: 35). Wilson's remarks are useful here as they allude to
 16 a sense of disorder and that London's specialness is routed in a history that has
 17 been characteristically organic and contingent. Plans to submit London to some
 18 kind of rational order or unique vision (as in say Paris or Vienna) are deemed to
 19 have failed here. Such a landscape is critical to the psychogeographic approach;
 20 it is resistant to rationalization and the threat that this poses to the layers of
 21 history that do and should define it. In the same way that surrealists sought to
 22 uncover the marvellous, there is a sense that urban life too offers a way in or pas-
 23 sage to something magical and occulted. Such an idea has remained important
 24 to psychogeography. In relation to this, Coverley (2010: 18) notes the influence
 25 of author Arthur Machen:

27 Machen [Arthur] extends De Quincey's role as urban wanderer, his explor-
 28 ations of the city's outer limits positioning him as a direct influence upon con-
 29 temporary psychogeographers such as Iain Sinclair. Machen once again seeks
 30 out the strange and otherworldly within our midst – a single street, event or
 31 object capable of transforming the most mundane surroundings into some-
 32 thing strange or sinister, revealing that point of access, called the Northwest
 33 Passage by De Quincey, which provides an unexpected shortcut to the magical
 34 realm behind our own.

36 Having lived in London for close to 40 years I too have witnessed a shift. To cycle
 37 and walk the city on a regular basis (as I do) is to be surprised by the ferocity of
 38 the processes at work. Here, the city has become 'planned' in the sense that it is
 39 guided and shaped by the jealous and relentless logic of global capitalism, most
 40 notably in relation to housing. As Atkinson (2020: 2) notes:

1 The psychology, economy, politics and deeper operating system of the city are run
 2 more and more for money, its reason for being in many ways forgotten and its vision
 3 of the future indifferent to the plight of many of its residents.

4
 5 Sinclair recognizes a dynamic at work that has taken the indigenous population
 6 unawares with a kind of tragic irony. Here, he suggests that the cityscape can be
 7 read through its graffiti:

8
 9 The world is turning fast: new-build canalside towers are purchased by Chinese
 10 investors while nice middle-income English couples become boat people in a parody
 11 of crowded, deck-to-deck Asian harbours and rivers. A new white stencil among the
 12 wall-tats on the towpath: SHOREDITCH IS THE REVENGE OF FU MANCHU.

(Sinclair 2018a: 31)

13
 14
 15 This is a vision of a London where the tables of British imperialism have been turned,
 16 where intergenerational injustice means that youngsters can no longer afford bricks
 17 and mortar and are forced to explore alternatives like the growing number of canal
 18 boats. Sinclair goes on to suggest that certain capital cities, most notably London,
 19 have become suburbs of the world: 'London is a suburb of everywhere: Mexico City,
 20 Istanbul, Athens. The same malls', a place within which we become transformed
 21 'into dumb tourists in our own midden' (Sinclair 2018a: 13). In this global landscape,

22
 23 one city is another city; all the places of a fugitive life and career are a single can-
 24 cerous cell. London is like that now, more a part of other expanded conurbations
 25 than of England: the real aliens are in Sunderland, Hull, Stoke-on-Trent [...] London
 26 was everywhere, but it had lost its soul.

(Sinclair 2018a: 6–7)

27
 28
 29 These 'alpha cities' (Atkinson 2020: 1) are homogenous and home to a global
 30 elite; a form of *Lebensraum* where space is set aside for those that can afford it.
 31 As Sinclair (2018a: 8) notes:

32
 33 Our cities are becoming electrified iceberg liners, islands from which the underclass
 34 can be excluded; liners serviced by zero-hour contracted serfs. In time, the floating
 35 cities will be the only safe places in which to patrol the world's oceans. Sealife: per-
 36 petual tourism. With cinemas, gyms, theatres, private hospitals and cycle lanes.

37
 38 Globalization, mobility and the international division of labour have then cre-
 39 ated an accompanying concierge class that, increasingly cannot afford to live in
 40 the centre of town.

Such an analysis might easily invoke a form of lazy bigotry, but it is important to recognize here that Sinclair's suburban analogy (or metonym) signals something more profound than nationality; it is a global capitalist class defined in terms of money, not necessarily racial or ethnic superiority, which is transforming London and the way it looks. In this way, London has become what Atkinson has described as an 'alpha city': 'Taken as a whole, this city, alongside a handful of others globally, is a key node in a global economy founded upon endless cycles of extraction and growth' (Atkinson 2020: 3).

My London (the emergence of non-places)

Drawing on my own experience and, as part of a psychogeographic commentary, I want to argue that what has disappeared from many parts of London is a sense of imperfection and, via this, a sense of the marvellous. We might even think of this in terms of seediness, the essential grit that helps form the gothic underside of any city. There is a particular dynamic at work here: after many years of mapping the strange and wonderful in London I repeatedly discover that the most seedy and gothic of London's sights eventually receive a makeover. Liz Wilson, in her book *The Sphinx and the City* (1991), references Claude Levi-Strauss's assertion that beauty in Latin American cities was a product of their wildness: 'extremes of wealth and poverty, of enjoyment and misery, made an essential contribution to this perception of the city. It was just those things that were shoddy and awful about city life that constituted its seduction, its peculiar beauty' (Wilson 1991: 5). Years after Jonathan Raban had published *Soft City* (1974), he reflected: 'My London was far seedier than it is now – an immense honeycomb of relatively inexpensive flats and bedsits, mostly contained by the perimeter of the Circle Line' (Raban 2008: n.pag.). It is precisely those aspects of ordinariness, disorder and imperfection that form the essence of psychogeographic enquiry.

A set of particular areas in London speak powerfully to a kind of flattening out: Covent Garden, the Thames/Canary Wharf, the South Bank, the Olympic site, Spitalfields, Borough Market, Brick Lane, Camden Market, Shoreditch, Arnold Circus, Bermondsey Street, Stoke Newington. I'm suggesting here that these have become 'non-places'. I use Auge's term with a degree of licence here: the spaces he cites are airports and shopping malls, places no longer characterized as 'anthropological' (Auge 2008). Non-places, he suggests, are disconnected with identity; all that remains is some gesture to the past: a name perhaps, often prominently displayed historical photographs. They do not integrate what precedes them: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory' and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position' (Auge 2008: 63) (Figure 1).

Like Auge's non-place, the areas I list above impose a kind of transience upon us – our licence to be there rests upon the understanding that we are passing through or there to consume. A visit to Camden Lock shows much of the original architecture to still be intact: the remnants of a goods yard, stables and its gin industry. However, what has often happened here is a kind of hollowing out of the buildings: empty signifiers stripped of their historical intestines. The real identity of London's 'markets' and other sites is consigned to 'memory': the unappealing offal, grime, shit and industry safely gone, often moved out of the town centre to be replaced by sanitized consumer-facing retail units. In this way, Borough Market, once a source of food for its locale, has been destroyed by the supermarket; now it is a reinvented 'Borough Market' an integral part of the tourist industry. Spitalfields market, which when I worked in Artillery Lane in the mid 1980s stank of rotting fruit and veg (like the original Covent Garden Market), has long gone. What replaces it are expensive boutiques and a flawless ambience of niceness: every detail is clearly worked out, every need anticipated. Sinclair (2018a: 179) captures this in typical style:



FIGURE 10.1: Temporary display window at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, Peckham, referencing the erstwhile Grand Surrey canal.

One afternoon I walked to Whitechapel to see if Stephen had been visiting his office. But Whitechapel was no longer there. The whole sweep on the south side of the Spitalfields Market, apart from a tragic façade propped up as a mocking quotation, was gone. Dust. Grit. You could taste it in your mouth all the way back to Hanbury Street. And without the brewery to wash away the hurt. Heritage tourists, style scavengers and city overspill occupied the narrow pavements in puddles of noise and whelping chatter. The concrete slab of the multi-storey car park built over the site of the final Ripper murder in White's Row was a nightmare eddy of oil and filth. But this view across the open ground, towards Hawksmoor's Christ Church, had not been available in generations. And would soon be obliterated by the latest thrust of aspirational towers. Already the field of rubble was enclosed with a green fence suitable for CGI promises and upbeat slogans. Toynbee Hall was part of the outwash, a pit, a destructive upgrade.

Here, the Truman brewery no longer produces beer – the smell of malt and hops has gone; Brick Lane is infused with the aroma of every possible kind of food the world has to offer mixed in with the acrid whiff of skunk. All of these areas have been recolonized by 'beards, the barista shamen, vegan pubs and discriminating archaeologists of vinyl' (Sinclair 2019:113). A seedy multi-storey car park has been flattened offering a temporary tantalizing glimpse of Hawksmoor's church while the dosshouse opposite it on White's Row has been converted into prime student accommodation.

A slightly more literal rendition of non-place can be seen in Sinclair's account of taking a swim at London's 'Shard'. Here, Auge's idea that identity must be rigorously performed and checked is made clear:

I swam at the golden hour. There were softly-spoken barriers and checkpoints at every stage of my ascent towards the high pool. You come off the street, away from the fumes of stalled buses, the repressed waves of anger and frustration, and into this otherness of uniformed security that is both courteous and judgemental. You are bowed through to the metal cabinet where inappropriate baggage is checked for explosives. At the reception desk, thirty-four floors up, you must present your passport. The right credit status, the digital information that moves you to the new level, is never accessible on screen. The induction process acts like a Zen filter, fine-tuning anxiety and inoculating the unwary before the next stage of enlightenment in this attempt at a Tibetan lamasery out of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*. A copy of Hilton's 1933 romance, newly printed in Singapore and cased in a leather binder, is left beside every king-size bed.

(Sinclair 2018a: 145)

1 The significance of this privileged and rarefied part of London resonates with Fritz
 2 Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and H. G. Wells's 'Eloi' and 'Morlocks', a literal and spa-
 3 tial layering produced by the new global class system; buildings as lived metonyms
 4 for inequality. De Certeau's distinction between voyeur and walker is increasingly
 5 written into London's high-rise architecture. Here, Sinclair (2018a: 145) notes that
 6 of all the sites owned by Chinese investors (the majority of which remain empty),
 7 the Shard, 'with its easy access to the Thames and the major heritage sites', is a
 8 preferred location. In this version of London he boldly asserts that we are the tour-
 9 ists. As a final remark on this he jokingly ruminates on the possibility 'that hard-
 10 core Maoist cadres have chosen to destroy capitalism from the inside, by buying
 11 London and leaving it empty' (Sinclair 2018a: 145).

Burgess Park

Discovery

18 It was some twenty years ago that I stumbled upon Burgess Park (Figure 2). I say
 19 stumbled upon because I set great store by the idea of discovering things on my
 20 own terms. Such an approach acknowledges that the experience of place can be
 21 conditioned by the notion of chance rather than in terms of it being a destination.
 22 Looking to escape the confines of Camberwell, where I lived at the time, I would
 23 often walk from my home with no firm plan or route in mind; if something caught
 24 my eye in the distance I would walk towards it – a kind of gentle, unpressured
 25 'derive'. I quickly found that certain areas would compel me to return. In this way
 26 I became intrigued by an irregular-shaped piece of greenery that appeared just off
 27 the Old Kent Road: Burgess Park. There was something unusual or quirky about
 28 the space that I couldn't put my finger on: the road I took (Trafalgar Avenue)
 29 bisected the park creating a separate strip of land that disappeared in the direction
 30 of Peckham town centre (see Figure 2). Tracing this odd corridor on a later walk
 31 took me under two elegant Victorian bridges before it terminated opposite Rye
 32 Lane and the erstwhile Jones and Higgins department store (Figure 3).

33 I was later to learn that this was the waterless remains of the Peckham branch
 34 of the Grand Surrey canal. On a subsequent trip to Postman's Park in the city of
 35 London, a place where the unsung heroes of the city are celebrated, I discovered
 36 that 'Richard Farris, labourer, was drowned in attempting to save a poor girl who
 37 had thrown herself into the canal at Globe Bridge Peckham May 20, 1878' (Fig-
 38 ures 4 and 5).

39 Typically, the long walk from Camberwell would end in a small cafe that
 40 formed part of Chumleigh Gardens; the lady who ran it was a jazz aficionado

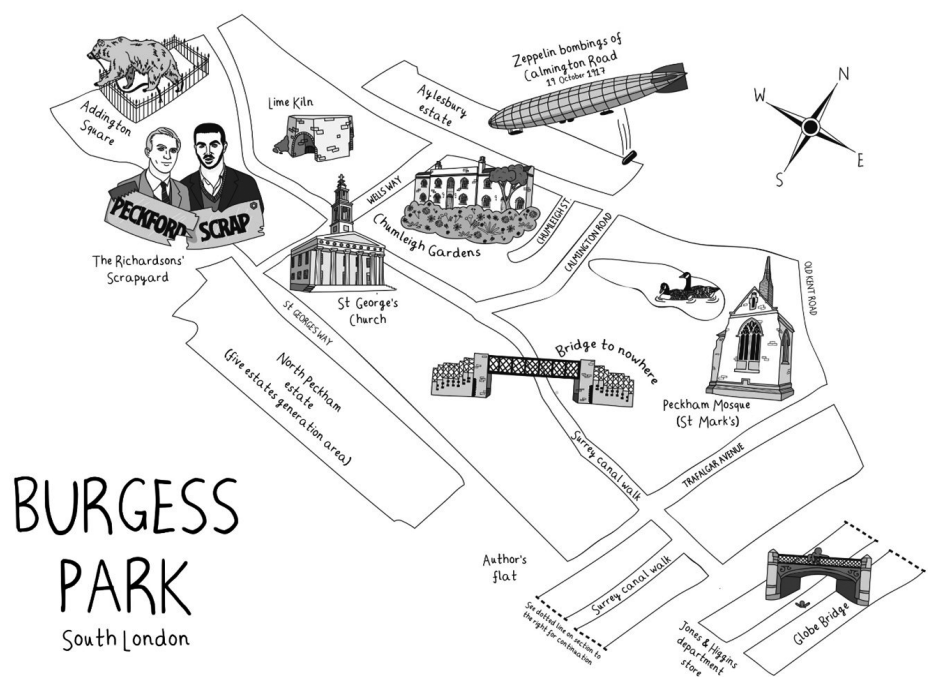


FIGURE 10.2: Burgess Park – a psychogeographic map. Credit: Sinead McDonnell.



FIGURE 10.3: Faded glory of the Jones and Higgins department store.



FIGURE 10.4: Globe Bridge.

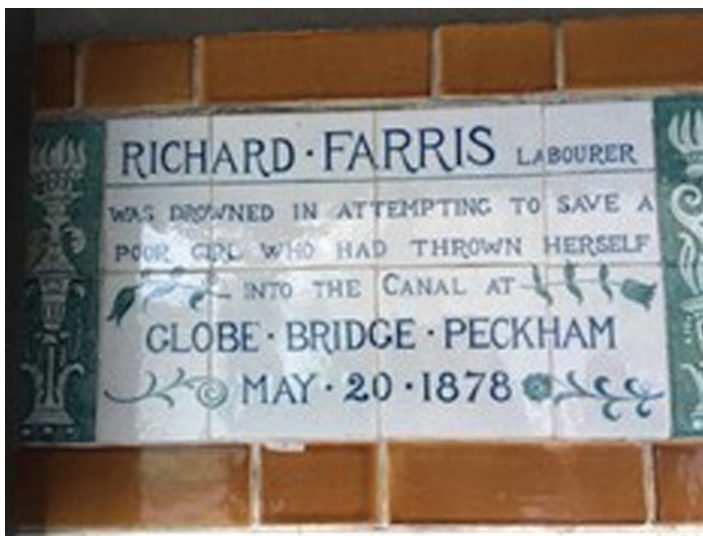


FIGURE 10.5: Tribute to Richard Farris, Postman's Park, London EC1.

who would occasionally put on Sunday gigs. The walled gardens were an oasis, the perfect spot to take a book and laze away an afternoon. This small collection of almshouses, a female asylum originally, seemed somehow widowed in the large green expanse of the park. In 2006, and partly because the area appealed, I bought

a flat on the edge of the park on Sumner Road, which afforded me great views of the park and northwards across the city (Figure 6).

Having moved to Peckham I would regularly explore the park and began to learn more about its history. Walks home from work would involve deliberately choosing alternative routes across the space. From my north-facing balcony I would pick out local landmarks and see if I could locate them. Prominent local architecture, especially churches, become a source of wonder and fascination. I began to map these out: St George's on Wells Way (1824, Francis Bedford), St Peter's in Walworth (1823, John Soane), St Mark's, Camberwell (Norman Shaw, 1879), St James's in Bermondsey (1829, James Savage) and, further afield, St George's in the East (1729, Nicholas Hawksmoor) and St Anne's Poplar (1730, Nicholas Hawksmoor). Aside from walking, cycling would take me further afield, finding alternative passages out of London via the Grand Union canal, New River and River Lea.

Although I had no knowledge of psychogeography initially, my visits to certain places would produce a certain resonance; I would imagine this as some kind of atavistic energy, pretending that my current form was a reincarnation of sorts, a presence that embodied or referenced past lives. Rupert Sheldrake has written about the idea of morphic resonance, a term born out of what he describes as the science delusion: a disjuncture between science as a method of enquiry and methodology and then science as belief system, world-view or cosmology. It describes the possibility that knowledge and familiarity can be transferred diachronically



FIGURE 10.6: The author's home: Galleria Court, Peckham.

within different species in ways that scientifically cannot be explained: 'It need not be attenuated by either spatial or temporal separation between similar systems; it could be just as effective over 10,000 miles as over an inch, and over a century as over an hour' (Sheldrake 2009: 86). This is a concept that emerges from science, although I want to suggest here that it is consistent with a number of psychogeographic tropes: ley lines, lines of force, genius loci and spectrality. These all have to do with acknowledging the possibility of seemingly uncanny, gothic or irrational forces and connections that shape our conscious experience of place. While my perceptions may not be an example of morphic resonance they do signal a certain suspension of disbelief that is important to psychogeography. This concerns our subjective and emotional responses to the city environment: how it makes you feel, why certain areas can attract or fascinate at a visceral level. To explore this more fully requires an openness to place that embraces the unscientific; a range of concepts that deal with what might be unseen or occulted.

The ancestral connection

For me the appeal of Burgess Park was its 'otherness': it wasn't like most of its London counterparts. Yes, there was a lake, but no evidence of Victorian civic pride in the form of wrought iron bandstands or statues of prominent local figures; it seemed to comprise a myriad number of disconnected vistas. Many of the park's structures were unusual: there was a seemingly superfluous bridge over a central pathway, redundant roads and curbing (Figures 7 and 8).

These elements evinced a strange poetics: a certain level of disorder, chaos and irrationality, evidence of what Tim Charlesworth would mournfully refer to as 'the lost city of Burgess Park' (Friends of Burgess Park 2015). My exploration of the local area and its history coincided with another personal project: tracing my family ancestry. The two activities began to intersect in unexpected ways. If I explain to the reader that my name (Sledmere) is rare then the significance of what follows becomes clearer. The family derives originally from an eponymous village in Driffield in Yorkshire and latterly York. In the nineteenth century an exodus took place with one branch of the family (headed up by Thomas Sledmere) relocating to the East End of London and then drifting over to the more respectable North London. Extensive research in York suggested that the migration south was the product of a particular Victorian epoch of poverty that lasted from the 1840s to the 1870s, the result of an experiment in free-market economics known as the great transformation (Gray 1998: 5). On tracing the family lineage online I was surprised to learn that an Alfred Harry Sydney Sledmere had been married to Sarah at St Peter's (see above), his child Charlotte had been baptized at St George's



FIGURE 10.7: The bridge to 'nowhere'.



FIGURE 10.8: The bridge to 'nowhere'.

and she had, in turn married at St Mark's. This discovery accentuated the magnetic pull that the area already exerted over me; there was a strange sense of connection, a confirmation of something more visceral generated by the thought of tracing my ancestor's footsteps; a morphic resonance possibly (Figures 9 and 10).



FIGURE 10.9: St George's Church.

These kinds of discovery are manna to the psychogeographer who seeks to bring together disparate elements as part of the effort to get in touch with an area. It provides Sinclair's 'active dust' a serendipitous moment of continuity between past and present. To seek out and discover these Sledmeres is to conjure up something spectral that helps provide 'an indissoluble marriage with place' (Sinclair 2003: 208). To develop this idea, I want to reference Derrida's (1994: 10) notion of hauntology. This draws upon Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where the presence of a ghost (Hamlet's father) evidences the way in which the natural order of things has been disrupted by the murder of his father, the king. Derrida uses Hamlet's assertion that 'the time is out of joint' (Shakespeare cited in Derrida 1994: 25) to signify 'the breaking down of delineations between past, present and future time' (Shaw 2018: 7). He then uses this to emphasize the spectral nature of Marx's work. The main thrust of this is to provoke a discussion about the failures of communism and how capitalism had emerged in a temporally inevitable way due to its perfectibility. This 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992) orthodoxy presents several fixed ideological or ontological ideas to which Derrida aims to provide a fresh theoretical response. Derrida suggests that the logic of the spectre can function to disrupt all oppositions, between the sensible and the insensible, the visible and the invisible. It mounts a challenge to the 'now' and the notions of progress that attach to capitalism. Shaw (2018: 2) notes that 'hauntology gestures toward the "agency of the virtual"', since the spectre is not of the here and now, yet is capable of exercising a spectral causality over the living'. The spectral in this context functions as



FIGURE 10.10: St Mark's Church.

a metaphor and describes a particular kind of encounter that can facilitate 'new ways of thinking about the past, present and future' (Shaw 2018: 5). Haunting then becomes a means of interrogating 'modern forms of dispossession, exploitation, repression, and their concrete impacts on the people most affected by them and on our shared conditions of living' (Gordon cited in Shaw 2018: 12–13).

Pursuing this hauntological motif, I want to suggest that Alfred, Sarah and Charlotte Sledmere are revenants: not alive certainly but also not completely dead. Having spent many hours online pouring over birth, marriage and death certificates the ancestral becomes spectral. Treading the same hallowed ground, imagining the lives of Alfred, Sarah and Charlotte is, I suggest, a form of haunting.

The information about these characters is there to be had but, in a very Derridean fashion, it is marginal, surfacing and returning only via the digital affordances of Ancestry.com. The narrative provided here is partial but evocative; like most of my female ancestors (dressmakers, glove sewers, seamstresses), Charlotte and Sarah work with their hands. Alfred, an ex-army policeman, disappears to the United States but Sarah describes herself as 'widowed' in the 1911 census; a compelling narrative emerges, a future project perhaps. The little I can gather in my dialogue with these ghosts suggests a working-class existence, part of a healthy vibrant community. Here it is tempting to conclude that the park was born out of necessary post-war slum clearances. However, in his account of the space, Tim Charlesworth makes it quite clear that this was not the case (Charlesworth 2000a: 26–27). Moreover, comments on the 'I Grew Up in Peckham' Facebook page sound a notable lament concerning the loss of housing and forced migration out of the area. In hauntological terms there is a sense in which these narratives of displacement resonate with the more recent processes of gentrification that too have forced local working-class people out of the area (Figure 11).

Burgess Park: a brief history

The history of the park is unusual; unlike most London parks, which have been carefully planned, Burgess park is something of an afterthought. A glance at a



FIGURE 10.11: All that remains of Chumleigh Street (residence of Sarah and Charlotte Sledmere at the time of the 1911 census).

map from 1864 or aerial shots from the 1930s show the entire area to be covered with houses and streets; so what happened? By the end of the Second World War significant parts of the area had been destroyed by bombing and, as part of the Abercrombie plan (formulated in 1943), the decision was taken to create a large brownfield park – ‘a St James of the south’. The post-war landscape of South London was, like much of London, heavily industrialized, with factories in close proximity to residences. The evolution of this landscape had been largely unplanned and organic. Burgess Park was no exception and included ‘Sun Pat’ peanuts and R. Whites Lemonade among its industries (Charlesworth 2000a: 21–22). The Abercrombie plan prioritized the idea of improving urban living via the creation of neighbourhood zones, which would include access to parks. Where necessary, overpopulation and slum living would be tackled by the building of new towns just outside of London and by moving industry away from the centre. Traces of Burgess Park’s industrial past can be found in a variety of buildings and chimneys that still survive close by. The creation of the park addressed many of the prerogatives I have just described; a process of only very gradual, piecemeal change ensued for some years mainly due to a lack of funding. The recent master plan, and that I discuss below, addressed many of these perceived shortfalls.

From the outset, Burgess Park was considered an unsafe space (Charlesworth 2000b) – the unusual layout and lack of lighting rendered it a no-go area after dark. It is characteristic of psychogeographic writing to foreground this gothic underside of urban life often in conjunction with fictional representations that connect in some way with the area. In Daniel Barber’s *Harry Brown* (2009), Michael Caine features as an ex-marine who looks to take on local crime in the ‘Death Wish’ vigilante tradition. The film’s opening scene portrays a couple of drugged-up ‘yoots’ on a motorcycle exiting the Aylesbury Estate on to Burgess Park. For pleasure they terrorize and then shoot a mother taking her child across the park. The film references this and other wanton acts of cruelty in its portrayal of a dystopian South London estate. Later research online highlighted an uncanny resonance with real-life gangland activities in the area. In the 1960s, alongside the feared Kray twins, a South London crew had emerged in the form of the Richardson brothers Eddie and Charlie. Operating from Peckford Metals, a scrapyard in New Church street (see Figure 2), the gang, which included ‘Mad’ Frankie Fraser,¹ became notorious for torturing anyone who stood in their way. Victims were subjected to a variety of punishments including electric shocks, the removal of teeth with pliers and being nailed to the floor. Charlie Richardson was sent down for 25 years in 1966 after a jury was convinced that he had indeed tortured his victims (McVicar 2012). Peckford Scrap Metal is no longer there, in its place a dull block of modern flats. Nearby at 33 Addington square, Charlie and Eddie ran a private drinking club where they kept two dancing bears that escaped into Camberwell one night

(Friends of Burgess Park n.d.). It is hard to walk the parameter of the park and not imagine either the screams of the Richardsons' victims or the reaction of Camberwell residents at the medieval sight of a dancing bear.

Burgess Park and gentrification

Burgess Park forms part of a larger area that has and continues to exert an influence on the park's evolution. I want to suggest here that the characteristics of the park are entirely sympathetic to and reflective of changes to its immediate surroundings.² Inspired by the Ville Radieuse and Corbusian ideas of a modernist utopia, planners in London set out to transform the city as part of a radical housing initiative. From the early 1960s to the mid 1970s a variety of estates were built in the borough of Southwark, two of which border on to Burgess Park: the North Peckham Estate and the Aylesbury Estate. The former was considered a success initially although by the 1980s it had earned a reputation necessitating a substantial makeover in the 1990s. The Aylesbury Estate, like the nearby Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle, is in the process of being redeveloped. Loretta Lees and Hannah White (2019) have argued that these evidence a broader set of neo-liberal imperatives. They have led to 'large-scale dispossessions due to the gentrification of council estates, what Elmer and Denning (2016) have called 'the London clearances' (Lees and White 2019). At the time of writing (2020), the Old Kent Road (on which is one of the main entrances to the park) is undergoing a planning consultation process that, if successful, will lead to a number of new high-rise blocks; initial plans referenced a block that was 44 storeys high. The model adopted here is one of allowing housing associations and private developers to assimilate responsibility for social housing by including a percentage of affordable homes. This in turn creates a tendency to build upwards in order to compensate for this condition. There appears to be little or no long-term considered assessment of the impact of such buildings. Julia Kollewe (2019: n.pag.) noted in *The Guardian* that 'there is no London-wide policy on tall buildings – councils decide whether they want them. Suburban Bromley has none, while Tower Hamlets, half the size, has plenty'. Moreover, council targets for the provision of new homes mean that there is considerable pressure on them to be supportive of such planning applications. Indeed, the relationship between council and large developers, like, Lendlease, has attracted considerable criticism (Novara Media 2013).

London often feels overcrowded although, in interviews with two Southwark councillors,³ it was pointed out to me that its density is comparatively low: that of Paris is about twice that of London (CRBE n.d.). However, Londoners know, from their daily commute, that much of it is already beyond capacity in terms of pollution and lacks the requisite transport infrastructure to keep growing its

population. It also overlooks both the historical lessons learned in the 1960s and 1970s about the efficacy of high-rise developments together with the need to build new towns. Amnesia in this regard is partly the product of the idea that increasing density and decreasing urban sprawl facilitate the possibility of the compact city. This is an idea often associated with Richard Rogers and laid out in his book/manifesto, *Cities for a Small Planet* (1997). I mention this here, in part because, as Neuman (2005: 11) notes, ‘recent attempts to halt sprawl and improve urban livability have been made by compact city, smart growth, healthy community, and new urbanist advocates’. Indeed, the notion of ‘smart’ is critical in arguing the case for compact cities that are justified on ideas of sustainability and other principles that underpin the ‘smart growth movement’. These include mixed usage, a variety of transport options, inclusive housing options and collaboration with the communities concerned. Critical here is the notion of discrete communities with a strong identity and where most facilities (and possibly work) are within walking distance.

The orthodoxy or feasibility of compact cities is predicated upon ideas of sustainability, which are difficult to define and implement (Neuman 2005). While the notion of smart is integral to the Mayor of London’s 2016 Plan this is something of a moving feast as different mayoral incumbents, serving varying political imperatives, produce different iterations of the plan. Previous versions, especially that delivered by Boris Johnson, have been criticized for their vagueness or ‘lack of bite’ (Holman 2010: 37). Here, there is a sense that the compact city and assumptions of sustainability that underpin it are by no means a given. It has been suggested that it ‘is by no means clear that the compact city is the best or only way forward’ (Jenks et al. 2005: 4). Neither is it a given that the compact city can achieve the kind of sustainability required. I mention this here largely because such a vision of the city relies on the notion of ‘smart’, a term that by no means offers a consistent or perfect vision. In his cautionary account of ‘radical technologies’ Adam Greenfield (2017: 55) warns against some of the assumptions that underpin the smart city and the idea it can be conditioned by ‘perfect knowledge’. This is to suggest that whatever knowledge or mastery can be achieved under a heading of smart, ‘there are and can be no Pareto-optimal solutions for any system as complex as a city’ (Greenfield 2017: 55). Commenting on the all-important ‘internet of things’, he adds that many of its manifestations ‘seem like an attempt to paper over the voids between us, or slap a quick technical patch on all the places where capital has left us unable to care for one another’ (Greenfield 2017: 60).

Alongside doubts about the efficacy of the compact city exist concerns about fairness and equality in relation to the regeneration plans of which they form a part. The example of the Heygate and other estates in London tend to suggest that inclusivity in the form of affordable housing features strongly in the rhetoric of

developers. However, critics are keen to accuse developers of profiteering while paying lip service to notions of equality when determining who can live on regenerated estates. Rather than automatically housing displaced residents from the Heygate Estate within the new development, the majority found themselves being decanted into other areas and even other parts of the country (Novara Media 2013, 2014). Southwark Council (2007) too seems complicit in terms of promoting exclusivity. Fred Manson, Southwark's former regeneration guru, famously declared that Elephant and Castle needed 'a better class of person' (Gann 2014). It was also hinted to me by Barratt Homes when purchasing my property that the council were looking to attract middle-class people into the area. While mixed-usage developments are intended to overcome potential ghettoization of city spaces, Niall Martin notes that neo-liberal urbanism tends towards the creation of two types of space. The first concerns shaping cities as global players that compete with their international counterparts for investment. The second are areas that are increasingly fragmented and populated by disenfranchised citizens and where public services suffer as money is redirected to entrepreneurial activities (Martin 2015: 145). Similarly, Atkinson (2020: 1–2) notes that 'the city's more or less unrivalled position has come about through its single-minded pursuit of the rich, creating seamless, open borders for capital while ignoring its working population and its poor'.

Burgess park: the revamp

In the time that I have lived in the area (fourteen years) the park has been revamped: a major re-landscaping that took place in 2010 and a series of other incremental changes. As I have already indicated, it is impossible to consider this in isolation from the wider efforts to regenerate the area. I want at this point to look briefly at some of the changes and imperatives that formed part of this initiative. Burgess Park received around £11 million as part of its regeneration (Crisp 2020: n.pag.) and, predictably, a period of planning and consultation preceded this. The wider rationale behind the changes was described in terms of 'Structure, Identity, and Programmatic Diversity' (LDA Design 2010). These headings covered an exhaustive list of imperatives, many of which were sensible and justifiable. More specifically:

- a park with a strong identity;
- a coherent park with a clear spatial structure;
- a park that links with its surroundings including the new structure of the Aylesbury Estate;
- a better used and more biodiverse lake;



FIGURE 10.12: Neate St, Burgess Park, in 2016.

- a sports hub that acts as a destination;
- a play hub that acts as a destination;
- a park that feels safe;
- a park for the future that is rooted in its past and in its communities;
- a robust and maintainable park.

The park's unusual evolution meant that it had some 42 entrances leading into what was considered to be an irrational space. Crossing the width of the park from north to south was deemed to be difficult and many of the original roads were still present in an uneven but pleasantly illogical configuration (2 km of curbing was ultimately removed from the park). The views into the park were deemed to be uninviting and the entrances not properly integrated into the surrounding areas. After a period of major disruption and some unexpected problems, the park was considered finished (Figures 12 and 13).

For my own part, I was struck by how the changes conflicted with my own discovery and enjoyment of the park. Its eccentricities and unexplained architecture had been described in the master plan as 'follies':

Burgess Park is the largest reclaimed park in Europe, and through its evolutionary process of being converted from a place of industry to a 51 hectare park, many of the significant buildings and follies have remained in the park. These buildings and follies include the listed St George's Church, impressive Bath House/Library, the



FIGURE 10.13: Neate St, Burgess Park, after the master plan makeover in 2020.

listed Lime Kiln, Chumleigh Gardens and the historic Canal Bridge. (LDA Design 2010: n.pag.)

London, like all cities, is a kind of palimpsest, a text inscribing itself on itself. In this context there are no follies but rather a kind of unity where the past and its remnants possess a sacred character. As Sinclair notes in relation to Haggerston Park in Hackney:

London is an organic entity, it's a kind of prescient being, the whole city is inter-linked: the material, the brick, the story of that brick and where it's come from in these columns, the grasses, the nature of the cobblestones, the memory of the park as being a gas and coke works, the bombs that fell here, the lives of the park keepers, the grass, the dog walkers, the joggers; all of this is making one complete organic thing. If you take out one element the whole thing trembles and loses some of its force.

(Sinclair 2017: n.pag.)

Rather than being purposeless indulgences, funded by some aristocrat, these ghostly 'follies' were the clues for and starting point of a powerful narrative about the area, one that was in danger of being systematically effaced.

One of the striking characteristics of the above master plan list is the staggering amount of different prerogatives that it seeks to address – it is worth interrogating these a little. What a park may or may not be is arguably not fixed but the product

of the social and historical conditions that prevail at the time it is conceived. As I have indicated in this chapter, my own ideas of what the park should be were borne out of the psychogeographic. That is a space which provides not only visual and ecological respite from the city but that is free from precisely those concepts that have a tendency to condition every other aspect of our lives. This is in turn connected with an imaginative rendering of the space: viewing it as an integral part of a totality comprising the various lives and histories that have shaped it.

Mine is then essentially a critical position, one that views each of the imperatives listed above as connected in some way with contemporary neo-liberal thinking. Although it does not use the word 'brand', the idea of a distinct identity for the park follows an instrumentalist or governmental logic whereby every facet of human life is rendered as part of a taxonomy of quantification and control: we must know exactly what it is and what it does. Without this it cannot merit any kind of funding (or justify the funding it has received): we must know if it is providing value for money. Moreover, and like commercial brands, it must have a purpose that, at the very least, offers the potential to evolve into areas with which it is not necessarily connected. When writing about the compact city, Richard Rogers (1997: 17) astutely observed that

contemporary architecture and planning might be expected to express our common philosophical and social values. But in fact, most recent transformations of cities reflect society's commitment to the pursuit of personal wealth. Wealth has become an end in itself rather than a means of achieving broader social goals.

I want to suggest here that both the park and the area it is intended to service are all, in some way, the product of neo-liberal prerogatives; these shape not only the environment but increasingly the individual. Here, overpriced homes, investment bonds for foreign criminals and oligarchs will overlook a space that has increasingly been shaped by the ideas of individual fitness; a kind of stay-active hegemony that it is difficult to criticize. Gym-related equipment has been installed throughout the park (Figure 14). This common-sense transformation of park into an open-air gym seem natural enough, even smart.

However, the neanderthal grunts of rugby players and the sound of leather on willow remind me that sport is the ultimate embodiment of competition. As Chomsky notes in the documentary *Manufacturing Consent* (Achbar and Wintonick 1992): 'Sport [...] a way of building up irrational attitudes of submission to authority, and group cohesion behind leadership elements – in fact, it's training in irrational jingoism. That's also a feature of competitive sports.'

Burgess Park's acquisition of a branded identity is coterminous with an ideological shift that looks to transform everyone into a brand. Davies (2014: 22) refers



FIGURE 10.14: COVID-19 quarantined gym equipment.

to this as a form of 'economic imperialism', whereby techniques developed for the study of 'markets and commercial activity' can 'travel beyond their initial sphere of application' and be applied to the individual. Similarly, Couldry (2010: 13) talks about the way 'self-branding' now figures in marketing discourse, creating the sense in which each of us now functions as a commodity in relation to other competing individuals. Other critics have viewed this in terms of a necessary response to precarity and 'to the post-Fordist regime of flexible accumulation and neoliberal political practices' (Hearn 2008: 497). It is difficult to criticize the pursuit of individual health but the way in which Burgess Park has been increasingly given over to competitive sports speaks to the rigours of the human market place: the necessity of peak fitness in order to stay in the game. As Greenfield (2017: 15) notes, such a quest concerns the transformation of the individual 'into all-but-fungible production units, valued only in terms of what they offer the economy'. As philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2017: 21) notes: 'Today, everyone is an auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise. People are now master and slave in one.'

Currently there is little in the way of smart technology being deployed by Southwark Council in relation to the park. It might be argued here that smart in the context of individual fitness means that data can flow from many individual sites. Phones, fitbits, smart bracelets all address the common-sense desire to enjoy health. But, as Greenfield (2017: 35) cautions, 'against the backdrop of late capitalism, the rise of wearable biometric monitoring can only be understood as a disciplinary power traversing the body itself and all its flows'.

Conclusion

In addressing the notion of the smart city I have made the case for a psychogeographic approach. I began by providing an overview of the ideas and philosophy that have informed this field. My thinking here was to stress a number of tropes that help facilitate a modern critical reading of the smart city together with the political and social context in which it is embedded. The value of these is that they provide an alternative perspective upon what the ideal city space might look like, one that is not predominantly conditioned by technology, rationality and science. As per the surrealists, we might think of such a place as defined by the marvellous, the eternal, the infinite, the inconceivable, the heavenly and even the transcendent. And, also like the surrealists, we must be open to notions of disorder, irrationality, even the Dionysian. These function to delineate the city as a spiritual place, evidence of a possible 'continuum between the real and the supernatural or mythical' (Metzidakis 1996: 32). They also provide a cautionary and timely allusion to the possibility that perfect knowledge and mastery is unobtainable: we cannot know everything.

A psychogeographic approach facilitates the reimagining of a city without always invoking the forward-looking gaze provided by science or logic. As Iain Sinclair (2019: 71) puts it, 'holding out against the know-nothing, value-nothing futurism represented by Taylor Wimpey'. Imagining means factoring in the past; stressing the importance of the city as palimpsest, a kind of text inscribed upon multiple layers that represent the city's dense history. Here, history and spirit of place speak to a notion of unity; to silence the city's ghosts is to stifle our critical awareness of what is happening in the present.

In order to throw some of the above areas into relief I have given a critical account of a specific area: Burgess Park. The value of such an approach takes a number of different forms. First, it gives primacy to the individual and subjective accounts of the outside world. Such an approach might even be seen as a form of bricolage where the writer assembles a number of different signs, 'analyzing them and re-presenting them in another narrative that may operate against the grain of the dominant discourse that functions in a specific space' (Richardson 2017: 3). These elements have been gathered by walking, observing, photographing and bringing together my own narrative of the area. True to a psychogeographic approach, I have drawn upon the personal with the suggestion that voices from the past, ranging from my own ancestors to the Peckhamites who once lived in the area, are useful in offering a different and more inclusive perspective; it is precisely these that can be so systematically effaced in the rush to create a smart city.

I have also suggested that the smart city is underpinned by a number of assumptions that connect it in a very profound way with neo-liberalism; I make

no apologies for using the term. Here there is a certain triumphalist discourse that attaches to science, defining it uncritically as a form of progress. And yet, the London I have been describing is rife with inequality. Traditional working-class areas, which Burgess Park and the surrounding area once were, are being developed in ways with which the smart city is complicit. A certain lip service is paid to inclusivity but the reality is a city where expensive real estate serves as an investment vehicle for foreign elites. The spectral voices of 1960s gangs like the Krays and the Richardsons remind us that crime is no longer the local affair it once was but is now global, its proceeds squirrelled away in safe, few-questions-asked investment havens like London. The resulting city space is deterritorialized, no longer anthropological, as the ties between people and place become weakened and altered. Flats lie empty while the original and inconvenient communities are decanted elsewhere. In Neil Smith's *The New Urban Frontier Gentrification* (2005), he draws a useful parallel between 'frontiers' in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West and then in the late-twentieth-century inner city. Using the term 'revanchist' he suggests that the city can be thought of as territory that can be cast historically in a particular way (i.e. working-class neighbourhoods), only to be reclaimed by capital. He goes on to point out that 'economic expansion today no longer takes place purely via absolute geographical expansion but rather involves internal differentiation of already developed spaces' (Smith 2005: n.pag.). A similar point is made by Jonathan Raban (2008: n.pag.) via his concept of the soft city, where he remarks that in 'Dr Johnson's, Dickens's or my London – the rich lived cheek by jowl with the poor, a source of daily interest and entertainment to both parties'. The price of London property and a lack of genuinely affordable social housing increasingly suggest that this is no longer the case. If there is a frontier in this context it is driven by capital as it probably always has been. Moreover, this urban frontier must be thought of as a global one: 'gentrification is a thoroughly international phenomenon' (Smith 2005: xv), entirely consistent with the channelling of the world's wealth into the hands of a small global plutocracy.

The changes I am describing go against the grain of history, signalling a type of city that is qualitatively new. As Sinclair notes (2018b):

We've lost one kind of organic city that had existed for hundreds or thousands of years; it's really become something quite new and strange; in some ways interesting now but different [...] now it's clearly a world city rather than a British city and also very largely electronic, digital, fast synapse.

At the same time, he describes this as 'The Last London' (Sinclair 2018a), suggesting a certain resignation and a degree of powerlessness. Against a perceived 'endism' we need to think about a 'smart' version of the city that is not always

technology led but more mindful of the fact that it is inhabited by individuals who often experience it in unique ways; rather like the psychogeographic reading I have offered in this chapter. Jonathan Raban, writing retrospectively about his seminal text, *The Soft City* (1974), had argued that the city was a place

where every citizen created a route of his or her own through its potentially infinite labyrinth of streets, arranging the city around them to their own unique pattern. That was why it was soft, amenable to the play of each of its residents' imagination and personal usage.

(Raban 2008: n.pag.)

Such a vision is perhaps less likely within the confines of a smart city, one that is carefully planned but increasingly determined by data and algorithms.

NOTES

1. Until his death, Fraser could regularly be seen walking his dog in Burgess Park; a visual testimony to the banality of evil.
2. In an interview with local councillor Barrie Hargroves he indicated that funding for a revamping of Burgess Park was at least in part contingent upon the regeneration of the nearby Aylesbury Estate.
3. Interview with Mayor of Southwark Barrie Hargrove 29 May 2020 and Councillor Richard Leeming 15 June 2020.

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