

**MAPPING THE SHADOWLANDS:
URBAN NOIR DETECTIVE FICTION AND PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY**

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Abstract

This practice-based thesis is composed of an exegesis and novel extract. The exegesis investigates how urban noir detective fiction and psychogeography have been used to explore, represent and engage with the city and whether these genres remain relevant today. Specifically, it explores the origins of both psychogeography and urban noir detective fiction in the London writings of William Blake, Thomas De Quincey and Charles Dickens. It considers how the themes, preoccupations and approaches of these writers were taken up by two strands of urban writing: the Los Angeles novels of Raymond Chandler, and Situationist psychogeography. Furthermore, it considers how these two strands of urban representation have continued to evolve and influence each other: Situationist psychogeography into the contemporary literary psychogeography of writers such as Iain Sinclair and Rebecca Solnit; and Los Angeles noir into a global phenomenon, including the Glasgow noir of William McIlvanney, the Marseille noir of Jean-Claude Izzo and the Shanghai noir of Qiu Xiaolong. This leads to a consideration of how urban noir detective fiction has been used to represent Sydney, and how strategies from psychogeography might further enhance these fictional representations. Ultimately, it argues for the continued value and relevance of noir detective fiction, in particular when enriched by psychogeographic approaches. The final creative component of this thesis is an extract of a noir detective novel set in Sydney, titled *Way to Blue*. The novel uses the classic noir detective model informed by the research in the exegesis to explore Sydney through the story of the search for a runaway teenage girl.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Annemarie Lopez

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Component 1: Exegesis - Mapping the Shadowlands

Introduction and Literature Review

When you circle around a murder long enough you get to know a city.
Richard Price¹

Repeated walks, circuits, attempts to navigate – to get to the heart of the labyrinth – proved frustrating. There was no centre. The geometry had been botched, the alignments twisted to flatter false imperatives: the money lake. The City was an off-shore island surrounded, protected by walls... The City resisted us.

Iain Sinclair²

I discovered these two passages during my attempts to write about Sydney in fiction and non-fiction. Together they raised questions about how we comprehend, engage with and represent urban space, how certain spaces give rise to or resist certain types of stories, and how telling stories can shape our interaction both with the places in which we live and ourselves in the process.

I wanted to find a way to write about Sydney, a city I have known since childhood; a city in a state of rapid, constant and sometimes seemingly senseless change; a place that is still wild but losing its connection to wilderness. I wanted to find a form that could explore a place so large, so sprawling, criss-crossed with freeways and no-man's-lands, unique and yet banal, beautiful and yet threatening. How could I write about a place that is part of me, that has shaped me and the way I look at the world?

The novelist Richard Price suggested that a detective story might be the form to employ to get to know the city. But could it really tell me not just about the surface of the city, its street names and landmarks, its criminals and victims, but also the unseen forces - social, economic and historical - that shaped it and continue to transform it. Could it help me explain these phenomena to others? Or did I need to find another technique to “get to the heart of the labyrinth”?

¹ Richard Price, quoted by Michael Connelly, “The Whites by Richard Price Writing as Harry Brandt,” review, *The New York Times* (February 12, 2015).
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/books/review/the-whites-by-richard-price-writing-as-harry-brandt.html>

² Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, (London: Granta Books, 1997), p.107.

I began to search for answers, not only in urban detective fiction, but also non-fiction. Guidebooks and official histories were not what I was after. I wanted something that got under the skin of the city, analysed its nature, peered into its dark recesses. This exegesis is an account of that journey.

The Investigation

My study explores potential intersections between the genres of psychogeography and the urban noir detective story. The scope is historical, philosophical and geographical, investigating the development of the modern city and its related networks of crime and corruption as shared points of recurrent interest. In exploring these related discourses, I attempt to define both 'psychogeography' and 'urban noir', despite their shifting and historically elusive categories of meaning.

In the course of this investigation I answer a number of key questions:

What is the *historical* foundation of urban writing, particularly in the emerging late 18th and early 19th century metropolis? What are the *philosophical* origins of psychogeography, tracing lines from the Situationists of post-war Paris to contemporary writers such as Iain Sinclair? How is Los Angeles used as the *geographical* location for the classic urban noir detective novel, and how does this setting establish and influence the genre? What is the *global* impact of noir detective fiction in radically different cities and cultures such as Shanghai, Marseille and New Orleans? Finally, how has the *specific site of Sydney* been represented by the genres of urban noir detective fiction and psychogeography? Ultimately, I am interested in how and to what extent these genres remain valuable and relevant strategies for examining and representing a modern, rapidly changing city.

I begin with a study of how writers attempted to describe one of the first major modern cities – London. In writings by William Blake, Thomas De Quincey and Charles Dickens we find early attempts to make sense of the modern sprawling metropolis, to explore the labyrinth and comprehend it, to tell a story about the city by travelling through it.

These writings identify distinct zones of the city, and link them to certain patterns of behaviour. Slums with their labyrinths of grimy darkened alleyways rubbing up against

richer areas were linked to prostitution, child labour, pickpocketing, murder, substance abuse and riots. The mists rising up from a polluted river led to disease but also provided cover for nefarious activities. The Inns of Court, huddled together in one area of the city seem to conspire to create networks of power, litigiousness, resentment, secrets and crimes.

In many ways these writings anticipate the themes and tropes of the urban noir detective novel, emerging from depression-era California and exemplified by Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*,³ which focused on unmasking the dark-side of Los Angeles. They also find numerous iterations in noir detective fiction up to the present day.

These early London writings also seemed to foreshadow another sort of urban writing – psychogeography. In Iain Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* and *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* I found that Sinclair made explicit and implicit links to Blake, De Quincey and Dickens as well as the crime stories of Conan Doyle and the historical speculation around the true crime story of Jack the Ripper.⁴

I also found that these two genres of urban writing, the noir detective story and psychogeography, not only sprang from the same source, but remained intimately connected, perhaps even constituting two strands of overlapping investigations. It seemed that a better understanding of both genres might provide a more nuanced way of engaging with the city. Following this line of inquiry, I gather evidence that links the early London writings to the emergence of the urban detective story, and in turn trace links between these stories and psychogeography.

I found a number of studies tracing the lineage of the modern urban detective story, many linking it to Victorian crime fiction: Lewis Moore's *Cracking the Hard-boiled Detective: A Critical History from 1920s to the Present*⁵, and *Connecting Detectives: The*

³ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, (London: Penguin, 2011).

⁴ Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, (London: Penguin, 2004) and *Lights Out for the Territory*, (London: Granta, 1997).

⁵ Lewis D. Moore, *Cracking the Hard-boiled Detective: A Critical History from the 1920s to the Present*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2006).

*Influence of 19th Century Sleuth Fiction on the Early Hard-Boileds*⁶ for example, or Richard Bradford's *Crime Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*⁷ and John Scaggs's *Crime Fiction*⁸. But while these literary genealogies often touched on the use of the urban environment in the detective story, they tended to focus more on how the Victorian writers originated styles of detection, types of detectives or certain themes about morality, rather than the connections between these Victorian writers and the tradition of urban writing and psychogeography. Other studies, including Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography*,⁹ link the origins of psychogeography to the urban writings of Blake and De Quincey, but only briefly touch on links with detective fiction.

G.K. Chesterton's 1901 essay "A Defence of Detective Stories",¹⁰ however, seemed to bring the two strands of urban writing and crime fiction together. Chesterton compared Sherlock Holmes crossing London to the journey in Homer's *Iliad* and argued that the detective novel captures "the poetry of modern life". Chesterton explained that in detective stories the city is viewed as "a chaos of conscious" forces, where each stone in the street is "a deliberate symbol – a message from some man", where "every crook and twist of a street expresses the intention, the soul of the man who built it", and every brick is a "human hieroglyph". Chesterton's description of the city in the urban detective novel seemed to foreshadow a way of looking at the city as a riddle or mystery that would later be employed by psychogeography.

Chesterton's focus on stories set in urban environments, where each element represents some form of human intent, also highlights an important distinction between the city-based writing of the urban noir detective story and psychogeography, which I will be examining in this paper, and writing about other environments. The "new nature writing" of authors such as Robert MacFarlane, for example, focuses on exploring our relations with the natural world.¹¹ This new nature writing is less concerned with

⁶ Lewis D. Moore, *Connecting Detectives: The Influence of 19th Century Sleuth Fiction on the Early Hard-Boileds*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2014).

⁷ Richard Bradford, *Crime Fiction, A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁸ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁹ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*, (Harpندن: Pocket Essentials, 2010).

¹⁰ G. K. Chesterton, "A Defence of Detective Stories", in *The Defendant* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, London, 1901), <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks13/1301311h.html>.

¹¹ Robert Macfarlane discusses the emergence of "new nature writing" in "Why We need Nature Writing", *New Statesman*, (September 2, 2015),

interpreting the essentially human forces at play in the urban environment, than in considering the consequences of humans ignoring or attempting to impose our will on the forces of nature.

Mapping Psychogeography

For the purposes of this study, we will consider psychogeography as an urban practice involving a number of methodologies, but focus on the writing it has generated about the urban environment.

In a review of an Iain Sinclair book, Robert Macfarlane advises newcomers to psychogeography to take a map of their city and draw an outline – a circle, isobars, the Shroud of Turin – the actual shape is not important.¹² They should then go out into the city with this map and walk the perimeter of that outline as closely as possible. Ideally, the experience should be recorded in writing, film or photography. The route and the medium can vary, but the key elements are a passage through the cityscape, coupled with detailed, recorded observation.

“Catch the textual run-off of the streets; the graffiti, the branded litter, the snatches of conversation,” urges MacFarlane. “Be alert to the happenstance of metaphors, watch for visual rhymes, coincidences.” The exercise is finished, he says, when the chosen path is completed. “Walking makes for content; footage for footage.”

MacFarlane’s characterisation of psychogeography suggests that it may be seen as an amalgam of practices, a sort of mindful sightseeing, a semiotic analysis and an aesthetic practice simultaneously. He also admits that psychogeography has generated a lot of “highbrow nonsense” but its “serious literary presence”, he says, is formidable.

Meanwhile, MacFarlane’s description of the literary process of psychogeography seems to echo Chesterton’s account of how the urban detective novel uses a passage through the city as a method of recording information, where the city becomes a set of signs to be recorded and interpreted. This prompted me to trace the lineage of psychogeography,

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/nature/2015/09/robert-macfarlane-why-we-need-nature-writing>

¹² Robert Macfarlane, “A Road of One’s Own”, *The Times Literary Supplement*, (October 7, 2005), pp. 3-4.

from its origins in 19th century London writing, through its emergence in late 1950s writings of Situationist theorist Guy Debord to the contemporary British author Iain Sinclair and other urban writers such as Matthew Beaumont (*Night Walking*), Rebecca Solnit (*Wanderlust*) and Lauren Elkin (*Flâneuse*).

Guy Debord claimed discovery of the name and distinct practice of psychogeography, defining it as “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”.¹³ He identified the key method of psychogeography as the *dérive*, or urban drift – a sort of attentive wandering. Though Debord uses the generic term “environment” rather than “urban environment”, his work focused on cities as sites where the forces of capitalism were focused, and not the countryside.

Psychogeography, for Debord, was a technique for seeing past the “society of the spectacle” and reinterpreting familiar terrain with fresh eyes.¹⁴ It was a way for the urban dweller to penetrate the capitalist scrim of commuting, working and consuming in order to become more sensitive to the hidden forces encrypted in the fabric of the city.

Debord’s essays, his *dérives*, and the resulting maps, seemed to offer new ways of interacting with and apprehending the city, of seeing both the surface and what lay beneath. They were attempts to understand the forces shaping the city – social, economic, environmental. At the same time, they also drew on earlier attempts to represent the city, while infusing them with a Marxist critique of capitalism.

One Situationist map in particular caught my attention. Created by Debord and his Situationist artist colleague Asger Jorn, it was named *The Naked City*. The title was an explicit reference to a 1948 urban detective film by Jules Dassin. This confirmed a definite link between urban noir and psychogeography. However, it was not just the name that the noir film and the Situationist map shared. The map and the film also shared a number of techniques, which were borrowed from in urban noir detective novels. It was their way of seeing the city, of cutting it up into zones to be rearranged

¹³ Situationist International, “Definitions” from “Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation” (Paris, June 1958), *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*, (Harpندن: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 90.

and reconnected, to be examined in detail, read for clues, correspondences, resonances.

Situationist psychogeography gradually became more rigid as theorists such as Debord attempted to establish strict rules and scientific reporting methods for what had started as a playful and disruptive creative practice. Debord also tried to isolate psychogeography from earlier attempts to describe urban modernity – such as Charles Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin’s writings on the *flâneur*, or the excursions of the Surrealists – rather than see his practice of psychogeography as part of a continuum.¹⁵ Debord harboured hopes of wresting psychogeography from its more playful and aesthetic, if politically charged, roots, and establishing it as both a scientific practice and a practical form of radical intervention. Eventually, however, psychogeography escaped Debord’s ring-fence after the disintegration of the Situationist group in the early 1970s. Perhaps this was inevitable, as psychogeography, a practice emerging from rebellious and anti-conventional impulses, resisted his attempts at control and ownership.

The subsequent evolution of psychogeography allowed many writers to continue along Debord’s earlier, more experiential path. The writings of Michel de Certeau, Gaston Bachelard, Iain Sinclair, Rebecca Solnit, Matthew Beaumont, Lauren Elkin and Nick Papadimitriou, for example, return to the original practice of psychogeography, the attentive urban drift that employs the senses to tune into the undercurrents and symbolic resonances of the streets. This key technique continues to link psychogeography with noir detective fiction’s methods of exploring and representing the unseen forces at work in the city.

Because my own creative practice is a novel, my exegesis focuses on the literary strands of psychogeography, the writings produced by psychogeographers, rather than the many other diverse manifestations of the psychogeography the visual and performing arts, film and television or social sciences, though I refer to these forms where relevant.

Noir is the New Black

¹⁵ Tom McDonough argues that Debord saw the urban idling of the *flâneur* as inherently aristocratic, while the person on the *dérive* attempts to suspend class allegiances. Meanwhile Debord criticised the Surrealist stroll as aimless and too reliant on chance, Tom McDonough ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002), pp. 257-259.

Throughout this exegesis I use the term “urban noir detective fiction” as a shorthand for describing novels which deal explicitly with crime and detection in cities, and where the exploration of a city itself becomes a central structuring element of the narrative. But any use of the term “noir” needs some clarification.

The term noir has specific historical origins in publishing, literary and cinema criticism, but its use has also broadened in recent years, to the point where it is now used both as an academic term and a broad marketing category for publishers.

The phrase *film noir*, meaning “black film” or “dark film” was first used by French film critics in 1946 to describe certain war era Hollywood films such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *Murder, My Sweet* (1944).¹⁶ Sheri Biesen in her study *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* notes that these films were characterized by a “cynical tone, brutal violence, and shadowy visual style” suggesting the realities of a world at war. These Hollywood dramas were also infused by the visual style of Weimar German expressionist cinema with its use of stylised high-contrast light and shadow and the creation of a labyrinthine *mise-en-scene*¹⁷. Often this was because the film makers themselves were refugees from wartime Germany and Eastern Europe. Their visualisation of the modern city was less straightforward realism than a way of creating expressive metaphors for a world of disenchantment, danger and corruption.

The narratives of these films, however, were often based on American hard-boiled crime novels, and as Biesen points out, the term *film noir* was linked to *série noire*, or ‘black’ detective fiction, the name for French translations of hard-boiled novels by US writers such as Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler.

Tzvetvan Todorov in his famous essay on detective fiction typologies,¹⁸ characterises “*série noire*” as different from the “whodunit” in that it does not separate the story of the crime from the story of the investigation, as can happen in a Poirot mystery. In noir,

¹⁶ Sheri Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 1.

¹⁷ Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*, (New York: Owl Books, 1997), p. 16.

¹⁸ Todorov, Tzvetvan, “Typology of Detective Fiction” in *The Poetics of Prose*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 47.

Todorov says the story of the crime and its investigation are fused, and “narrative coincides with action.” In the noir thriller, curiosity about what happened in the past is replaced by suspense about what will happen next, partly because the detective in *série noire* “risks his health if not his life” in the investigation. Todorov also considers the milieu and themes of *série noire* to be essential to its “constitutive character”, suggesting that a focus on “violence”, “sordid crime” and “amoral characters” is key to the genre.¹⁹

In other definitions, noir fiction is distinguished from “hard-boiled” crime fiction, where, “hard-boiled” refers to the tradition of crime stories written from the 1930s in a spare, post-Hemingway style prose.²⁰ The style, exemplified by writers such as Dashiell Hammett, often features a male detective with a tough-talking attitude towards his milieu and attempts to capture the language of the streets.²¹ “Noir”, or “Roman Noir” on the other hand, is sometimes referred to as a narrow subgenre of hard-boiled fiction in which the protagonist is not a detective or crime solver, but instead a suspect, a perpetrator or someone directly tied to the crime,²² as in James M Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* or *Double Indemnity*.

Meanwhile, in *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis identifies noir as a “corpus” of like-minded film and writing: “a fantastic convergence of American tough-guy realism, Weimar expressionism, and existensialized Marxism, all focused on exposing the ‘bright and guilty place’ called Los Angeles”, where Los Angeles itself is “a stand in for capitalism”.²³

The use of the term noir has widened over time, and is now often used generically to refer to crime stories linked to place and mood. For example, the Marseille crime novels of Jean-Claude Izzo are marketed as Marseille or Mediterranean Noir.²⁴ Crime fiction from Scandinavian countries such as Stieg Larsson’s *Girl with a Dragon Tattoo* or Henning Mankell’s *Wallander* is often referred to as Scandi Noir or Nordic Noir. The writings of William McIlvanney, Ian Rankin and Denise Mina set in Scotland are referred

¹⁹ Todorov, “Typology of Detective Fiction”, p. 48.

²⁰ Richard Bradford, *Crime Fiction*, p. 27.

²¹ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, p. 57.

²² George Tuttle, “What is Noir”, *Mystery Scene*, 43, (1994), p. 36.

²³ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, (New York: Vintage, 1992) p. 18.

²⁴ These types of noir are not just publishing marketing niches, but the subject of academic discussion, such as Edmund J Smyth’s “Marseille Noir: Jean-Claude Izzo and the Mediterranean Detective” in *Romance Studies*, Vol.25(2), (April 2007), pp. 111-121.

to as Tartan Noir, while the crime novels by Tana French or Alan Glynn set in Ireland are dubbed Emerald Noir.

To some extent these are publishers' marketing terms, and a handy way of grouping disparate global titles together for the bookshop shelf. But many share certain characteristics with earlier *série noire* and Los Angeles noir such as cynical attitudes to the status quo, strong violence, and a brooding preoccupation with a "world of menace and urban deviance".²⁵

The Marseille novelist Jean-Claude Izzo, for example, recognises noir as a way of looking at "the dark opaque criminal side of the world" but characterises Mediterranean noir specifically as "a fatalistic acceptance" arising from conflicts throughout the centuries, that crime is the driving force that governs relationships between people.²⁶ This is coupled with a passion for the beauty of the Mediterranean, where these dramas are played out.

In this exegesis "urban noir detective fiction" includes a number of elements from the above definitions. It features a violent crime at its heart, and links this crime both literally and figuratively to the city where it occurs. It uses an investigation/search narrative as a means of travelling through the city in order to solve the crime while simultaneously conducting a detailed examination of that particular city, its specific history and geography, its unique buildings, roads, neighbourhoods, layout etc. It also examines aspects of the urban space, which is to say the series of relationships between that place and larger social and economic forces. The noir detective novel depicts a troubled, corrupt, or dystopian *mise-en-scene*. The tone of these stories tends to be cynical, fatalistic or pessimistic, with a strong sense that the city is a world gone wrong in ways specific to its character and history. These narratives are also preoccupied with identifying and critiquing the signs of corruption in the fabric of the cityscape, while also connecting them to wider societal and more recently, global forces.

²⁵ Biesen, *Blackout*, p. 2.

²⁶ Jean-Claude Izzo, "Blue and Black" in *Garlic, Mint & Sweet Basil*, (New York: Europa Editions, 2013), pp. 43-6.

The urban noir detective novels studied in this exegesis feature morally ambiguous detective protagonists who seem somehow implicated, literally or figuratively, in the crime or mystery they are trying to solve, rather than simply being detached observers as in the “cosy crime” genre. Often these detectives put their own health, well-being or life at risk in the investigation, as Todorov has noted. In urban noir detective fiction it is the troubled relationship of the protagonist with their city and the subsequent desire to comprehend and make peace with it that is central to its depiction of the urban space. At the same time, the detective’s stake in solving the crime heightens the sense of suspense, and reminds the reader that in the modern city happy endings or even neat resolutions are never assured.

This exegesis focuses on novels which draw on the traditions of hard-boiled and *série noire* fiction while also being influenced by the themes and literary devices used by 19th century London authors Blake, De Quincey and Dickens, to explore the darkness and violence of the city.

My research explores the genres of literary psychogeography and urban noir detective fiction side by side, in order to reveal their common preoccupations and shared strategies. But it also sets out to challenge the notion that the former might have greater value simply because it is more self-consciously literary, intellectual or politically engaged, while the latter is simply low-brow escapist entertainment.

In his article “The Criminal Neglect of Detective Fiction”, Richard Bradford notes that academic studies of detective fiction have historically been patronising or derogatory.

The first academic study of crime fiction was Marjorie Nicolson’s *The Professor and the Detective* (1929). This begins with the observation that a considerable number of her fellow dons are avid fans of detective novels and poses the question of why this should be – much in the manner of someone who wonders why priests visit brothels.²⁷

²⁷ Richard Bradford, “The Criminal Neglect of Detective Fiction”, *Times Literary Supplement*, (June 4, 2015). <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/content/the-criminal-neglect-of-detective-fiction>.

Bradford believes there have been many high-calibre crime novels that deserve academic respect, but which are usually ghettoised as genre literature. Why, he asks, is Patricia Highsmith not accorded a status similar to Fyodor Dostoevsky?

The answer, for Bradford, is found in the paradox that informs literary studies. On the one hand, literary theory now discourages attempts to define literature as an art form and academics now feel that it is “intellectually naive and ideologically unsound to grade writers and books in terms of their intrinsic qualities”. But at the same time, says Bradford, this “theory” has done little to challenge the old-fashioned canon of the “Greats”.

Bradford further argues that any lecturer who proposed that Conan Doyle should be given the same status as Henry James and Thomas Hardy on a core module covering 19th-century fiction would be “treated as suspect”.

This is also a key reason for comparing works of urban noir detective fiction and literary psychogeography. I will argue that there are noir detective novels which should be accorded the same status as works of literary psychogeography, both as intrinsic pieces of writing, and as texts that help us explore, interpret and engage with the city.

My research also suggests that the narrative techniques and devices used by urban noir detective authors and literary psychogeographers find their origins in similar sources, with a desire to engage with the city at ground level. They take us on a journey through city streets and shopping malls, into abandoned warehouses and under bridges, shaking us from our habitual view and alerting us to unfamiliar aspects of the urban environment. They provide us with glimpses of hidden stories, engage us with the task of decrypting a city’s secret codes, and provide us with an immersive experience of its unseen forces.

This thesis therefore documents my attempts to investigate strategies of urban noir detective fiction and literary psychogeography, the connections between these strategies, and to consider how these practices remain relevant as ways to explore the modern city. As a writer I also want to consider the value of drawing on these techniques in my own writing about Sydney.

Maria Tumarkin has stated: “Understanding a place involves more than a factual narrative – it’s about haunting, it’s about echoes, it’s about the unsaid and it’s about what everyone knows but no one says.”²⁸ I am interested in how both noir fiction and psychogeography can help us as strategies to locate these echoes and unspoken aspects of a place.

Here we must address the concept of place and its relationship to space. These terms have literal and everyday meanings, as well as specific but also shifting meanings in geography and literary studies. John Agnew points out that the study of place fell out of favour in the 1960s, when geography underwent a “spatial revolution” and ‘place’ became seen as simply incidental to “more profound spatial processes such as class struggle, perceptual capacity, capital accumulation, or commodification”.²⁹ Agnew argues that more recently there has been a revival of interest in place. However, places are seen not as the “bounded, isolated entities” of traditional geography, but in an increasingly globalized world they are located within “a series of extensive economic, political, and cultural networks with varying geographical scope”. ‘Space’ then refers to the interactions between these networks in general, while ‘place’ refers the specific combination of interactions in a particular location. As Doreen Massey describes it, the specificity of a place “comes from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there”.³⁰ This conception of place is comparable to Debord’s psychogeographic notion of place as made up of “constant currents, fixed points, and vortexes”.³¹

Place has a different meaning in literary studies, where it is often used as a synonym for setting. In studies of crime fiction it may literally refer to the scene of the crime. Catherine Cole argues that crime fiction is “drama” and therefore requires “a stage”, from the “Orphean underworld of Venice” to the “maze of alleys that make up the

²⁸ Madeleine Watts, “Interview with Maria Tumarkin”, *Griffith Review*, Edition 44, (April 2014).
<https://griffithreview.com/articles/interview-withmaria-tumarkin/>

²⁹ John Agnew, “Place and Space”, in J. Agnew and D. Livingstone (eds.) *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, (London: Sage, 201) p. 12.

<https://www.geog.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/users/jagnew/416.pdf>
<https://www.geog.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/users/jagnew/416.pdf>

³⁰ Doreen Massey, quoted in *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, p. 26.

³¹ Guy Debord, “Theory of the Derive”, *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 62.

modern city” or the “regulated spaces of law courts and police stations”.³² These places, says Cole, are “deliberately chosen to add a sense of foreboding, threat or horror to the narrative”. The use of place, Cole argues, is one of the great attractions of the genre, where the crime novel can take us to unfamiliar places or allow us to relish settings we know well. Cole claims she chose the setting of Balmain, a suburb of Sydney, for her own novels, because it was an area she knew. Cole acknowledges, however, that place “needs to hold additional dimensions, to offer its own clues, its own interactions with plot, influencing the action in its own unique way”. She also acknowledges that a convention in crime fiction allows place to become a character, and also creates a language of place. “Through this language readers translate and decode. A setting may speak of poverty or privilege, lust or celibacy.” Cole nevertheless sees the opening pages of the crime novel that “locate the characters firmly in a milieu” as creating an “empty stage” that is waiting for its characters. This characterisation of place is typical of literary analyses that regard place as subservient to “drama”, a mere setting that serves the narrative.

I would argue, however, that in urban noir detective fiction, including Cole’s own novel *Dry Dock*, place can also act as the catalyst or even source of the drama. In Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*, Sara Gran’s *City of the Dead*, or Jean-Claude Izzo’s *Total Chaos*, the particular crimes emerge specifically from the places where they occur. They are crimes that happen precisely because of “the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there” as Massey might say or the combination of currents and vortexes found in that city and its neighbourhoods.

Sheila Hones has argued that narrative theory might benefit from greater exposure to geographical concepts of space and suggests that it might be productive “to engage with Massey’s definition of space as the dimension of coexisting simultaneity”.³³ This comparative study of urban noir detective fiction and psychogeography aims to do just that, by revealing how techniques such as the *dérive* and the search narrative construct complex, multi-layered, and dynamic representations of urban space and of particular places.

³² Catherine Cole, *Private Dicks and Feisty Chicks*, (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2004) p. 161.

³³ Sheila Hones, “Literary Geography: setting and narrative space”, *Social and Cultural Geography*, (Issue 7, Volume 12, 2011) <https://www.tandfonline-com.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/doi/full/10.1080/14649365.2011.610233?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

Why Urban Noir?

I have never forgotten the excitement that Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and Dickens's *Bleak House* inspired in me as a teenager growing up on the semi-rural fringes of Sydney. They were books peopled by vivid, troubled, knotty characters whose lives were touched and often transformed by crime. As a teenager I did not fully understand their adult motivations or poor decisions, but I was drawn to the complexity of their lived experience.

Only later, as an adult, did I discover that the lives of people close to me had also come in contact with crime, and that it had shaped their destinies, and perhaps even my own. In his introduction to *USA Noir*, editor, Johnny Temple, noted that "writings from outside the mainstream almost necessarily coincide with a mood and spirit of noir", and that noir authors have often had life circumstances which have placed them in the environs of crime.³⁴ This is certainly true of my own life history, and I have often reflected on the "there but for the grace of god go I" appeal of noir, a glimpse into the alternative paths any of us might have taken.

As an adult, having lived in cities such as Paris, London, Los Angeles and Sydney, I found that these books continued to hold a fascination. I also found myself drawn to a range of urban noir novels from New Orleans to Glasgow, Dublin, Marseille and Shanghai. These stories were connected by narratives that immersed the reader in the gritty reality of the city. They were guided by detectives who not only sought to describe some injustice or imbalance at the heart of their city, but wanted us to engage with it, to empathise with their own sadness, anger and despair at the status quo.

Scottish crime writer Val McDermid has suggested that the preoccupations of urban noir, "lean to the left". Unlike the typical thriller, which McDermid suggests tends to describe the perils of a world turned upside down, the noir novel is dissatisfied with the world as it is.

It's critical of the status quo, sometimes overtly, sometimes more subtly.
It often gives a voice to characters who are not comfortably established

³⁴ Johnny Temple, "Introduction", *USA Noir* (New York: Akashic Books, 2013), p. 11.

in the world – immigrants, sex workers, the poor, the old. The dispossessed and the people who don't vote.³⁵

McDermid suggests that often noir writers' views "slip into our work precisely because they are our views, because they inform our perspective and because they're how we interpret the world". She adds that noir writers are not necessarily trying to convert their readership to their perspective. "Except, of course, that sometimes we do."

McDermid explains that when she started publishing in the late 1980s, she wanted "straight people to love a gay character, understanding they had more in common than separated them. It was, in a small way, a political act."

The attraction of urban noir sprang from both a curiosity about the city, but also an awareness of its dark side, of the sinister effects it can have on people's lives, and how its controlling forces and social imbalances can change people, communities and environments irrevocably.

I would argue that, in noir, the city is not viewed as static, but as a restless zone in flux where the forces of money, power, and time compete with human desires, turning regular citizens into victims, murderers, exploiters and avengers. The city and its corruption can also represent a loss of innocence, and the detective's quest becomes a desire to somehow make sense of this fall from grace.

In this sense the urban noir detective novel recalls Svetlana Boym's notion of "reflective nostalgia", since it evokes a type of nostalgia that "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity".³⁶

Indeed, if, as Joan Didion has said, "we tell ourselves stories in order to live",³⁷ then perhaps we tell ourselves noir detective stories in order to live with our fears, mistakes and crimes, our troubled pasts and uncomfortable relationships with the modern city.

³⁵ Val McDermid, "Why Crime Fiction is Leftwing and Thrillers are Rightwing", *The Guardian*, (April 1, 2015). <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/apr/01/why-crime-fiction-is-leftwing-and-thrillers-are-rightwing>.

³⁶ Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia", from *The Atlas of Transformation*, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html>.

³⁷ Joan Didion, *The White Album*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2017), p. 11.

Why these Urban Noir Detective Novels?

The detective novels I have chosen to explore have been selected from a vast pool of geographically inflected urban noir, from the Scandi-noir to Tartan noir mentioned earlier, to novels from Japan, Africa and South America.

Focusing on the question of what urban noir can tell us about a city, I have chosen a group of novels that clearly focus on investigating a crime as a device for exploring a city.

While Dashiell Hammett's San Francisco-set *The Maltese Falcon* is a prime example of both the hard-boiled and *série noire* genres,³⁸ its narrative seemed less focused on exploring the city's different zones or their relationship to the central crime than Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*.

In the writing of Raymond Chandler, (and later Ross MacDonald and Joan Didion) however, we find narratives that analyse of the roots of a crime in the sins of the city's forefathers, and depict this as both a domestic but also urban tragedy.

Similarly, I have chosen William McIlvanney's Glasgow-set Laidlaw mysteries, not because they are superior to Denise Mina's Glasgow-set Alex Morrow novels such as *End of the Wasp Season*, or Ian Rankin's Edinburgh-set Rebus tales; but they are examined because of their use of the investigation of a crime as a means to interrogate the nature of a changing post-industrial, Thatcher-era Glasgow from a psychogeographic perspective.

Similarly, while French novelist Jean Patrick Manchette writes gripping noir crime stories, his novels such as *The Mad and The Bad* (1972) and *The Prone Gunman* (1981) offer an existentialist study of doomed characters in a capitalist society, rather than details of any one city. However, Jean-Claude Izzo's detective novels forensically analyse Marseille as a space of intersecting histories of French colonialism, immigration, racism,

³⁸ Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, (London: Orion Books, 2010).

class, the rise of extremism and globalised crime, alongside the narrator's nostalgia for the lost city of his childhood.

I was also interested in urban noir detective fiction from non-Western countries, such as China. However, Chinese storytellers have historically been limited by issues of censorship. As Andrew Nette points out in his article "Crime Fiction and Social Harmony in China", crime fiction was banned in China after the communist revolution in 1949.³⁹ There was a relaxation of these rules in the late 1980s and 90s, when the government encouraged writers and filmmakers to create home-grown novels and films to compete with Western imports.⁴⁰ This in turn allowed the brief emergence of what the government called "hooligan literature", in which formally taboo subjects were discussed such as in Wang Shuo's punk noir mystery *Playing for Thrills*,⁴¹ in which a gambler accused of murder must revisit his wild past to remember if he committed the crime, or Mian Mian's *Candy*, about a young woman's journey into a world of nightclubs, drugs and sex.⁴² This period, however, was followed by another freeze on local crime fictions after 2007, as the Communist Party adopted a policy of "social harmony". Meanwhile, Chinese novelists and filmmakers who have attempted crime narratives have often found their works under intense scrutiny, condemned or banned.⁴³

There are, however, several Chinese authors writing crime fiction, while living outside China including Qiu Xiaolong and Diane Wei Liang. Wei Liang has lived in the United States and now the United Kingdom, while Qiu Xiaolong lives and works in the United

³⁹ Andrew Nette, "Crime Fiction & Social Harmony in China", The Wheeler Centre, (February 15, 2011), <https://www.wheelercentre.com/notes/4f42c3a19f0a/>

⁴⁰ Jamie James, "Bad Boy", *The New Yorker*, (April 21, 1997) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/04/21/bad-boy-2>

⁴¹ Yibing Huang, "Wang Shuo: Playing for Thrills in the Era of Reform, or, a Genealogy of the Present", in *Contemporary Chinese Literature*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) pp. 63-64.

⁴² Mian Mian, *Candy*, trans. Andrea Ligenfelter, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2003).

⁴³ Chinese storytellers, both novelists and filmmakers, have historically been subject to censorship if they are seen to promote an unfavourable view of the country. See Kaufman, Anthony, "Banned Chinese Filmmakers Persevere; Suzhou River's Lou Ye Premieres Latest at Venice", *Indie Wire* (September 1, 2011) <http://www.indiewire.com/2011/09/banned-chinese-filmmakers-persevere-suzhou-rivers-lou-ye-premieres-latest-at-venice-134556/>

Meanwhile, in a discussion at The Wheeler Centre (Andrew Nette, "Crime Fiction & Social Harmony in China"), when Chinese author Murong Xuecun was asked why there is so little crime fiction coming from China he replied: "This is because crime fiction is seen as conflicting with the aim of encouraging a 'harmonious society', one of the guiding principles of the ruling Communist Party." He added that while it was considered acceptable for Chinese people to read fictional accounts of crime in other countries, it was not considered okay for them to read similar accounts in their own.

States. In Qiu's novels we find an exploration of crime and inequity in Chinese cities such as Shanghai, that the author would have struggled to publish if he had remained in China.

I have chosen to examine Qiu's Inspector Chen novel, *Death of a Red Heroine*, because it provides one of the clearest adaptations of the classic urban noir detective model to explore a non-Western city. It focuses on Shanghai as the crossroads for the forces of Westernisation, cultural memory and authoritarian power. The depiction of the city through the central murder investigation also evokes a sense of loss, nostalgia and alienation, perhaps linked to Qiu's experience as an expatriate writer.

Contemporary America, in contrast, offers an overwhelming choice of urban noir that uses its investigative narrative to explore its cities such as Richard Price's recent New York-set novel *The Whites*; George Pelecanos's Nick Stefanos or Derek Strange and Terry Quinn detective novels set in his hometown of Washington D.C.; Dennis Lehane's moody Boston noir; James Lee Burke's Cajun detective Dave Robicheaux; Elmore Leonard, the 'Dickens of Detroit', or Sara Paretsky's Chicago-set V.I. Warshawski series.

For this study, however, I chose to examine Sara Gran's *City of the Dead*. Not only does *City of the Dead* link its central crime narrative to the neglect of New Orleans's underclass before and after Hurricane Katrina (2005), but its central detective/narrator, Claire DeWitt, uses a De Quincey-esque intoxicated reverie as a tool for interpreting the city. Hence Gran's novel reveals a capacity for urban noir detective fiction to draw on irrational and visionary tropes to interrogate aspects of New Orleans that could not be explored by a more traditionally hard-boiled detective.

Meanwhile, Australia offers Melbourne writers Peter Temple's Jack Irish series, along with *The Broken Shore* and *Truth* and Shane Maloney's Murray Whelan series; or West Australian author David Whish-Wilson's Frank Swann novels *The Line of Sight* and *Zero at the Bone*. However, my focus on representations of Sydney led me to its most prolific crime writer Peter Corris, while I also examine how Sydney authors Marele Day and Catherine Cole have attempted to adapt the noir model with their female detectives Claudia Valentine and Nicola Sharpe and in so doing offer different representations of Sydney.

A Psychogeographic Turn

As with the best urban noir detective fiction, the literary psychogeography of Iain Sinclair, in books such as *Lights Out for the Territory* and *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*, or Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust* and *A Field Guild to Getting Lost*, can offer similar insights and pleasures connected with our complex relationships to place and space. These psychogeographers often have a mapmaker's eye and an analytical vision but also a storyteller's sensibility and a delinquent's nose for mischief. They lead us through the streets, engaging us in a playful desire to peek into the darker corners and discover their secrets and hidden crimes. They offer story-maps for a city that is always rewriting itself, which can help us orient ourselves and navigate spatially and temporally, but perhaps also emotionally.

While Guy Debord sought to understand the effects of an environment on its inhabitants from a scientific point of view, Iain Sinclair states that his work seeks to "analyse the psychosis of the place where he lives".⁴⁴ Here Sinclair is describing both the competing currents and narratives of the places he studies, as well as his own eclectic methods, which involve viewing the city through a prism of poetry, mysticism, detective fiction and the visual arts rather than actual psychoanalysis.

At the centre of Sinclair's literary psychogeography is the figure of an urban wanderer. This figure – part self-portrait, part literary construct – is depicted as a freelance investigator and mystic who explores urban space and time, uncovering its darker resonances and irrational aspects, examining its myths, exposing its half-erased histories and drifting at the coalface of social disintegration and change.

Sinclair's psychogeography is most relevant since it strongly evokes the pessimism of noir, conjuring a view of the city in the grip of both dark occult forces and capitalist systems that overpower human agency, while the psychogeography of Solnit and Elkin tends to paint a more playful and empowering urban landscape. In Solnit and Elkin's

⁴⁴ Iain Sinclair, "On the Road", interview by Stuart Jeffries, *The Guardian*, (April 24, 2004) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview14>

writing, the city is viewed as a place of transformation and possibility, where the thrill of discovery and a delight in illicit pleasures are less inflected by the cynicism of noir.

Sinclair's writing also invokes the capacity of language and stories to shape the urban landscape. He uses metaphors from magic and shamanism, such as "casting spells" and "breaking curses", to evoke ideas about the way in which storytelling rewrites and creates alternative versions of the city that coexist with the physical one.

The Shape of Things to Come

Chapter One examines the origin and development of key themes and techniques in urban writing through the London authors William Blake, Thomas De Quincey and Charles Dickens. It traces how these writers established key tropes that reappear throughout urban noir detective fiction and psychogeography, and how their exploration of dark side of the city helps us understand the forces shaping our urban spaces.

Chapter Two moves to Los Angeles, to explore Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, in depth. This work not only gave us an iconic hard-boiled detective, but transforms the urban drift into an investigative narrative that links a central crime to the very nature of the city itself. In so doing it provides both a compelling form to the investigation of the city, and a compelling character to take us on this journey. This chapter will also touch on Chandler's successors including Ross MacDonald and Joan Didion and how they adapted his techniques to investigate troubled undercurrents of Los Angeles and California.

Chapter Three investigates the origins of psychogeography and its links to the traditions of both literary London writing and urban noir detective novels. It explores key psychogeographic texts including works by Guy Debord as well as later developments in the work of Iain Sinclair, Rebecca Solnit and Lauren Elkin. It examines the evolution of this strand of urban investigation, and how psychogeographers continually drawn on the detective form as a way of bringing cogency to their exploration of the city.

Chapter Four analyses how the tropes of urban noir detective fiction and literary psychogeography have spread globally. It examines William McIlvanney's Glasgow-set

Laidlaw novels; the Mediterranean noir of Jean-Claude Izzo's *Marseille Trilogy* (*Total Chaos*, *Chourmo*, *Solea*); Sarah Gran's New Orleans noir in *City of the Dead*, and Qiu Xiaolong's Shanghai noir *Death of a Red Heroine*. It reveals how the key elements of the noir detective story have not simply been mapped onto different locations, but in fact, enriched by local knowledges, cultural perspectives and in-depth psychogeographic observation.

Chapter Five examines how the urban noir of Peter Corris and Marele Day has depicted the Sydney and its darker undercurrents and how these aspects have been explored in other genres from historical and social realist novels, to psychogeographic studies such as Delia Falconer's *Sydney* and postmodern crime fiction by Mandy Sayer. Ultimately, it suggests advocates for noir detective fiction as a useful form to depict Sydney but suggests the possibilities of bringing further psychogeographic observation too the genre.

An afterword will investigate the possibilities and challenges of my own creative project – *Way to Blue* – a detective novel set in Sydney and informed by the urban noir detective fiction and literary psychogeography examined in this exegesis. It addresses some of the perceived shortcomings of noir detective fiction, such as its pessimism, its traditionally male gaze and troubling depiction of women. It also examines the potentials and limitations of noir storytelling as a genre for representing the city, and how I have attempted to address these concerns.

On Common Ground

Detective fiction and psychogeography are traditionally viewed as separate and distinct fields, but this exegesis uses content analysis, textual analysis, genre and cross-genre studies to locate areas of common ground. It also examines the potential for these points of intersection to generate new and alternative ways of representing the city. Ultimately, it argues for the value and continued relevance of the urban noir detective story as a cogent and accessible way of exploring and representing the modern multi-layered global city, but it also suggests that the form is most powerful and engaged when informed by psychogeographic approaches.

Chapter 1. Straying in Shadows and Fog - Urban Writing in London

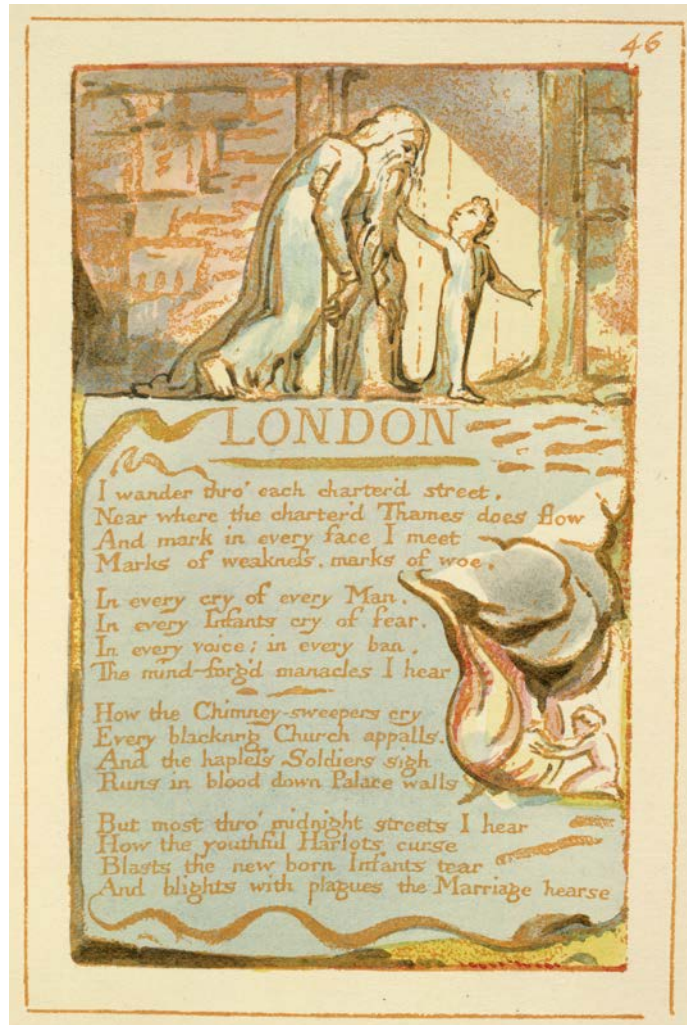


Figure 1.1: William Blake, "London"

Long before Parisian Situationists began drifting through the streets of Paris, or Iain Sinclair began "analysing the psychosis" of where he lived,¹ three London authors William Blake, Thomas De Quincey and Charles Dickens were finding ways of exploring and representing their city.

Their urban wanderings and reflections between 1780-1860 marked out a path for

¹ Iain Sinclair, quoted in "On the Road", an interview by Stuart Jeffries, *The Guardian*, 24 April, 2004. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview14>

urban engagement that still resonates today. These writers found themselves experiencing the relatively new phenomenon of the modern metropolis. They were finding their way, often literally in the dark, as they tried to describe and understand the turbulent forces at work.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, London went through a period of radical and unprecedented upheaval, including rapid technological and infrastructural development and a population explosion. By 1750, with a population of 675,000, London had become the largest city in Europe.² Bridges were built across the Thames and new major roads saw the city spread beyond its traditional Roman walls to swallow formerly outlying settlements. By 1801, London's population of one million was double that of Paris. This period of dramatic social and geographic transformation gave rise to new types of writing.

Iain Sinclair has dubbed London writer and artist William Blake (1757-1827) both a pioneer of psychogeography and a literary inspiration for his own writing.

Child Blake seeing angels in a tree on Peckham Rye. Naked Blake reciting *Paradise Lost* in a leafy Lambeth bower. Blake the engraver, in old age, walking to Hampstead. Blake singing on his deathbed in Fountain's Court. Blake, lying with his wife Catherine, in Bunhill Fields. Blake the prophet. Blake the psychogeographer.³

Blake was not a social scientist; his view of London was a highly individualised, poetic and often hallucinatory one. Yet his writing gives us a visionary version of the city, alerting us to the fact that, behind the shop fronts and grinding cogs of industry, there is also violence and enchantment. "His presence animates certain dusty corners," says Sinclair. "The incantatory rhythms of his poems drum in our heads and fire our blood."

In Blake's poetry, the powerful rhythms become a tool for recording the pulse of a city in relentless motion, which he experienced through his own restless habit of walking the streets.

² Jeremy Tambling *Going Astray: Dickens and London*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2009), p. 16.

³ Iain Sinclair, "Into the mystic", *The Observer*, (22 October, 2000).

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/oct/22/classics.williamblake>

Peter Ackroyd's biography of Blake describes him more specifically as a "Cockney visionary":⁴ "He had a very strong sense of place and all his life he was profoundly and variously affected by specific areas of London."⁵ Ackroyd points out that Blake was a compulsive walker, and spent a great deal of time crossing London on foot. One of Blake's key childhood memories, according to Ackroyd, was of "solitary walking". It was a practice he would continue throughout his life, informing his writing and his art. Ackroyd notes that Blake left London only once, and spent most of his life in an area bounded by the Strand, Holborn and Oxford St. "He did not need to travel any further because he saw, literally *saw*, Eternity there."⁶

Despite the celebrated intensity of Blake's spiritual visions, much of Blake's writing and imagery stems directly from the physical and social realities of his immediate environment. His intimate knowledge of the centre of a rapidly modernising city gave him a strong urban sensibility. Blake's writings and poetry are preoccupied with the contrasts of light and darkness he saw there, from the wonders of new technology to his burning sense of injustice at the evils caused by inequality.

For example, in Blake's poem, "London", from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the narrator walks through the streets of London and comments on what he observes both physically and emotionally. The narrator is pictured in Blake's own illustration as an old man being led by a child (see figure 1.1)⁷. This image of innocence and experience echoes how Blake himself viewed the city, both with weariness at the suffering and degradation he witnessed, but also a child-like wonder at the marvels of the modern metropolis.

The narrator describes walking through London's "charter'd" streets and "charter'd Thames" referring, not simply how the streets and landmarks were mapped, but also how they were controlled and circumscribed by laws and legal statutes. The centre of Blake's London was home to courts and legal offices, where laws were made, negotiated

⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake*, (London: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 91.

⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶ Ibid., p. 91.

⁷ William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, facsimile of first edition, published 1923, Liverpool. Image British Library. <https://www.bl.uk/works/songs-of-innocence-and-experience>.

and contested. Blake's narrator, however, reveals a delinquent urge common to many urban writers, a desire to free himself from the official pathways where he is directed. He meanders on his own course, reporting on unmapped and illicit sights.

Once he strays off course, the narrator finds despair, fear and oppression. The poem becomes a walking commentary using metaphors and rhymes to conjure up the social ills endemic to the city. The cries of chimney-sweeps "blacken" the churches with shame because they do little to protect children from exploitation. Further on the walker hears the sighs of soldiers and sees visions of blood running down the walls of a palace. As the poet pushes on "thro' midnight streets", he sees even grimmer sights. The curses of "youthful harlots", child prostitutes, drown out the cries of new-born babies, in a condemnation of society's hypocrisy.

At this point Blake's walk has become transgressive. He is seeing, hearing and commenting on hitherto invisible realms of the illegal, shameful and forbidden.

In Matthew Beaumont's study, *Nightwalking*, which traces both the legal and literary discourses of urban walking at night, he points out that the mere act of walking at night had long been considered a suspect act.

Nightwalking is, in both the physical and moral meanings of the term, deviant. At night, in other words, the idea of wandering cannot be dissociated from the idea of erring - wandering.⁸

But for the urban writer, the night has a particular allure. In the dead of night, the spirit of the city can seem to manifest itself more powerfully. As Rupert Brooke once wrote: "*Cities, like cats, will reveal themselves at night.*"⁹

Blake's "London" poem, with its meandering passage through the streets, its attention to observed details and urge to conjure metaphors from their minutiae, can be seen as a sort of literary forerunner to the urban psychogeography identified by Robert MacFarlane. It highlights the poetic nature of urban observation, where the walker-

⁸ Matthew Beaumont, *Night Walking*, (London: Verso, London, 2015), p. 5.

⁹ Rupert Brooke, *Letters from America*, (New York: Charles Scriber Sons, 1913), p. 29.

recorder must be “alert to the happenstance of metaphors, watch for visual rhymes, coincidences, analogies, family resemblance, the changing moods of the street”.¹⁰

Blake’s narrator also foreshadows the noir detective’s urge to stray from the designated pathways into the ‘mean streets’ in search of clues and answers. From Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe to Sara Gran’s Claire DeWitt, we find detectives wandering the streets at night, confronted with a world both poetically alluring yet ugly. When Philip Marlowe writes that the “the world is a wet emptiness” he elevates the rainy streets of Los Angeles to an almost existential plane.¹¹

Like many a later noir detective, Blake not only bore witness to crime, corruption and moral turpitude, he became caught up in violent undercurrents of the city. Matthew Beaumont reminds us that on one of Blake’s night walks in 1780, while he was still an apprentice in Covent Garden, the young artist got drawn into a volatile urban uprising.¹²

Blake was walking through central London during the Gordon Riots, an anti-Catholic protest that degenerated into riots and looting. A group of protestors charged towards Newgate prison to liberate protesters who had been incarcerated. Blake found himself suddenly engulfed by a surging crowd and carried along by its force to Newgate. There he witnessed the storming and burning of the prison, one of the most violent events of his era, and if caught, he might have been hanged for it.

Years later, Blake would allude to the night when his solitary walk became an apocalyptic episode of destruction and liberation. In his prophetic book *Jerusalem*, Blake writes that the poet must supplicate not to tyranny and wrath, but to prostitutes and sinners: “For Hell is opened to Heaven, thine eyes beheld. The dungeons burst and the prisoners set free.” For Blake this is not an abstract metaphor, but an image drawn from something he actually witnessed on the streets.

¹⁰ Robert Macfarlane, “A Road of One’s Own”, *The Times Literary Supplement*, (London, England), October 7, 2005; Issue 5348, pp. 3-4.

¹¹ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 162.

¹² Beaumont, *Night Walking*, pp. 265-8.

Below is an engraving of the burning of Newgate Prison during the Gordon Riots in central London (figure 1.2).¹³



Figure 1.2: “The Burning and Plundering of Newgate: Setting the Felons at Liberty by the Mob.”

Another image of the riots, painted by artist Charles Green, is viewed as if from within the mob (figure 1.3)¹⁴. The image of fires and raised arms is reminiscent of scenes from the French Revolution, an exciting, if terrifying moment, full of unchained energy.

¹³ “The Burning and Plundering of Newgate & Setting the Felons at Liberty by the Mob”, (London: Fielding and Walker Publisher, 1780), British Museum Collection Online http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=765660&objectId=3021204&partId=1 accessed 10 February 2015.

¹⁴ Charles Greem “Newgate Riots,” 1896, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/charles-green/the-gordon-riots-QLpSMJXL2KmHwh0s4XsJ8g2>



Figure 1.3: “Newgate Riots”, Charles Green

Blake himself had radical leanings and was known to have worn a red bonnet around London in solidarity with the French Revolutionaries, a daring act in his day. He was also attuned to a world in turmoil with violent forces at work. During the industrial revolution, and in an age of Enlightenment, Blake’s urban drifting awakened an awareness of the darker side of a rapidly modernising London - a place where poverty bred in the shadows and exploded in baying mobs surging through the streets, threatening to set the world alight.

Another celebrated image from Blake’s writing, that of the “dark satanic mills”, may also be drawn from his urban observations. Iain Sinclair points out that the Albion Mills on Blackfriars Road were close to where Blake worked. These flour mills churned out huge quantities of flour and threatened traditional manual workers’ jobs.¹⁵ The mills caught fire and burnt to the ground, and though it is unclear whether it was arson, the scene was reminiscent of the Newgate fire. Publications and pamphlets reported the mill fire,

¹⁵ Iain Sinclair, “William Blake’s Radicalism”, video <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/william-blake-radicalism>

such as this Albion Mills ballad broadside (public poster), published by C. Sheppard, 1791 (figure 1.4).¹⁶



Figure 1.4: “The Albion Mills on Fire”,
British Library English Online Collection.

*And now the folks begin to chat,
How the owners did this and that,
But very few did sorrow show,
That the mills were burnt so low.*

This is essentially an illustrated piece of reportage in verse form. The image shows the mills ablaze, while fire engines try to put the flames out and dancing devils play violins and fan the flames with bellows.

¹⁶ “Albion Mill Ballad”, (London, March 1791), British Library English Online Collection, <http://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/english-online/collection-item-images/b/r/o/broadside%20b20070%2002.jpg>.

While the image of “dark satanic mills” from “Jerusalem” may have taken on other metaphorical meanings, its origin, Sinclair argues, was in the actual mills, which for him represented the ominous forces of industrialisation.¹⁷

London may have seemed a model of industry and modern progress to many. Yet Blake’s eye, tuned to symbolism in the streets, saw simultaneous undercurrents of violent destruction. In this way, his perception of the city’s dark forces seems to foreshadow both the preoccupations of the modern psychogeographer and the noir detective.

This combination of reportage and hallucinatory visions was pushed further by another early London writer. Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) was an English essayist, best known for his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which recounts an episode of opium addiction while living in London.

The impetuous young De Quincey swapped an education at Oxford for a series of ill-fated literary and travel escapades that resulted in him living a semi-vagrant life on the streets of London. This period forms a significant part of the first section of *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, in which the young writer dreamed of distinguishing himself as a romantic poet, while idling in the streets. In this essay, his poetic observations of street life take on a distinctly psychogeographic flavour, blending reportage and interior reflections.

In “The Pleasures of Opium”, De Quincey describes the long walks he took through the London under the influence of opium:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances; for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motions of time.¹⁸

In his survey *Psychogeography*, Merlin Coverley suggests that while Blake provides an imaginative basis for psychogeographic ideas, it is De Quincey who is “psychogeography’s first actual practitioner”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Iain Sinclair, “William Blake’s Radicalism”, video and transcript, (London, British Library). <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/william-blake-radicalism>

¹⁸ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an Opium Eater and Other Writings*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 53.

¹⁹ Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 17.

Rather than sending De Quincey into a torpor, opium seemed to propel the author into a series of nocturnal drifts. These drug-fuelled journeys recall both the visionary tradition of Blake, and prefigure the playful 'drifting in the city' aspect of psychogeographic *dérive*.²⁰ In a later chapter we will see how Guy Debord, for all his talk of precise scientific techniques, initially favoured alcohol to fuel his own urban drifts.

De Quincey's urban writings also foreshadow the recurring connection between the investigator and the urban underclass in noir. De Quincey's semi-vagrant state and drug use made him both an observer and friend of the denizens of the night, the "peripatetics" who existed on the fringes of 19th century society such as the 16-year-old prostitute Ann, whom he befriends and writes about in *Confessions*.

De Quincey's relationship with Ann, in his own description, is one of sympathy and kinship, rather than censure or exploitation. He acknowledges that "in the existing state of my purse, my connection with such women could not have been an impure one".²¹ But he also adds a note of ambiguity by saying that, in any case, he does not consider the touch of a person like Ann "polluting". De Quincey does not see Ann as immoral, as many might have in this time, but refers to Ann's fate as a result of a betrayal by a rogue that left her penniless and abandoned on the streets to fend for herself. Ann, says De Quincey, is one of the "...many women in that unfortunate condition" and he urges the reader not to look down upon or disapprove of the women in prostitution: "The reader needs neither smile at this avowal, nor frown."²²

De Quincey and Ann are both creatures of the streets, and he maps their relationship in terms of specific street names - where they drifted and sought refuge from their hardships. He tells us about how they walk along Oxford Street together, and when he collapsed from lack of food, she took him to Soho Square to rest on the steps of a house while she went in search of spiced port wine to revive him. Eventually De Quincey is

²⁰ De Quincey's writings also inspired later accounts of intoxicated ramblings by Charles Baudelaire in Paris, in *Les Paradis Artificiels* (1860) and Walter Benjamin's accounts of his experiments with hashish, see Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²¹ De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 24.

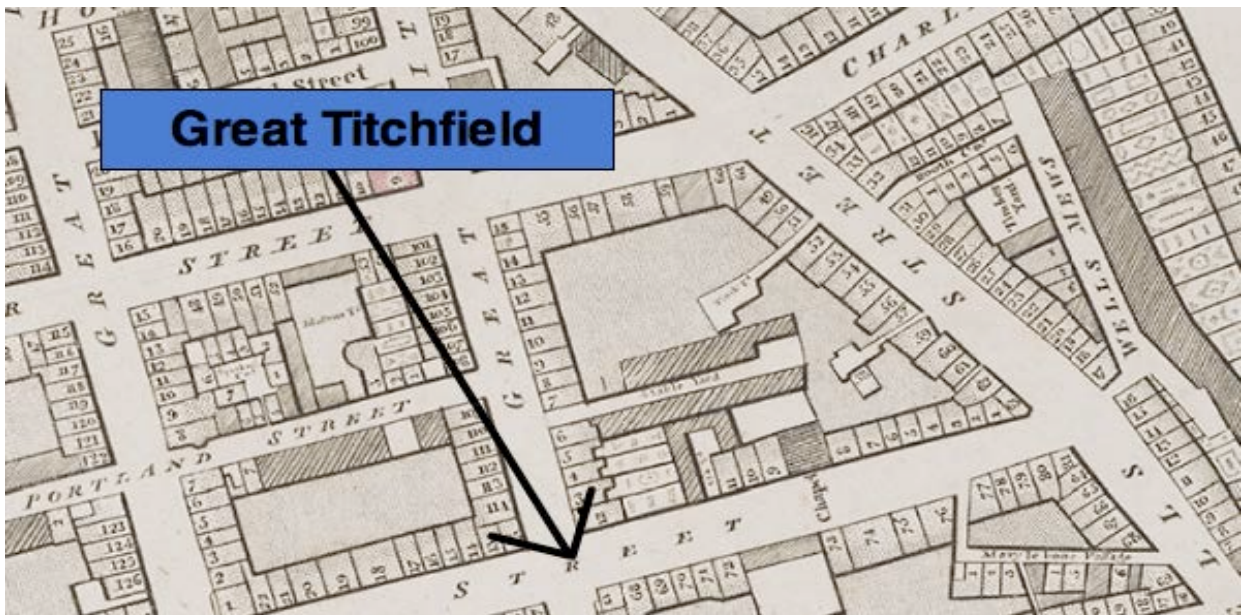
²² Ibid.

forced to leave her. He goes to the country to borrow money, and describes their parting at a coach station at Piccadilly. De Quincey writes that they chose a quiet spot to say their goodbyes.

Our course lay through a part of the town which has now all disappeared, so that I can no longer retrace its ancient boundaries – Swallow Street, I think it was called. Having time enough before us, however, we bore away to the left until we came into Golden Square; there, near the corner of Sherrard Street, we sat down, not wishing to part in the tumult and blaze of Piccadilly.²³

In this passage, De Quincey is describing parts of the city that have changed beyond recognition, but he also seems to be echoing the sense of loss and regret he feels about Ann. After this moment, De Quincey tells us, he lost contact with Ann.

De Quincey writes that on his return to London he waited for Ann: “at 6 clock, near the bottom of Great Titchfield Street; which had formerly been our customary haven of rendezvous, to prevent our missing each other in the great Mediterranean of Oxford Street”.²⁴ See figure 1.5.²⁵



²³ De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 30.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 31.

²⁵ Joel E. Salt, “Re-Mapping as Remembering: the Digital De Quincey”, Digital Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan, (Undated, accessed July 2017)
<http://drc.usask.ca/projects/eng803/joel/dequincey/dequincey.html>

Figure 1.5: 19th Century map of London showing Great Titchfield St.

De Quincey visits this spot repeatedly hoping to find Ann, but never sees his friend again. He writes that she seems to have been swallowed up by the city, and he is haunted by imagining what might have happened to the orphaned girl. His metaphor of Oxford Street as the “Mediterranean” evokes an image of a vast and treacherous sea where the vulnerable are lost. Ann’s disappearance becomes an urban tragedy, potentially one of many.

De Quincey’s sympathy for the lives of urban street dwellers is echoed in a number of later noir detective novels. In William McIlvanney’s *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, the narrative is set in motion by Laidlaw’s desire to understand the death of a homeless man. Meanwhile, in Sara Gran’s *City of the Dead*, Claire DeWitt tries to solve a missing person case by taking drugs with street kids, talking to vagrants and drifting through New Orleans in order to induce states of visionary insight.

In De Quincey’s writings we find an early account of this affinity between the urban wanderer and the underbelly of the city. Where other writers may have looked down upon the prostitute or vagrant as a social ill, to be viewed with pity or disgust, De Quincey finds a connection with the precarious lives of the marginalised and through their experiences a strong poetic connection with the streets.

De Quincey’s *Confessions* also introduces us to the complex and intertwined nature of the literary urban wanderer and the urban detective. Unlike Ann, De Quincey had the option of leaving the streets, and did so to borrow money from friends. Urban writers and detectives are creatures of the street, but they distinguish themselves from the victims who are forced there by circumstances. They are drawn to the streets, but their writings and investigations allow them to explore this environment without getting lost – a sort of Ariadne’s thread that leads them through the dark labyrinth.

Matthew Beaumont argues that De Quincey’s “night walking” is a conscious act of straying and one of the ways in which he fashioned a Romantic shadow self. “It collapsed

the dark recesses of the psyche into the labyrinthine spaces of the city.”²⁶ For Beaumont, De Quincey is consciously constructing a literary image and alternative identity for himself by plunging into the city’s darkness.

De Quincey’s urban wanderings were no doubt partially a rebellion against the bourgeois life mapped out for him by his parents, as well as a self-conscious fashioning of a radical persona. We will see in Chapter 3 how they also foreshadow Guy Debord’s own desires to stray from the paths laid out by society, to get lost in the city and find his own direction. De Quincey, was also looking up at the stars from the gutter. He writes that during his vagrant years he would often “gaze from Oxford Street up every avenue in succession which pierces through the heart of Marylebone to the fields and the woods to the north...”²⁷

North of Oxford Street, Beaumont explains, refers to De Quincey’s literary ambitions and longing to join the ranks of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, who lived in the Lakes District in the north.²⁸ In the passage above, and in other references to Oxford Street as “a stony-hearted step-mother”, De Quincey uses the streets of London to delineate the conflict between his frustrated ambitions and his dreams for a more exalted literary career. The streets describe boundaries that he longs to cross.

At other times the murky streets of London offer a source of exhilarating and disorienting freedom.

And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares, as must, I conceive, baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney-coachmen. I could almost believe at times, that I must be the first to discover these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted whether they had been laid down in the modern charts of London.²⁹

²⁶ Beaumont, *Night Walking*, p. 319.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 40

²⁸ Ibid., p. 316

²⁹ Beaumont, *Night Walking*, p. 53.

The London De Quincey describes is full of risk; it is threatening yet offers exciting possibilities. There are zones where official maps cease to be of use and all productive activities are abandoned in favour of the pleasure of drifting. De Quincey self-consciously seeks to lose himself in the city. While he may never have truly risked getting swallowed up, like his poor companion Ann, he manufactured for himself a way of seeing the city in a new light – or perhaps more accurately, a new shadow.

Later in his literary career, De Quincey transformed himself from Romantic visionary to Victorian man of letters, publishing topical and literary articles in the *London* and *Blackwood's* magazines. In a Postscript to his famous essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," De Quincey takes a breezy, ironised attitude towards violence, while harking back to his fascination with the London's darker side.

De Quincey's essay centres on the crimes of murderer John Williams, who brutally killed seven people in London's East End, not far from where De Quincey once lived. His article draws heavily on news reports of the Ratcliffe Highway killings, but also changes some facts for the sake of a good story. The piece seems to position De Quincey as a writer with a special insight into city's underbelly, but also one who brings poetic insight to the grim realities rather than being a mere reporter. In the course of the essay De Quincey references Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Milton's "Paradise Regained", and compares the burning of Drury Lane to the fall of Apollo. He then suggests that when John Williams brutally murdered two households with a hammer and crow bar, he "asserted his supremacy above all the children of Cain".³⁰

Interestingly, De Quincey's combination of cool irony and street knowledge with poetic and literary references seems to prefigure some of the literary tropes and techniques of urban noir described in the later discussion of Raymond Chandler.

These stylistic and thematic concerns are amplified further by Charles Dickens (1812-70) whose themes and techniques are also echoed in psychogeography and urban noir.

³⁰ Thomas De Quincey, "Postscript [To On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts]", *Thomas De Quincey On Murder*, ed. Robert Morrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p98. See also notes, pp. 190-91.

A compulsive walker, Dickens often walked at night to soothe mental anguish or insomnia, but also to observe street life and shape his restless, half formed thoughts into stories.

In his essay “Night Walks”, Dickens writes, “Some years ago, a temporary inability to sleep, referable to a distressing impression, caused me to walk about the streets all night...” During these walks, Dickens says he developed a sympathy for the condition of the homeless (he uses the term “houselessness”). He observes the “restlessness of a great city, and the way in which it tumbles and tosses before it can get to sleep”.³¹

Dickens tells us that while out walking, he was consciously on the look out for diversions, and occasionally saw a fight or heard a policeman’s rattle (a precursor to the whistle), but mostly he observes the afflictions of the homeless and the alcoholic, “the thin-armed, puff-faced, leaden-lipped gin-drinker”.³²

For Dickens, the city is monstrous, infinite, often humorous but also nightmarishly cruel, often a ghostly phantasm of hell. His walk through the late-night streets of London becomes a catalogue of urban suffering, from the homeless vagrants soaked by the “pattering rain”, to murder victims and suicides on the Thames, the inmates of Newgate Prison, and the incarcerated debtors. Dickens travels literally and imaginatively, joining those huddling in the reeking breweries and standing near the warmth of dray horses or grain storage warehouses on the waterside. He stumbles over a wretch sleeping on the steps of a church, with rags falling off his body, and laments the pitiful shoeless children fighting for food scraps in the market place.

While many of Dickens’s observations resemble a journalistic account of the streets of London, “Night Walks” also evokes the atmosphere of the city and its unnerving effects on the psyche, with poetic and metaphorical images of death and corruption.

Dickens compares homeless children in the marketplace to discarded rotting fruit, while at night the cemeteries summon visions of a great army of the dead, rising up and

³¹ Charles Dickens, *Night Walks*, (London: Penguin, 2010), Kindle, Location 33.

³² Dickens, *Night Walks*, Location 34-45

invading the streets. As Dickens passes Bethlehem hospital, he muses on whether the sane and insane are really the same when they are asleep and dreaming, and sees a “wild moon and clouds” as a restless “evil conscience in a tumbled bed”. Dickens pieces together a string of observations and begins to spin them into melodramatic tales of murder, poverty and insanity. Dickens seems to be letting us see his own internal creative process – revealing how the streets of London, and the bleak dramas that play out there, are woven into stories.

G.K. Chesterton suggested that Dickens’s originality as a novelist stemmed from this intimate knowledge of London. He observed that Dickens seemed to possess “the key of the street”.

Few of us see through the shining riddle of the street, the strange folk that belong to the street only... Of the street at night, many of us know even less. The street at night is a great locked up house. But Dickens had, if ever man had, the key of the street... He could open the inmost door of his house – the door that leads into that secret passage which is lined with houses and roofed with stars.³³

Perhaps it is also true that Dickens’s knowledge of London, its murky labyrinthine streets, poverty, violence and the precarious lives of Londoners gave rise to the particular types of stories he told.

Dickens, after all, was no stranger to the precariousness of London life. As a child he had been made brutally aware of the city’s fickle cruelty. Shortly after moving to the city from Kent, Charles’s father, John Dickens, had been thrown into the Marshalsea debtors prison for unpaid debts and was joined by his wife and younger children, while Charles, at the age of 12, was forced to board alone and work ten-hour days at a “blacking factory”, pasting labels on pots of boot polish.

To the 12-year-old newcomer, London must have seemed harsh and bewildering. These experiences left the lasting impression on Dickens that London was a perilous place for the poor and vulnerable, while also providing the inspiration and setting for *Oliver Twist* to *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House*. Perhaps they even accounted for the anxiety that drove Dickens out of his bed and into the streets at night in his later life.

³³ G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), pp. 23-4.

Matthew Beaumont observes that for Dickens, walking and particularly walking at night – was “a territorial habit, one that enabled him to orientate himself in the city, to realign the relationship between the metropolis and mental life”. It was also a productive technique for his writing.

In his non-fiction, Dickens depicts the ravages of street life on London’s homeless population. In his essay “On Duty with Inspector Field”, he records the night patrol of a police detective who will become the inspiration for Inspector Bucket in his novel *Bleak House*.

Dickens’s description of the journey through central London is drenched in visceral detail and a frustration at how suffering is hidden in plain sight.

How many people may there be in London, who, if we had brought them deviously and blindfold, to this street, fifty paces from the Station House, and within call of Saint Giles’s church, would know it for a not remote part of the city in which their lives are passed? How many, who amidst this compound of sickening smells, these heaps of filth, these tumbling houses, with all their vile contents, animate, and inanimate, slimily overflowing into the black road, would believe that they breathe THIS air? ³⁴

Dickens also records Inspector Field’s pity and disgust at the conditions of the homeless who sleep crammed in a flophouse in the squalid district “like maggots in a cheese”.

In *Bleak House* we find this same visceral detail and potent imagery, the sights, smells and physical sensations we might experience if we were walking with the author. The city Dickens describes is a place of fog and drizzle, where man and beast struggle for a foothold, and hope is shrouded in a pall of gloom. Yet, there is magic, even here.

LONDON... Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot

³⁴ Charles Dickens, *Household Words*, Vol III, p. 265. Dickens Journals Online <http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iii/page-265.html>

passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.³⁵

In this extraordinary opening passage, Dickens evokes both the dreariness of the urban streetscape, and a sort of "astonishment in a terrain of familiarity" in Robert Macfarlane's words.³⁶ This "astonishment" is a desirable state, which the Situationist psychogeographers would later claim provoked a sensitivity to "*the hidden histories and encrypted events of the city*". What could be more astonishing than seeing a giant Megalosaurus lumbering up a gloomy city street? By inserting the image, Dickens snaps the reader out of their familiarity with the dull, sodden commute through London streets, and adds an element of surprise and wonder.

If *Bleak House* is not quite an urban noir novel, we nevertheless find elements that anticipate that genre's portrayal of the city. Its circuitous plot, incorporating several search narratives, acts as a sort of literary *dérive*, taking the reader on a journey through various ambiances and zones - from the houses of the rich, through the Inns of Court, into the dangerous alleys and the toxic slums. Dickens wants to guide his readers to look into dark corners they would normally ignore and share his physical disgust that such places can exist in a modern city.

This is vividly illustrated in Chapter 16, where we move from a crimson and gold great drawing room and the stately oaks of Lord and Lady Dedlock's country estate, to London. Lady Dedlock, disguised as her maid, visits the office of the solicitor Mr Tulkinghorn in the Chancery area, then walks to the nearby slums to follow up her investigation. Dickens creates a fictional slum "Tom-All-Alone's" to stand in for the many slums close to the Inns of Court and fashionable areas, highlighting the social inequality of his time.

³⁵ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, (London: Penguin, London, 2003), p. 13.

³⁶ Robert MacFarlane, "A Road of One's Own", *The Times Literary Supplement*, (October 7, 2005); Issue 5348, pp. 3-4.

Jo lives – that is to say, Jo has not yet died – in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in... ³⁷

This 1853 illustration for *Bleak House*, by Hablot Knight Browne (AKA Phiz) gives some sense of the atmosphere and psychogeographic ambience Dickens was trying to evoke (see figure 1.6).³⁸



Figure 1.6: Hablot Knight Browne, "Tom-All-Alone's", British Library.

³⁷ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 256.

³⁸ Hablot Knight Brown (aka Phiz) "Tom-All-Alones", illustration for Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, London, 1853, British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/charles-dickens-victorian-gothic-and-bleak-house>

The old tenements are propped up by support beams, and Dickens tells us they frequently collapse on their inhabitants.

Lady Dedlock asks a homeless boy, Jo, to take her to a grave, which holds the key to a mystery she is trying to solve. But while she is drawn on by curiosity, she is also repulsed by where her investigation leads – a “hideous archway” with “deadly stains contaminating her dress” and “dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of life hums in Tom-all-Alone’s, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air, and winking . . . at many horrible things.”³⁹

Throughout the novel, Dickens seeks to take us by the hand and lead us through the streets of London, as a popular later song would suggest.⁴⁰ Or, as Jane Griffith points out in her article “Such a Labyrinth of Streets”, the plot of *Bleak House* is advanced by travel both to and from the city, and within it. “The race to find Lady Dedlock through London’s streets epitomizes the novel’s peak of suspense.”⁴¹

Griffith also notes the novel’s fixation with the possibility of seeing and finding the truth in the labyrinthine city. *Bleak House*’s repeated scenes of surveillance, mirrors, disguise, fog, family resemblance, illiteracy, and both symbolic and literal blindness exemplify this. Dickens also offers us the split perspective of two narrators; one is Esther, the other an omniscient voice. Each provides a different view of events and, in turn, they describe two different views of London.

It is therefore difficult to know whether *Bleak House* is mapping the city or deconstructing the map. As Griffith says, “Sometimes, the novel represents urban space as if mimetically mapping the city, and at other times represents London as unreadable or indescribable”.⁴²

³⁹ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 262.

⁴⁰ Ralph McTell, “Streets of London”, from the album *Spiral Staircase*, (London: Transatlantic, 1974). The lyrics offer to take the listener by the hand and lead them through the streets of London, to see homeless, lonely and forgotten members of society.

⁴¹ Jane Griffith, “Such A Labyrinth Of Streets: Serialization And The Gendered View Of Urban Space In *Bleak House*”, *English* (Autumn 2012) 61 (234), pp 248–266: <https://doi-org.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/10.1093/english/efs033>

⁴² Griffith, “Such a Labyrinth”, p. 253.

Griffith describes many scenes in *Bleak House* as “cartographic” – meaning that urban space is presented to the reader like a map or guidebook. A character will walk on a street and turn left on a road with a specific street name. At other times, these directions become confused and blurred, and characters become lost in the city.

For example, there is one moment, for example, when Esther believes she has arrived in London, only to find she is “ten miles off “. Once in London, she asks if there is a great fire because “the streets [are] so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything [is] to be seen” and she wonders “how the people [keep] their senses” due to the fog. ⁴³

Later in the novel, Esther describes the disorienting experience driving in a carriage through the labyrinthine streets of London.

Where we drove I neither knew then, nor have ever known since; but we appeared to seek out the worst streets in London...I was prepared for our descending into a deeper complication of such streets, and we never failed to do so. ⁴⁴

Griffith’s essay argues that the two narrators represent two different gendered perspectives – an omniscient male narrator, and a subjective and an unreliable female one (Esther). She emphasises this by arguing that Dickens privileges the “omniscient” male perspective, by making it seem more reliable, compared with that of the subjective and fallible Esther. Another more productive interpretation might be to see these two narrators as signifying different ways of seeing. Rather than privileging one point of view over the other, perhaps Dickens is suggesting that a single perspective is never enough.

Dickens seems therefore to be experimenting with perspective to give us a richer understanding of the city, in which an official map or an official view can be questioned and undermined. With the dual narrator, Dickens reveals that individuals walking in the streets experience a city in different ways that can offer heterogeneous but equally valid perspectives.

⁴³ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 42.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 903.

Perhaps we can even see in Dickens's dual narrators in *Bleak House* a prototype for shifting from the single omniscient observer of much psychogeography towards a more "relational" approach to space, closer to one that Doreen Massey advocates in *For Space*.⁴⁵ Massey argues for an "appreciation of the spatial" that recognises that spaces involve a "negotiation of relations". Dickens's shift in perspectives shows us how individuals negotiate space in general, as well as certain places (the Inns of Court, Tom-All-Alone's) in particular.

While many early urban noir detective novels and urban writings feature a privileged, single, masculinised viewpoint, fiction can also offer alternative ways of seeing urban space as a "negotiation of relations" and "engagements", which might allow it to transcend some of the limitations of both traditional psychogeography and noir.

Consider, for example, how Esther in *Bleak House* describes a physical interaction with the city's contaminating poverty. Esther and her maid Charley find Jo, the homeless boy, in a rundown cottage, a place that "was closer than before, and had an unhealthy, and a very peculiar smell".⁴⁶ Jo is sick and stares at Esther and Charley with "burning eyes" and describes his symptoms, running hot and cold, his head "all sleepy, and all a going mad-like" and his bones "isn't half so much bones as pain".⁴⁷ Their contact with the sick boy, presumably suffering from small pox, makes first Charley then Esther ill. Esther contracts the disease and becomes momentarily blind; even when she regains her health, her face remains disfigured.

In this way, Esther's story gives readers an account of the city's visceral impact on her body. It becomes an evocation of urban "relational space", demonstrating how poverty corrupts and contaminates the bodies that inhabit and pass through the slums.

It is probably no coincidence that *Bleak House* also features one of the first professional detectives in English fiction - Inspector Bucket. During this period, crime stories were emerging in popular literature in London and Paris. In 1842, ten years before *Bleak*

⁴⁵ Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage, 2014) p. 147.

⁴⁶ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 489.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

House, Eugene Sue had published his serial *Mysteries of Paris*,⁴⁸ featuring the hero Rodolphe, an aristocrat disguised as a worker, who nevertheless possessed some of the qualities of the hard-boiled detective, such as the ability to speak argot, fight and navigate the different layers of society.

In *Watching the Detectives*, Simon Dentith suggests that in this serial novel, “the mystery of the city is made narratable” and that “transgression provides the opportunity for narrative”. Dentith argues that *Mysteries of Paris*, which subsequently inspired George Reynolds’ homage, *Mysteries of London*, has an important place in the history of the urban crime novel. Through these tales, he argues, “the mysterious realities of urban life are made paradoxically more comprehensible by unlocking them through the aberrant narratives of crime”.⁴⁹

Unlike Sue’s aristocratic hero, Inspector Bucket is a pragmatic professional, whose comic name suggests a man who dredges up the dirt on peoples’ lives for a living. He also introduces us to some of the qualities that will reappear in the lineage of fictional urban detectives. Bucket is an outsider, a ghostly presence, who materialises so suddenly in Mr Tulkinghorn’s office that Mr Snagsby wonders if he has come out of a cupboard.⁵⁰ He is described as a stout, middle-aged, sharp-eyed man-in-black, and a quiet listener.

Bucket is also a man of the streets, who “seems in some indefinable manner to lurk and lounge”, even as Snagsby has to pick up his pace. He leads Snagsby down pestilent streets full of “fever houses” that make Snagsby feel “as if he were going every moment deeper down into the infernal gulf”. Yet the streetwise Bucket remains cool, calm and collected, even as Snagsby starts to look unwell and complains that he can’t breathe in the infernal air.

⁴⁸ Eugene Sue, *The Mysteries of Paris*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845).

⁴⁹ Simon Dentith, “The Shitty Urban Machine Humanised: The Urban Crime Novel and the Novels of William McIlvanney”, in *Watching the Detectives: Essays on Crime Fiction*, ed. Ian A Bell and Graham Daldry. (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 20.

⁵⁰ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 355.

In *Bucket* we have an early example of a detective toughened by experience; alert, observant but unflinching when confronted with the miseries of the streets. These qualities enable Bucket to lead the reader into no-go areas where they would normally never venture, places which are compared with sewers: “the crowd flows round, and from its squalid depths obsequious advice heaves up to Mr Bucket”.⁵¹

Dickens’s *Bucket* suggests how the detective persona can be used in the psychogeographic mapping of uncharted zones, where not only the delicate *Snagsby*, but many a reader would choose to avoid.

By concentrating on Blake, De Quincey and Dickens, I hope to show a common ancestry between the preoccupations, themes and techniques of literary psychogeography and urban noir. Their writings hover between documentary and poetry. They create narratives where the city itself is central to the story and where the details of the city are given metaphorical and poetic resonances. Their techniques, including the attentive urban drift and the search narrative have been retraced countless times by subsequent urban writers, both psychogeographers and noir novelists, looking for ways to describe and engage with the forces shaping the city and the lives of those who live in them. In the following chapter, I reveal how these ideas were taken up and transformed into the modern urban noir detective story, which gave a new and compelling form to the urban drift and provided an accessible framework for its psychogeographic observations.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 359.

Chapter 2. Los Angeles Noir

A yellow window shone here and there, but most of the houses were dark. A smell of kelp came in off the water and lay on the fog. The tyres sang on the moist concrete of the boulevard. The world was a wet emptiness.

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*¹

Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles-set novel *The Big Sleep*, provides an ideal model for examining the emergence of the noir detective genre with links to earlier traditions of urban writing. It offers a clear early example of a story that connects its central crime to the nature of the city itself, and uses its investigation/search narrative as a device for exploring the physical and affective landscape of the city. Throughout the story the search narrative acts as a compelling spatial drift, which draws us to consciously explore the layered histories, desires and metaphorical resonances encrypted into the cityscape and the effects these have on their inhabitants.

Chandler's Noir

The Big Sleep, Chandler's first novel, published in 1939, was written for an existing market of hard-boiled crime fiction nourished by publications such as *Black Mask*. The cheaply produced 'pulp' magazine was aimed at the mass market and sought to satisfy a desire for crime stories in the "spare, idiomatic" style of writers such as Ernest Hemingway.²

Chandler's novels draw on the influence of Hemingway's clipped prose, and Dashiell Hammet's tough-talking street dialogue, the bleak domestic operas of James M Cain, and Horace McCoy's blackly absurdist tales. Chandler also admitted to copying out stories by Erle Stanley Gardner (author of the Perry Mason detective novels), to teach himself to write pulp fiction.³

¹ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 162.

² Richard Bradford, *Crime Fiction a Short Introduction*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 27.

³ Chandler's letter to Erle Stanley Gardner appears in Frank McShane, *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler*, Delta, New York, 1987, p. 8. Also discussed in John Carey, "Criminal mastermind; Raymond Chandler revolutionised crime fiction, but only started writing in his forties", *Sunday Times* (July 22, 2012), p. 31.

At the same time, Chandler self-consciously rejected certain literary styles and genres. In his 1944 essay, "The Simple Art of Murder",⁴ he distanced himself from the clue-puzzle style mysteries of the British Golden Age detective tradition represented by writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. He aimed instead for a more realistic, active and indeed "masculine" style, even if, as Stephen Knight suggests, Chandler's self-analysis is problematic.⁵

Knight has argued that Chandler's writing was in fact marked by an aestheticising and romanticising tendency.⁶ This may indeed be due to the influence of English writers Chandler was exposed during his schooldays, perhaps even Blake, De Quincey and Dickens. As Will Norman points out, the great paradox of Chandler's career is that the most famous practitioner of the typically American art form of hard-boiled detective fiction was educated in a British public school and thought of himself as a British exile.⁷

T.R. Steiner notes that even the expression "mean streets", which became synonymous with Chandler's Los Angeles noir ("down these mean streets a man must go")⁸ was borrowed from Britain. Steiner argues that the phrase was already well-known in British culture when it was used by Victorian writer Arthur Morrison in his 1894 collection of slum fiction, *Tales of Mean Streets*.⁹

While Chandler's personal history, literary pretensions and influences are debatable; his ambition was clearly to create a modern, realistic and meaningful depiction of city life in America. This led him to focus on ways of representing the peculiarities of his adopted city of Los Angeles. His attempts to give resonance to the city's sprawling and indeterminate urban space in *The Big Sleep* combine detailed, realistic accounts of moving through the streets along with more poetic and metaphorical imagery that draws connections between the physical and psychic space of the city.

⁴ Raymond Chandler's, "The Simple Art of Murder" first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1944), pp. 53-59, cited version from *The Second Chandler Omnibus*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962).

⁵ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan), 2010, p110.

⁶ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, (London, Macmillan, 1980), pp. 135-67.

⁷ Will Norman, *Modernism/Modernity*, Nov, 2013, Vol.20(4), pp. 747-770.

⁸ Chandler uses the phrase "down these mean streets a man must go" in "The Simple Art of Murder", p. 14.

⁹ T.R. Steiner, "The origin of Raymond Chandler's 'mean streets'", *ANQ*, Oct, 1994, Vol.7(4), p. 225.

Knight acknowledges that Chandler's style involves beginning each scene by carefully pinpointing locations on the map of the Los Angeles area, and that his vivid imagery gives an "affective force" to the locations he describes.¹⁰

A City Built on Stories

Before we explore Chandler's technique, however, it is important to examine the urban context that provided the setting for Chandler's iconic novel.

Jonathan Kellerman has written that "LA isn't a city, it's a concept which applies anywhere in the Golden State (California) where nice weather abounds, a chasm yawns between the haves and the have-nots, and delusional blind ambition is habitually confused with work ethic and wisdom."¹¹

Kellerman's Los Angeles is also the archetypical city of urban noir. The key ingredients are a large modern city seemingly filled with opportunities, but where "a chasm yawns between the haves and the have-nots". The "nice weather" is not even essential, but adds a layer of irony. While Los Angeles might be associated with sunshine and wholesomeness, it is also a place of shady people and dark deeds. In *The Big Sleep*, Los Angeles is increasingly soaked with rain, Chandler's ironic comment on the sunny postcard images of the city.

Chandler's *The Big Sleep* is constantly interrogating and ironically commenting on Los Angeles, its self-image, pretensions and hypocrisies. This may be because Chandler was an outsider, but perhaps also because of the unstable and indefinable nature of Los Angeles itself.

In *For Space*, Doreen Massey describes Los Angeles as a "series of negotiations", human and non-human, of varying degrees of success.¹² There is a "perilous thrown-togetherness" to the city, says Massey, which is the result of culture clashes and conflicts,

¹⁰ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p. 143.

¹¹ "Jonathan Kellerman's Top 10 LA Noir Novels", *The Guardian*, (31 March 2010).
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/31/jonathan-kellerman-top-10-la-noir-novels>

¹² Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 160-61.

and a love-hate relationship with the forces of nature, as well as a sense of an overall lack of urban design.

Mike Davis, in his evocative study, *City of Quartz*, notes that in its formative days Los Angeles was in search of stories to define itself and its identity, but inevitably these stories were turned into marketing pitches to attract population, buyers and wealth.¹³

From the early 20th century, Los Angeles was subject to a massive real estate boom. It soaked up stories and exploited them to turn a small frontier town into a city, making a lot of people rich in the process. Los Angeles was an isolated town perched between the desert and the sea. It was initially portrayed as a last chance saloon for many desperate to strike it rich, both hucksters and those who had simply missed out on the riches and opportunities elsewhere. But to make it work, says Davis, they had to attract more settlers, residents and people willing to part with their cash.

To this end, the real estate speculators absorbed and exploited the cultural mythologies available, often generated by the region's writers and artists. As is so often the case, the artists were the avatars of capitalism, creating value where it had not existed before, spinning glamorous tales and visions of grandeur from the dust. Davis notes that Los Angeles, a mirage city in a desert, is one of the most mediated towns in America, and almost impossible to view except through the "fictive scrim of its mythologisers".¹⁴

Davis describes how groups of writers and artists, such as the Arroyo Set, conjured images of the South West's Spanish mission past, creating "a Mediterraneanized idyll of New England life" among the "perfumed ruins" of Spanish culture. Their idealised fictional visions then became fodder for real estate marketing pitches, promoting property with the aura of "history and romance".¹⁵ In doing so, "they wrote the script for the giant real estate speculation of the early twentieth century," says Davis. In turn, their images, motifs, and myths were reproduced in Hollywood, and turned into the ersatz landscapes of suburban LA.

¹³ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, (London: Verso, 1990), p. 20.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 27-30.

Los Angeles was marketed variously as a new Rome, an Arabian-style oasis in the desert, and a new Cote d'Azur. Each new suburb and new development offered an exotic new vision, and the prospect of beauty, sunshine and opportunity for anyone game enough to try their luck. The city became a magnet for gamblers, chancers, starlets, anyone who was prepared to take a chance on a better life, and those who were keen to exploit them.

The Transformational Grammar of Noir

While real estate agents and developers exploited the utopian images of the city from art and literature to attract buyers, another counter-narrative began to emerge with the growing hardship and disillusionment brought on by the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The "Depression-crazed middle classes" of Southern California became the "original protagonists of noir", argues Davis.¹⁶ Beginning with James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a succession of "through-the-glass-darkly" novels, repainted the image of Los Angeles and its hinterland as a deracinated urban hell. "Writing against the myth of El Dorado, they transformed it into its antithesis; that of the dream running out along the California shore..." They created "a regional fiction obsessively concerned with puncturing the bloated image of Southern California as the golden land of opportunity and a fresh start".

Davis argues that noir emerged from a radicalisation of the middle classes as a result of the Depression, "as jobless accountants and ruined stockbrokers stood in the same breadlines as truck drivers and steelworkers", and this downwardly mobile middle stratum was at war with itself.¹⁷ The very structure of the boom years, fuelled by middle-class savings channelled into real estate and oil speculations, ensured a vicious circle of crisis and bankruptcy.

Yet as the Depression shattered a stratum of the "dream-addicted" Los Angeles middle-class, it also brought together hard-boiled novelists and anti-fascist exiles from Europe, argues Davis. They worked together to expose how the Los Angeles dream had become a nightmare and the noir literature that emerged from this fermenting social malaise "was like a transformational grammar turning each charming ingredient of the boosters'

¹⁶ Davis, *City of Quartz*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

arcadia into a sinister equivalent".¹⁸

In their article on Los Angeles Noir, Gary Hausladen and Paul Starrs argue that noir represents a rare episode of "pause for introspection and uncertainty" between the utopian visions in America conjured in the 1920s and 1960s.¹⁹

Yet, even as the effects of the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, images of a carefree beach lifestyle still appeared in promotional material for Los Angeles that continued to extol the city's good life, while ignoring its problems.²⁰ Noir was the antidote to this marketing hype, but one that also ran parallel to it.

In *The Big Sleep* the Los Angelino mystique of success and pleasure, beach clubs, mansions and gambling houses is explored but also undermined. Chandler's detective narrator Philip Marlowe systematically subverts the glossy brochure images. His drift through Los Angeles peeps behind the glamorous facades to reveal that stately mansions contain deranged daughters, dignified-looking bookshops front for pornographers, and suburban bungalows conceal depraved activities. Meanwhile, the sunny beachside postcard image of Los Angeles melts in the eerie, increasingly heavy rain until it becomes "a wet emptiness".²¹

Mike Davis suggests that the first-generation 1930s noir writers created a vision of Los Angeles where the tensions are more economic than psychological. He even describes *The Big Sleep* as Chandler's "most anti-rich novel". Chandler's *The Big Sleep* certainly seems suspicious of the moneyed establishment in Los Angeles, not simply in the form of the Sternwoods, but the legal establishment that enables the wealthy and powerful to manipulate justice. The book also seems wary and disapproving of those who choose the get-rich-quick path through pornography, blackmail scams and gambling dens. Yet *The Big Sleep* is not simply a moral tale about the evils of money. The novel seems more interested in showing how the pattern of stories built into the fabric of Los Angeles generates a complex web of desire and crime.

¹⁸ Davis, *City of Quartz*, p. 38.

¹⁹ Gary J. Hausladen & Paul F. Starrs, "LA Noir", *Journal of Cultural Geography* (Vol. 23, 2005), pp. 43-69.

²⁰ David Fine, "Nathanael West, Raymond Chandler, and the Los Angeles Novel" *California History*, 68/4 (Winter 1989/1990), p. 198.

²¹ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 162.

Searching for the City

The search narrative in *The Big Sleep* allows the detective, Marlowe, to drift through Los Angeles and observe its undercurrents of desire, corruption and power. Marlowe must track down a blackmailer targeting the wealthy General Sternwood's daughter Carmen; he also takes it upon himself to find out what happened to Rusty Regan, the husband of the other daughter, Vivian. This dual quest initiates a passage through the cityscape that in turn generates a series of fleeting images and metaphors that are woven together to evoke a sense of the moods and affective influences of the city.

In his 1969 article on Philip Marlowe, R. W. Lid describes how the detective criss-crosses the landscape of greater Los Angeles "moving from terrain to terrain, locale to locale, setting to setting" while lingering on their physical aspects in a way that invests them with value and meaning.²² The different places and people he encounters, "are seemingly held together by a thread of meaning solely of Marlowe's making", says Lid. But "a pattern gradually emerges, a meaningful arrangement" that represents American society as Chandler sees it: "mobile, fluid, a reticulated crisscrossing of people through time and circumstance".

In other words, Marlowe's movement through the landscape shows us that everything and everyone is connected – "decayed buildings and decaying people, are just "a stone's throw away from the deep lawns and private driveways and stately mansions".

However, as Robert Merrill argues in "Raymond Chandler's Plots and the Concept of Plot", while Chandler and many critics have dismissed the role of plot in his novels, it actually plays a significant role, specifically as a way of creating and delineating character, and helping to provide moral meaning.²³

Chandler himself claimed he was not particularly interested in an approach to the novel that emphasized plot. In his famous essay "The Simple Art of Murder," he remarked that "the coolheaded constructionist does not also come across with lively characters, sharp

²² R. W. Lid, "Philip Marlowe Speaking", *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1969), pp. 153-178.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4334891>

²³ Robert Merrill, "Raymond Chandler's Plots and the Concept of Plot", *Narrative* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 3-21, see especially p. 7.

dialogue, a sense of pace and an acute use of observed detail”.²⁴

Unlike the puzzle solvers Agatha Christie or Dorothy L. Sayers, Chandler said he was more concerned with style than plot, and described *The Big Sleep* as a “detective yarn that happens to be more interested in people”.

Critics have tended to agree, says Merrill, describing *The Big Sleep*’s plot as “a confused tangle”, attributing this to the fact that it cannibalised two short stories Chandler wrote earlier for *Black Mask* magazine, “Killer in the Rain” (published in 1935) and “The Curtain” (published in 1936). Merrill, however, argues that the plot of *The Big Sleep* was not an afterthought, nor was it the *Frankensteinian* by-product of two stories being stitched together, but instead “flows” psychologically from Marlowe’s situation.

Merrill points out that by the midpoint of the novel, Marlowe has fulfilled his contractual obligations to General Sternwood following the deaths of Arthur Gwynne Geiger, Owen Taylor, and Joe Brody, the arrest of Geiger’s lover, Carol Lundgren, and the recovery of the incriminating pictures of Carmen Sternwood. The novel should end here, he says. But rather than heading home for a stiff drink, Marlowe begins a second quest. He begins a search for Vivian’s missing husband, Rusty Regan.

Thus, Marlowe puts himself at risk and crucially loses money in attempting to find the answer. “In this plot the absence of a ‘logical necessity’ for what Marlowe does is deeply meaningful,” says Merrill. “The novel continues because what satisfies Marlowe professionally does not satisfy his personal concerns.”²⁵

Merrill argues that the aim of the plot in *The Big Sleep* is to delineate Marlowe’s character, and connects to the idea of Chandler as a romantic writer influenced by medieval chivalry. Marlowe’s nature or fate is to try to assist people such as the Sternwoods. Marlowe likes both General Sternwood and his daughter Vivian, despite his disgust for their lifestyle. He wants to put Sternwood’s mind at rest, and perhaps, either satisfy his own doubts about Vivian, or rescue her, like the knight rescuing the maiden in the engraving on the Sternwoods’ wall.

²⁴ Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”, *Second Chandler Omnibus*, p. 5.

²⁵ Merrill, “Raymond Chandler’s Plots”, p. 8.

I would suggest another reason behind the circuitous plot of *The Big Sleep* is Chandler's desire to depict the sprawling, complex nature of Los Angeles itself. This desire links his noir novel to both the earlier chroniclers of London and the later project of psychogeography. Therefore the plot of *The Big Sleep* does not end when Marlowe resolves the blackmail case, because he has not finished with the city. Through the character of Marlowe, Chandler drifts through the streets of Los Angeles and follows its "compulsive currents". Chandler's motivations for continuing the narrative seem to go beyond a simple desire to portray Marlowe's chivalrous nature. While Merrill focuses on the manner in which the plot "flows" psychologically from Marlowe's situation,²⁶ I would suggest that it also flows *psychogeographically*.

Merrill acknowledges that Chandler wrote of his intentions to expose "this strange corrupt world". He also argues that Marlowe's meditations and digressions in *The Big Sleep* dramatise Chandler's "painfully sensitive response to a city he has watched decline for twenty years".

In order to complete his depiction of a "world gone wrong", Chandler had to reveal the true source of the corruption lying beneath the city. Marlowe's search for Regan therefore ends in a derelict oil field, from which both the wealth and the corruption of the Sternwoods and Los Angeles has sprung.

At the end of *The Big Sleep* Marlowe has solved the initial case, but leaves much unresolved. Carmen will be sent to an institution but we don't know if her guilt will be revealed to the wider world, while the villain, Eddie Mars, remains free, and we never find out who exactly did kill Owen Taylor. Nevertheless, Chandler has completed his circuit of Los Angeles – from the stately Sternwood mansion he has meandered through its sleazy shops, homes and gambling joints, and finally reached the fetid, greasy, abandoned sump wells from which the city's and the family's wealth sprang. Marlowe has done what Robert McFarlane later instructs the aspiring psychogeographer to do. He has gone out into the city, walked a circuit, and recorded the changing moods of the street.

²⁶ Merrill, "Raymond Chandler's Plots", p. 7.

In the course of Marlowe's passage through Los Angeles he not only collects clues for his case, but evokes how the city's past is coded into the fabric of streets and buildings. Details of the architecture, street design, even the placement of buildings and the moods they provoke are integral.

The Sternwood mansion, for example, inspires a sense of European-style aristocratic grandeur, projecting an ersatz history of nobility built on a dubious past. Its plush white interior creates a vision of purity but cannot conceal the sexually promiscuous behaviour of one daughter, while the other uses her sex appeal and money to conceal a crime. Meanwhile, the greenhouse, meant to convey a sense of exotic abundance, becomes a life support system for the frail father who is kept alive like "a new-born spider".²⁷

In central Los Angeles a visit to a respectable looking bookshop reveals a hidden cache of pornography. Behind the doors of a suburban home, girls such as Carmen Sternwood are drugged for lurid photo shoots, and a clandestine gay lover seeks deadly revenge. A Hollywood apartment houses a gun-toting chancer trying to impress his mercenary femme fatale.

As Marlowe moves through the urban landscape in search of clues, he is also building up a picture of a city where no façade can be taken at face value. His pursuit acts like a type of Ariadne's thread, leading him through the city's sprawling, deceptive labyrinth. It connects the dots between disparate worlds and builds up a geography of desire, delinquency and corruption. Chandler uses elements of the actual geography but also rearranges and reconnects them to form a map of a "world gone wrong".²⁸

Marlowe's fleeting observations are like moody snapshots gathered from a crime scene – hard wet rain on the clear foothills; a sweeping mansion entrance with a stained glass tableaux of a naked maiden in need of rescue; a dirty bookstore with its interior shielded by Chinese screens; the narrow lobby of the Fulwider building with its "well-missed

²⁷ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*. Detailed descriptions of the Sternwood mansion appear over the first three chapters of the novel, pp. 1-21.

²⁸ Raymond Chandler, introduction to *Trouble is My Business*, in *The World of Raymond Chandler: In His Own Words*, ed. Barry Day (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2014), p. 194.

spittoon on a gnawed rubber mat", and, bizarrely, a case of false teeth on the mustard coloured wall; the abandoned oilfield "as lonely as a churchyard"; the slanting grey rain "like a curtain of crystal beads".²⁹

Marlowe's journey weaves these poetic images into a kaleidoscopic picture of LA's built environment, its natural landscapes, weather and moods, but also its treacherous glamour, the hidden currents of power, inequality and desire that give rise to the city's corrupt behaviour.

Movement through the landscape and different ambiances seems especially important. Whereas Agatha Christie's detectives might have been able to solve their crimes sitting in the dining room of a manor house, Marlowe gets out onto the street, following people and vehicles and getting into fights in parking lots. Chandler's mysteries are about trying to get to grips with a city in constant flux.

Richard Rayner's *A Bright and Guilty Place* describes the Depression era Los Angeles that Chandler inhabited as being in a "scandalous process of becoming". It is a world where "everything and everyone seems connected, and in one way or another, is corrupt, is seeking corruption, or trying to escape it."³⁰ Chandler, Rayner says, became the interpreter of this world.

Chandler conjures the city's mood of unease. It is in a process of growing, but is also in danger of disintegration from environmental threats, and financial and spiritual decay following the Depression. This malaise is exemplified in *The Big Sleep* by the ailing Sternwood, propped up in his chair in a hot house. He is suffering from terminal but indeterminate diseases resulting from a decadent lifestyle, and is being killed off by his wayward daughters.

As David Fine has documented, sickness was a real factor shaping the social structure of Los Angeles.³¹ He notes how, in the constant boosting of the city, miraculous healing

²⁹ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 174.

³⁰ Richard Rayner, *A Bright and Guilty Place* (London: Constable, 2010) p. 8.

³¹ David Fine, "Nathanael West, Raymond Chandler, and the Los Angeles Novel" *California History*, 68/4, (Winter, 1989/1990), p. 198.

powers were ascribed to its warm, dry, Mediterranean climate. The lure of the weather, and the promise of a kind of paradise brought invalids, the aged and ailing of all kinds. In their wake came the healers, spiritualists and quacks. It is Chandler's joke about the myth of Los Angeles's healing weather that the General Sternwood must seek out heat, not in the California sun, but in artificially heated orchid house "too hot for a man with blood in his veins".

Another key element of Chandler's exploration of Los Angeles is the wildness he conveys at its fringes. David Thomson in his study of the *film noir* version of *The Big Sleep* (1946), points out that the movie never quite allows itself the pleasures of the novel in portraying the natural elements described in the book of driving rain, big sky, "the potent open air of Southern California".³²

There are moments in the movie, says Thomson, when there is an "appealing air of some Los Angeles street" but there is "no real threat of wildness". In Howard Hawks's film version, when Marlowe goes up into the hills, it is a "charming masquerade of hilliness", or when he goes to Realito, we get "a moody gesture towards a little town Chandler dreamed up". In contrast, Chandler's novel creates a powerful sense that Los Angeles, "its weather, its light, its nearness to earthquake, fire, landslide are all begging metaphors for a city that has always enjoyed hovering between real and Realito".

"Hovering" seems an appropriate image of flux to describe Chandler's evocation of Los Angeles. It implies a sense of impermanence, or transition from one state to another, and suggests another reason why the city inspired his particular brand of urban noir – Chandler was trying to capture a place in a constant state of restlessness. There is a quality of liminality, the sense that it is on a threshold, physically poised between the desert and the sea, two natural forces that could eat away and destroy it, and metaphorically on a threshold between growth and collapse.

The sensation is not only directly physical, but abstract and interior. When Marlowe is beside the sea in *The Big Sleep*, he does not encounter the sunny paradise of advertising

³² David Thomson, *The Big Sleep*, (London: British Film Institute, 1997), pp. 11-12.

brochures and postcards, but rather experiences a melancholic sense of desolation and loss.

Marlowe first travels to the coast in to see the body of Owen Taylor, the Sternwoods' chauffeur, who has been discovered dead in a car that has plunged off Lido Pier. As Marlowe drives away from the scene with the DA's assistant Bernard Ohls, his vision is bleak and otherworldly with the sea and sky seeming to merge. "Seaward a few gulls wheeled and swooped over something in the surf and far out a white yacht looked as if it was hanging in the sky."³³

Later, Marlowe finds himself beside the sea again. This time it is in a highly charged moment between trying to break through Vivian's cool exterior to find out the truth, falling for her charms, and realising that she is trying to seduce him for her own purposes. Here he experiences the world as "a wet emptiness" and has a vision of the silent surf, curling and creaming, "like a thought trying to form itself at the edge of consciousness".³⁴ Here the sea represents both the literal margin of the city, and a psychological littoral where truth and fiction, desire and despair ebb and flow. It is as if, at this moment, in this liminal zone, not only Marlowe's steely resolve to find out the truth, but the whole city and all its hopes and dreams could be washed away.

The Murky Geography of Noir

For all their metaphorical potency, only some of the locations Chandler depicts in *The Big Sleep* can be definitively located on a real map. Others, such as the Sternwood mansion, were based on imagined composites of actual places.

A book by Elizabeth Ward and Alain Silver, *Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles*, attempts to illustrate Chandler's literary journey through Los Angeles with photographs. But the authors note that one of the key challenges in connecting Chandler's novel to actual geography is that many of the actual sites are now lost. Even more of them are Chandler's pastiches of real and imagined places, or actual places embellished to fit the

³³ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 52.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 162-163.

needs of the narrative. As a result, the authors say, “the challenge was sometimes not merely to photograph a place that no longer existed but to find one that never was.”³⁵

Another more recent book, *Daylight Noir: Raymond Chandler's Imagined City* by Catherine Corman,³⁶ uses real Los Angeles locations to depict real and imagined places from Chandler novels. Her moodily vignetted black and white images are not documentary records, but aim instead for an oneiric vision of Chandler's world, Chandler's Los Angeles as we remember or fantasise about it. Despite his use of imagined locations, Chandler's novel evokes a powerful sense of Los Angeles, and has even inspired tourist maps of the city listing key locations from Chandler novels and films (see figure 2.1).³⁷

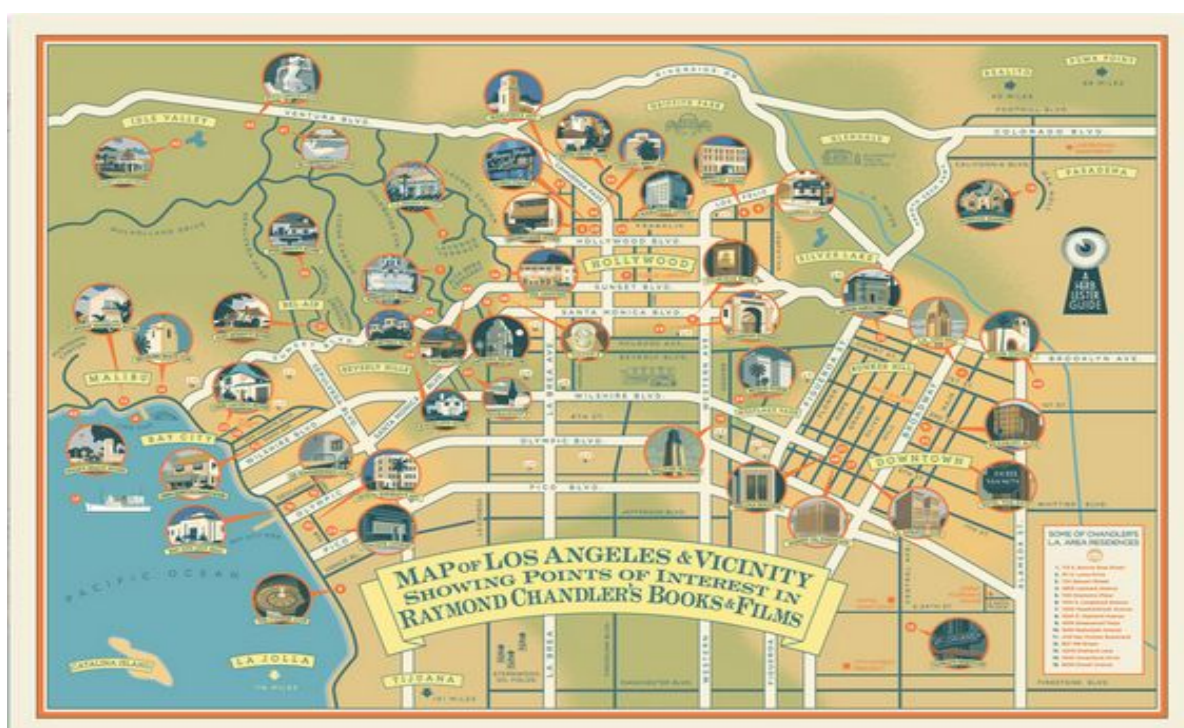


Figure 2.1: The Raymond Chandler Map of Los Angeles by Kim Cooper

While Stephen Knight has questioned Raymond Chandler's assertion that the masculine, action-based detective of hard-boiled fiction was a completely new American phenomenon, he admits that the setting of these novels was new.

³⁵ Elizabeth Ward and Alain Silver, *Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles*, (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1987), p. 2.

³⁶ Catherine Corman, *Daylight Noir: Raymond Chandler's Imagined City*, (Edizioni Charta, Milan, 2009).

³⁷ See for example Kim Cooper, "The Raymond Chandler Map of Los Angeles", (London: Herb Lester Associates, 2017).

“The setting was a crucial part of this modern and innovative sense of anomie,” says Knight: “the shapeless, valueless, traditionless” cities of the far west of America. Knight also observes that a “compulsive image” from this fiction is that of the private eye “alone on watch on the street” or “on the move to another scene of danger in his car”.³⁸

Furthermore, John Scaggs’s study of crime fiction notes that a “threatening city” is a key element of hard-boiled fiction and that in Chandler’s novels Los Angeles is “characterised, above all, by unreality”. Scaggs argues that Marlowe’s sustained commentary and analysis of the details of architectural décor, “spring from his probing of the surface of unreality”.³⁹

Chandler records the surface details of the architecture, the streets, and places where manmade structures meet nature, such as the beach houses and fishing piers, but he is seeking to draw our attention to the unseen forces that lie behind these. As Kevin Starr puts it: “Chandler’s Los Angeles yields an inventory of places that, when extracted, form a factual and symbolic map of the city”.⁴⁰

For example, the Sternwood mansion in Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* draws on a combination of historical and architectural elements from 8 Chester Place in Downtown LA, and the Greystone mansion in Beverly Hills. Chester Place was owned by oil tycoon, E.L. Doheny who may have provided a model for General Sternwood in *The Big Sleep*. Greystone was built by Doheny for his son Ned as a wedding present. The palatial 55-room Greystone was a 46,000-square-foot mansion in a neo-Gothic style with vast terraced gardens, completed in 1928. A few months after Ned Doheny moved in, he was killed in an apparent murder-suicide.⁴¹

³⁸ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), p. 112.

³⁹ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 71.

⁴⁰ Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 306.

⁴¹ Rayner, *A Bright and Guilty Place*, pp. 80-81.

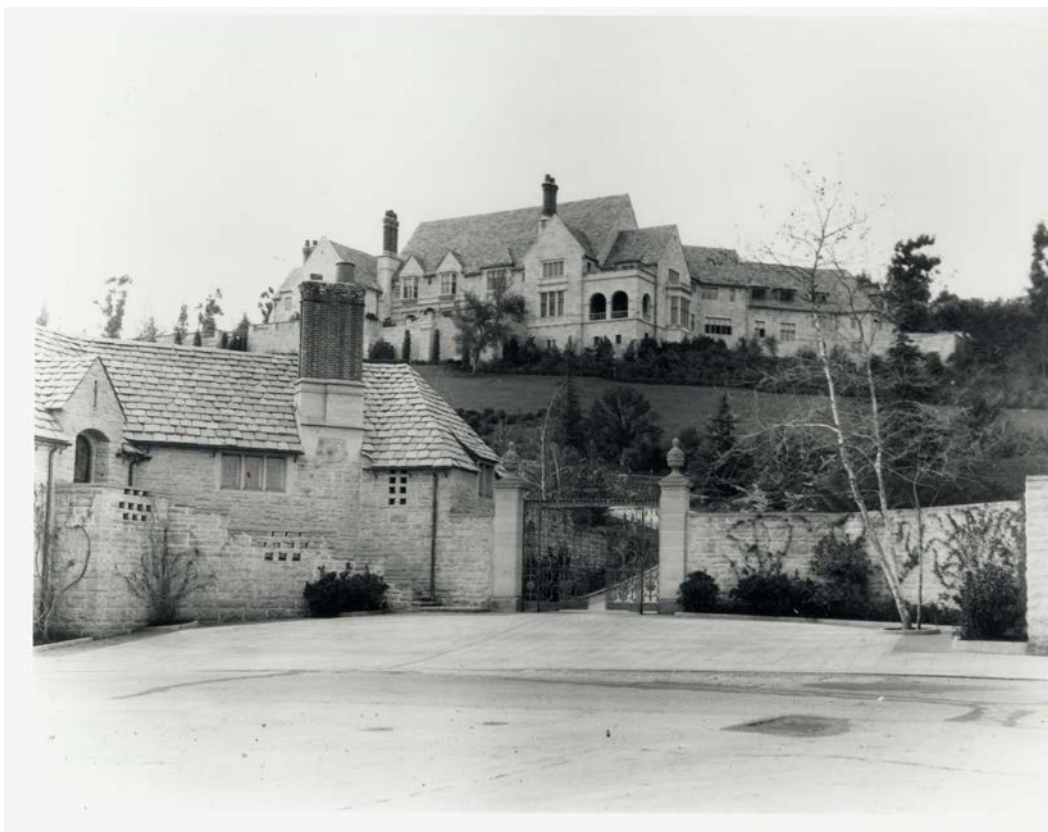


Figure 2.2: The Greystone Mansion, Beverly Hills

The story of the Dohenys is said to have haunted Chandler and a version of Greystone is featured not only in *The Big Sleep*, but also in *Farewell My Lovely*.⁴² Chandler's descriptions of the Sternwood mansion in *The Big Sleep* are remarkably similar to the details of the Greystone mansion (see figure 2.2).⁴³ The novel begins with the detective narrator, Philip Marlowe approaching the mansion with the description: "I was calling on four million dollars."⁴⁴

The Greystone estate was said to cost over \$3 million to build, a vast sum in its day.⁴⁵ Yet in *The Big Sleep*, the Sternwood mansion is not a symbol of financial success, but a scene of tragedy, echoing the tale of E.L. Doheny's tragic family decline. Each image Marlowe conjures in his description of the luxurious architectural details of the estate set the

⁴² Rayner, *A Bright and Guilty Place*, p. 81.

⁴³ "Greystone Mansion Beverly Hills, Doheny Estate," City of Beverly Hills (2012) <http://www.beverlyhills.org/exploring/greystonemansiongardens/historyofgreystone/>

⁴⁴ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ "History of Greystone", Friends of Greystone, <https://www.greystonemansion.org/history.html>

scene for the tragic events to follow. The grand entrance of the Sternwood mansion suggests a castle (see figure 2.3).⁴⁶

“The main hallway of the Sternwood place was two stories high...” and the staircase “tile-paved, rose to a gallery”.

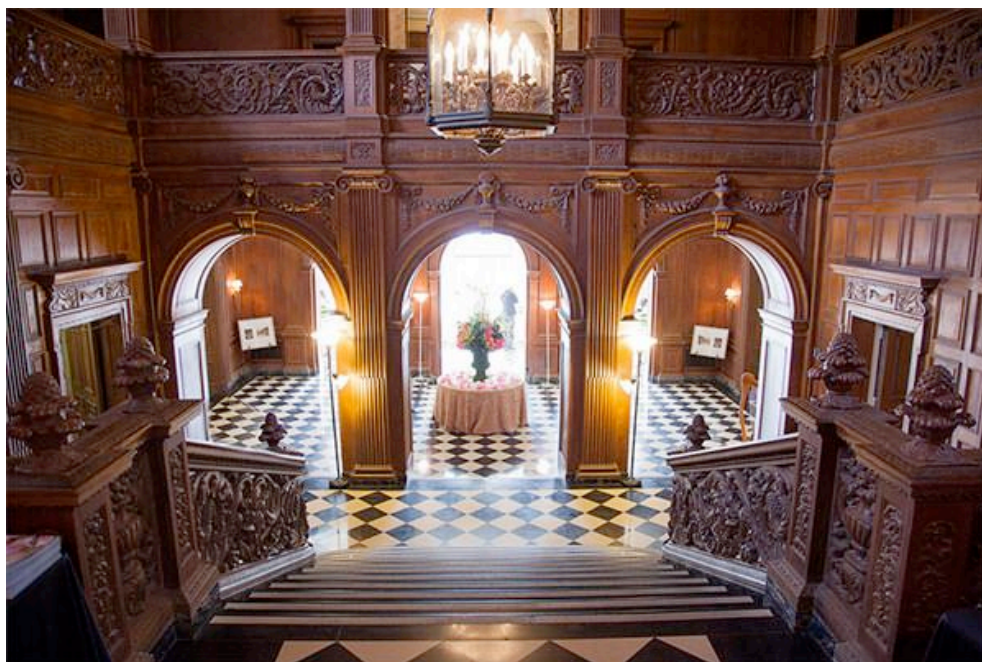


Figure 2.3: Greystone entrance hall

Marlowe describes a stained glass detail of a knight rescuing a maiden, which serves both as a metaphor for the ensuing story, and a wry evocation of an ersatz chivalric history the tableau attempts to convey. The “sweep of emerald grass leading to a white garage” hints at the chauffeur who will later be found dead off the Lido Pier. The naked maiden will not be saved.

Marlowe spots a pair of chairs that look like no one ever sat in them, an old portrait that resembles Sternwood, along with war memorabilia that hints at the distinguished past of this establishment family, while the true source of their wealth, oil, is just out of view.

Marlowe also encounters the General’s youngest daughter, Carmen, who falls provocatively into Marlowe’s arms, in a parody of the naked maiden of the stained glass

⁴⁶ Jared Cowan, “A Cinematic Tour of LA’s Greystone Mansion,” *LA Weekly*, (September 14, 2016), Slide 13/219: <http://www.laweekly.com/slideshow/a-cinematic-tour-of-las-greystone-mansion-7373964/13>

window. He is then led to the greenhouse, to meet General Sternwood, an ailing King Lear-like figure in exile while his seemingly ungrateful daughters run riot in the main house (see figure 2.4).⁴⁷



Figure 2.4: Doheny Mansion Greenhouse, Beverly Hills

The butler leads Marlowe through a vestibule and into the greenhouse where the air is “thick, wet, steamy and larded with the cloying smell of tropical orchids in bloom”.⁴⁸

Marlowe describes the light in the greenhouse as having an “unreal colour” like the light in an aquarium, and the plants have “nasty meaty leaves” and “stalks like the newly washed fingers of dead men”. Sternwood is an ailing, sickly man, kept alive by the heat of the orchid greenhouse “like a newborn spider”. The flesh of the orchids is compared to that of dead men, and their rotten sweet scent to that of a prostitute.

After a strained exchange in which Sternwood’s oldest daughter Vivian tries to find out about Marlowe’s assignment, Marlowe leaves the doomed Sternwood mansion, and spots the source of both their wealth and their woes – in the distant oil field.

⁴⁷ Ward and Silver, *Raymond Chandler’s Los Angeles*, p. 169

⁴⁸ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 6.

... faint and far off I could just barely see some of the old wooden derricks of the oilfield from which the Sternwoods had made their money. Most of the field was public park now, cleaned up and donated to the city by General Sternwood. But a little of it was still producing in groups of wells pumping five or six barrels a day. The Sternwoods, having moved up the hill, could no longer smell the stale sump water or the oil, but they could still look out of their front windows and see what had made them rich. If they wanted to. I didn't suppose they would want to.⁴⁹

The last two lines, says David Thomson, let us know that "Chandler feels we are on a fault zone here, that many successful Angelinos need to learn a way of overlooking their own past and back story".⁵⁰

From Doheny's multi-million dollar mansion, oil derricks were also visible in the not too distant La Brea/Baldwin Hills region, just as in this description by Chandler. It is a landscape that Marlowe returns to in the climactic scene of *The Big Sleep* and, "the terrain functions as the location at which the hidden corruption of wealth literally bubbles to the surface".⁵¹

After initiating his story in the wealthy mansion of an oil enriched family with pretensions to aristocratic grandeur, Marlowe's drift through Los Angeles takes him to a number of locations which can be identified or guessed at in the Los Angeles cityscape.

We are told Geiger's pornographic bookstore is on the north side of "the Boulevard" near Las Palmas.⁵² From the descriptions in the book, it seems likely that Geiger's shop was in the Outpost Building, on the north side of Hollywood Boulevard ("the Boulevard") at the corner of Las Palmas, depicted in this photograph circa 1934 (see figure 2.5 below).⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁰ Thomson, *The Big Sleep*, p.13.

⁵¹ Nicolas S. Witschi, *Traces of Gold: California's Natural Resources and the Claim to Realism in Western American Literature*, (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2002) p. 158.

⁵² Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 22.

⁵³ "Birdseye view of Hollywood Boulevard 1934," USC Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll65/id/20189>



Figure 2.5: Birdseye view of Hollywood Boulevard 1934

Other locations are more notional, and conjure a sense of LA's exoticism and secrecy. Marlowe pursues one of Geiger's customers down a "narrow tree-lined street" with "a retaining wall on one side past a bungalow court called The La Baba"; "a quiet dim place with three shaded bungalows". He notes that the cypress trees are trimmed in the shape of oil jars from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.⁵⁴

The images accumulate to create the picture of a furtive, decadent place, behind a more wholesome façade. Chandler also implies that this decadence is insidious. After Marlowe discovers the pornographer, rain begins to splash knee-high off the pavement. Marlowe struggles into a trenchcoat and dashes across the street to a drugstore for a pint of whiskey.⁵⁵ He becomes drenched, as if the corruption of the case threatens to soak into him.

The sequence gives us a sense of the 1930s central Hollywood streetscape, crowded with shops, the hubbub of people and traffic, but also concealing many illicit activities. Yet Chandler is not simply documenting the streets of Los Angeles but offering us a psychologically rich interpretation of the layers of meaning encoded in them. Nothing is

⁵⁴ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

what it seems, he is saying – even staid-looking bookshops in Los Angeles conceal dark and potentially dangerous undercurrents of desire.

The sequence calls to mind Robert McFarlane's description of psychogeography as a way of passing through urban spaces while catching "the textual run-off of the streets" of being "alert to the happenstance of metaphors", watching for "coincidences, analogies, family resemblance, the changing moods of the street". Chandler is steadily building up a map of Los Angeles; not merely its physical geography, but its affective landscape – the patterns connecting one zone to another. He is capturing the textual runoff of the streets, sometimes literally, as the rain splashes down and the pavements run with water and "very nice-looking people" in very nice cars, pop into Geiger's store to pick up their parcels of smut.⁵⁶

Marlowe follows pornographer-blackmailer Arthur Geiger to Laurel Canyon Drive and into Laverne Terrace. It is initially an innocuous suburban location, but Geiger's house conceals a kitsch, pseudo-exotic interior with an air of depravity – Chinese and Japanese prints and rugs, the odours of cordite and the sickish smell of ether. In this clandestine setting Marlowe also discovers the body of the murdered Geiger, and a drugged, semi-naked, gibbering Carmen Sternwood. When he takes Carmen home, he notes that it is a mere ten minutes from this den of iniquity to the Sternwood estate, reminding us again that sleaze and corruption are never far from wealth and status.

The Big Sleep provides a powerful example of the "transformational grammar of noir" that Mike Davis refers to in *City of Quartz*. "Each charming ingredient of the boosters' arcadia", Los Angeles as an exotic and glamorous destination, is turned into "a sinister equivalent".⁵⁷

Mapping *The Big Sleep*

As Marlowe unravels the mystery at the heart of the *The Big Sleep* it is as if he is charting the mystery of Los Angeles itself. He moves deliberately through the landscape of Los Angeles, recording his journey to create a map of real and imagined places that become interconnected in an oneiric network of desire, corruption and power.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Davis, *City of Quartz*, p. 38.

This map (figure 2.6)⁵⁸ of central Los Angeles identifies the possible locations of some of the key places visited in *The Big Sleep*. The numbers below correspond to numbers on map.

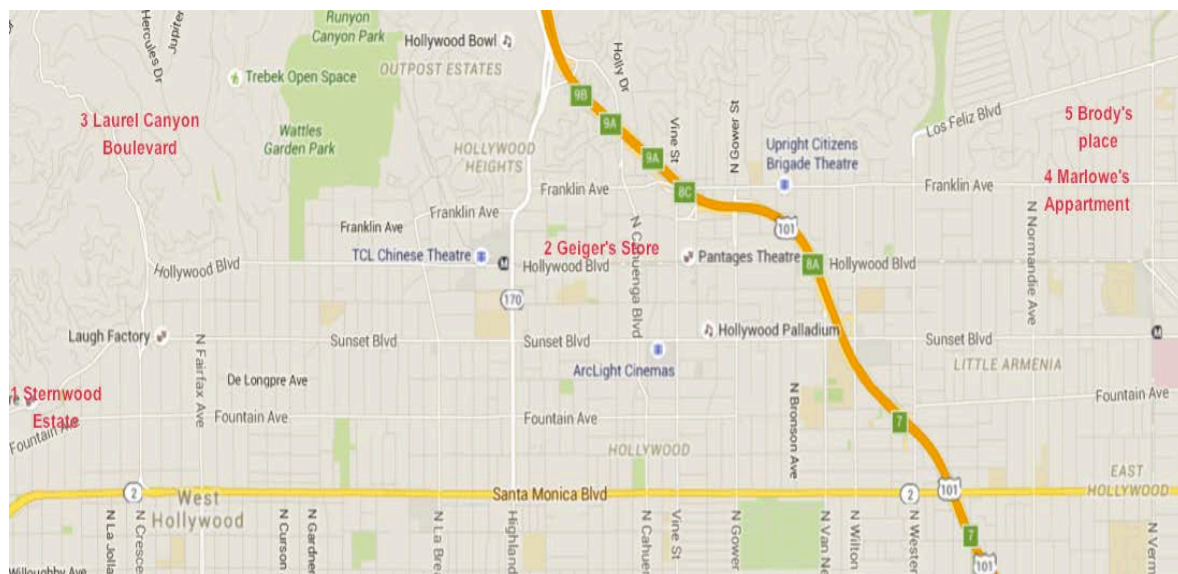


Figure 2.6: Hollywood Downtown, Google Maps with own annotations.

1. Sternwood Estate: In the novel, the address given for the Sternwood estate is 3765 Alta Brea Crescent in West Hollywood, which does not appear on maps. But Marlowe says that he goes *down* Laurel to get to the Sternwood's, and that after dropping Carmen back home, he walks briskly for half an hour to get back to his car at Geiger's house. This would probably place the Sternwood estate in this vicinity, which is also close to the actual Greystone Mansion still in existence today.
2. Geiger's store: Geiger's illicit bookstore is said to be on the north side of Hollywood Boulevard near Las Palmas.
3. Laurel Canyon Boulevard: Geiger's house, rented from Eddie Mars, is on Laverne Terrace, a side street off Laurel Canyon Boulevard. The named Laverne Terrace, doesn't appear on maps, but according to the description in the novel, it is "halfway up the grade" along Laurel Canyon, which would put it approximately at 3.
4. Marlowe's apartment: Marlowe lives in the Hobart Arms building on Franklin Avenue, near North Kenmore Avenue.

⁵⁸ "Los Angeles, California," Google Maps. Google. 16 February, 2016.

Whether the names refer to real or composite locations is not critical. What is important is how Chandler's descriptions suggest the actual ambiances and affective zones in and around Los Angeles, and the way these zones are connected.

Beyond *The Big Sleep*

Thus, with *The Big Sleep*, Chandler developed a way of using a search narrative to explore Los Angeles, and established a set of tropes for examining other modern cities. The novel views the city's geography as encoded with meaning – stories, desires, psychic disturbances – which are recorded and linked through the detective's journey as they seek to solve a mystery and find the truth.

It is not so much Marlowe's tough or hard-boiled persona that is key in this model, though typically a detective must have a certain hardness to pursue the truth and stray into the city's darker corners. Instead it is Marlowe's willingness to explore the city and his sensitivity and alertness to its details, shifts in mood, and his ability to make connections between these elements that make *The Big Sleep* such a useful and influential model.

Marlowe is not a cerebral detective. He doesn't sit in a room like Christie's Miss Marple, sizing up the flaws of his suspects. Nor does he lounge in a study making mental deductions as might Sherlock Holmes. Marlowe gets out onto the street, walking, driving, peering into living rooms, skulking in stairwells, hiding in offices, getting into fights outside gambling joints, until he finds the truth. But he is not a thug either, and his cynical tough-guy exterior hides a sensitive soul whose perception transforms the ugly world into poetry.

We can find many earlier examples of the hard-boiled detective in the city, but it is harder to find a more fully realised or sophisticated version of the detective as urban wanderer, exploring the nature of the modern city itself before Chandler's *The Big Sleep*.

Chandler's influence can be found in the approaches of later Californian writers such as Ross MacDonald, whose noir mysteries adapt the Chandler model with a more overtly psychoanalytical approach. MacDonald's novels such as *The Drowning Pool*, *The Galton Case* and *The Zebra Striped Hearse* employ detective Lew Archer to explore Los Angeles and its surrounds, delving deep into the psychology of his suspects, while linking their

crimes to the stories embedded in the landscape of southern California.⁶⁰ *The Drowning Pool*, for example, links murder to California's history of oil exploitation, greed and self-deception woven with Oedipal complexes. At the conclusion of the case, Lew Archer, observes "The happy endings and the biggest oranges were the ones that California saved for export."⁶¹

Meanwhile, Joan Didion takes the drifting urban detective on a different sort of journey through an alienated 1960s Los Angeles in *Play it as it Lays*, where troubled Maria, and then her friend Helene reflect on the causes of Maria's disturbing behaviour, as if examining a crime scene.⁶² The novel seems to suggest that the very urban fabric of Los Angeles, its landscape sleazy motels, swimming pools and bars, and freeways, perched between the desert and the sea, prompts Maria's self-destructive behaviour, mental break down and ultimately BZ's suicide. As Maria drives around the city, aimless and lost, Didion evokes an autonomous zone of the freeway reminiscent of Reyner Banham's "autopia", but transforming it into a dystopia.⁶³ It is this landscape, Didion seems to suggest, that provokes the nihilism of the central characters.

Chandler's urban noir model, where a detective traces the sources of a crime in the fabric urban landscape, has travelled far beyond the sprawl of Los Angeles and greater California. In the following chapters I will examine how this narrative model anticipates the techniques and preoccupations of psychogeography, and how other writers have adapted it to explore and engage with their own cities.

From Glasgow to Marseille, New Orleans to Shanghai and Sydney, writers have borrowed and adapted this noir detective model. They use a detective as urban explorer and a search narrative as a device to drift through the city, collecting images, and finding patterns of significance arising from undercurrents of power and desire. Meanwhile, the grammar of noir has also provided inspiration for interrogating and debunking the myths and marketing pitches of the modern city. Its tropes suggest ways of shining a

⁶⁰ Ross MacDonald novels: *The Drowning Pool*, (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2012); *The Galton Case*, (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2012); *The Zebra Striped Hearse*, (New York: Random House, 1998).

⁶¹ MacDonald, *The Drowning Pool*, p. 233.

⁶² Joan Didion, *Play it as it Lays*, Didion, Joan, *Play it as it Lays*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2011).

⁶³ Reyner Banham's, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, (London: Allen Lane, 1971) identifies four distinct zones of Los Angeles, including the zone of the car, which he calls "Autopia".

light into hidden corners, illuminating unseen forces, and of provoking dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Chapter 3. Psychogeography and Noir

From Mean Streets to Naked City

The notion was to cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city, to vandalise the dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking...recording and retrieving the messages on walls, lampposts, doorjambs: the spites and spasms of an increasingly deranged populace.

Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*¹

A city is built to resemble a conscious mind, a network that can calculate, administrate, manufacture. Ruins become the unconscious of a city, its memory, unknown, darkness, lost lands, and in this truly bring it to life.

Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*²

This chapter will chart the development of psychogeography as a practice, its links to early urban writing, and how the aesthetic and analytical strategies of psychogeography are directly indebted to the practices of urban noir detective fiction. It will consider how the themes and strategies of psychogeography and noir continue to intersect and enrich each other. It will also examine how the search narrative, which acts as the engine of urban noir detective plot, works to generate alternative maps of the city.

Urban Walker as Detective

Psychogeography has many literary and historical precursors. As Robert MacFarlane has pointed out, it existed “*avant la lettre*” in the writings of De Quincey and Blake.³ It was also influenced by the figure of the “writer as walker” in French poet Charles Baudelaire’s portraits of the hedonistic *flâneur* (inspired by De Quincey’s *Confessions*)⁴ and by Walter Benjamin’s later studies of strolling the Parisian arcades, (in turn inspired by Baudelaire).

¹ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, (London: Granta Books, 1997), p. 1.

² Rebecca Solnit, *Field Guide to Getting Lost*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006) p. 89.

³ Macfarlane, “A Road of One’s Own”, *The Times Literary Supplement*, (London, England), October 7, 2005, pp. 3-4.

⁴ Emily B Stanback, “Peripatetic in the City: De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and the Birth of the *Flâneur*”, *Literature Compass*, vol. 10, no. 2, February 2013, pp. 146–161. Stanback argues that De Quincey should be regarded as the earliest *flâneur*, and anticipates the nature of *flânerie* suggested by Baudelaire and eventually theorized by Walter Benjamin. Baudelaire’s “An Opium Eater”, specifically discusses and paraphrases De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, see Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, (London: Kensington Publishing Group, 1998), pp. 77-79.

Merlin Coverley suggests that both writers were also influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Man of the Crowd" (1845) which featured a "detached observer" who becomes absorbed by the movement of the crowd.⁵ For Baudelaire and Benjamin, proposes Coverley, the story represented the emergence of a new urban type, an avatar of the modern city whom Baudelaire dubbed the *flâneur*. Coverley argues that like London, 19th century Paris had expanded beyond the point where it could be comprehended in its entirety, and the *flâneur* evolved into an urban explorer "or even a detective solving the mystery of the streets".⁶

Coverley only links urban exploration and detection in passing. However, Poe's London-set story is clearly linked historically and emblematically to the emergence of the urban detective. The narrator, a recovering invalid of independent means, effectively becomes a detective when he catches his first glimpse of an unusual looking man who appears to be carrying a concealed diamond and a dagger. He is drawn to look for what lies beneath, for the hidden dark side of this man of the crowd; his curiosity initiates a search narrative as he decides "to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go".

The pursuit takes the narrator to parts of London "very different from those we had hitherto traversed", including areas "of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime". Ultimately the narrator decides that he cannot discover anything more about a man who is "the type and genius of deep crime" due to his inscrutability and ability to submerge himself in the crowd. The story, however, has been a search for clues, gathering information about not only the mystery-man, but the nature of the modern city itself.

Walter Benjamin later described Poe's tale as "an X-ray of a detective story" because it dispenses with "the drapery that a crime represents".

Only the armature remains: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who manages to walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd.⁷

⁵ Edgar Allen Poe, "Man of the Crowd", 1845, <https://poestories.com/read/manofthecrowd>

⁶ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*, (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010), pp. 58-62.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire", *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 27.

The locations it describes are also more generic than those depicted by De Quincey, Dickens or in Chandler's noir, suggesting general zones of poverty or criminality rather than specific streets or neighbourhoods.

Nevertheless, Poe's story draws a link between urban exploration and the mystery of the city. It also recalls Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting" essay (1930),⁸ in which the narrator describes a type of surreptitious urban wandering that involves not only an immersion in the street, but also in the minds and lives of passers-by. Woolf writes of creating the pretext of buying a pencil on The Strand in London on a wintry twilit evening in order to observe passers-by – washerwomen, publicans, street singers – and to penetrate their consciousness. In the process, the wanderer gains the sense that "one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others".⁹ At the same time Woolf's "street haunter" suggests a private detective such as Philip Marlowe, lurking in the shadows and tailing their quarry.

It also recalls G.K. Chesterton's description of the detective as an urban explorer interpreting the "chaos of conscious forces" and how this foreshadows the practice of psychogeography.¹⁰

From Pranks to Psychogeography

The term "psychogeography" emerged from the turbulent urban intellectual milieu of post-WWII Paris. It was first used by a group of *avant garde* intellectual pranksters, known as the Letterist International, who wanted to upset the status quo and make their own mark on the city. They once famously staged a demonstration against Charlie Chaplin, with a pamphlet calling the Hollywood actor a "fascist insect" and wishing him a quick death.¹¹

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting*, (San Francisco: 1930), British Library Online Collection, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/street-haunting-an-essay-by-virginia-woolf>

⁹ Ibid. p. 34.

¹⁰ G. K. Chesterton, "A defence of detective stories", in G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (London, 1901) <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks13/1301311h.html#ch17>

¹¹ Letterist International, "No More Flat Fleet" (France 1952), *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott Mackenzie, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), p. 50.

Letterist International (LI) member Guy Debord also liked to carry out *dérives* or 'drifts' throughout Paris with his colleagues, often from one bar to another. In Debord's account, on one of the LI drifts in the summer of 1953, an "illiterate Kabyle" (an Algerian Berber), allegedly suggested the term "psychogeography" to them, to describe the network of emotive forcefields in a city.¹²

When Debord formed a new group, Situationist International, he began to formalise his earlier playful and intuitive practice of urban exploration. He defined psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."¹³

In Debord's formulation of psychogeography the *dérive* was the primary tool. It was a manner of attentive urban walking, or urban drifting, where the walker was freed from usual motivations – going to work or buying something – in order to focus their attention on changes in the surrounding atmosphere of the streets. In the inaugural issue of the journal, *Internationale Situationniste*, the *dérive* was described as "a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the condition of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances".¹⁴

Situationists used "*ambiance*" to refer to the feeling or mood associated with a particular place, its character or tone, or to the effect it might have on the passer-by. They also used the term to describe the place itself, calling small sections of the city *unités d'ambiance* (unities of ambience), parts or zones of the city with a distinct urban atmosphere.¹⁵

¹² Guy Debord, "A Critique of Urban Geography", <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2>

¹³ Guy Debord, "A Critique of Urban Geography", <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2>

¹⁴ Situationist International, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Secrets, 1995): p. 49.

¹⁵ Denis Wood, "Lynch Debord: About Two Psychogeographies", *Cartographica*, Vol 45, 3, University of Toronto Press, (2010), p. 187.

Terms such as “unities of ambience” have a pseudo-scientific ring to them, but as Greil Marcus points out in *Lipstick Traces*, the origins of the *dérive* were more to do with artistic play, delinquency and political disruption than science.¹⁶

Debord opened the Situationists’ founding papers in 1957 with “First of all we think the world must be changed”.¹⁷ Here the Situationists defined themselves as disruptors with utopian ambitions. They wanted to reimagine and transform the city from the existing “scrim of commodities and power” into a “field of psychogeography” where the urban wanderer could not only experience and understand the effects of their environment, but could potentially transform it.

The Situationists criticised Haussmann’s Parisian boulevards, originally designed to be wide enough to transport troops and crush insurrection. Debord declared Haussmann’s Paris, “a city built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”.¹⁸ But Debord was also critical of Paris’s contemporary urban planners, who he felt were increasingly interested in ensuring the circulation of the motor car, which for him was yet another symbol of capitalist tyranny. In contrast, Debord and his fellow Situationists proposed a new utopian way of urban living in which the city became a playground for an exciting game, and the *dérive* was both a poetic and political act designed to achieve this goal.¹⁹

Debord and the Situationists acknowledged that the *dérive* had earlier historical antecedents in the opium-laced wanderings of Thomas De Quincey and in Andre Breton’s Surrealist perambulations directed by “magnetic fields”.²⁰ But they had bigger ambitions, seeking not merely to wander aimlessly in the city, but to transform it.

¹⁶ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), pp. 163-168.

¹⁷ Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organisation and Action” 1957, *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, 2006), p. 25.

¹⁸ Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography”, 1955, *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, p. 164.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 168.

In their earliest form, however, Debord's *dérives* were neither scientific exercises nor constructive interventions in urban development. They were an escape from the ennui of the suburbs, acts of truancy and rebellion that included drinking and daydreaming.

In *Walking and Mapping*, Karen O'Rourke describes how Debord's first *dérives* with LI member and fellow urban drifter Gil Wolman would often lead from one neighbourhood bar to another. One of these drifts started at 10am and involved various stops at local bars patronised by bargemen on the right bank of Canal St Denis, before finishing up at a Spanish bar known as Tavern of the Rebels.²¹ We can imagine that Debord's psychogeographic 'method' here seems more akin to a mindful bar crawl than any analytical methodology.

Debord's brand of psychogeography therefore emerged organically from the activities of a group of young intellectuals and disaffected individuals frustrated with a conservative, materialist and authoritarian society. They reacted by developing their own alternative way of living, with links to criminal and marginal lifestyles. Just as noir was attracted to the margins of the city, so too was psychogeography.

In *The Tribe*, Jean-Michel Mension, a Letterist International member and co-founder of the Situationist International, describes how the informal groups that he and Debord were part of consisted of "wayward youths" often in trouble with the law. Mension himself had been in reform schools and was involved in petty crime and smoking hashish in North African bars with other teenage runaways. Debord was from a bourgeois family but was fascinated with people "on the lam in some way or other".²² Mension also reflects on his friendship with Debord: "I was a youngster who had done things he was incapable of doing. In a way I was the existential principle and he was the theoretician."²³ Debord's interest in those "on the lam" also recalls De Quincey's attraction to the figure of Ann as one of the city's outsiders.

²¹ Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers*, (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2013) pp. 9-10.

²² Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe: Conversations with Gerard Berreby and Francesco Milo*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (London: Verso, 2002), p. 39.

²³ Mension, *The Tribe*, p. 43.

Debord proudly describes the “anarchic lifestyle” of his group who enjoyed other subversive pastimes – slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking without destination in Paris during a transport strike, and wandering in subterranean catacombs forbidden to the public – a practice continued by urban explorers today.²⁴ These practices, says Debord, were all expressions of “a general sensibility which is no different from that of the *dérive*”.²⁵

Détournement and Noir

A separate but related technique of the Situationist psychogeographers was “*détournement*”, which Greil Marcus defines as “the theft of aesthetic artefacts from their contexts and their diversion into contexts of one’s own devise”. In other words, the Situationists took images and texts from advertising, film, newspapers and official maps then reused them for their own creations. *Détournement* was designed to undermine the “powerful reality of a capitalism and a technology that render the individual powerless”. Situationists argued that in order to resist this reality, one had to become an “intellectual terrorist” or “a thief”.²⁶

The concept of *détournement* was therefore not only the art of subversive quotation, but also a way of viewing the city and its objects outside the prevailing systems of law or capitalism. The Situationists saw themselves as mavericks and outlaws, taking over the city and making it their own.

The *dérive* and *détournement* were both part of the same aesthetic process. To practice the *derive* is “to drift through the city, allowing its signs to divert, to ‘*détourn*’ your steps, and then to divert those signs yourself, forcing them to give up routes that never existed before”.²⁷ *Détournement* was therefore a playful intellectual game, where the city’s roads, buildings, streets and signs are detached from their function and turned into objects for the psychogeographer’s own purposes.

²⁴ Bradley L. Garrett, *Explore Everything: Place Hacking the City*, (London: Verso, 2013), is an account of the activities of urban explorers who “recode” closed, hidden, secret and forgotten urban spaces and make them “realms of possibility”.

²⁵ Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Derive*”, in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, 2006), p. 62.

²⁶ Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, p.178.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 170.

Marcus explains Debord's theory of *détournement* as the idea that "any sign" - any street, advertisement, painting, text, any representation of society's idea of happiness - "is susceptible to conversion into something else, even its opposite".²⁸

This understanding of *détournement* recalls Mike Davis's characterisation of the "grammar of noir" in Depression-era Los Angeles, discussed in the previous chapter. In Los Angeles, writers turned the myths of real estate brochures and postcards of sunshine, wholesomeness and prosperity on their head to evoke a dark shadow version of the city. It is uncertain whether Los Angeles noir writers such as Raymond Chandler, Horace McCoy and James M. Cain directly influenced the Situationists' theories of *détournement*, but the Situationists were certainly watching Los Angeles.

Debord's group had read about and was inspired by the Watts riots in Los Angeles in 1965, citing them as an example of rebellion against the oppressive culture of commodity and spectacle in capitalist America in their pamphlet "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy".²⁹ The pamphlet claimed it did not justify the rioters' actions, but attempted to "elucidate their perspectives".

If the riots in Los Angeles had reached their consciousness, so too had the hard-boiled noir of American detective stories.

The Naked City

The Situationists put their revolutionary urban ideas into practice, not by rioting, but by drifting through the city's streets and bars, writing reports and creating psychogeographical maps of their journeys. One of their earliest maps, created by Debord and his Situationist colleague Asger Jorn, was called *The Naked City* (1957), (see figure 3.1).³⁰

²⁸ Ibid. p. 179.

²⁹ Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, p. 176-8.

³⁰ Guy Debord, "Naked City: Illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographie", (1957), FRAC, <http://www.frac-centre.fr/collection-art-architecture/debord-guy/the-naked-city-64.html?authID=53&ensembleID=705>

The map took its title from a 1948 American urban noir detective film with a documentary style voice over called *The Naked City* (directed by Jules Dassin).

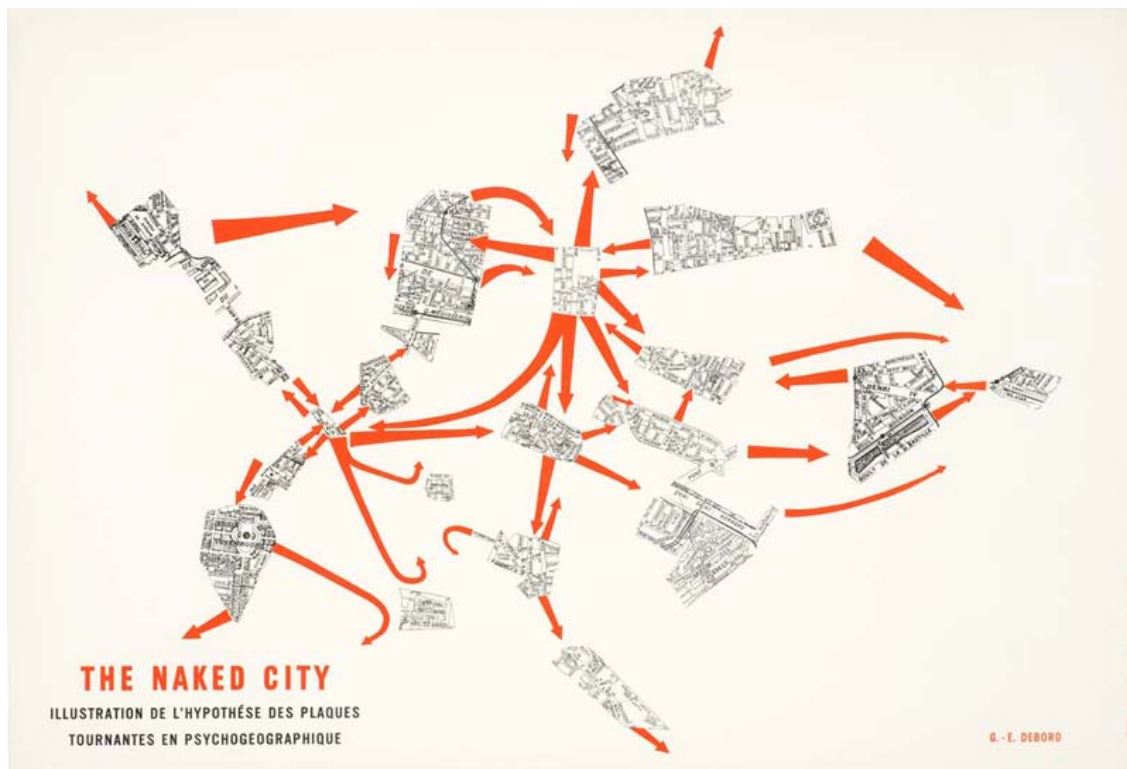


Figure 3.1: *The Naked City*, FRAC Centre Val-Loire

Though the Situationists condemned Hollywood as “the pole of the spectacle society”, their selection of *The Naked City* was not an arbitrary choice. It was a deliberate act of appropriation. In his article on “Situationist Space”, Thomas McDonough argues that the movie “laid bare” the social body through the city’s architecture, and this interpretation of the city served as an analogy for Debord’s cut-up map of Paris.³¹

The Situationist map made use of a commercial travel map of Paris cut into pieces and rearranged, and linked by red arrows which indicated psychogeographic hubs called “plaques tournante” (turntables) - pivotal points of attraction or repulsion, around which distinct ambiances were organised. By charting the location of these hubs or “turning points” the Situationists claimed they could determine how experiencing this urban geography generated types of conscious and unconscious behaviour.

In *The Naked City* film, the urban landscape is represented as a black and white grid of

³¹ Thomas F. McDonough, “Situationist Space”, *October* Vol. 67 (Winter, 1994), pp. 58-77.

oblique angles, which seem to surround and overwhelm the human figures and shape their motivations (see figure 3.2).³² The Situationists regarded the urban landscape of Paris as similarly overpowering, and their maps were an attempt to both highlight this and bring attention to it so as to weaken its power.



Figure 3.2: Still from *The Naked City*, Jules Dassin, 1948

By fragmenting the well-known *Plan de Paris*, the Situationists hoped to dislodge key sites and neighbourhoods from the influences or attractions of the urban grid and disrupt “the habitual patterns through which residents negotiate the city”.³³

McDonough observes that for the Situationists, the structure of Paris, like that of New York in the noir movie, was seen as a “great obstacle” that simultaneously offered “tiny clues”. In the movie these clues are viewed when the camera shifts from the vast grid-like pattern of New York, and zooms in on architectural details or objects - a bottle of pills, a gold cigarette case, a poster of a wrestler. In the Situationist map the clues are the urban fragments torn from their context. However, the clues in the Situationist map were not to the solution of a crime, says McDonough, but to “a future organization of life and the presentation of its sum of possibilities”.

³² Still from *The Naked City*, Jules Dassin (1948), image appears in David Frear, “The Naked City Directed by Jules Dassin”, *Time Out* (July 2, 2012) <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/film/new-york-movies-the-naked-city>

³³ McDonough, “Situationist Space”, p. 62.

In her *Atlas of Emotion*, Giuliana Bruno further emphasises the significance of the *The Naked City* film to Situationist mapping. The film, says Bruno, transformed the “urban topography into a social and affective landscape”.³⁴ As we follow the detectives (literally, in their footsteps), the landscape of a crime is sequentially re-traversed and then recomposed on the landscape of the city as experienced by its inhabitants. “Space becomes psychic space, taking shape in the stories of the city dwellers and reflecting their representation of its contours”, argues Bruno.

Bruno adds that this passage through the city creates a narrative of “navigated, lived space, of segments retraced” which would be represented on the Situationists’ *The Naked City* map by red arrows. She concludes that *The Naked City* film “gave rise to a theoretical tactic: a filmic narrative was the graph upon which the Situationist narrative was built”.³⁵

It is also worth noting that Jules Dassin, who directed *The Naked City*, fled America for France soon after the film was released after being condemned during the McCarthy-era Communist purge. So despite Debord’s suspicion of Hollywood, Dassin was actually a Hollywood exile, who may also have satisfied his interest in those “on the lam”.

The film itself was notable for combining a semi-documentary style that included location shoots in the New York streets with Hollywood noir genre tropes. It had even borrowed its title from *Naked City* (1945), a collection of gritty black and white street photographs by Weegee, still credited as “among the most important sociological studies of New York”.³⁶ Ultimately though, Dassin was said to be unhappy with the film, claiming the studio had cut many of his more powerful scenes, including social realist footage of Bowery bums.³⁷

Rebecca Prime argues that Dassin had always intended the film as social critique.

³⁴ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*. (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 266.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David W. Dunlap, “Weegee’s Other Naked City”, *The New York Times*, 16 December 2011, https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/16/weegees-other-naked-city/?_r=0

³⁷ Rebecca Prime, “Cloaked in Compromise” in, *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, ed. Frank Krutnik et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 142-151.

“Throughout the film geography acts as a medium for class commentary,” and dialogue later cut from the original script ascribes social causes to the murdered girl’s death.³⁸ However, Prime claims that studio interference meant that instead of depicting the harsher realities of life in New York, it provided “the distractions of popular culture”.

Nevertheless, the Situationists clearly saw the potential of this noir detective narrative as a tool for the exploration of the city in their own practice.

What Lies Beneath

The Naked City film and the Situationists’ map depict the city as an organisation of space and architecture that influences human actions. In the film this is conveyed through the blend of documentary style and poetic, black and white noir imagery. The famous scene of the killer trapped on a tower of the Williamsburg Bridge above the distant city skyline is a striking example (see image Figure 3.2 above). Meanwhile, the Situationists attempted to depict the hidden “psychogeographic forces” of the city through the graphically effective technique of placing red arrows on their fragmented black and white map.

In *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, Denis Wood admits that these psychogeographic forces would hardly have been recognised or understood by town planners.³⁹ The “unities of ambience”, for example, consisted of things that could be identified, but were difficult to define or quantify. The Situationists recorded “hard” elements, like the “shape, size and placement of masonry”, but also “soft” elements such as “the play of presence and absence, light and sound, human activities, even of time and the association of ideas”. These affective terms remind us that the Situationists were reacting against the official maps and official ideas of what counted as “data”, but they were also drawing on aesthetic tools rather than scientific ones.

For example, Debord pondered whether “the district in Paris between Place de la Contrescarpe and Rue de l’Arbalete conduces rather to atheism, to oblivion and to the

³⁸ Ibid. p. 310.

³⁹ Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, (New York: Guildford Press, 2010), p. 174.

disorientation of habitual reflexes".⁴⁰ He did not, however, elaborate how or what structures or elements might promote these effects; intrinsically his speculation was more provocatively rhetorical or philosophical rather than scientific.

Debord gradually attempted to give his *dérives*, maps and psychogeographic forces a scientific status. However, without systematic data or a psychoanalytic framework, they remained fundamentally poetic concepts, linked more to the grammar of noir than to science or geography.

Wandering Onwards

The activities of the Situationists waned after 1968 and finally came to an end with the dissolution of the group in 1972. The events of May '68 may in fact have superseded their theories and slogans with actions. Yet while the Situationists may have taken credit for the graffiti "*Sous les pavés, la plage*" (under the paving stones, the beach), their psychogeographic project never quite fulfilled its scientific or political ambitions. It did, however, give urban aesthetic and theoretical practices an expanded and influential vocabulary.

One strand of the Situationists' practices can be followed through London's punk movement as Greil Marcus has argued in *Lipstick Traces*, as well as graffiti, street art and urban exploration.⁴¹ There is also a growing focus on the psychological effects of urban environments in architecture, geography, criminology and social science.

The Situationists also drew on and expanded discussions in French philosophy which have continued to explore how the affective urban landscape influences us. For example, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958) described how people create personalized maps of their environments. Each one of us, he wrote, "should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches".⁴²

⁴⁰ Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), p. 8.

⁴¹ Scottish artist Robert Montgomery, who pastes over billboards with posters of his text art, cites the Situationists as a major influence. Matilda Battersby, "The Artist Vandalising Advertising with Poetry", *The Independent*, (3 February 2012). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/the-artist-vandalising-advertising-with-poetry-6353303.html>

⁴² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 12.

Bachelard examined how we map and remodel space, while also being shaped by it, through lived experience as well as our imaginations. “Thus we cover the universe with drawings we have lived,” wrote Bachelard. “These drawings need not be exact. They need only to be tonalised on the mode of our inner space... Space calls for action, and before action, the imagination is at work. It mows and ploughs.”⁴³

Michel De Certeau later pursued this idea when he described how people actively shaped the space of the city. His essay “Walking in the City”, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, describes two types of relationships to the city.⁴⁴ One is formed by the “strategies” of governments, corporations, and other institutions that describe the city with totalising tools such as maps. De Certeau gives the example of looking down from the World Trade Centre in New York to illustrate his notion of this unified, panoramic view. He contrasts this with the walker at ground level who moves in “tactical” ways that are never completely determined by the city’s controlling forces.

De Certeau argues that everyday life is a process of using the rules and commodities imposed from above, but never using them quite as intended. By looking at the city through everyday practice we discover different “ways of operating”, anthropological, poetic and mythic space, and the “blind mobility” of the bustling crowd. Through these experiences we can discover another “migrational” or “metaphorical” city, amid the readable, planned, geographical one.⁴⁵

De Certeau doesn’t use the term *détournement*, but suggests that people are not Debord’s passive consumers oppressed by the city, but individuals actively adapting or *détourning* its structures and pathways to their own ends.

In this way, we can consider urban noir detective fiction in terms of experiential, ground level spatiality. Instead of an overview of the city, this fiction offers the reader a chance to follow a detective or criminal or both, around the city and experience urban space, and the specificity of certain places, through their eyes. Through these characters the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1984) pp. 91-110.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

reader can become conscious of an unofficial or even metaphorical city amid the officially represented geographical one.

The architectural critic Reyner Banham further developed psychogeographic techniques in an attempt to retrieve Los Angeles from noir representations, finding instead a bright future for a new type of urbanism. Banham even adapted the pedestrian *dérive* to the car culture of LA, saying that “like English intellectuals in the past who taught themselves Italian in order to read Dante in the original, I learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original”.⁴⁶

Banham argued that it was not merely the sprawl of this 20th century city which meant that exploring it on foot was no longer possible, but that certain aspects could only be truly understood while travelling by car. He identified four ecologies in the city: Surfurbia, Foothills, The Plains of Id, and Autopia (beach, basin, foothills, freeways). The last, Autopia, the world of the freeway, was, in Banham’s view, a unique modern ecology in its own right, which was only truly comprehensible to the driver.

Yet even in Banham’s sun-filled depictions of Los Angeles, moments of noir occasionally emerge.

Los Angeles looks naturally to the Sunset...and named one of its great boulevards after that favourite evening view. But if the eye follows the sun westward, migration cannot. The Pacific beaches are where young men stop going West, where the great waves of agrarian migration from Europe and the Middle West broke in a surf of unfulfilled and frustrated hopes.⁴⁷

Sinclair’s London

In recent years the focus of psychogeography has shifted away from Los Angeles and back towards London, through the prolific psychogeographical fiction and non-fiction of Iain Sinclair and followers such as Peter Ackroyd.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, (London: Allen Lane, 1971), p. 23.

⁴⁷ Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Peter Ackroyd has drawn on and done much to popularize Iain Sinclair’s work in his crime novels. Meanwhile, Will Self popularised the term psychogeography with his newspaper column in *The Independent* from 2003-2008.

Sinclair's 1975 book *Lud Heat*, a poetic exploration of a mysterious and mystical cartographic relationship between six churches in London's East End built by the 18th century architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, reaffirms the indebtedness of psychogeography to urban noir narratives. Sinclair literally maps the city, showing the churches and their "lines of influence", connecting them through anecdote, literary and historical references (figure 3.3).⁴⁹ He depicts the city as a sinister affective landscape and provocatively asserts that the churches draw on mysterious occult energies that continue to influence the city's moods and patterns of behaviour.

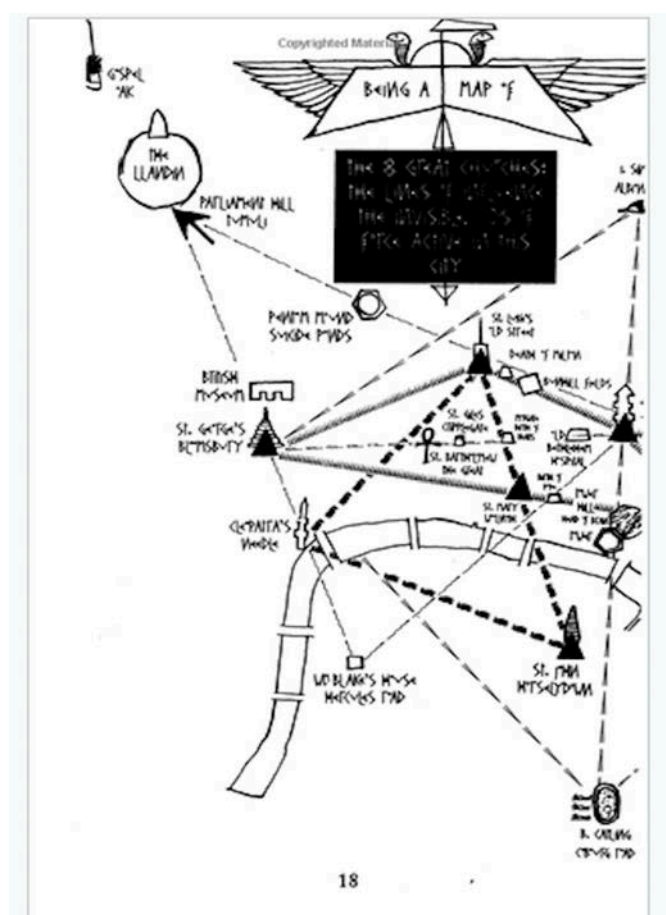


Figure 3.3: Map of Hawksmoor church locations East London, in Iain Sinclair's *Lud Heat*

The evocative nature of *Lud Heat* encouraged a new interest in psychogeography as a tool for exploring and reimagining the city as a source of untapped stories. Peter Ackroyd has drawn on Sinclair's work directly as inspiration for his London crime novels *Hawksmoor* and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, which shift between

⁴⁹ Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge*, (London: Granta Books, 1995), p. 18.

historical and contemporary London, exploring the dark terrain of the city and its persistent historic resonances.

Sinclair acknowledges that his use of the term psychogeography is “cannibalised from French Situationism”.⁵⁰ He also admits to a certain opportunism in taking up the term: “For me, it’s a way of psychoanalysing the psychosis of the place in which I happen to live. I’m just exploiting it because I think it’s a canny way to write about London.”

Sinclair uses the term “psychosis” not in a clinical psychiatric sense, but rather as a poetic way of describing the layered and competing stories and histories that he teases out in his writing. It is also an attempt by Sinclair to link his own writing to William Blake, whom Sinclair cites as bridging a “schizophrenic” division between spiritual visions of angels and demons, and a real human and political world around him of riots and industry.⁵¹

Sinclair’s writings differ from the revolutionary tone of the Situationists, but they have their own subversive quality, a desire to resist the city’s totalising forces in favour of individual lived experience. Rather than proposing utopian visions like the Situationists, Sinclair chooses to summon up its dark shadows and weaken their power by exposing them into the light.

Sinclair adopts the Situationist method of the *dérive*, walking in a state of alert reverie as a way of tuning into the city’s hidden affective landscape and unseen historical patterns. His references to ley lines, for example, are an attempt to describe what he sees as unconscious or primitive patterns that can still exert influence on the city and its inhabitants.

Sinclair’s mystical focus on invisible forces and historical patterns differs from the Situationists who focused on the mundane effects of capitalism and consumerism on the behaviour of city dwellers. The Situationists looked for spaces of resistance to launch their project of transforming the city. Sinclair does not shy away from the power of capitalism, but adopts a more mischievous tone of rebellion. While working on a book

⁵⁰ Stuart Jeffries interviews Iain Sinclair, “On the Road”, *The Guardian*, (April 24, 2004) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview14>

⁵¹ Iain Sinclair, *William Blake’s Spiritual Visions*, video, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/william-blake-spiritual-visions> .

about the Olympic Park in London, Sinclair admits to obsessively trying to “cut through the defensive ring” of security fences by means of “trespass, disguise and chutzpah”.⁵²

Yet there is also a dark and melancholy tone in his writing, which links his work to the traditions of urban noir. For Sinclair the city is a cold case, a landscape of ghosts that still have influence, a grid of mean streets he feels compelled to explore and illuminate.

Sinclair draws on a range of tropes and influences beyond the vocabulary of the Situationists, from the occult writings of Aleister Crowley to Gothic fiction. He often depicts himself as a mix of magus-visionary, mad scientist and hard-boiled detective. He shifts fluidly between these identities, from the gritty streets of overflowing garbage bins, skinheads, graffiti scrawls and dog shit, to a mystical world of ancient symbols and runes, translating one into the other through the alchemy of writing.

In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair explains that an urban walk collecting graffiti from Liverpool Street to Canning Town to the Lea Valley is an “outwardly eccentric Dr-Who style progress” which becomes “a paradigm for any visionary exploration of the Essex fringes”. He admits to giving a scientific pretext for what is essentially “joyriding the tail of the cosmic serpent”, but suggests that “as with alchemy” it is not the result that matters, but the process.⁵³

Sinclair’s walking-mapping techniques are orchestrated to stimulate visions and find correspondences and connections between the urban landscape, personal memories and his own encyclopaedic and occasionally fictionalised knowledge of the city’s history and literary traditions.

In *Lights Out for the Territory* Sinclair outlines his process:

Walking is the best way of exploring and exploiting the city... Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself.⁵⁴

⁵² Robert MacFarlane interview with Iain Sinclair, “Iain Sinclair Struggles with the City of London”, *The Guardian*, 15 July, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/15/ghost-milk-ian-sinclair-olympics>.

⁵³ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, (London: Granta, 1997), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 4

Over the years his walks have involved a V-shaped drift designed “to vandalise the dormant energies of the city”,⁵⁵ a trek around the circular M25 to undo a purported curse on the city in *London Orbital* and a pedalo journey from Hastings to an east London canal in a symbolic elegy for Hackney.⁵⁶ While these might seem like self-consciously eccentric missions, there is an evolving method that connects his works to the tradition of visionary writings from Blake and John Clare, as well as the urban and crime writings of Dickens and Conan Doyle.

In *Lud Heat*, for example, Sinclair suggests that the area between the Hawksmoor churches has an “unacknowledged magnetism and control-power” and “built-in code force” that has supposedly given rise to the area’s history of violence and continues to be felt in the present day. Sinclair illustrates his point by listing a series of violent murders, from Ripper victims, to the Ratcliffe Highway murder, and the death of Mr Abraham Cohen who had ritualistic coins laid at his feet, like Ripper victim Mary Ann Nicholls.⁵⁷ Here Sinclair is drawing on De Quincey’s essay on the art of murder and the Victorian penny dreadful, to summon up a spectral East London, amid the area’s rapidly gentrifying modern neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, in Sinclair’s novel *White Chappell, Scarlett Tracings*, which links the activities of a group of book collectors to the Ripper murders, he describes how certain writings by Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Conan Doyle have escaped the page to enter the city. “They got out into the stream of time, the ether; they escaped into the labyrinth.”⁵⁸ Sinclair references classic crime stories such as Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* and Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, explaining that the fabric of London is infused with texts, characters and myths, which influence the mental and emotional landscape of the city and how we experience it.

The characters in the novel suggest this process is the reverse of the conventions of classic crime, in which the central mystery is solved and effectively contained by the

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

⁵⁶ Steve Rose, “Swandown: Two Men and a Pedalo”, *The Guardian*, (July 18 2012) <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jul/18/swandown-iain-sinclair-andrew-kotting>

⁵⁷ Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge*, (London: Granta, 1997), p. 21.

⁵⁸ Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlett Tracings*, (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 117.

application of logic. But while that might be true of the whodunit, it is less so for urban noir. In *White Chappell* a fictional Sinclair and his collaborator Joblard find evidence that the violence in the books they have collected has escaped the page and permeates London's East End both in the cultural imagination and in actual crimes.

Here Sinclair places a much greater emphasis on the power of language and stories to affect the city than the Situationist psychogeographers. They considered the written record of their *dérives* far less important than the *dérive* itself. Debord writes in his "Theory of the *Dérive*" that "written descriptions can be no more than passwords to this great game."⁵⁹ Perhaps this explains why their psychogeographic reports, in contrast to their often playful and inventive *dérives*, tended to be dully scientific and prosaic.⁶⁰

For Sinclair, however, writing and walking are both essential parts of the same process which summons up stories, myths and images. When Sinclair was asked whether he regarded his psychogeographic walks as a way to collect data in an objective, scientific way, or for making poetic observations, or as a sort of method for channelling messages from occult forces, Sinclair replied: "All three."⁶¹ He elaborated:

I don't write about all my walks. I might have walked an area several times before I decide there's something to write about there, something that draws me back. Then, when there is something that draws me, something I feel I need to explore, I go on the walk with a camera and a notebook, and sometimes another walker. I take photographs, I make notes, we might discuss the walk, and then I go back to write about it, and often that's when the more alchemical, occultish connections and correspondences will appear.

So for Sinclair, writing is the meditative process that allows him to connect with images or stories summoned by his walks, a sort of automatic writing that follows the walking séance.

⁵⁹ Guy Debord, "Theory of the *Dérive*", in *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Situationist Abdelhafid Khatib's report on Les Halles comments on a population of down and outs around the Square des Innocents with the observation that the "whole area is depressing", and notes that the Rue de Rivoli is "by night hard-working and lively". Abdelhafid Khatib, "Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles" (1958), in *Theory of the Derive and Other Situationist Writings on the City*, ed. Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, (Barcelona: Museo d'Art Contemporani, 1996), pp. 73-77.

⁶¹ Iain Sinclair, response to a question at book reading for *London Overground: The Ginger Line*, Waterstones Islington, London, 7 April, 2016.

By Debord's standards, Sinclair's project might lack a revolutionary impulse, and some contemporary architecture critics have described Sinclair's views on urban development as conservative and a "literary rejection of human endeavor".⁶² Others, however, have argued that Sinclair's psychogeography provides counter-narratives that question dominant histories and challenge stable identities, or the possibility of separating genres and disciplines.⁶³

Certainly Sinclair's psychogeography makes the case that there is not one London, but multiple Londons composed of competing voices and stories. These multiple cities jostle on fault lines created by competing forces (political, economic, cultural, mystical). They provoke a "psychosis" or restless city, which the alert urban psychogeographer can tune into by moving through the landscape and record through poetic images, metaphors and word associations, not unlike the detective collecting clues from the street to tell a bigger story.

Sinclair's psychogeography may be seen as retreating from the radicalism of the Situationists. But Sinclair has suggested that when Blake's own revolutionary political views put him at risk of prison, he retreated into metaphorical and spiritual visions as a way of exploring the violent energies of the city.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, journalist John Walsh describes Sinclair as "a most unusual anti-development activist". He does not picket or write to his MP, instead he has "accreted information from a thousand sources and shaped it into a long literary polemic, full of dazzling phrases and angry denunciation".⁶⁵

Sinclair's psychogeography is thus connected to a literary tradition that views the city as the centre of dark forces, a vision shared by noir, according to James Narremore's *More Than Night*. The "dark city" says Narremore is "a literary topos inherited from the nineteenth century". It includes Blake's London, the "blighted, mind-forged creation of

⁶² Tim Abrahams, "An End to Psychogeography", *Cosmopolitan Scum* blog, (June 23, 2012), <https://cosmopolitanscum.com/2012/06/23/an-end-to-psychogeography/> Architecture theorist Tim Abrahams criticises the conservatism of Iain Sinclair's psychogeography in relation to his disapproval for new urban developments (such as the London Olympic Park), without proposing new alternatives.

⁶³ Henderson Downing, *Iain Sinclair And The Psychogeography Of The Split City*, Ph.D. thesis, Birkebeck, University of London, 2015, p. 34.

⁶⁴ Iain Sinclair, *William Blake's Spiritual Visions*, video, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/william-blake-spiritual-visions>

⁶⁵ John Walsh interview with Iain Sinclair, "The Olympics have destroyed my patch of London", *The Independent*, (1 July, 2011) <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/iain-sinclair-the-olympics-have-destroyed-my-patch-of-london-2304336.html>.

industrial rationality” and Baudelaire’s Paris, the “perversely seductive” realm of a *flâneur*, at once “oppressive and pleasurable, alienating and free”. The “dark city” contains many contradictory meanings, which were carried into the modernist era and in the 20th century and transformed, according to Narremore, “into the privileged *mise-en-scene* of the masculine unconscious”.⁶⁶

But if the “dark city” is a manifestation of the “masculine unconscious” we must ask how women engage with the city through psychogeography and noir.

Women walking

You don’t need to crunch around in Gore-Tex to be subversive, if you’re a woman. Just walk out your front door.⁶⁷

In tracing the paths of urban noir and psychogeography so far, we have not encountered many women along the way, except in supporting roles as victims or obstacles to the truth – De Quincey’s prostitute Ann, Chandler’s wayward vixen Carmen and calculating sister Vivien. Deborah Knowles points out that of the seventy-two texts listed as further reading in Coverley’s *Psychogeography* (2006), only six are co-authored by women. Meanwhile, writers such as Will Self have described psychogeographers as a “fraternity” of “middle-aged men”.⁶⁸

For many years urban noir fiction was dominated by the figure of the hard-boiled masculine detective.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the figure of the *flâneur*, the psychogeographer and urban drifter has also tended to be male and white, while women on the streets have frequently appeared as peripheral, vulnerable, sexualised, something to be observed.

In Joan Didion’s 1970s novel, *Play it as it Lays*, we find an urban drifter protagonist, Maria, but eventually she succumbs to the city’s alienating forces, becoming more a

⁶⁶ James Naremore, *More Than Night*, (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2008), p. 44.

⁶⁷ Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: The Feminine Art of Walking in Cities*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 20.

⁶⁸ Deborah Knowles, “Claiming the Streets: The Feminist Implications of Psychogeography as a Business Research Method”, *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, (Volume 7, 2009), p. 51.
<http://www.ejbrm.com/volume7/issue1>

⁶⁹ Since the 1980s, many women have begun writing urban noir fiction featuring tough women protagonists, from Sara Paretsky’s detective V.I. Warshawski, created in response to hard-boiled detectives such as Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, to Val McDermid’s more recent socialist lesbian feminist journalist Lindsay Gordon.

victim of Los Angeles than its interpreter. She is not even allowed the hedonistic pleasure of the *flâneur*, and her experience of becoming lost in the city leads to a mental breakdown.

The relegation of women to victims (or *femmes fatale*) in the urban narrative is blamed largely on the historical constraints that have been imposed on women. Matthew Beaumont in *Night Walking* acknowledges that walking at night has long been viewed as a suspect activity, but women who walked at night were particularly vulnerable - viewed under a system of patriarchal oppression either as prostitutes or potential victims of sexual violence.⁷⁰

Michèle Bernstein, for example, was the most high-profile female member of the Situationist International, but is best known for her fiction. In her novel, *Toutes les Chevaux du Roi* (*All the King's Horses*), the character Genevieve (based on Bernstein herself) describes her attempts explore the city of Nice on foot alone. She finds that her solitude attracts “overly precise compliments” which chase her out of a café, while in the street she also attracts unwelcome attention and is forced to flee into her room, finding the whole experience “rather sad and discouraging”.⁷¹

Rebecca Solnit also acknowledges that the practices of psychogeography, urban walking and writing have largely been the preserve of men. Until the 20th century, few women other than prostitutes wandered the streets, and prostitutes have left us almost no records of their experience.⁷² It is De Quincey who speaks for Ann – she leaves behind no record of her own experiences, no mention of whether the street offered her moments of freedom and pleasure between the periods of deprivation and despair.

Deborah Parsons' *Streetwalking the Metropolis* however, argues that in the literature of women writers from the 1880s onwards, such as Amy Levy, Jean Rhys, Anais Nin, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes, we can find evidence of how women have experienced

⁷⁰ Beaumont, *Night Walking*, pp. 3-4.

⁷¹ Michelle Bernstein, *All the King's Horses*, (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2008), p. 65.

⁷² Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, (London: Granta, 2014) p. 181.

and written about urban environments,⁷³ though little of this writing has been traditionally associated with the field of psychogeography.

However, this does not mean that women have not practised psychogeography, or that it is an exclusively male genre. Lauren Elkin's *Flâneuse* argues that there are numerous examples of female urban drifters, determined, resourceful women who are "keenly attuned to the creative potential of the city". Elkin cites the Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay "Street Haunting" arguing that the author is inciting women to become psychogeographers, to "integrate ourselves into the world of the city by becoming attentive to the shifts in the affective landscape"⁷⁴. However, even in Woolf's essay, it is worth noting that she feels the need to create a pretext – buying a pencil – in order to indulge in the pleasure of walking in the street. A woman walking without such a useful pretext would presumably still be considered suspect.

Elkin admits that the social realities of cities have meant that for women the key ritual of psychogeography, walking in the streets, has been not just riskier or more subversive, but often dangerous. Yet for Elkin this vulnerability can itself also bring new insights about the city. "She voyages out, she goes where she is not supposed to; she forces us to confront the way in which words like *home* and *belonging* are used against women."⁷⁵ Urban walking has therefore not only been a transgressive act for women, but also for those who are not part of the dominant ethnic group.

Algerian psychogeographer and Situationist Abdelhafid Khatib discovered this when he attempted to conduct a psychogeographic portrait of Les Halles in Paris.⁷⁶ Khatib was unable to complete his study because of police harassment. At the time, North Africans were considered suspect and subjected to curfews by the French authorities who were concerned about colonial unrest and the Algerian War. After repeated arrests, Khatib gave up on his Les Halles study, and eventually withdrew from the Situationists in 1960.

⁷³ Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷⁴ Elkin, *Flâneuse: The Feminine Art of Walking in Cities*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 288.

⁷⁵ Lauren Elkin, pp. 22-3.

⁷⁶ Abdelhafid Khatib, "Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles", in *Theory of the Derive and Other Situationist Writings on the City*, Andreotti & Costa, Barcelona, Museo d'Art Contemporani, 1996, pp. 73-77.

The pleasures of anonymity in the crowd afforded the white male psychogeographer are a privilege that women and ethnic minorities have rarely enjoyed. At the same time, psychogeographers and noir writers from diverse backgrounds have the potential to bring a greater complexity to our understanding of the urban environment. For example, African-American crime writer Chester Himes describes a nightmarish environment of the racially-charged, wartime Los Angeles streets in his 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*.

It was the look in white people's faces when I walked down the streets. It was that crazy, wild-eyed, unleashed hatred that the first Jap bomb on Pearl Harbour let loose in a flood. All that tight, crazy feeling of race as thick in the street as gas fumes. Every time I stepped outside I saw a challenge I had to accept or ignore.⁷⁷

Writing six years after Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, Himes's noir exploration of the Los Angeles streets from the perspective of Robert, a young African-American shipyard worker, is a world away from the cool confidence of Philip Marlowe. Robert cannot escape the pressures of racism or its toxic, pervasive atmosphere. Even Robert's experience of driving on the streets of Los Angeles in his '42 Buick Roadmaster is not one of freedom, but of perpetual threat and frustration – a “battle royal” with a “cracker motor-cycle cop”, a near miss with a truck and an oncoming streetcar, pedestrians who dawdle and glare when they see he is “coloured”.⁷⁸ Robert's experience of the city is not one of the anonymous observer, but one of his body and his blackness being observed and criminalised, constantly drawing attention and threat.

Contemporary female psychogeographers such as Rebecca Solnit, however, have also championed the mindful urban walk as an activity of potentially transformative power. In her history of walking, *Wanderlust*, Solnit summons up the noir-ish and subversive glamour of the street as “a dirty magic”. For Solnit, the street is a place of potential – for everything from illicit acts to political activism and flirting.⁷⁹ Strolling in the streets is also potentially an act of resistance and creativity, she says, at a time when “consumption and production” have become the prevailing forces in our lives. “Walking is a mode of making the world as well as being in it.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, (London: Serpents Tail, 1999), p. 4.

⁷⁸ Himes, pp. 12-15.

⁷⁹ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 176.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

For Lauren Elkin, the female urban walker is also potentially a force for change. She can become a disruptor, able to test the invisible limits of the city and intervene in the organisation of space. Elkin writes: “We claim our right to disturb the peace, to observe (or not observe), to occupy (or not occupy) to organise (or disorganise) space.”⁸¹

Drifting Towards Noir

Despite Iain Sinclair’s fear that psychogeography may simply become another consumer brand,⁸² psychogeographic techniques have been productively taken up by multiple disciplines, from visual art to criminology and cultural theory, sometimes with direct links to urban crime narratives. In David Brown’s article “Strolling the Coastline: Criminology in Everyday Life”, the criminologist uses a stroll along a popular tourist path in Sydney between Maroubra and Bondi as a way of examining the history of crime along the route and exploring how knowledge of this history changes our perception of the landscape.⁸³ Meanwhile, Peter Doyle’s “‘Bombora’, ‘Malabar Mansion’”, looks at how two popular songs summon up a sense of the landscape of the Botany Bay area of Sydney and its uneasy history of violence.⁸⁴

This study demonstrates how psychogeography owes a debt to noir both for its method of re-traversing and examining the urban terrain in general and its ability to generate representations of particular places in terms of their affective landscape and their unique mixture of influences. It also shows that it is the playful, creative exploratory aspects of psychogeography such as the urban drift and *détournement* that have been its most productive aspects, rather than the attempts to turn it into a rigid and codified scientific method. The following chapter explores how the insights of psychogeography have permeated noir detective fiction across the globe, enriching it and giving a heightened consciousness of the social and political implications of the cityscape.

⁸¹ Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse*, p. 288.

⁸² John Walsh interview with Iain Sinclair, “The Olympics have destroyed my patch of London”, *The Independent*, 1 July, 2011 <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/iain-sinclair-the-olympics-have-destroyed-my-patch-of-london-2304336.html>, cited 7, July 2016

⁸³ David Brown, “Strolling the Coastline: Criminology in Everyday Life: Through ‘Landscape’ from Gaol to ‘Badlands’”, in *Law Text Culture*, Vol. 13 no.1 (2009), pp. 311-338.

⁸⁴ Peter Doyle, “‘Bombora’, ‘Malabar Mansion’: the psychogeography of the Sydney Sonic Sublime”, *Transforming Cultures* eJournal, Vol. 4 no. 1, (April 2009), <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC>

Philip Howell in his essay “Crime and the City Solution” argues that some forms of crime fiction develop “urban knowledges” that are “as critical and counterhegemonic, if not more so, than much of what passes for radical urban geography”.⁸⁵ He suggests this crime fiction can create “alternative epistemologies of the city”, ones in which “knowledge of the city is never total or whole” and “even the detective’s knowledge of the city is based on fragments, incomplete and unsure”.

In this way, an urban detective hitting the streets to solve a crime is not a formula so much as a methodology. The detective acts as the author’s avatar, not merely solving the central crime, but exploring and gathering information about the city’s affective landscape in a way that also allows the reader to make connections and map its lines of power and desire.

As Val McDermid has written of Sara Paretsky’s Chicago-set V.I. Warshawski novels. “The crimes that happened in those books happened because it was that kind of city, it was that kind of politics that ran the city, because these industries operated there, because that kind of corruption happened there.”⁸⁶

Like the Situationists, noir detectives wander through their cities, stray down alleyways, inhaling the smells, listening to the sounds, gathering data to build up their own personalised maps of the city. Stephen Knight has suggested that detective fiction offers readers a comforting “illusion of security” in an “oppressive modern reality” while validating the romantic or intellectual alienated individual.⁸⁷ But perhaps they also inspire the reader to engage with the baffling, threatening city - suggesting ways to read its signs, look beneath its surface, avoid its pitfalls, and even battle its injustices.

Jules Dassin’s film *The Naked City* film was followed by a 1950s television series of the same name. The narrator closed each episode with the lines: “There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them.”

⁸⁵ Philip Howell, “Crime And The City Solution: Crime Fiction, Urban Knowledge, and Radical Geography”, *Antipode*, Vol. 30 no. 4, (October 1998), p. 357.

⁸⁶ Katy Guest “Val McDermid: Even on a Romantic Holiday My Thoughts Turn to Murrder(sic)”, *The Guardian*, (August 19, 2017). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/19/val-mcdermid-books-interview-crime-tony-hill-carol-jordan-insidious-intent>.

⁸⁷ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p. 192.

In a globalised world where over half of the world's seven billion people live in cities, there are many more stories to tell, and noir remains a flourishing narrative form. The following chapter shows the potential of the noir genre, when enriched with a psychogeographic sensibility, to remain a powerful and relevant way for writers to create new and alternative representations of their cities.

Chapter 4. Translating Global Noir

Everything would be lost except memory. The people of Marseilles will be happy enough. They all know what is under their feet and carry the history of the city in their hearts. It's their secret and no tourist will ever be able to steal it.

Jean-Claude Izzo, *Chourmo*¹

In her 2010 *Washington Post* article, "Fiction's Global Crime Wave", Alexandra Alter reports on a recent surge in US publishing interest in crime fiction from around the world.² Publishers were releasing crime titles from Iceland, Japan, Nigeria, South Africa and Sweden. The reason, she says, is that publishers were on the lookout for the next Stieg Larsson. The Swedish writer's *Millennium* trilogy, featuring a hacker heroine with a dragon tattoo, sold 40 million copies worldwide and turned Nordic-Noir into a global phenomenon. This prompted US publishers to look for their next bestseller overseas. "The result is a new wave of detective fiction that's broadening and redefining the classic genre," said Alter.

Noir fiction from countries outside of America is not a new phenomenon, of course. Lee Horsley points out that many of the popular crime paperbacks published in Britain in the late '40s and the '50s were "primarily imitations of American tough guy and gangster pulps" to satisfy a growing appetite for American hard-boiled crime thrillers. Prompted by the success of James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, which sold over a million copies between 1939 and 1944, writers like Frank Dubrez Fawcett, Harold Kelly and Stephen Frances (writing under the names Ben Sarto, Darcy Glinto and Hank Janson, respectively) were writing pulp crime fiction for the mass market.³ Meanwhile, in Australia, writers such as Alan Geoffrey Yates (known as Carter Brown), wrote multiple pulp detective novels set in America, saying that he chose American settings because Australians preferred them.⁴

¹ Jean-Claude Izzo, *Chourmo*, trans. Howard Curtis, (New York: Europa Editions, 2013), pp. 125-126.

² Alexandra Alter, "Fiction's Global Crime Wave", *The Wall Street Journal*, (1 July 2010).
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703426004575338763878488670>

³ Lee Horsley, "British Noir", *Crime Culture*, 2015, http://www.crimeculture.com/?page_id=1441

⁴ "Carter Brown, Writer; Books Sold In Millions", (*The New York Times*, May 8, 1985).
<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/08/books/carter-brown-writer-books-sold-in-millions.html>

It is important to recognise that these novels were setting out to imitate the American hardboiled style gangster and detective forms, and often, as in the case of Carter Brown, actual American settings, rather than focusing on the unique nuances of the countries or cities they were written in.

Alexandra Alter argues that “mystery novels translate well across cultures, because they usually prize plot over literary acrobatics”. She points to “the global influence of American and British crime writing”, which has led to “the widespread adoption of familiar tropes and plot conventions”. The conventions Alter outlines are the classic elements of noir fiction that we might find in the Chandler novel: “the gloomy, loner detective, clipped dialogue, the standard plot structure that opens with a body and follows the investigation”.⁵

Alter’s assessment displays a familiar patronising tone towards the crime genre in general and the noir detective in particular. However, there is a key quality of global urban noir that Alter scarcely mentions, which allows it to cross national borders, but also distinguishes the new wave of global noir from its earlier incarnations. This is the genre’s utility for exploring the physical and affective landscape through the search narrative. It is this element of the urban noir detective novel, a sort of accessible psychogeography, that perhaps also accounts for both its global adaptability and the variety of recent iterations, as well as its success among readers.

In this context, the search/investigation narrative conventions of urban noir may be seen less as a formula and more as a methodology, just as the *dérive* is the methodology of a psychogeographer. While the method provides a strategy for the novelist, each author may take a different path and find many versions of a city on their chosen journey.

Simon Dentith argues that the urban crime novel provides a way of negotiating the class-divided realities of the modern city that combines “crime, narratability and sexuality”

⁵ While not all of Chandler’s novels literally start with a body - the investigation in *The Big Sleep*, for example is ostensibly initiated by a blackmail plot - the body of Rusty Regan is the real engine behind the story.

and this accounts for the “continuing appeal of specifically urban crime fiction”.⁶ Furthermore, Dentith stresses that it is the hard-boiled style pioneered by writers such as Chandler, rather than the tradition of British clue puzzlers of Agatha Christie or Dorothy L. Sayers, that has specifically been used as “a way of exploring the contemporary city.”⁷

Dentith often uses the term “hard-boiled” to emphasise urban noir’s tradition of featuring demotic language and a masculine viewpoint, which originally appealed to urban working class readers as a way of negotiating their relationship with the city. However, in this chapter I want to focus on how the urban noir narrative form has been adapted by authors from diverse global backgrounds to explore urban networks of power, class and sexuality.

As Val McDermid suggested of Sara Paretsky’s noir novels, their crimes seems to emerge from that specific city, and a journey through its urban underworld is often central to solving or resolving the case.⁸

Hence, this chapter will explore how Chandler’s noir model has been adapted, and even *détourned*, by diverse writers to provide alternative maps of their own urban landscapes. William McIlvanney’s Laidlaw novels conjure a sullen, brooding Glasgow constantly on the edge of violence; French novelist Jean-Claude Izzo depicts the tense, racially-volatile streets of Marseille; Chinese-emigre writer Qiu Xiaolong describes the forgotten alleyways and wealthy enclaves of Shanghai in *Death of a Red Heroine*; the American author Sara Gran describes a waterlogged and abandoned post-Katrina New Orleans in *City of the Dead*.

Glasgow Noir

William McIlvanney’s gritty Laidlaw trilogy of crime novels set in his home city of

⁶ Simon Dentith, “‘This Shitty Urban Machine Humanised’: The Urban Crime Novel and the Novels of William McIlvanney”, *Watching the Detectives: Essays on Crime Fiction*, eds. Bell, Ian F. A., Daldry, Graham Palgrave Macmillan, London 1990, p. 20. NB. Dentith acknowledges his debt to the work of Peter Brooks, and Ken Worpole (see bibliography).

⁷ Dentith, “‘This Shitty Urban Machine’”, p. 21.

⁸ McDermid, Val, “Why Crime Fiction is Leftwing”, *The Guardian*, (April 1, 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/apr/01/why-crime-fiction-is-leftwing-and-thrillers-are-rightwing>

Glasgow, written between 1977 and 1991, undeniably emerge from the tradition honed by Chandler and enriched by Ross MacDonald. However, when critics suggested that McIlvanney had gone “downmarket” by writing the Laidlaw novels following his acclaimed historical novel *Docherty*, McIlvanney responded that Laidlaw was “not a whodunnit but a whydunnit”.⁹ He emphasised that his books were not only about crime, but were concerned with society as a whole. “He’s a kind of figurehead for that time and that place,” said McIlvanney. “Laidlaw is not just an inspector of crime; he’s an inspector of society.”

In another interview, McIlvanney said that he “wanted to write about contemporary Glasgow from the point of view of someone who would have to go to bad places. “I didn’t want it to be some Cook’s Tour of the city so I made him a cop.”¹⁰

The first Laidlaw novel re-iterates this point, as detective Jack Laidlaw explains to his colleague Harkness why they’re taking a bus to observe their environment:

Tourists spend their lives doing the Cook’s Tour of their own reality. Ignoring the slums. Travellers make the journey more slowly, in greater detail. Mix with the natives. A lot of murderers are, among other things, travellers... To come at them you’ve got to become a traveller too. Think of this as a wee ritual exercise for opting out on tourism. A car is psychologically sterile – an oxygen tent. A bus is septic.¹¹

Here Laidlaw could be explaining the theory behind psychogeography’s urban drift or *dérive*. Earlier he has been walking the streets and reading messages on building walls warning visitors to the city of Glasgow not to be cheeky, before entering a slum zone.¹² These moments of “catching the textual run-off from the streets” could also have emerged from Robert Macfarlane’s psychogeography guide.

⁹ Marcus Williamson, “William McIlvanney: Author whose gritty Laidlaw novels began the ‘Tartan Noir’ genre, inspiring writers like Ian Rankin” *The Independent*, (December 7, 2015), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/william-mcilvanney-author-whose-gritty-laidlaw-novels-began-the-tartan-noir-genre-inspiring-writers-a6763951.html> .

¹⁰ Interview appears at the end of William McIlvanney, *Strange Loyalties*, (Edinburgh, Canongate, 2012), p. 265.

¹¹ William McIlvanney, *Laidlaw*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013), p. 127.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Furthermore, Laidlaw novels reveal a desire to explore life on the streets as a way of understanding the city and the condition of society. In *The Papers of Tony Veitch* the narrative is initiated by the death of a homeless alcoholic, which Laidlaw's colleagues are happy to dismiss, but Laidlaw becomes determined to understand. His search for answers becomes a way of exploring the divisions of wealth and power in the city and their consequences. Laidlaw's curiosity sets him apart from his colleagues and gives him the ability to both understand the city and solve its crimes.

Notably, it is not Laidlaw's toughness but his sensitivity that gives him an added insight. In the first novel in the series, *Laidlaw* (1977), he is described by a colleague as "one of our less conventional men".¹³ Fellow officer Milligan complains that he is too compassionate, and warns rookie cop Harkness he'll need "wellies" to "wade through the tears".¹⁴ Laidlaw is described as more concerned about victims than the other cops, and as the series progresses this sensitivity leads to his marriage breakdown, a struggle with alcohol and increased alienation.

Despite his hard-boiled qualities, Laidlaw also shares with Chandler a romantic and poetic side that gives him a unique perspective. Philip Marlowe may have relied on streetwise cynicism to resolve the blackmail case in *The Big Sleep*, but it is his romantic sense of chivalry towards Vivien Sternwood and her father that prompts Marlowe to pursue what happened to Rusty Regan. Similarly, Laidlaw goes the extra mile for his victims out of a sense of compassion and empathy.

This "sensitivity" also translates into a heightened attentiveness to the surrounding environment and an ability not only to focus on details and images, but also connect them into a coherent pattern of meaning. For example, it is Laidlaw who notices and translates the Latin inscription on the Mercat Cross, which warns visitors that provoking the locals may result in retribution.¹⁵

The Laidlaw novels also warn against casually arrogant assumptions, in favour of a more cautious, sceptical and exploratory approach.

¹³ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁵ William McIlvanney, *Laidlaw*, p. 112.

People like Ernie Milligan are dangerous. He knows this city, he says.... He's like a lot of policemen here. He knows the names of streets. He doesn't know the city. Who does? Walk down a side-street on your own, you're finding out again. Who ever knew a city? It's a crazy claim. And those who make impossible claims are always going to cause more trouble than they solve.¹⁶

McIlvanney suggests that understanding the city is a constant process, because it is constantly changing, and also changing us – ultimately unknowable, you can only investigate, engage with and experience it.

In the first two novels, *Laidlaw* and *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, detective Laidlaw is not the sole narrator, and his viewpoint is only one of several perspectives, which the reader must piece together to form a narrative picture. In *Tony Veitch*, for example, we see Glasgow through the eyes of petty criminal, Mickey Ballatar who is returning to the city after having been away. He is described as being like an expert “reminding himself of the fauna special to this area”. Ballatar is disoriented, he has “difficulty isolating the sense of place”. We are told that “cities are essentially the same” but “the intonations are different”. Ballatar is trying to “re-attune himself to Glasgow’s”.¹⁷

This opening passage gives us a sense of what McIlvanney himself was attempting with his Laidlaw novels. He was borrowing the urban noir detective form developed in Los Angeles, and applying it to his own city. He tells us that he's going to use the key tropes, such as the detective, the search, the mean streets, but he's going to tune them to the particular nuances of Glasgow.

Marseille Noir

Jean-Claude Izzo seems to share a similar ambition for his Marseille Noir. The term was coined to describe the detective fiction of Jean Claude-Izzo, in particular his Marseille-set trilogy, *Total Chaos* (first published 1995), *Chourmo* (1996) and *Solea* (1998). Novelist, journalist and left-wing activist Izzo was an autodidact and son of Italian and Spanish immigrants. A member of the Communist Party, he also wrote for the local party newspaper, *La Marseillaise*.

¹⁶ William McIlvanney, *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013), p. 276.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 1.

In an obituary for the author, historian Douglas Johnson writes that Izzo was put off writing literature by the French critical establishment's championing of the "new novel" and prevailing intellectual concepts such as structuralism.¹⁸ He believed in social realism, and turned to noir fiction relatively late in life, writing his Marseille trilogy in his 50s.

The novels tell their stories through a classic Chanderlesque hero – a world-weary Marseille detective, Fabio Montale. Montale is solitary, brooding, tough, prone to nostalgia and regret. Yet Montale is also distinctly a Marseillais – his "melancholy is tempered by a love for women and good food" and his "pessimism is put in its place by his horror of injustice, racism and violence".¹⁹

Edmund J. Smyth writes that with Montale, Izzo created "a memorable character who will henceforth be the model of the Mediterranean detective".²⁰ According to Smyth it is "above all the representation of Marseille and the Mediterranean which is privileged" and "Marseille's sights, sounds and smells permeate the trilogy".²¹ Smyth points out that Izzo lists actual streets and districts as well as providing an account of the city's history, economic and social development, and contemporary problems, such as the issue of regeneration, renovation and gentrification of urban areas.

In the first novel, *Total Chaos*,²² Izzo immediately locates the reader in specific streets of Marseille, conjuring both the poverty of a slum area called the Panier, and its unique nostalgic significance. Montale's childhood friend, Ugo, makes his way to the Rue de Pistoles, where he has returned after time abroad. We are told that "the ground was

¹⁸ Douglas Johnson, "Jean-Claude Izzo: Catching the Mediterranean tragedy in tales of old Marseille", *The Guardian*, (Feb 2, 2000) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/feb/02/news.obituaries>

¹⁹ Johnson, "Jean-Claude Izzo".

²⁰ Edmund J. Smyth, "Marseille Noir: Jean-Claude Izzo And The Mediterranean Detective," *Romance Studies*, Vol. 25 no. 2, (April, 2007), p. 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²² Jean-Claude Izzo, *Total Chaos* trans. Howard Curtis, (New York: Europa Editions, 2013). It is interesting to note that Izzo's novel was previously published with a different translation as *One Helluva Mess*, trans. Vivienne Menkes-Ivry (London: Arcadia, 2000). This translation emphasised the class and language differences by using old Cockney slang to represent the French-Arabic argot known as "verlan", where syllables of common slang words are inverted.

littered with garbage sacks spilling their contents. There was a pungent smell on the streets, a mixture of piss, dampness and mildew”.²³

The run-down area is a maze of narrow streets undergoing redevelopment. Houses have been painted in Italianate ochres with green and blue shutters (figure 4.1).²⁴ But the renovation project is only partial. “The developers seemed to have taken a breather here. The houses were blackened and dilapidated, eaten away by sewer vegetation.”



Figure 4.1: Google Map image of Rue des Pistoles, Marseille.

Izzo paints a picture of a city that is changing, getting a facelift, but the surface paint job provided by new money cannot completely efface the old world underneath with its stench of poverty and crime. Yet Izzo’s view of the city is complex, where decay and poverty co-exist with nostalgia, sensual pleasure and beauty. No sooner does he cast a jaundiced eye over the decrepitude of the old immigrant slum neighbourhood, than his thoughts turn to his childhood, coffee and women.

Izzo’s memories of the impoverished streets of his youth recalls Svetlana Boym’s idea of “reflective nostalgia”, which dwells on individual rather than national memories and savours the details of a past, while “perpetually deferring the homecoming itself”.²⁵ With

²³ Jean-Claude Izzo, *Total Chaos*, p. 17.

²⁴ “Rue Des Pistoles, Marseille, France”, Google Street view (accessed June, 2016).
<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Rue+des+Pistoles,+13002+Marseille,+France/>

²⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 49-50.

reflective nostalgia longing and critical thinking coexist – “as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection”.

In his article “Walking Through Memory”, Alastair Bonnett points out that nostalgia is a key element of psychogeography, as “psychogeography was born with a sense of loss for the city”.²⁶ The Situationist movement, Bonnett notes, was born and bred in post-war Paris, and its relationship with Paris “was framed and informed by the confluence of revolutionary and nostalgic sentiment”. The two contradictory impulses were linked by the belief that “*their* Paris, the street-based, intimate and organic Paris of the bohemian and working-class community” was “under assault by the forces of banalisation and modernisation”.

Izzo’s Marseille trilogy also encapsulates these two currents in order to offer a similarly complex representation. Izzo is both deeply nostalgic for the old Marseille of his childhood, a place of romance and camaraderie, but remains hopeful of the possibility of transformation, of a united culture, born from the multiplicity of Marseille and its residents. This transformed world is represented in the microcosm of Hassan’s bar.

It felt good to be in Hassan’s bar. There were no barriers of age, sex, colour or class among the regulars there. We were all friends. You could be sure no one who came there for a pastis voted for the National Front, or ever had.²⁷

Izzo’s narrative in *Total Chaos* is centred on Montale’s search for a missing girl and for the culprits who have killed his childhood friends. All three crimes are linked to a criminal gang that has been infiltrated by far-right extremists. The plot takes the reader through the streets of Marseille, from the deprived northern suburbs, crammed full of project-style flats, to the luminous and redemptive Mediterranean. The narrative identifies distinct zones in the city, in the way the psychogeographic drift identifies “unities of ambiance”. Early in the novel, Izzo seeks to identify the city’s unique character and subvert the Mediterranean paradise image of the Cote d’Azur. The surface of the city is ugly, its undercurrents are violent, but Izzo reveals the deeper strata of camaraderie in its survivors.

²⁶ Alastair Bonnett, “Walking Through Memory: Critical Nostalgia and the City”, in *Walking Inside Out*, ed. Tina Richardson, (London: Rowman and Littlefield), 2015, p. 76.

²⁷ Jean-Claude Izzo, *Solea*, trans. Howard Curtis, (New York: Europa Editions, 2013) p. 27.

"Marseille isn't a city for tourists," Izzo tells us.²⁸ "Its beauty can't be photographed. It can only be shared."

The atmosphere in the city is portrayed as tense and alert, particularly in the poorer areas, like the Panier.

A new face in the neighbourhood spelled danger. A cop. An informer.
Or the new owner of a renovated building, who'd go to the town hall
and complain about the lack of security. The cops would come back
and check them out.²⁹

Izzo evokes the sense of imminent violence in the streets, and the patterns of behaviour it induces. Marseille is a city where you have to take sides and learn to fight, says Montale.

Alongside this edgy urban grittiness, Izzo also summons up the ancient narratives of the city, suggesting that they create patterns that repeat themselves in the present day. He compares the city to an ancient tragedy, in which "the hero is death".³⁰

Izzo links the ancient and modern narratives of Marseille in a passage describing a building project that uncovers ancient ruins.

When the Bourse shopping mall had been under construction there had been long, tough negotiations. The excavations had revealed the walls of Massilia for the first time. Even so the ugly concrete bunker had been given the go ahead, in return for an area designated "the garden of ruins" ...³¹

Montale's journey reveals the city as palimpsest, where layers of past are literally built on top of each other, reminding us of the rise and fall of civilisations. In modern-day Marseille, capitalism eventually wins and the ugly concrete shopping mall is built. But traces of the ancient past remain in the form of the *memento mori*, the "garden of ruins", and in the memory and rebellious behaviour of the city's inhabitants.

As the trilogy unfolds, Izzo's vision of Marseille lurches between despair and sensual joy, its streets smell of shit and garbage but also the salt of sea air, mint, basil, and sex. Above

²⁸ Izzo, *Total Chaos*, p.39.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

³¹ Izzo, *Chourmo*, pp. 125-6.

the unchanging sediment of rock and ruins, the city is one of transience, dynamism, and flux. This impermanence is celebrated and aestheticized by Izzo even as its beauty disappears.

Izzo says that in the Mediterranean light, “one never found what one was seeking; the discovery of its beauty changed everything”.³²

The line recalls Debord’s exhortation in his “Theory of the Derive”, that the psychogeographer should “let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there”.³³ Yet the *dérive* also involves a contradictory process: “the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities”.³⁴

In Izzo’s novels, the author is both in love with the city’s attractions, yet its sternest critic. Izzo’s detective Montale is seduced by the beauty he encounters, by the promise of sensual satisfaction, and by a nostalgia for a lost past – all these things are portrayed as intrinsic to the city’s streets. But Montale is also forced to cast a jaundiced eye over the city as he grimly pursues the perpetrators of a crime and tries to solve the mystery at its heart – how can somewhere so beautiful be so treacherous?

Montale’s journey throughout the Marseille trilogy oscillates between this letting-go, of being drawn by the attractions of Marseille - its nostalgia, sunshine, food, drink and beautiful women – and a contradictory attempt to “dominate” this dangerously seductive world by keeping his head and searching for truth.

At the start of *Total Chaos*, Montale is a cop who was assigned to the Neighbourhood Surveillance squad in North Marseille five years earlier. His detailed and forensic knowledge of the city, combined with an ironic turn of phrase gives him a unique perspective. He describes areas in the way a psychogeographer might describe a “unity of ambience”. He visits a “largely Arab housing project” where the sun has “free rein” because there are “no trees”. Montale dispels any illusions about the area by quoting a

³² <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/feb/02/news.obituaries>

³³ Guy Debord, “Theory of the Derive”, *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 62.

³⁴ Ibid.

Charles Aznavour lyric that “poverty isn’t so bad in the sun”, while commenting: “I don’t suppose he’d ever been here, to this pile of shit and concrete”.³⁵

Montale makes it clear that this treeless, barren area, crowded with concrete apartment blocks, is both a dumping ground for society’s unwanted and a breeding ground for crime. The neighbourhood is filled with punks (young criminals), junkies, and dropouts. Kids spend their teenage years “walking a tightrope” before mostly falling into one of the categories above. Montale describes the pattern of teenagers from poor neighbourhoods drifting into petty crime and prisons, recognising it from his own childhood while adding that “the risks are higher now”.³⁶

Montale identifies the public housing flat blocks by their numbers, C12, B7, but says each is no different from the others. “The lobby was filthy and stank of piss. Someone had thrown a stone at the light bulb and smashed it. And the elevator didn’t work.”³⁷ He uses these details to build up the atmosphere of despair, poverty and neglect in the area, and the anger, rebellion and criminality these factors breed.

Geography is key to the social divide and can be represented by a subway line (figure 4.2).³⁸ Line 1 goes from Castellane to La Rose, from the affluent new neighbourhoods with their bars, restaurants and cinemas, to North Marseille “a place you didn’t hang out in if you didn’t have to”.³⁹

Izzo’s Marseille is composed of distinct ambiances or zones, which Montale reads and connects by employing his senses to build up a detailed map of these areas.

³⁵ Izzo, *Total Chaos*, p. 51

³⁶ Ibid., p. 53

³⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁸ “Marseille Metro Map”, UrbanRail.net (2015).

<http://www.urbanrail.net/eu/fr/marseille/marseille.htm>

³⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

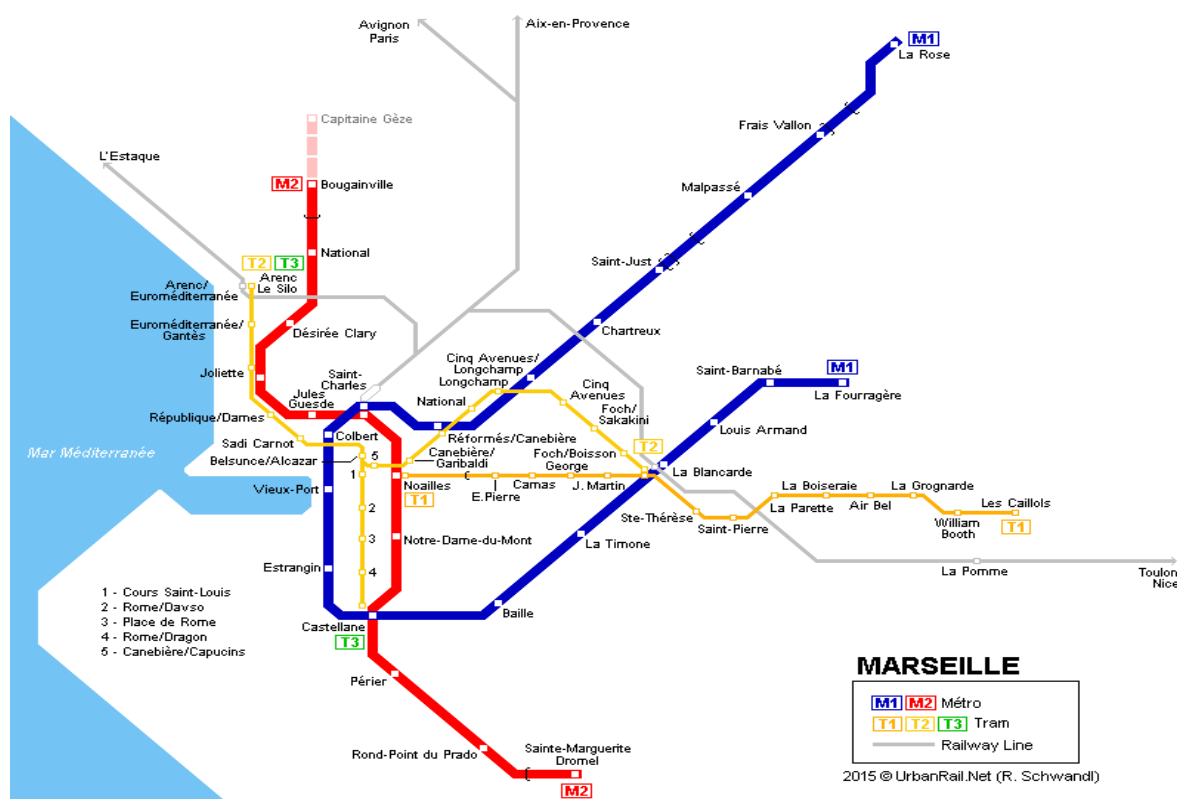


Figure 4.2: Marseille subway map showing M1 Metro line, Castellane to La Rose, from the inner city, to the northern suburbs.

Montale charts not just the “textual runoff” of the streets, but their sonic patterns and rhythms as he observes Arab boys on the subway. “They’d gathered at the front end of the carriage, standing on the seats, using the walls and windows as tom toms, beating on them in time with the music from the ghetto blaster.”⁴⁰

The youths play rap music by Marseille hip-hop bands such as IAM. Montale explains that Marseille was a place where people liked to talk a lot, and rap is a form of talk – mixed in with the rhythms of the many cultures of the city “tom toms from Africa, the Bronx, the planet Mars”.

The rhythm of tom toms symbolises the energy of the streets, but also their dangers and tensions. Tom toms signal war and herald a confrontation between the kids from the Northern projects and the police.⁴¹

Music emanates from the streets of Marseille in Izzo’s novels, and is frequently used to evoke the layers of history and culture in the streets and to conjure an affective

⁴⁰ Izzo, *Total Chaos*, p. 73.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

landscape. Montale admits he is no fan of rap music, but acknowledges its relevance for the disaffected Marseille youth. Montale however listens to blues and jazz, and the songs he chooses suggest the more sensual and melancholy aspects of the city.

Smell and taste are also senses that Izzo employs in his affective survey. There is the sensual, basil-scented smell of his love interest Lole, the memory of the taste of garlic in the mouth of Ugo's childhood sweetheart - a reminder of their shared Mediterranean immigrant family background. There is also the smell of poverty, mildew in the clothes of the poor children, uncollected garbage, bad plumbing, and increasingly, as the series of novels continues, the smell of death.

"Life stank of death," Montale tells us as he walks into Hassan's bar on a hot Marseille day. "The air was a viscous mixture of pollution and humidity" ... "I really felt death around me. The rotten putrid smell of it." But even at these moments, the city also offers pleasure, life. "A nice cool sea breeze and everything will be fine..."⁴²

Izzo's depiction of Marseille is connected to the Situationist understanding of the city as both "a mechanism of oppression and as a facilitator of liberty". But if the Paris of the Situationists was one of "agitation against colonialism in Algeria and the authorities in the 1960s",⁴³ Izzo's Marseille is its aftermath.

In his eulogy for Izzo at the beginning of *Solea*, fellow Mediterranean noir novelist Massimo Carlotto writes that one of Izzo's intuitions was identifying "the Mediterranean as the geographical centre of the universal criminal revolution". His novels tease out "the rich fabric of alliances in the region between new illegal cultures emerging from the east and from Africa".⁴⁴

Carlotto writes that Izzo's Mediterranean noir differs from previous French noir and even the modern police novel since it "no longer recounts a single noir story in a given place at a given moment but begins with a precise analysis of organised crime".⁴⁵ Izzo,

⁴² Izzo, *Solea*, p. 27.

⁴³ Edwin Heathcote, "City Limits", in *The Financial Times*, (12 June, 2010) <https://www.ft.com/content/92816336-74de-11df-aed7-00144feabdc0>

⁴⁴ Izzo, *Solea*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Izzo, *Solea*, pp. 13-14.

says Carlotto, describes a city in which crime and anti-crime (the institutions that fight it) are fusing into a single “socio-economic locomotive”.

Izzo’s trilogy therefore uses its journey through Marseille’s streets to depict them as the meeting point of East and West, of ancient myths and romances, and the modern narratives of post-colonialism, capitalism and globalisation.

Fabio Montale tells us: “Now our former colonies were here. Capital: Marseille.”⁴⁶

At the end of *Total Chaos*, Izzo returns to Marseille’s founding myth in a moment of hope and transcendence. He refers to the story of Gyptis and Protis, about a marriage between two cultures that created Massilia (Marseille’s ancient name). In this founding narrative, Izzo seems to offer hope. Montale holds his gypsy lover Lole’s hand and watches the city “burst into flame” it is an intense, even violent image, but also an optimistic one. The city’s passion is its strength.

Shanghai Noir

Chinese émigré novelist Qiu Xiaolong’s Inspector Chen novels take the noir model beyond western confines to a different global setting. They adapt the key elements (body, detective, search) as a way of exploring post-Tiananmen⁴⁷ Shanghai as the centre of a quantum shift in power from the old Communist state-run institutions to a free-market economy. Shanghai is presented as the unstable nexus of treacherous political, social, historical and financial forces that create fault-lines in the city from which deadly crimes emerge.

Jonah Raskin suggests that the focus in Qiu’s novels is on morals and society in the manner of 19th century French literature, such as Stendhal’s *The Red and The Black*.⁴⁸ But he also acknowledges the novel’s debt that it is the tradition of urban noir, and detectives such as Marlowe “walking the mean streets”.

⁴⁶ Izzo, *Total Chaos*, p. 229

⁴⁷ Post-Tiananmen refers to the period following the student-led protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing in 1989, which arose during a period of rapid economic development, social changes and political anxiety in post-Mao China.

⁴⁸ Jonah Raskin, “Red Cop in Red China: Qiu Xiaolong’s Novels on the Cusp of Communism and Capitalism”, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 62 no. 5, (October, 2010), <https://monthlyreview.org/2010/10/01/red-cop-in-red-china/>.

At the same time, Raskin argues, “Chen is no second-hand copy. He’s Chinese through and through, a creature of Shanghai society, and a product of Chinese history.”⁴⁹

The first of Qiu’s Chen mysteries, *Death of a Red Heroine* (2000), is set in Shanghai in 1990. Xiaolong left China in 1988 to study in the US and remained there to avoid persecution by the Chinese Communist Party. His view of China and its government is necessarily coloured by his perspective as an émigré, what Svetlana Boym might describe as a “reflective nostalgia”, where longing for the past is mixed with critical reflection.⁵⁰

In his description of Shanghai, Qiu pays great attention to recording and reflecting on the minutiae of a changing city, bridging ancient and modern times in a Communist country undergoing rapid modernisation. His study of the cityscape draws on urban noir fiction tropes and narrative devices to evoke a multi-layered representation.

The central protagonist in *Red Heroine* is a male police detective, Inspector Chen - though the perspective of the novel sometimes shifts to another police detective Yu, (Chen’s subordinate). Like many noir heroes, Chen lives alone and is prone to moody contemplation, though his distinguishing characteristic is that he writes poetry in his spare time. This makes his colleagues and even some literary critics suspect him,⁵¹ but also allows Chen to make poetic observations about the crime he is investigating.

Chen’s case involves solving the murder of a shop worker and Communist poster girl whose body is found in a canal in a remote area outside the city. The search narrative allows the detective to explore and reflect on Shanghai and briefly Guangzhou.

The search sees Chen on the streets collecting data – signs, sounds, smells, moods, while his poetic sensibility makes him especially attuned to the city’s resonances, histories and underlying forces – in this case, the shift in power from the old Communist institutions

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 49-50.

⁵¹ Andrew Nette in his article “Crime Fiction & Social Harmony in China”, The Wheeler Centre, (February 15, 2011), complains that he found “Chen’s constant spouting of poetry distracting and it broke up the pace” of the detective narrative. <https://www.wheelercentre.com/notes/4f42c3a19f0a/>

to the new capitalist society, which in the case of the *Red Heroine*, includes the commodification of sex.

Death of a Red Heroine opens with the body of the shop worker floating in a Baili Canal, about twenty miles west of Shanghai. Two friends travel there to go fishing and to avoid the polluted river nearer the city. It is an area, Xiaolong tells us, as “yet untouched by Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms”, away from industry and urban development, it is “a dark stretch of water obscured by tall weeds and shrubs”, but also “relatively unpolluted” and abundant with fish. But what appears to be pristine water turns out to have already been tainted by the spreading corruption of society - a murder victim floating in a plastic bag.

The action then moves to Inspector Chen’s one-bedroom apartment on Huaihai Road, in central Shanghai, a “desirable noiseless distance” from the traffic. Chen reflects: “In an overpopulated city like Shanghai, with more than thirteen million people, the housing shortage was acute. Still he had been assigned a private apartment.”⁵²

The setting is not incidental. Through the description of Chen’s apartment, Xiaolong is able to shift to an exploration of how Shanghai is a cramped, overcrowded city. This is not merely an aside but one of the engines of the story. There is a housing shortage, with housing assigned by those in power, which promotes competitiveness and resentment among the civil servants vying for private accommodation and ultimately affects the attitudes of the police. It becomes a motive for the detectives to distinguish themselves, but also encourages obedience if they are to secure an apartment at all. Meanwhile, the disparity between the dormitory accommodation in the squalid neighbourhood of the murder victim and the spacious residence of the murderer in an old diplomatic quarter is also highlighted to illustrate social inequality resulting from and promoting corruption.

Qiu explains the history of Shanghai, its transition from a fishing village to a prosperous commercial city “with companies and factories appearing like bamboo shoots after a spring rain”. We learn that the crisis has forced two and three generations to live together in cramped quarters, but employers dispense new apartments to favoured employees.

⁵² Qiu Xiaolong, *Death of a Red Heroine*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), p.10.

Chen has been assigned an apartment that is “not luxurious”, with “no real kitchen” or bathroom, but he is nevertheless the envy of his fellow colleagues in even more humble accommodation. “There had been some complaining at the bureau about his privileges”.⁵³

Geographical detail is steadily accumulated, adding to the layered portrait of the city. Chen works in a police bureau on Fuzhou Rd with a grey iron gate, guarded by two armed soldiers. The body is found in a canal off the Suzhou River, ten miles west of the Shanghai paper mill, in an area few people visit.⁵⁴ The victim was a young woman called Guan Hongying (her surname translating as “red heroine”), who works for Shanghai First Department Store, where she was honoured as a “national model worker”. But despite her special status, we learn that her address is Lane 235, Hubei Rd, in a squalid dormitory block in a former red-light district.

When Chen begins his investigations, he gets off the bus at Zhejiang Road to “walk around the neighbourhood”, which he says “could speak volumes for the people living there – as in Balzac’s novels”.⁵⁵ Guan’s neighbourhood is linked to the poverty and sleaze of its past as a red-light district – there are a number of “squalid lanes”, and children “raced about like scraps of paper in the wind”. Chen tells us that the lanes used to have different names. “Notorious names.” Despite government attempts to erase this past, the people still use the old names – Guan even receives an electricity bill addressed to the old street name, Qinghe Lane, which Chen notes is “one of the most infamous in the twenties and thirties, or even earlier. It was where the second-class prostitutes gathered.”⁵⁶

Raskin writes that in the Chen novels, the detective is a valuable character “to expose the hidden flaws of Communist society, to connect crimes in high places with criminality in low places, and link violations of the human soul to transgressions against the human community”. Because Guan has had sex shortly before she’s murdered, the crime is labelled “sexual”. Because she’s a Communist, it’s a political case. Sex and politics are

⁵³ Qiu, *Death of a Red Heroine*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 25. The river has also been used as the setting for another noir story, Lou Ye’s film *Suzhou River* (2000) where it appears heavily polluted and a site of industrial decay.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

therefore inextricably linked in *Death of a Red Heroine*, but they are also concealed behind both metaphorical and physical facades.⁵⁷

The old prostitute quarter is now a dormitory for poorly paid shop workers, while Guan was treated like a disposable sex object by a party member. Chen conjures the atmosphere of the zone and its old stories. In a laneway festooned with laundry, Chen recalls the superstition that walking under lacy women's underwear is bad luck.⁵⁸ "But with the past associations of the lane in his mind, Chief Inspector Chen found it almost nostalgic."

Here Qiu calls to mind again Boym's idea of "reflective nostalgia", which she distinguishes from "restorative nostalgia" or the desire to restore the past. In contrast, reflective nostalgia "savours details and memorial signs", "cherishes shattered fragments of memory", it is "ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary". It does not desire to restore the past, but reveals that "longing and critical thinking" may co-exist.⁵⁹

Chen feels a pang of nostalgia at the memories of the seedy glamour of old Shanghai, while he evokes the details of the oppressive older-style street – a walled off courtyard, tiled roofs, heavy carved beams overhead, its balconies spilling over with dripping laundry, piles of vegetables and used bicycle parts, a kiosk with one public phone for the dormitory women. We are told that "even before the revolution the houses appeared to have been subdivided to accommodate more girls, with smaller alcoves for maids or pimps". There are signs of neglect all around, "gaping windows, scaling cement, peeling paint, the smell of the public bathroom permeating the corridor". Chen finds Guan's room, on a floor shared with eleven families, with coal, cabbages, pots and pans piled the corridor.

In his passage through the streets of Shanghai, detective Chen explores and connects a series of contrasting urban ambiances: the desolate canal; his own neat, desirable, if modest home; the victim's crowded, squalid neighbourhood; and finally the luxurious neighbourhood where the Communist officials live.

⁵⁷ Jonah Raskin, "Red Cop in Red China".

⁵⁸ Qiu, *Death of a Red Heroine*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 49-50.

In this way Qiu's depictions of Shanghai subvert the official narratives of an orderly, harmonious city, revealing instead distinct zones of poverty and vulnerability, wealth and power. They also evoke a sense of reflective nostalgia as they record the passage of time – a sense of the loss of Shanghai's past, and uncertainty about its future. Chen notices new construction everywhere, detour signs "like mushrooms", an old building replaced by a luxury hotel, a woman in a sportscar.⁶⁰ "Shanghai was changing rapidly," Chen observes. "So were the people. So was he..."

Qiu's awareness of change may stem from leaving China in 1988, shortly before the Tiananmen protests prompted him to stay in the US. The author admits that he "writes about the kind of life he might have led had he stayed in China".⁶¹

Boym argues that such nostalgia, particularly for the emigrant or exile, is prompted by a longing for a feeling of intimacy with their world. For the nostalgic, the lost home and the new home can both feel haunted. Boym gives the example of the spooky haunted suburbia of Hollywood as the ghostly other side of the American dream for the immigrant. This is important for our understanding of Qiu, but also for his relationship to Chandler, whose British education meant he never felt at home in Los Angeles, and may have prompted his view of Los Angeles as a haunted landscape. Chandler, however, chose to write about his new home, while Qiu writes about his old one.

Qiu's mental *dérive* through the streets of Shanghai may in fact be an attempt to try to gather and hold fragments of his past in order to maintain an intimacy with his old home. As Boym has noted, the "double consciousness" of the exile, an exposure to different times and spaces, is itself a "complex mental geography".⁶² Perhaps this "double consciousness" also prompts a heightened awareness of the multiplicity of space and intersecting urban stories.

We are told that Qiu's detective, Chen, once aspired to be a poet, but was assigned a job as a policeman. Yet literature and poetry still preoccupy him, and inform his investigation of the case, allowing him to make metaphorical connections between

⁶⁰ Qiu, *Death of a Red Heroine*, p. 130.

⁶¹ Qiu Xialong, interview with Caroline Cummins, *January Magazine*, <https://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/QiuXiaolong.html>, undated article accessed 21 July 2017.

⁶² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 256.

current events, a recent and an ancient past. For example, when Chen visits the City God's Temple, which has been turned into a marketplace he notices an ancient couplet inscribed above the entrance: "Be an honest man, so you can enjoy a peaceful sleep. Do something good so that God will know about it." Chen observes that Communists don't believe in gods, but that the quotation is still good advice.⁶³ He also notes that some people have said that the marketplace will become a temple again. This is perhaps both an ironic comment on the rise of commodity fetishism in modern China, and on how the long history of China has witnessed many dramatic reversals. Nothing is permanent, gods have been banished for communism, which might soon be replaced by the triumph of capitalism.

Chen's poetry is also used as a plot device and a clue about the political situation in contemporary China. He travels to Guangzhou under the guise of a writer to pursue his investigation, and is later interrogated by his superiors about a poem he wrote, to warn him against upsetting the authorities.⁶⁴

Like McIlvaney's early Laidlaw novels, *Red Heroine* shifts the perspective from the single loner detective, Chen, to reveal insights from other characters, such as his deputy Yu. We are told that Yu spent his childhood with friends, drifting through Shanghai streets in a manner reminiscent of the Situationist *dérives*.

They wandered through one street after another, walking aimlessly, talking energetically... So they had become familiar with various parts of the city.

Yu identified one area in particular, Henshen Road, the pre-revolutionary quarter of "fabulous rich capitalists" with imported cars and chauffeurs. The young Yu felt out of his element immediately in this zone of high walls, with impressive mansions that are also "silent, solemn, and almost soulless".⁶⁵

This is significant because this area is also the home of the chief murder suspect, Wu Xiaoming, the only son of Wu Bing, a high-ranking Party official. Yu remembers his shock at discovering that only one family lives in the huge house, while a much smaller one would have been subdivided for families in his own neighbourhood.

⁶³ Qiu, *Death of a Red Heroine* p. 316.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 246.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 223.

Yu tells us that Wu lives in a “modernised castle”.⁶⁶ Urban space has been organised in this particular place to act as a shield around the powerful: Wu is protected behind high walls, he has room to manoeuvre, he is cushioned from the realities of life and the consequences of his actions, while his victim was made vulnerable by her exposure to the poverty of her neighbourhood.

Another crucial piece of evidence in the investigation comes from Yu’s father, a former policeman aptly named “Old Hunter”, who still walks a beat. Old Hunter is retired but drifts around his neighbourhood, keeping track of the slums turned into car parks and the streets that have disappeared. While patrolling these streets as a “sort of watchdog”, he spots Wu’s expensive car picking up Guan from the shabby neighbourhood.⁶⁷

For Qiu, noir narrative devices – the body, the detective(s), the search narrative that drifts around the city and puts the investigator in direct contact with conflict and danger – become precise techniques for exploring the shifting social, political and affective landscape of Shanghai. They also become a means of subverting the official narratives of the city, dictated by the government, in order to create a nuanced portrait of a world in flux.

New Orleans Noir

A further example of the diversity and adaptability of the urban noir detective model appears in Sara Gran’s *City of the Dead*.⁶⁸ The novel uses a female detective Claire DeWitt, part hard-boiled noir PI, part New Age visionary, to explore the cityscape of post-Katrina New Orleans. The case involves the disappearance of a wealthy male district attorney, and to solve the mystery, DeWitt must delve into the dangerous quarters of a city devastated not only by natural disaster, but by the manmade disasters of racism and inequality.

City of the Dead starts with DeWitt being called to New Orleans to solve a case, but our first view of the city is through DeWitt’s dream rather than a memory or direct experience. DeWitt dreams she is in New Orleans during the post-hurricane flood. She is sitting on a rooftop when she sees a man she identifies as Jacques Sillette, the writer of

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 225.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 321.

⁶⁸ Sara Gran, *City of the Dead*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).

her favourite detection manual. He dispenses cryptic philosophical advice about solving the case and DeWitt wakes up spitting out water, as if she has almost drowned. It's the first clue that this will not simply be a social realist detective story set in New Orleans, but an exploration of the city's psyche, traumatised and haunted, even doubting its own existence.

Gran is alerting the reader that she will be playing with the conventions of noir, and drawing on the more visionary strand of urban writing, where dreams, hallucinations and insights gained through altered states of consciousness are included in the urban explorer's observations. This tradition stretches back to Blake and De Quincey,⁶⁹ but also includes Iain Sinclair's psychogeography, and even the Situationists' intoxicated bar crawls, where alcohol was used to fuel the *dérive* but also presumably to heighten the drifter's sensitivity to the urban environment.

With DeWitt, Chandler's solitary, phlegmatic male detective is replaced by an intrepid woman – though she is by no means the first tough, streetwise female PI, but follows others such as Sara Paretsky's Chicago-based VI Warshawski and Val McDermid's PI Kate Brannigan taking on Manchester's underworld.⁷⁰ Claire DeWitt, however, is a slightly different type of detective. While she often affects the tough, knowing persona of a classic noir PI, she is less consistently rational than Marlowe, and considerably less sensible than Warshawski or Brannigan.

In a further twist that links the noir detective to the origins of psychogeography, DeWitt teeters on the edge of mental instability and substance abuse. She puts herself in dangerous situations, making herself vulnerable to solve her case. She seems to sway between methodical research and rational deduction, and a reckless reliance on drugs,

⁶⁹ DeWitt is by no means the first drug-using detective. Several Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories such as *The Sign of Four* (1890) and *A Scandal in Bohemia* (1891) feature the detective's drug use, a seven per cent solution of cocaine that he injects. Meanwhile, other stories reference it as a habit the detective has given up. Holmes's drug-use however is largely confined to the comfort of his velvet armchair, seemingly to alleviate his boredom rather than as a way of engaging with the psychogeography of the street. In fact Dr. Watson regards the drug as a hindrance to Holmes's detection, stating in *The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter*: "For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career." Arthur Conan Doyle, *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Stories Vol. 2*, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 1124.

⁷⁰ See novels such as Sara Paretsky *Indemnity Only* (first published 1982), (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008) the first novel in her V.I. Warshawski series; Val McDermid, *Dead Beat* (first published 1992), (London: Harper Collins, 2011).

chance and an intuitive connection to “the forces of the universe” to solve her case. She is frequently an unreliable narrator, but paradoxically her approach gives her a unique perspective on the city’s dispossessed and its secrets, closer to Debord’s bar-crawl *dérives* or De Quincey’s opium-laced night ramblings.

DeWitt’s distinct viewpoint reinforces the idea that the noir detective is both of and separate from the city. When DeWitt submerges herself in New Orleans to understand a drowned city emerging from the flood-waters, the narrator’s risky state of consciousness offers an echo or mirror of the city.

There are times when DeWitt casts a cool, analytical eye over the city, such as when she first hires a car to assess the post-Katrina damage. She notes that the average tourist visiting the city wouldn’t notice much difference, but under her careful forensic gaze the impact of the storm becomes apparent.

Sections of the city DeWitt describes as largely untouched except for a few collapsed porches; there is an intermediate zone, where the water has “only visited”, leaving street lights out, trash piled high. Then she notices the textual runoff - the spray painted marks on doors, tallies of the dead. She sees the apartment blocks in the housing projects without walls, and others collapsed into rubble.⁷¹

Later DeWitt drives up to Lakeview and Broadmoor, where “the streets got quieter until the quiet was a roar, eerie and deafening”. This is where the water reached its peak and sat for a few days – buildings missing walls, houses pushed by the force of the water into other houses, cars on top of cars, boats on sidewalks, an abandoned strip mall. It’s a devastated zone, even a year after the flood.⁷² In this town, where everything is damaged, her new truck stands out. She runs it into a lamppost to make it look “normal” like all the other damaged cars in the city. On one level it’s a rational act, but it also hints that DeWitt is someone who will risk all for an investigation.

DeWitt is constantly attuned to the mood, sounds and sights of the streets and their changing zones. When she goes to visit the missing man Vic’s apartment, she notices it is

⁷¹ Gran, *City of the Dead*, p. 21.

⁷² Ibid. p. 23.

quiet – the noise and the crowds and the vomit of upper Bourbon, a few blocks away, don't reach there.

"I'd forgotten that in New Orleans every block was its own world".⁷³ Here DeWitt identifies distinct "unities of ambience" to determine what is normal, what is out of place. She identifies the division between rich and poor neighbourhoods, the upmarket areas and the projects where poor black families live. A missing person may not even be noticed among the homeless or poor, but in the richer neighbourhoods it's a significant event.

On other occasions DeWitt relies on distinctly unprofessional methods, such as when she tosses dice to decide which of the street dealers to buy an unregistered gun from.⁷⁴ When DeWitt's case reaches a dead end, she resorts to using drugs to help her find answers, recalling De Quincey's use of opium to reveal the city's hidden truths.

These altered states change the process of detection itself. DeWitt puffs on a cigarette spiked with PCP (a pesticide and drug known to induce hallucinations) given to her by street kids, justifying it by saying: "Drugs take you places – some fun, some terrible. But the important thing about those places isn't whether or not they're fun. The important thing is that, sometimes, in some places, you can find clues."⁷⁵

On one occasion DeWitt shares a joint with the street kid Andray after he has hit her over the head to stop her investigating a case. She experiences a powerful hallucination:

Smoke spread out on the Mississippi, settling over it like fog... We were standing next to each other on the street in Central City. No one else was around and I heard the water curl through the streets. It rose up, wrapping us tight and leaving us dry. Birds flew overhead, parrots, pigeons, doves, starlings, bluejays, all singing together, flying in a whirlwind above us...⁷⁶

During or after the hallucination, DeWitt encounters a homeless man with a pet rat in his pocket. She smokes cigarettes and a joint with him. "The man told me he'd hidden in a

⁷³ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 209-10

spot he knew, a spot he would not reveal, but from which he could watch all the madness in the world without being seen by any authority.” DeWitt is then approached by Jack Murray, a homeless, alcoholic former PI, who tells her she is on the right track, before leaving her to wake up on a park bench.⁷⁷

Later DeWitt casts the I Ching, which directs her to seek answers in “the perfect nothingness” before she drives to the devastated flood zones ⁷⁸, where she finally discovers “the truth”, that the missing man, Vic Willing, was shot by one of the street boys he abused, and that his body was taken away by the carnival “Indians” for a traditional burial.

DeWitt’s odyssey through the city paradoxically reveals both the truth and the uncertainty of truth at its dark heart. She uncovers the neglect and exploitation of New Orleans’s poor, its black community, and its street kids who had been abandoned long before the flood waters came. *City of the Dead* distinctly and boldly combines the tropes of noir: body, detective, search, with a psychogeographic *dérive* that draws on earlier visionary traditions. The novel’s depiction of the homeless and the street children recalls Blake’s poem about London’s streets, Dickens’s night walks, or De Quincey’s tales of young street prostitutes and the “stony hearted stepmother” of Oxford Street that “listenest to the sighs of orphans and drunkest the tears of children”.⁷⁹

Gran summons the intoxicated De Quincey, visionary Blake, the insomniac Dickens and even the self-styled mystic Iain Sinclair, in poetic, irrational, dream-like images that suggest that New Orleans cannot simply be understood through rational language alone. In so doing, she calls to mind Maria Tumarkin’s observation that understanding a place involves more than a factual narrative “it’s about haunting, it’s about echoes, it’s about the unsaid and it’s about what everyone knows but no one says”.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 211-214.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 239-40.

⁷⁹ De Quincey, *Confessions of an Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, pp. 39-40.

⁸⁰ Madeleine Watts “Interview with Maria Tumarkin”, *Griffith Review* 44, (April, 2014) <https://griffithreview.com/articles/interview-withmaria-tumarkin/>

DeWitt's novel suggests that to engage with New Orleans's complex history, its intersecting cultural traditions – such as the “Indians” (black carnival revellers who dress as Native Americans) – and to understand its suffering, requires a poetic leap. To understand its unique condition, split personality, devastation after the flood, Gran's detective must make herself vulnerable, immerse herself, submit to its rituals and lose her purely rational subjectivity. It is only then she can solve the crime that arises from New Orleans's divided nature, its history of rich and poor, black and white, multiple histories and mythologies. In this way, *City of the Dead* combines the urban noir detective story with psychogeographic techniques at their most radical to map out the city's geography of inequality, but also its grief and anger.

Gran's New Orleans is geographically and culturally far from Los Angeles, and DeWitt is a different gender and temperament to Marlowe. However, *The Big Sleep* and *The City of the Dead* share roots, strategies, and a poetic sensibility that is attuned to the city's patterns and rhythms, and the particular sickness of which its crimes are a symptom.

The global explosion of noir detective fiction has thrown up many other contemporary examples of how the noir form is adaptable to a psychogeographic urban exploration, such as Denise Mina's contemporary Glasgow in *Blood, Salt, Water*; Tana French's post financial crash Dublin in *Broken Harbour*; or Ahmed Mourad's *Vertigo*, set in the corrupt underbelly of contemporary Cairo. Each of these novels provides an example of how noir detective storytelling can be adapted to offer multi-layered, psychogeographic insights into a city.

In the hands of McIlvanney, Izzo, Xiaolong and Gran, we can already see how the urban noir detective model can offer not just a social realist portrait of the city, but allow the reader to engage with the city on multiple levels, poetic, cultural, psychological, mystical. This storytelling model also has the potential to examine the question of how the observer shapes the city themselves by engaging with it.

In a global era, the idiosyncratic traits of these detectives allow them to reveal multiple intersecting aspects of the urban experience. The fictional form also has an advantage in being able to enter into the experience of multiple characters, to imagine and evoke their engagement with the affective landscape. Just as Virginia Woolf's street haunter used the

pretext of buying a pencil to dip in and out of the consciousness of passers by on the street, in the noir novel, the search for a missing person or a killer in effect becomes simply the spur to the question – ‘what connects the disparate elements of this city?’

Chapter 5. Towards a Psychogeography of Sydney Noir

It was a place you took lightly at your peril, whose beauty has never been far from rage, and perhaps even the urge for destruction... Like Los Angeles, to which it is often compared, Sydney's misty sunshine is never far from noir.

Delia Falconer, *Sydney* ¹

Even the few [Australian noir] novelists with an international reputation, like Garry Disher and Peter Corris, give no special thought to the foreign reader. If they did, they would be less stingy with local colour, something their countrymen are obviously not clamouring for more of.

BR Myers, "Down Underworld", *The Atlantic* ²

The Sydney area has been inhabited by indigenous communities for over 30,000 years with their own culture and stories, but the modern city only emerged after Captain Arthur Philip named the European settlement in 1788. Since then, its new arrivals, soldiers, colonisers, convicts, settlers, immigrant workers, refugees, first from Britain and then from around the world, have searched for stories that can make sense of it - its strangeness, dazzling beauty, banality, violence and deeply troubled origins. Part of living anywhere involves trying to find this connection, and stories and myths are a way of doing this. But the types of stories we tell ourselves reveal much about our culture and our relationship to a place.

Mike Davis has written about how the Arroyo set in turn-of-the-20th-century Southern California invented fictions of an "Anglo-Saxon promised land" among the ruins of an "innocent but inferior Spanish culture",³ while a later "Depression shattered" group of hard-boiled writers and anti-fascist European exiles dispelled these myths. In Australia, many stories have been used to explain our relationship to place, from the egregious British myths of "*terra nullius*", to later attempts by writers of historical and literary fiction, urban noir and psychogeographic non-fiction.

¹ Delia Falconer, *Sydney*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press), 2010, pp. 2-3.

² BR Myers, "Down Underworld" *The Atlantic*, October 2011

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/10/down-underworld/308640/>

³ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, p. 20.

Literary writers such as Kenneth Slessor were part of an early 20th century mythologising of Australia as a sort of Arcadia, where the erased indigenous narratives were replaced by a mix of Bohemian and classical ones, but where a sense of the haunted nature of the landscape was also evoked. Meanwhile, Eleanor Dark, Ruth Park and Mandy Sayer have helped to build up literary portraits of Sydney's urban environment, in historical narratives, social realist tales and post modernist urban fictions often with a psychogeographic sensibility. Delia Falconer has combined memoir and psychogeography to excavate the many layers of Sydney from a personal perspective, challenging the idea of a single objective point of view.

Noir detective fiction has also played a role in the narration and representation of Sydney. Peter Corris has drawn on the Chanderlesque male detective, but with a quintessentially Anglo-Australian version, building a picture of Sydney and its hidden violent undercurrents. Meanwhile, Marele Day and Catherine Cole have created female PIs to explore Sydney's underworld. However, both Corris and Cole share a tendency to be "stingy with local colour" as BR Myers has noted, and this limits their capacity to explore aspects of Sydney's affective landscape. Meanwhile Cole demonstrates a stronger psychogeographic sensibility, which enriches her depiction of a Sydney neighbourhood.

This chapter explores the limitations and possibilities of these genres and considers the potential of cross-genre strategies for offering a richer understanding of the particular dynamic mixture of influences that intersect in the affective landscape of Sydney while locating it with a wider global context.

Ghost City

"For all its vitality, Sydney is a haunted city... Few other cities have such a compelling sense of being so temporary, yet so close to the eternal,"⁴ writes Delia Falconer, in her evocative non-fiction psychogeographic study of the city. Others before Falconer have commented on the city's spectral quality, the contrast between the ephemeral and the eternal. Arthur Stace became known as Mr Eternity for repeatedly chalking the word "Eternity" in elegant copperplate on Sydney's pavements between 1932 and 1967.⁵ A

⁴ Falconer, *Sydney*, p. 21.

⁵ "Arthur Stace, Eternity Sign, 1960-67", National Museum of Australia Collection, <http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/?object=60237>

reformed alcoholic turned Christian, perhaps Stace was alluding to Corinthians: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is *unseen is eternal*.” At the same time Stace was reminding Sydney’s inhabitants of the timeless quality beyond the visible streets (figure 5.1).⁶



Figure 5.1 A tribute to Arthur Stace, on the Sydney Harbour Bridge at the close of the new millennium fireworks display.

Sydney’s dazzling physicality often deflects attention from its less visible layers of history, and an urban unconscious of melancholy, violence and unresolved crimes. Robert Hughes, in his historical study *The Fatal Shore*, writes about how Sydney was founded on amnesia. Hughes describes how Britain’s authorities established the colony of Sydney as a place where the “criminal class” could be sent and forgotten. He quotes Jeremy Bentham who saw the convicts as an “excremental mass” that could be projected “as far out of sight as possible”.⁷

⁶ Image appears in Marie Hogg, “Arthur ‘Eternity Man’ Stace, the real story, 50 years on from his death”, *Southern Courier* (July 29, 2017),

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/southern-courier/arthur-eternity-man-stace-is-remembered-50-years-on-from-his-death/news-story/6f91bb316c6139a16e9186587a5ce64f>

⁷ Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 2.

There was another type of specific historical amnesia involved in the establishment of Sydney – the failure to recognise the traditional owners of the land. In 1770 Captain James Cook had landed in Botany Bay, home of the Eora people, and claimed possession of the East Coast of Australia for Britain. This claim was long upheld under the legal doctrine of ‘*terra nullius*’, which ignored the fact that Australia had been settled for over 50,000 years before the arrival of the British. The British government acted as if Australia was uninhabited, avoiding the need to make a treaty with or recompense its indigenous owners, and effectively turning them into ghosts in their own land. The result, as Falconer reminds us, was the loss of much of the indigenous Eora people’s stories and the erasure of traces of their culture, which has permeated Sydney’s urban landscape with a haunted quality.⁸

Bohemian City

The poet and journalist Kenneth Slessor (1901-1971) depicted Sydney as a good-time city with a mournful undertow. His collection of illustrated poems, *Darlinghurst Nights* recounts the two sides of the inner-city quarter - glitz and glamour and poverty and gloom - in “The Girl in the Window” (1933).⁹ Two women, one clad in pearls and diamonds, the other in a shabby dress, stare at each other from apartments across a square in a sort of *mise-en-abyme* of longing and regret. Eventually the girls become interchangeable, as their story is repeated in the narrative of the city.

While *Darlinghurst Nights* touches satirically on two sides of inner-urban Sydney, the glittering hedonistic Bohemian surface and the sadness beneath, Slessor’s poem “Five Bells” delves deepest into the haunted, melancholy undercurrents. “Five Bells” recounts the story of Slessor’s friend Joe Lynch, who fell off a ferry while drunk on May 14, 1927, and was dragged to the bottom of the harbour by the weight of the bottles of beer in his overcoat pocket.¹⁰ His body was never recovered. In Slessor’s poem, Joe’s death is separated from its absurd circumstances and becomes almost mythical. The death haunts Slessor, acting as a *memento mori* in the shimmering harbour, a reminder of ephemeral life, and the sense of loss that haunts such a beautiful place.

⁸ Delia Falconer, *Sydney*, pp. 32-33.

⁹ Kenneth Slessor, “The Girl in the Window”, *Kenneth Slessor: Collected Poems*, ed. Dennis Haskwell and Geoffrey Dutton, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson 1999), pp. 161-162.

¹⁰ Lindsay Foyle, “The Life and Death of Joe Lynch”, *Quadrant Magazine*, Vol. 56 no. 10, Oct 2012, p. 38. <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2012/10/the-life-and-death-of-joe-lynch/>

You have gone from earth,
 Gone even from the meaning of a name;
 Yet something's there, yet something forms its lips
 And hits and cries against the ports of space,
 Beating their sides to make its fury heard.

Slessor is troubled by the fact that Joe's body has not been found:

memory of some bones long shoved away,
 and sucked away in mud;
 You have no suburb, like those easier dead
 In private berths of dissolution laid –

Slessor tries to listen out for the voice of his friend, but it eludes him: "I hear nothing, nothing...Your echoes die, your voice is dowsed by Life." The vibrancy of the city drowns out the past and death. Slessor laments the fact that Joe has no grave to mark his passing, no "funeral-cakes of sweet and sculptured stone". The poem is meant to act as a form of memorial or epitaph in a city that is short on them. The "nothing" that Slessor describes in "Five Bells" nonetheless makes its absence felt. Perhaps Slessor had also sensed the haunting quality of other unrecorded deaths hovering in the landscape and saw in Joe's death an echo of this sadness even in the beauty of the harbour. Or, as Peter Kirkpatrick suggests in his book *The Sea Coast of Bohemia*,¹¹ Slessor was possibly drawn to "impose a spiritual landscape upon a physical one".

Kirkpatrick argues that Slessor's 1920s bohemian circle constructed an idea of Sydney as Arcadia because it gave European-based cultures a way "to speak affirmatively of a sense of place".¹² The idea of Sydney as Arcadia, a place of beauty and pleasure, populated by nymphs and shepherds rather than troubled ghosts, offered consolation for the many unresolved longings of its inhabitants. It was a way to "transform actuality in terms of the dream". So Joe Lynch was memorialised not only with a poem, but with a statue of a Satyr made by his brother Guy, which now sits in Sydney's Botanical Gardens. Joe's consolation is a scene from an imagined Arcadia, overlooking Sydney Harbour.

Eleanor Dark's *A Timeless Land* (1941) is also a literary memorial or elegy, in this case specifically evoking the disappearance of Sydney's indigenous past. The novel seeks to record some of the losses as the European penal colony usurped the Eora. The narrative enacts a temporal and spatial drift across the city, from the first encounter between

¹¹ Peter Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia*, (Brisbane: UQP, 1992), p. 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 315-316.

Bennilong (based on the historical personage Bennelong) and his father Wunbula and the “boat with wings” (the First Fleet in 1788) at Sydney Cove. The story drifts from Sydney Cove, inland to Rose Hill, Parramatta, the Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains, as the colonisers look for new land and the indigenous people are forced to retreat. It returns to Sydney Cove around 1795, to witness Bennilong’s tragic, alcoholic disillusionment with the white men and his own community. Her novel attempts to capture the birth of the city through Eora and European eyes, while the landscape of Sydney symbolises both the losses of the indigenous population and the fears and hopes of the Europeans.

An early passage in *A Timeless Land* describes the new governor of the colony at anchor on his ship near the entrance to Sydney harbour. “The land engulfed her in the majestic silence of antiquity. Governor Philip stood on deck watching the twilight sink into the night, and struggled with an illusion. There was no sense of Time here.” And later in the same passage: “There was nothing but oneself, a tiny spark of consciousness, alone and aghast in the unconquerable silence.”¹³

Dark’s image suggests that, since its earliest colonial days, Sydney has struggled with a sense of its own impermanence in the face of a powerful ancient world. For the Europeans, Sydney Cove is baffling and overwhelming. Captain Watkin Tench feels like an intruder there, while convict Andrew Prentice experiences his new surrounds with startled hostility. The water is dazzling, the light brighter than what he is used to; the scents are “alien, unidentifiable”; shrill and piercing bird sounds emanate from the “unfamiliar green” of his surrounds.¹⁴ His first response to this unfamiliar place is hatred and disorientation. “They had arrived? Where? There was none among them who had any clear geographical position of this New Holland. It might be a large island, or it might be a small one. It might be, for all they knew, part of Asia.”¹⁵

Governor Arthur Philip, musing on his place in this new world, experiences conflicting thoughts. He wants to build something more than a jail in Sydney, but does not want convicts to build its foundations. He also feels the power of the land, which he imagines taking possession of his colony and claiming it as its own. But he also experiences a

¹³ Eleanor Dark, *A Timeless Land*, (London: Collins, 1941), p. 43.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 51-52.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 53.

vision – “He had seen a city on these shores. He had seen wharves crowded with shipping. He had seen wide streets and lofty buildings and the homes of a free and happy people...”

Early attempts to build this dreamt-of city falter, however, and Bennilong watches as the Europeans’ brick buildings melt in the torrential rains, reflecting on the superiority of his bark hut. For the Eora peoples, the gradual emergence of the colonial city is an experience of destruction, loss and dispossession. The white men’s “settlement” begins to encroach on their world, prompting them to move camp.¹⁶

As the white men march inland, looking for fresh water and farming land, Phillip begins naming the new places they find, despite his uneasy sense that he is somehow displacing an ancient culture: “They had their names, he realised, and their names had been old when the Roman legions were invading Britain, bringing to the land of a conquered race, as he was bringing now, names from their own homeland.”¹⁷ Phillip remains constantly aware of the presence and absence of the natives, however. “Not a day had passed without their seeing some trace of their presence – huts, burnt out fires, notched trees, a fragment of chewed fern root.”¹⁸

By the end of the novel, not only has Bennilong’s world been displaced by the colony, but Bennilong’s sense of himself has been undermined by his time in England. The experience is a sort of spiritual death for him, but also a metaphor for the destruction of a culture and community.

He had lost his awareness of eternity, his fellowship with past ages and ages yet to come... Change had gashed it like a knife, and the spirit flowed out of it like blood. There had been a betrayal - but where was the betrayer? There was an enemy - but what was his name?¹⁹

The novel concludes with Bennilong trying to deface the rock carving his father Wunbula made of “the boat with wings”, trying to erase his own culture, which he now feels ashamed of, but also the image of the winged messenger of change.

¹⁶ Dark, *A Timeless Land*, p. 57.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 104.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 105.

¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 398-400.

The image offers a metaphor for Sydney, trying to obliterate and ignore its past, more ashamed than proud or even accepting of its origins. Sydney is portrayed as a city that has struggled with self-acceptance and self-awareness.

Shame city

Sydney has sometimes reacted unfavourably to those who have tried to hold up a mirror to it. When Ruth Park wrote *The Harp in the South* (1948) about the down-at-heel Irish-Australian Darcy family in Surry Hills, a suburb of Sydney where she had lived as a struggling writer, her story was met with hostility and shame.

Park's warm-spirited tale resembles a gentler John Steinbeck, and explores crime through family saga rather than mystery. Its sympathetic and frequently humorous portrait of slum life deals with poverty, abortion, and prostitution, and with the resilience of the poor. But the story, as Delia Falconer points out, was controversial even before it made it into print.²⁰

Harp had won a prize in a *Sydney Morning Herald* literature competition, but when the *Herald* released a synopsis, it was met with a flood of correspondence condemning it, and denying the existence of slums in Surry Hills. Later, when it appeared in instalments in the newspaper in 1947, Angus & Robertson balked at publishing the book, though eventually they had to honour a 'gentleman's agreement' to publish the winner.

Falconer suggests that Park's status as both a New Zealander and a woman played a part in the controversy, but it is also likely that many Sydney residents, content with the idea of living in a fair and prosperous city, did not want to admit to the shame of poverty and slums in their midst. "It was considered a betrayal of the myth, and that is why there was a fantastic rumpus about it," Park said in a 1981 interview. "(That) shocked me to the core because I had thought of it as a domestic comedy."²¹

Yet for others, Park's book has become a useful reference tool for the human geography of Sydney. Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather points out that to the humanistic geographer,

²⁰ Delia Falconer, "On 'The Harp in the South', by Ruth Park", *Griffith Review*, undated accessed November 2017.

<https://griffithreview.com/harp-south-ruth-park/>

²¹ Stephen Romei, "Sydney's Dickens, Ruth Park, Dies, Leaving her Mark on Nation's Psyche", *The Australian*, (18 December 2010). <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/sydneys-dickens-ruth-park-dies-leaving-her-mark-on-nations-psyche/story-e6frg6nf-1225972951293>

Park's novel can act as "a source of information about the experience of living in certain environments and about the way people thought about their lives".²²

Teather uses Park's *Harp in the South* and her follow-up novel, *Poor Man's Orange*, as a source for studying the experience of living in post-war Sydney, using it to map out experiences of security and stress (poverty, filth, proximity to crime, dirty factories etc.), stimulus and ennui, status and stigma in the urban environment.

Teather argues that imaginative writing goes beyond the limitations of official *facts*, in order to explore "the *experience* and *meaning* of environments and societies". For example, Teather notes that Park's novels present the viewpoints of women, which are unlikely to be accessible through official documents relating to early post-war Sydney, such as a 1947 Census and council planning schemes.

The intimate portrait of Surry Hills provided in Park's *Harp in the South* is also useful to the writer who might wish to explore the present-day suburb with an awareness of its past.

Noir Sydney

Another vision of Sydney appears in detective fiction about the city. The acknowledged "Godfather" of Sydney noir is Peter Corris.²³ His Cliff Hardy series spans forty-two novels over three-and-a-half decades. Readers were first introduced to the hard-drinking private detective in the 1980 novel *The Dying Trade*. Corris admits his inspiration came from the pages of hard-boiled crime's "holy trinity" Chandler, Hammett and Ross MacDonald. The author also acknowledges that initially he struggled to get his work into print because publishers believed that Australian crime readers wanted to read about New York or London or Los Angeles rather than Sydney.²⁴ However, Corris persisted, giving readers a series of books with a Sydney detective, Sydney locations, and a model for exploring the city's unique character.

²² Elizabeth K. Teather, "Early Postwar Sydney: A Comparison of its Portrayal in Fiction and in Official Documents", *Australian Geographical Studies*, Vol. 28 no.2 (1990), p. 204.

²³ Linda Morris, "Peter Corris calls time on the iconic fictional detective Cliff Hardy", in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (January 2, 2017), <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/peter-corris-calls-time-on-the-iconic-fictional-detective-cliff-hardy-20161215-gtbp32.html>

²⁴ As noted in the chapter Translating Global Noir, the hugely-successful Sydney-based crime writer Alan Geoffrey Yates (aka Carter Brown) set his novels in America to appeal to a perceived audience demand for foreign rather than local settings.

Corris's Hardy novels satisfy many Chanderlesque generic tropes. They feature a solitary male private detective with a tough, cynical exterior, an eye for the ladies, and a tendency for Marlowe-like laconic quips. Hardy investigates cases that take him on journeys through the urban space, horizontally, across town, and vertically, through the many levels of society. But unlike pulp novelists such as Alan Geoffrey Yates (aka Carter Brown), Corris also began to explore the specificity of Sydney's urban environment, naming individual streets, identifying contrasting neighbourhoods and zones.

Despite his debt to Chandler, however, Corris's spare, workmanlike prose lacks the poetic and elegiac quality of Chandler's descriptions of people and places. Perhaps that sort of eloquence would seem phony to Hardy who is modelled on the idea of the quintessential, laconic, Australian male, with working-class roots.²⁵ Hardy is specifically a white male of Anglo-Celtic origins and while his lack of emotional self-analysis or interest in deeper feelings may be true to type, it can also prove unsatisfying. Yet perhaps this lack also unconsciously reveals aspects of Sydney's capacity for emotional repression and escapism.

Nevertheless, Corris's Hardy novels pass through Sydney in a way that resembles an urban drift and illuminates aspects and zones of the city. His early novel, *The Empty Beach* (1983) explores pre-gentrification 1980s Bondi, Bronte and Clovelly, revealing an increasingly disturbing and squalid underworld beneath the picture-postcard surface of sun-kissed beachside suburbs.

The Empty Beach begins in Bondi, where Hardy is hired by a wealthy woman to find her missing husband. Hardy's first impression of the beachside suburb is the standard tourist view. He notices the suntanned people, white sand, fresh sea air. But soon he must leave the postcard image to meet his client in the "dark and quiet" Regal Hotel. He is briefed on the case, but after leaving the hotel he encounters a local thug and narrowly avoids a fight, recalling Delia Falconer's opening comment that, in Sydney, "sunshine is never far from noir".

²⁵ Peter Corris's website tells us that Cliff Hardy was "born and raised in working class Maroubra, ex-army, law student dropout, insurance company investigator turned Private Eye". "Cliff Hardy Series" Introduction: http://www.petercorris.net/petercorris.net/Cliff_Hardy.html undated site accessed 12 January 2017.

Hardy lives in Glebe, then a solid working-class suburb, reminding us of his class background. Hardy has to travel across town by car to reach the eastern beach suburbs where the case will unfold. Bondi becomes a symbol of the emerging 1980s world of hedonism, pretension, materialism, and fast money from dubious sources. The journey across town represents a journey into a different moral universe. The experience of Bondi clearly attracts yet repels Hardy; it is alluring yet flawed, full of sensual promise yet ultimately corrupt and rotten.

The separation of east and west Sydney is a recurring motif. When Hardy arrives in Bondi, he strolls around, making observations on the landscape, buildings and atmosphere of the suburb. We are told that Bondi is “flat country” crowded with big blocks of small flats for Australians clinging to the desire to live near the sea. It is a mix of smart and shabby, a jumble of the poor and the privileged with the slope of the bay creating “haphazard levels” that correspond to the social hierarchy – “the penthouse dwellers sip their drinks high above the streets like fat, privileged eagles in their eyries”.²⁶

Bondi also becomes a symbol of edginess and liminality. For Corris it is a symbol of Sydney’s supposedly idyllic Australian lifestyles, but also a place in flux, populated with tourists, transients and immigrants. Hardy’s perspective instinctively takes the white, Anglo-Celtic Australian as its norm. Hardy notes the multicultural nature of the community, represented by the variety of ethnic food establishments – Russian, Lebanese, Italian, Chinese, Indonesian, Italian.

Hardy characterises the distinct atmosphere of the area with an air of bemusement - Bondi has a cosmopolitan feel, the people are “a breed apart” who “ate out and lived on top of each other”. He also notes the profusion of second hand furniture shops, which indicate the lack of funds and the transient nature of much of the community.

As Hardy searches for clues about the missing husband, he delves deeper and discovers Bondi’s hidden layers - small time thugs running games rooms frequented by delinquents and wasters. The pinball parlour is a “garish barn with strobe lights and brain-scrambling music” and, outside the snooker room, Hardy is mugged by drug

²⁶ Peter Corris, *The Empty Beach*, in *The Cliff Hardy Omnibus*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988) p. 17.

addicts.²⁷ The discovery of Bondi's ever-seedier underside jars with Hardy's expectations.

It struck me that Bondi was light on for outdoorsy places like surf shops. There was a dark window at the end of the court, dimly lit from inside, with an illuminated sign saying 'Manny's' over the door.²⁸

The chapter exploring Bondi verges on psychogeography, marking the shift from day to night, sunny wholesomeness to sinister gloom, the ominous fault-lines between the haves and have-nots.

As the novel proceeds, Hardy continues his drift through Sydney's suburbs, reporting on their contrasting ambiances and the effects on their inhabitants. One character, Ann Winter, slums it in "a dump" in Bondi, but comes from a sleek Point Piper residence. When Hardy pulls up outside her parents' house he notices "a high wall that looked as if it was shielding a half a million dollars' worth of house". Even if the price seems ludicrously cheap for a Point Piper mansion today, the line seems to consciously echo Marlowe's comment at the beginning of *The Big Sleep* that he was "calling on four million dollars" when he visits the Sternwood mansion. In neither case is this a casual aside, but a way of highlighting the physical separation of rich and poor. It also positions Hardy as the everyman observer, intrigued but also wary of wealth and luxury, and assuming a reader who might share his opinion.

In another echo of *The Big Sleep*, Hardy's search for a missing husband leads him to another, even darker case of missing persons. The second case of disappearing homeless men, alcoholics and pensioners, takes him to Bronte. Hardy plunges into the more down-at-heel area, into pubs and "rundown, chunder-green boarding houses", crowded in the back streets, without views, some of them "actually grovelled below street level".²⁹ There is a mix of the squalid and glamorous in Corris's description, reminiscent of Chandler's LA. The flats have an exotic feel, but lose their "Hollywood Morocco air" when the sun moves on.³⁰ The place that Hardy visits is a disgusting green colour – highlighting a damp, sweating, decaying Sydney, which Hardy portrays as a counterpoint to the sunny image of the beachside suburbs.

²⁷ Corris, *The Empty Beach*, p. 20.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 22.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 50.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 52.

Here Hardy does in fact offer some of the “local colour” which BR Myers argues is often absent from the descriptions in many Australian crime novels.

The second missing person’s case eventually leads Hardy to the suburb of Clovelly, almost unrecognisable today. Hardy describes it as “downmarket”, an almost Dickensian slum full of “mean dwellings”, crumbling, abandoned cottages, “twisted streets”, and run-down houses converted into flats. It is here that Hardy reaches the novel’s heart of darkness: a squalid, boarding house-of-horrors with an evil ethnic landlady and elderly residents, drugged-up and kept barely alive while she harvests their pensions. This eerie image haunts the novel, a cast of people who have ‘disappeared’ from the landscape and are kept in a sort of zombie-like liminal zone between life and death. Furthermore, when they die, their bodies are dissolved and rendered untraceable. However, the plot only hints at a narrative of disappearance and loss that never seems fully explored. The discovery of this “pension farm” provokes anger in Hardy to put things to rights, but not a more in-depth analysis about its significance or its echoes in a broader Sydney narrative.

While *The Empty Beach* conducts a drift through the city that evokes aspects of its psychogeography, Corris seems less interested in an excavation of the past or deeper historical or mystical undercurrents. When he refers to the past of locations he visits, it is often personal and fleeting – Bronte, for example, is connected to stories of an unhappy childhood, where his angry father threatened to drown his alcoholic mother.³¹ This terrible incident is impassively recounted and left unexplored. The violence seems casual, incidental, an almost accepted part of Australian life.

Alistair Rolls has argued that Peter Corris’s Hardy stories are emblematic of a wider narrative about Australia.³² Rolls suggests that Corris has written for an international market and Sydney has become, “metonymically, an emblem for an Australian national crime narrative”. At the same time, Rolls says there is also a tendency for Corris’s stories to map Sydney “even as they extend beyond that city’s borders”. If this is the case, then the novels both undermine certain ideas about Australia as the “lucky country” and an untroubled paradise, yet perpetuate other myths. The Hardy books remind us that there

³¹ Ibid. p. 48.

³² Alistair Rolls, “Empty Sydney or Sydney Emptied: Peter Corris’s National Allegory Translated”, *The Translator*, Vol. 22 no.2, pp. 207-220.

is always trouble in paradise, and that even in “supposed” classless Australia the emerging culture of the fast buck has created opportunities for corruption and crime. Yet the novels also suggest that a decent Aussie bloke with some street smarts and the guts to put things to rights can solve Sydney’s problems. *The Empty Beach*, with its tale of disappearance and living ghosts would have been an ideal vehicle for exploring the sense of haunting and loss that hover in the Sydney landscape. However, these deeper themes are left unexplored. Partly this is due to the character of Cliff Hardy himself.

Stephen Knight has argued that with Hardy, Corris developed a unique voice, that both drew on the hard-boiled tradition and became something uniquely his own.

It could be a calm [Ross] Macdonald, a relaxed Hammett, or indeed an unexcitable version of Robert B. Parker, Corris’s American near-contemporary with whom he shares a number of features. However, *The Empty Beach* is in fact the first authoritatively Corris title and the novel where he first speaks in his own dominant voice.³³

Hardy is an embodiment of a sort of unflappable, laconic, understated Aussie bloke, but this quality is also his greatest limitation. Hardy often seems too calm, too untroubled, too unreflective to even notice any deeper resonances of Sydney’s urban unconscious.

Corris’s more recent novels such as *Gun Control* (2015) do attempt to explore the city’s past. Hardy investigates a murder that leads to an exploration of earlier crimes and links between corrupt former members of the police Gun Control Unit and outlaw bikies. In an article on the novel and Corris in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, academic Sue Turnbull writes:

Through the unwavering gaze of Cliff Hardy, Corris has conducted a longitudinal investigation of Australian society over the past 35 years, providing a searing and wry commentary on social injustice, corruption, and urban development. Like Hammett and Chandler, the godfathers of American crime fiction who were his early influences, along with John D. MacDonald, Corris portrays society itself as the crime.³⁴

This is true in many ways, yet reading his novels, a reader can be frustrated by what remains unexplored. In one exchange in *Gun Control*, Hardy discusses his case with his date, Alicia, who works at the Powerhouse Museum. She remarks that their work is

³³ Stephen Knight, “Real Pulp at last: Peter Corris’s Thrillers.” *Meanjin* vol. 45 no.4 (1986), p447.

³⁴ Sue Turnbull, “Gun Control review: Peter Corris uses his hero Cliff Hardy to investigate Australian society”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (April 18, 2015).
<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/gun-control-review-peter-corris-uses-his-hero-cliff-hardy-to-investigate-australian-society-20150411-1miahe.html>

similar because it deals with “the past impacting on the present”. Hardy’s response is: “It often explains things, but I have to deal in the here and now”.³⁵ This seems to clarify Corris’s narrative strategy, and perhaps what he feels are the exigencies of the detective novel genre. He is more concerned with an existential present than dwelling on the past or exploring its deeper significance, lest they hold up the action.

However, in Corris’s 2016 novel, *That Empty Feeling*,³⁶ Hardy returns to the 1980s through the prism of memory. The story begins with Hardy reading the newspaper obituaries where he spots a death notice for Ray Bartlett. This triggers memories of a tragic case in the late 1980s when corporate capitalism was at its height and the line between businessmen and criminals was blurred. His old client Bartlett is described as a “colourful Sydney identity”, which Hardy tells us means that he was “a crook who had stayed out of gaol”.³⁷ The shift in time scales allows Corris to give us a slightly more multi-layered image of Sydney. For example, he notes the rise of gentrification “as Newtown slowly shed its sleazy image and started its transition to metro chic”.³⁸

But while Corris’s novels provide a witty, often perceptive, geographically specific and socially broad-ranging view of Sydney, they remain limited by the clipped and emotionally repressed personality of Hardy. He is intelligent, observant and rational, but less attuned to the complexity of his environment. In contrast, Philip Marlowe is a romantic with a witty but poetic turn of phrase that draws out the more melancholy aspects of Los Angeles’s affective landscape. Laidlaw’s depressive personality, soul-searching, and alcohol dependency gives him particular insight into the undertow of poverty and violence in Glasgow. Jean-Claude Izzo’s Fabio Montale draws on his mixed immigrant heritage and Mediterranean sensibility to explore the divisions and strengths of Marseille. Meanwhile, Sara Gran’s Claire DeWitt uses her unstable persona, drug use and mysticism to tune into the rich cultural undercurrents of New Orleans.

However, Hardy’s own Anglo-centric heritage remains largely unexplored or investigated. In novels such as *The Empty Beach* this perspective seems to provoke an inevitable suspicion for the newer generations of Mediterranean immigrants, typified by

³⁵ Peter Corris, *Gun Control*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2016), Kindle, Location 1909 of 2222.

³⁶ Peter Corris, *That Empty Feeling*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2016), Kindle Edition.

³⁷ Corris, *That Empty Feeling*, Location 80 of 2169.

³⁸ Corris, *That Empty Feeling*, Location 465 of 2169.

the slum landlords who exploit derelicts for their pensions. It is not Hardy's whiteness, maleness or middle-class status that is the issue, but the assumption that he represents a norm from which everyone else - women, immigrants, the homeless - is judged.

Hardy is too sensible and too rational, for example, to rely on dreams or coincidence, or to take drugs with the homeless as Sara Gran's Claire DeWitt does to explore the deeper resonances of New Orleans. He represents an assumed rational male objectivity and we are meant to trust his perspective and believe he'll put the world to rights. But there is also a sense that his perspective on Sydney is narrow and exclusive, leaving many underlying tensions of the city uncharted and unspoken. So while Corris is duly credited with pioneering an urban noir model for Sydney, and for writing novels that are emblematic of Sydney and the wider Australian experience, his novels also leave many aspects of Sydney's diversity and troubled affective landscape unexplored.

Marele Day

Another Sydney crime writer, Marele Day, is credited with creating Australia's first female PI, Claudia Valentine with *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender* (1988).³⁹ Day's female heroine is billed as a feminist and seems almost an ironic version of Corris's Hardy. She is a tough, cool, sexually confident and pragmatic woman who can make Hardy seem shy and sentimental. Yet Valentine's descriptions of the Sydney cityscape frequently offer even less than Hardy's in terms of affective resonances with only the barest generic backdrop for action scenes.

A sequence from Marele Day's *The Disappearances of Madelena Grimaldi* (1995) can be compared with a passage from Chandler's *Farewell My Lovely*.

I followed him onto the Princes Highway, heading south. But at Rockdale he turned off and stopped outside a block of flats. We went up to the flats and pressed the buzzer. About ninety seconds later a young man in a shiny grey suit came out, carrying a small suitcase and eating an apple. They got into the station wagon. The young man dropped Mr Larossa off at the airport.⁴⁰

³⁹ Mitzi Brunsdale, *Gumshoes: A Dictionary of Fictional Detectives*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), p156. Around the same time that Day introduced Claudia Valentine, Claire McNab also introduced a Sydney female detective, who was also a lesbian, Detective-Inspector Carol Ashton. While her book titles include *Death Down Under*, the landscape of the city is rarely the focus on her stories. McNab has possibly received less attention as an Australian crime author because she moved to Los Angeles in 1994. Her more recent series features Kylie Kendall, an Australian transplanted to Los Angeles, who becomes a private detective to carry on her father's business.

⁴⁰ Marele Day, *The Disappearances of Madalena Grimaldi*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1996), p3.

Now Chandler:

1644 West 54th Place was a dried-out brown house with a dried-out brown lawn in front of it. There was a large bare patch around a tough-looking palm tree. On the porch stood one lonely wooden rocker, and the afternoon breeze made the unpruned shoots of last year's poinsettias tap-tap against the cracked stucco wall. A line of stiff yellowish half-washed clothes jittered on a rusty wire in the side yard.⁴¹

In the first passage, Day provides the barest of geographic detail – Princes Highway, Rockdale, nearby airport – but offers little for the reader unfamiliar with the area in terms of visual description. The reader does not know whether the flats are modern and stylish or decrepit and run down, what the surrounding area looks like, or what the atmosphere of the neighbourhood is – threatening, cosy or depressed. By contrast, the passage from Chandler is rich with detail that suggests the drab, dishevelled milieu, while also stirring up impressions of tension and restlessness through the tapping poinsettias and jittering laundry. The ambience is not merely impoverished and unkempt, but potentially threatening.

In his *Atlantic* article, critic BR Myers notes that *How to Write Crime* (1996), an Australian primer edited by the novelist Marele Day, “has conspicuously little to say on evoking locations”.⁴² Myers wonders if this could be “a reaction against the once-common practice, lamented in the same book, of trying to lure foreign readers with exotic touches”. Even the words “lure”, “foreign” and “exotic” suggest a puritanical stance against the sinfulness of descriptive prose.

The persistent lack of nuanced and specific physical detail in Corris and Day's stories, however, can create oddly vague and indistinct scenes that seem disconnected from place. This perhaps unwittingly raises a question about how many Sydney-siders relate to their city. Perhaps there is a sense that life is more exciting elsewhere and so we ignore what is right in front of us. Indeed, as discussed earlier, publishers in previous decades encouraged Australian authors such as Alan Geoffrey Yates (aka Carter Brown) to set their crime novels in America, as the setting was seen as more popular with readers. However, perhaps it is also the case that, until recently at least, readers have taken their own immediate environment for granted.

⁴¹ Raymond Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 25.

⁴² Myers, “Down Underworld”.

Day's Claudia Valentine series does offer some promising narrative scenarios. The search narrative in *The Disappearances of Madalena Grimaldi* involves a brief passage through one of Sydney's underground tunnels. This would seem to offer potential for an exploration of Sydney's subterranean elements and its urban unconscious. However, the setting seems underused, providing a merely functional location for a chase sequence.

Meanwhile, Claudia's backstory, dealing with her estrangement from her alcoholic father Guy, might have offered a moment for reflection on Sydney's relationship with its own past. Claudia eventually tracks her father Guy down to a nondescript block of housing commission flats in Surry Hills, where he now lives as a pensioner. Day offers some details about the building's faded curtains, and a patch of scrappy lawn, but again the generic setting could be any social housing project. Even the moment of confrontation, potentially rich and cathartic, seems underplayed and passive. Claudia decides not to confront Guy, instead watching him from a bench. She decides that she has no part in his life any more - and leaves.

The narrative seems to offer the possibility of some insight into Claudia's past, but ultimately leaves us with a sense of her own inability to confront it. The non-descript locations and the lack of emotional connection summon up a place where people never fully engage with each other or with their environment. This too perhaps tells us more about the affective landscape of Sydney than intended.

Catherine Cole

Catherine Cole's Sydney-set urban noir detective novel *Dry Dock* (1999) offers the reader more in terms of psychogeographical detail. In *Dry Dock* detective Nicola Sharpe investigates two cases - one a stalker, the other missing person - which end up being connected. The story is intimately tied to both the history of the suburb of Balmain and the more recent changes in its social make-up and urban development. Because Cole's story focuses almost exclusively on this one suburb, she is able to offer more both in terms of geographical details of the area, but she also delves deeper into the historical resonances, affective landscape and the undercurrents of power in this particular urban zone.

Cole charts the change in Balmain from its past as a working-class community, represented by her father's generation, to an area characterised by superficial material

aspirations and rapacious development with a potential for violence against those who stand in the way. Balmain is also presented as an area where the past is still apparent and reveals itself in the urban fabric through an intermittent ghosting effect. Cole depicts this in a passage which evokes the area's colonial and working-class past, through a description of Cockatoo Island, as seen from the Balmain waterfront.

It is only when the sun disappears briefly behind a cloud that the dark takes shape. Then, across the water, I see the skeletons of abandoned buildings and rusty iron frames. I hear the crying of wayward women, of boys moored in their prison, of workers out of jobs. And I hear the soft ghost voices coughing – always coughing – as though the harbour had stolen into their lungs.⁴³

This passage, early in the novel, also serves an important narrative purpose. It is seeded with clues to the central crime, which will reappear as Nicola Sharpe retraces the urban landscape and decodes its signs to solve the mystery.

Passages like these in Cole's novel suggest the potential of urban noir detective fiction to reveal the multiple intersecting influences that coalesce in Sydney and also the precariousness of place in a rapidly changing world. These techniques could be further developed to explore and connect other areas of Sydney, so as to create a more wide-ranging and nuanced representation of the city's intersecting networks. For example, Cole's novel, barely discusses the diverse ethnic make-up of modern Sydney, apart from a few passing references to Thai restaurants and Italian delicatessens. This is in part due to the predominantly Anglo-Celtic working class history of the suburb, and of its detective protagonist, Nicola Sharpe.

To an extent Cole also avoids the potential for her detective to explore some of the challenges faced by a female investigator on the streets of Sydney by making Sharpe very tall and powerfully built with short hair and the ability to fight and physically compete with men. She is described as "tough as nails".⁴⁴ Her strong, androgynous physicality is deliberately contrasted with her client, stalking victim, Selina Bower, who is described as Botticelli-like, wearing silk

⁴³ Catherine Cole, *Dry Dock*, (Sydney, Harper Collins, 1999), p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

stockings, pearls and Issey Miyake perfume.⁴⁵ While Selina is a hard-headed financial investor, her feminine physicality creates a sense of vulnerability and makes her a victim. In this sense, Cole's detective mimics the standard role of the hardboiled male investigator, largely liberated from a sense of physical vulnerability on the street, while rescuing a vulnerable damsel in distress. It is interesting to imagine how different this story might have been if the physical roles of Nicola Sharpe and Selina Bower had been reversed. In a twist, however, Sharpe also investigates the case of her father's colleague, who is threatened with violence and then disappears. In this narrative thread, the traditional noir male and female roles are reversed, as the younger woman seeks to rescue a vulnerable older male. Thus, once again, the noir detective form reveals its versatility, and its potential as a method for exploring multiple experiences of the city.

Postmodern Sydney

Mandy Sayer's novel *The Cross* (1995) offers a different sort of crime story about Sydney that also adopts postmodern literary techniques rather than a classic noir detective model. *The Cross* explores a real missing person's case that has become an urban legend. Juanita Nielsen, an activist and journalist, disappeared during a campaign to save houses on Victoria Street in Sydney's Kings Cross area from development in the 1970s. Nielsen has long been presumed murdered, supposedly by agents of the developers she opposed. Her body was never found, leading to urban myths that she was buried in the concrete foundations of the Victoria Point development she fought against. Her story continues to resonate because it seems emblematic of Sydney's recurring themes of erasure, disappearance, the destruction of the past and those who try to prevent it.

Mandy's Sayer's *The Cross* uses the real story as a starting point to explore Kings Cross through a series of characters and stories. In the novel, Gina Delgado acts as a fictional stand-in for Juanita Nielsen, while the multi-layered narrative is composed of monologues from seven main characters who recount the last six months of Gina's life with their own individual flourishes and interpretations. Sayer's multi-perspectival approach shifts the focus from the events of Juanita's disappearance to a meditation on how stories are constructed.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 4, 8-9.

Sayer's focus is on postmodern ideas of fragmentation and unreliable narration, yet her novel nevertheless evokes psychogeographic aspects of the area. Through the character voices the narrative enacts a drift around Kings Cross tracing and retracing a palimpsest of history, diverse communities and multiple stories. Yet the novel's focus on its own literary form also lessens its impact as urban noir or as a psychogeographic journey through the physical space of Sydney.

Psychogeographic Sydney

Delia Falconer's elegiac non-fiction work *Sydney* combines personal memoir with historical anecdote and observation. Rather than following a single chronological narrative or spatial drift through the city, however, it explores the city's substrata of history, myths and lines of desire by mood and theme: "Ghosting", "Dreaming", "Living", "Sweating", "Showing Off".

Crime and the concept of noir is often integral to her observations. One chapter, ironically titled "Living", explores the concept of a "badlands" in Sydney's western suburbs through the story of the horrific 1986 murder of Anita Cobby. The chapter "Sweating" drifts through the red-light district of Sydney and the inner-west, linking the perpetual humidity, decay and insect life of Sydney to the city's hedonistic urges, and its history of organised crime, returning us to the story of Juanita Nielsen.

Falconer's account of Sydney moves our attention away from the glitzy images of its sunshine and tourist spots, while reminding us of a certain unknowability. "To live here is always to feel the place has a secret life that resists you," Falconer writes.⁴⁶

However, by retracing the steps of her own past and revisiting places she remembers as a child, Falconer gathers previously undiscovered stories of Aboriginal history and lost communities of immigrants. It is both a project of retrieval and renewal. Personal memory and physical exploration of the landscape become the stimulus for Falconer's deeper understanding of the city.

Falconer repopulates a landscape she found empty as a child with stories that give it greater resonance. She frequently refers to the city as haunted, partly because the Eora,

⁴⁶ Falconer, *Sydney*, p. 11.

whose language and stories “made sense of the place” are largely gone.⁴⁷ But haunting can also act in positive ways, according to Falconer. It has a “tendency to turn the mind toward the precipice between life and death”.⁴⁸ She also reminds us of Michel de Certeau’s comment that “only haunted cities are worth living in”.⁴⁹ The suggestion is that without haunting, there is no past or narratives we can draw on, no stories we can use to find resonance with our own present circumstances.

Falconer admits that the project of trying to understand the character of a city may be an anachronism, in an age “where populations and money move more easily from one place to another”. This impermanence, Falconer acknowledges, may indeed be Sydney’s “most authentic form of cultural expression”.⁵⁰

Cross-genre Sydney

Literary fiction such as Dark’s historical novel, Slessor’s lyrical poetry, Park’s social realist family saga or Mandy Sayer’s polyphonous postmodernist narrative, has been a powerful way of representing aspects of Sydney’s affective cityscape. Meanwhile, psychogeographic non-fiction such as Falconer’s *Sydney* has revealed how the urban environment, and our engagement with it, is shaped through personal memory, storytelling and mythmaking. It also reveals how the presence of some stories is as significant as the absence of others, which nevertheless hover in the city’s unconscious.

However, these literary forms are less effective at evoking certain key aspects of the city – the sense of energy, excitement and sometimes danger that experiencing the urban environment can provoke; the potential for violence; the potential for encounters with strangers from unfamiliar worlds; or the banal frustrations of everyday urban life like traffic jams and menial jobs; the harsh, lively and sometimes crude aspects of urban demotic speech; or the lives of the city’s underclass. For these storytelling elements we would normally turn to urban noir.

Peter Corris and Marele Day write accessible crime stories that evoke a fast-paced urban milieu where danger and dubious individuals, sex and violence are just around the

⁴⁷ Falconer, *Sydney*, p. 22

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 254.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 256.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 255.

corner, but they are less successful at capturing the specific Sydney-ness of this world. While they have chosen Sydney as the setting for their crime stories, their often functional use of place and laconic detectives rarely seem to explore the deeper emotional, mental and historical resonances of cityscape.⁵¹ Catherine Cole is more successful at summoning these resonances in *Dry Dock*, by focusing almost exclusively on one suburb, Balmain, but at the same time reveals the potential for a noir narrative to range wider and connect the city's disparate zones and diverse communities.

My investigation has therefore examined a paradox in writing about Sydney. While the urban noir detective model can offer an accessible, powerful and evocative way of rendering the dynamic aspects of the modern city, it can also seem flat and generic without the specificity and poetry of psychogeographic observation, or limited by focusing in too tightly on one neighbourhood. Meanwhile, elsewhere in Australia, novelists such as Peter Temple have offered examples of noir detective novels that attempt a deeper psychogeographic engagement with their environments and communities – Melbourne and regional Victoria. The novels *Truth* and *The Broke Shore*, for example, are bleak, brooding elegiac tales, that attempt to come to terms with the troubled violence beneath the happy-go-lucky myths of Australia.⁵² These novels reveal the potential for the urban noir detective model, when informed by psychogeographic sensibility, to offer the reader a deeper engagement with the multiple stories that lie beneath its surface of our cities, and yet which seem to remain largely unexplored in much Sydney noir

⁵¹ Meanwhile, recent crime novel *The Dry* by Jane Harper (Sydney: Pan MacMillan, 2016) offers rich and resonant descriptions of the landscape, but focuses on a rural setting rather than the city.

⁵² Another noir novelist who infuses his writing with psychogeographic observation is the West Australian author David Whish-Wilson, in novels such as *Line of Sight* (2010) and *Zero at the Bone* (2013).

Conclusion

The research in this exegesis has examined how urban noir detective fiction and psychogeography have been used as parallel and often intersecting strategies for exploring and representing the city. This research arose from my own questions about how best to write about Sydney, what genres have been used to represent cities, and their possibilities and limitations.

Late 18th and early 19th century texts about London by Blake, De Quincey and Dickens, offered vivid insights into their city in a rapid state of change. Through their eyes the city was viewed as a mystery, full of wonder and threat, best grasped by an attentive passage through the streets. This process involved both a careful recording of the details of particular localities and a teasing out of their deeper metaphorical resonances. From these writings two key genres emerged, often with overlapping themes and practices. The first is the urban noir detective story, which used an investigation or search narrative to conduct its study of the city. In the detective story, the investigation of a crime – often a murder or a missing persons case - not only provides a pretext for the exploration of the cityscape, but also a way of linking disparate zones and suggesting metaphorical resonances.

Arthur W. Frank, in his discussion of storytelling in *Letting Stories Breathe*, argues that stories are about how humans deal with trouble.¹ In noir fiction this trouble is intimately connected to the urban landscape, which is presented as a troubled place.² Detectives search for missing girls, solve murders, foil extortionists and run foul of gangsters, but in the process they also reveal the intersecting and conflicting influences and interests at work in the city. In Chandler's detective stories, for example, Los Angeles's myths, phoney pretensions and dubious sources of wealth are presented as the root of the trouble, and Marlowe's investigation is about exposing these treacherous undercurrents.

Chandler's Los Angeles noir became a highly influential style, which can be traced not

¹ Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), p. 41.

² Chandler wrote a novella called *Trouble is My Business*, Raymond Chandler, *Trouble is My Business*, (London: Penguin, 2013).

only through other crime novels, but also through Situationist psychogeography.

Situationism attempted to find new ways of interrogating the effects of the urban environment and on their inhabitants in general and of specific zones within particular cities. They developed techniques such as the *dérive*, which drew on a whole tradition of urban exploration and representation that stretched back to 19th century London and Paris, but also included the noir detective model. The Situationists' first map, *The Naked City*, named after the noir film, drew direct inspiration from its techniques, such as breaking down the city into distinct zones to be retraced, examined for clues and reconnected. Although Situationist psychogeography gradually sought a more scientific status for its methods, these early playful and exploratory techniques proved the most influential. Later psychogeographers such as Iain Sinclair, have continued the use of the *derive*, while also drawing on the themes and tropes of earlier urban explorer-writers and noir detectives. Other psychogeographers such as Rebecca Solnit and Lauren Elkin, have also used poetic and personal memoir, closer to Dickens's *Night Walks* or De Quincey's *Confessions* than the Situationists' pseudo-scientific reports.

Meanwhile, noir detective fiction has also continued to evolve, from mimicking the American hard-boiled style and settings in post-war crime thrillers, to a contemporary global phenomenon with a greater focus on exploring the local uniqueness of diverse urban environments. While drawing on the Chandler model, this newer wave of novels is not simply repeating a tired formula mapped onto different locations. On the contrary, in works by writers such as McIlvanney, Izzo, Qiu and Gran, the search narrative allows for a deeper psychogeographic exploration of Glasgow, Marseille, Shanghai and New Orleans. These novels reveal how a psychogeographic approach can enhance the basic noir model, allowing the author to present a deeper understanding of a city through their detective's unique character and methods.

McIlvanney explores the violence lurking in the streets of Thatcherite Glasgow, employing a troubled detective with a sympathy for the city's underclass. Izzo explores both the ancient origins of violence in Marseille and the emergence of a new global form of crime, employing a detective whose own ethnic origins and delinquent past attune him to the city's fault-lines. Qiu explores the decline of Communism and rise of Capitalism in China through a poet-turned-cop who can detect the ancient resonances of his culture. Meanwhile, Gran examines an eerie post-Katrina New Orleans, with a

visionary, drug-taking female heroine receptive to the less rational aspects of the city.

Yet despite these diverse examples, the genre has also come in for criticism for its perceived bleakness, negativity and inherent pessimism. The Chinese regime has periodically banned this type of fiction because it is seen as conflicting with the government's goals of social harmony. Meanwhile, some western critics have also been scathing of the genre. A review of Peter Temple's *Truth* both praised the writer as "far more literary than his peers", then criticised his novel for failing to escape "the pigeonhole of genre fiction because of its unrelenting ugliness of vision", which the reviewer found hard to accept.³

In contrast, utopian Situationist psychogeography offers the possibility of revolution for those who take up its methods – and was in fact realised in the May '68 slogan "*Sous les pavés, la plage!*" For later psychogeographers the city also offers the possibility of freedom. This is represented as anonymity and immersion in Woolf's "Street Haunting"; subversive resistance in Sinclair's writings; the illicit pleasures of escape from consumer culture in Solnit's *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*; or female self-expression, creativity and empowerment in Elkin's *Flâneuse*. Yet Sinclair is perhaps closest to noir in his vision of the city as a locus of dark forces with the potential to overwhelm individual agency, even while showing us how to resist.

It is when these two genres, noir and psychogeography, are brought together, however, that some of the richest and most sophisticated representations of the city result. This is grounded in the writer's use of the basic tools of the noir detective story – crime, detective, investigation – offering an entry point for the reader to orient themselves, and a compelling thread to draw them into a deeper exploration of the psychogeographic resonances of the city.

While a psychogeographer may use an arbitrary device, such as a shape drawn on a map, to explore the city, the noir detective writer uses the search for a culprit or missing person to shape their journey. Nevertheless, both genres stimulate the reader to actively engage with their urban environment at street level, and focus on the specifics of the place where they are, to be alert to what they see, hear, feel, and to trust their lived experience and affective responses to this landscape.

³ Edmund Gordon, review "Truth by Peter Temple", *The Observer*, (January 10, 2010) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/10/truth-peter-temple-edmund-gordon>

Sydney urban noir detective fiction from writers such as Peter Corris and Marele Day, however, has tended to distil rather than enrich the Chanderlesque model. Perhaps due to the demands of earlier publishers or audiences, they have focused more on the armature of action and plot than on deeper psychogeographic aspects of their settings, creating stories that seem less resonant and satisfying as representations of Sydney. Catherine Cole has perhaps come closest to a more psychogeographic representation of at least one area of Sydney in her crime novels, but also reveals the potential for noir fiction to further explore the diversity of Sydney's urban environment.

Meanwhile, the poetry of Kenneth Slessor, the novels of Eleanor Dark, Ruth Park, and Mandy Sayer, and the non-fiction of Delia Falconer offer alternative representations of the city's darker sides, its capacity for violence, its persistent melancholy, and the haunting absences of its indigenous culture.

An examination of these texts suggests the potential for incorporating a stronger psychogeographic sensibility into urban noir detective fiction about Sydney. This potential cross-genre approach seems to offer the possibility of using a popular and accessible genre such as detective fiction to pursue a deeper investigation into the troubled sense of place and history in Sydney and the unique mixture of influences that come together there.

Urban noir detective fiction, of course, has its limitations as method of representing a city. A story involving a murder or disappearance, followed by a street-level investigation, can risk taking us on predictable journeys. At its worst it may rely on lazy stereotypes, generic mean streets and plots lifted from other novels or media rather than an authentic exploration of the unique aspects of its particular urban setting. Yet even an evocation of the banal and generic nature of a city can serve a purpose, if it is a conscious decision. As Gill Plain points out in her study of Ian Rankin's representations of Edinburgh in his Rebus detective novels, his depictions of the city have changed significantly over the series.⁴ In more recent works such as *The Naming of the Dead*, for example, Rankin weaves together the personal and political, local and global, argues Plain.

⁴ Gill Plain, "The Map That Engenders the Territory?": Rethinking Ian Rankin's Edinburgh." In *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes*, ed. Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps, pp. 16-28. (University of Wales Press, 2013). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhd8f.7>.

The meaning of the city as the locus of crime cannot remain the same in a world where television images turn the local and familiar into global entertainment, and the internet allows the easy disruption on national boundaries.

Hence as our cities become more globalised, stories about them will tend to reflect this by including global and cross-cultural phenomena, mixed with specific local details particular to that place.

Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*, also suggests the tropes of noir themselves risk being co-opted for other purposes.⁵ He describes writer Budd Shulberg's consternation at finding out that his critique of greed and ambition, *What Makes Sammy Run?* had become something of a "handbook for yuppies" in the Reagan era. Meanwhile, Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* imagines a Disneyfication of noir in an oppressive future America, where a shopping mall called the Noir Centre features a mineral water boutique called "Bubble Indemnity" and a patio furniture outlet called "The Lounge Goodbye".⁶

Another potential limitation of noir detective fiction is that historically, their narratives have favoured plots involving violence against women, and featured a privileged white heterosexual masculine viewpoint. However, the range of examples I've chosen to explore in this exegesis has shown that this is not necessarily the case. The genre is in a constant state of evolution, as Val McDermid's lesbian detective Lindsay Gordon, or African American writer Attica Locke's Texas-set noir *Black Water Rising* reveals.⁷ The female protagonists in Val McDermid and Denis Mina novels, for example, have been credited with "invigorating the crime fiction genre", by offering "a fresh insight into the role of women and the challenges they continue to face in contemporary society".⁸

Noir detective fiction may favour red-light districts, the playgrounds of the rich, or the corrupt corridors of power, while ignoring offices, hospitals or warehouses where everyday workers spend their lives. However, the noir detective story can visit any of these locations and more, and may be more adventurous in its choice of setting than other genres.

⁵ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, pp. 45-6.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Attica Locke, *Black Water Rising*, (London: Serpents Tail, 2010).

⁸ Lorna Hill, "Bloody Women: How Female Authors Have Transformed the Scottish Contemporary Crime Fiction Genre", *American British and Canadian Studies*, (June, 2017)
<https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/abcsj.2017.28.issue-1/abcsj-2017-0004/abcsj-2017-0004.xml>

Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* for example, explores the lives of black workers in a naval shipyard in wartime America. Meanwhile, "domestic noir", such as *Gone Girl* and *Girl on a Train*, explores the psychology and socioeconomic aspects of domestic spaces. Equally, we might find noir detective stories that visit Amazon warehouses, courier depots or farms where itinerant labourers work.

Considering the possibilities of using the noir detective story to generate representations of the city, however, also raises the question of the limitations of storytelling in general. Maria Tumarkin in her article "This Narrated Life", questions our society's current obsession with storytelling.⁹ "No doubt a story is a singularly powerful thing," Tumarkin says. It offers a "back door into the deepest parts of us not accessible in other ways". However, she also suggests that we need to be aware of the limits of certain types of storytelling, and of trying to express the multiplicity of human experience through reductive concepts such as "story arc" and "personal journey".

Nevertheless, I have shown that urban noir detective fiction can offer a set of highly versatile and productive techniques for exploring the city. Noir narratives can disrupt our habitual responses to urban space, and heighten our awareness of diverse communities and fragile environments found in particular places. They can make us aware of the urban unconscious, of the diverse influences intersecting and influencing a particular area and may also act as cautionary tales, reminding us of the hazards of the modern city, in which our freedoms, environment and most vulnerable citizens are increasingly under threat from globalised capitalism and crime.

We navigate by apps that tell us the quickest way from A to B. We submit to the watchful eye of surveillance cameras and the live-streaming smartphone. We walk the streets staring at screens, scrolling through an endless media loop. Yet there is still so much we do not see or experience that is hidden in plain sight. Writing that can show us how to be both mindful and engaged with our cities may now be more necessary than ever.

This study has attempted to show how urban noir detective fiction and psychogeography can offer valuable and engaging ways of exploring and representing cities, and reveal the diversity of experiences of living in those cities. In this sense, a

⁹ Maria Tumarkin, "This Narrated Life", *Griffith Review*, Edition 44, (April 2014)
<https://griffithreview.com/articles/this-narrated-life/>

work of noir detective fiction can offer as many insights for those seeking to understand the nature of a city as a work of literary psychogeography.

This study demonstrates the versatility of these forms and shows that, even if, historically they have been dominated by the perspective of white male detectives and psychogeographers, this is neither necessary or inevitable. Diverse perspectives can be employed in both psychogeography and noir detective fiction. Psychogeographers and detectives from different genders or ethnic backgrounds, with disabilities or mental illness can all offer valuable perspectives on the experience of being in the city and of specific places or zones within those cities. The individual challenges and vulnerabilities these psychogeographers or detectives may face in exploring the streets themselves add to the richness of our understanding of the city. Drawing on a combination of strategies from both genres, and on the writings of diverse crime novelists and psychogeographers, may prove the most effective way to orient ourselves in the urban shadowlands.

Afterword: On Writing *Way to Blue*

How to grasp something unfinished yet always remodelling itself,
changing without a basis for change? So much visible impatience to be
born, to grow, such wild tracts of space to be filled...

Gavin Lambert, *The Slide Area*¹

In Sydney nothing matters more than a fast return on the last deal and
an inside run on the next. It is a city which eats itself. The two centuries
of creation and destruction which have shaped, scoured and often
horribly disfigured her face can stand as a mandala for the deepest
processes of her soul. It does not matter that she rests upon stolen land
- in fact, it may even be fitting.

John Birmingham, "A City Obsessed"²

The creative component of this thesis, a novel titled *Way to Blue*, is intended as an
example of an urban noir detective story informed by psychogeographic approaches.

This work is draws on the critical research into urban writing, noir detective fiction and
psychogeographical writing I have conducted in my exegesis, which sought to examine
approaches to representing cities in general, and Sydney in particular.

It is also informed by specific research I have carried out in the process of writing the
novel about Sydney's history, environment, cityscape, contemporary social issues and
crime stories, much of which involved trawling through the online archives of *The
Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* as well as various local newspapers. In
addition, I visited the Museum of Sydney, Police and Justice Museum, and the Art Gallery
of NSW for inspiration, as well as attending talks about psychogeography and
psychogeographic methods. Finally, I also undertook my own urban drifts through areas
of Sydney including Kings Cross, Bondi, Homebush, Five Dock, Marrickville and further
afield to the far western fringes of Sydney and northern NSW.

This research was combined with reading a wide variety of urban crime novels beyond
the scope of what could be discussed in my exegesis (Tana French's *Broken Harbour*,
Denise Mina's *Blood, Salt Water*, Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising*, and Richard Price's

¹ Gavin Lambert, *The Slide Area: Scenes of Hollywood Life*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1959) p16.

² John Birmingham, "A City Obsessed", in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (July 13, 2002)
<https://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/07/12/1026185107540.html>

The Whites, to name but a few), along with non-fiction books about Sydney's past including Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* and John Birmingham's *Leviathan*³.

The initial impetus for writing *Way to Blue*, however, was the desire to write about Sydney in a way that captured the city I recognized, one that I remembered and one that seemed to be in process of change and disappearance. When I came across the Gavin Lambert quote about Los Angeles it resonated with my thoughts regarding Sydney. I wanted to depict the city's seemingly inexhaustible and often thoughtless eagerness for change and growth without a clear sense of its future, and to consider what might be lost or forgotten in the process.

Sydney is a city I realized I knew less about than I should, partly because so much of it has been erased or forgotten in the rapid process of its development. It is a city that has often delighted but also troubled me. I wanted to depict its diversity, its vibrant and affluent quarters, its sprawling suburbs, its unsettling no-mans lands and vanishing fringes of wildness.

I also wanted to capture Sydney's darker sides, the rapaciousness of its development and often casual disregard for history and community, its materialism and obsession with property and its increasing disregard of the less advantaged – a side of Sydney evoked alarmingly by John Birmingham in his article "A City Obsessed", above.

Working as a journalist for many years in Sydney, I became aware of how the city wanted to present itself, and how the media conspired in this representation. The shadow Sydney is rarely discussed in mainstream versions of the city, which tend to depict an eternally sunny place of opportunity, carefree lifestyles and dream homes. Though ironically, it is now common to read newspaper stories about young people forced out of Sydney by rising rents and house prices, alongside articles boosting Sydney's housing boom or raising anxieties that "the housing bubble" may be about to burst.

One particularly jarring article I came across in the Domain property section of *The Sydney Morning Herald* described how the former home of Juanita Nielsen, an activist who was murdered in the 1970s for fighting a large real estate development, was now

³ John Birmingham, *Leviathan*, (Sydney: Random House, 1999).

up for auction “with a price guide of more than \$879,000”.⁴ It then quoted the real estate agent promoting the fact that the property had approval for further development.

I came across many other articles about dubious property developments and questions raised about cosy deals between the government and developers. Alongside these were countless articles about Sydney crime figures linked not only to drug trafficking, money laundering and violence, but also shady property deals.

When Sydney crime is discussed it is often in light-hearted terms involving colourful identities, larrikins, rogues, and good time girls. What is less examined is the symbiotic relationship between Sydney’s obsession with fast money and property and its disregard for its own past, with political corruption and organised crime.

I wanted to explore some of these ideas in a novel, rather than in non-fiction, personal memoir or series of news articles, because I believed fiction would give me greater freedom in the types of stories I could tell and the way I could tell them.

William McIlvanney has said that after writing his historical novel *Docherty*, he wanted to write about his contemporary Glasgow, so he chose the detective form. He said he wanted to “colonise the genre” in order to say “serious things about how we’re living now, what’s happening in our society”.⁵

Given that it was my aim to explore contemporary Sydney and its dark sides, a noir detective story also seemed to be an obvious choice. I have seen how the noir model has been used effectively to depict life in cities around the world.

Arthur W. Frank argues that fiction not only has the ability to “present models of dealing with different kinds of troubles”, it can also make particular points of view “not only plausible but compelling”.⁶ Frank suggests that fiction can cultivate our sympathetic imagination, prompting us to see the world from different perspectives in a way that journalism or ethnography may not be able to “among other genres of storytelling”.

Exploring a place through character, for example, gives the landscape and architecture a

⁴ Toby Johnstone, “Killed Activist’s Home on the Market”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (May 6, 2013) <https://www.domain.com.au/news/killed-activists-home-on-the-market-20130504-2izrx/>

⁵ Noel King, “Taking a Lonely Chance”, interview with William McIlvanney, Café Royal, Edinburgh, 1992 used with permission of Dr Noel King.

⁶ Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, pp. 30-32.

human scale and perspective. A story can also stimulate greater empathy with the lives of a diverse range of people living in a city and can establish a more intimate relationship between the reader and the world being described. Characters' actions and inner lives can also summon up a relationship between the city and the urban unconscious.

However, Frank also acknowledges that stories can limit our sympathetic understanding, by making one character's perspective "too compelling".⁷ There is always a risk in crime fiction, for example, that we make the villains more appealing because of the scope these characters give a writer in terms of creating memorable portraits. Elmore Leonard famously commented that: "The bad guys are the fun guys. The only people I have trouble with are the so-called normal types. Their language isn't very colourful, and they don't talk with any certain sound."⁸

Frank's *Letting Stories Breathe* also notes that fiction can "make life dramatic and remind us that endings are never assured".⁹ This is particularly true of the noir genre, where good guys often lose. In Robert Towne's original script for the urban noir detective film, *Chinatown*, for example, Evelyn Mulray and her daughter got away from evil Noah Cross who was himself killed. This was changed for a much more tragic ending in the film because, as the director, Roman Polanski, told an interviewer, if *Chinatown* had ended happily, "We wouldn't be sitting around talking about it today."¹⁰

Stories have many other capacities and limitations, as Frank goes on to explain. They resonate with echoes of the other stories that have come before them, and intimations of stories yet to be told. They can "summon up whole cultures".¹¹

Stories also, arguably, have an inherent morality, and this is very relevant to crime stories in general, and noir in particular. They teach us about what is right and wrong by linking characters actions to consequences.¹² In Chandler's noir the detective must

⁷ Ibid. p. 32.

⁸ Elmore Leonard quoted in Marilyn Stasio, "A Novelist Who Made Crime an Art, and His Bad Guys 'Fun'", *The New York Times*, (August 20, 2013).
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/21/books/elmore-leonard-master-of-crime-fiction-dies-at-87.html>

⁹ Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, p. 32.

¹⁰ Peter Gerstenzang, "20 Things You Probably Didn't Know about Chinatown", *Esquire*, (June 23, 2014).
<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/movies/a29106/chinatown-things-you-dont-know/>

¹¹ Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, p. 37.

¹² Ibid. p. 36.

travel the “mean streets”, though he himself is not mean, but presented as rather noble. In *The Big Sleep*, for example, Marlowe must deal with the consequences of Carmen’s crimes, and Vivian’s attempts to cover them up. One sister is presented as bad, while the other is misguided, but also manipulative. The novel seems to suggest that the world of the wealthy Los Angelinos is particularly vulnerable to corruption and crime, a notion that apparently stuck with Chandler from his experience of working in the oil business, and from the famous Doheny murder case in Los Angeles in the late 1920s.¹³

But while stories may imply a certain morality, their value, says Frank, lies in bringing clarity to a story, while maintaining the complexity of “life in flux”.

There is also, argues Frank, a “symbiosis” between stories and the people who tell them. He refers to Joan Didion’s observation that “we tell ourselves stories in order to live”.¹⁴ Frank points out that Didion does not say “we make up stories”, but rather *we tell them*, as if the stories were already there waiting to be told. Our role then as writers is to decide which stories we choose to tell, and how best to tell them.

In writing a detective story about Sydney, I recognised that it was important to keep the potentials and limitations of stories in general, and detective stories in particular in mind, while also facing the challenge of how to craft an entertaining story that worked in its own terms, rather than merely an illustration of a thesis. Entertainment here is not a dirty word, but a doorway through which we invite the reader to explore a world.

After reading a number of noir detective stories set in Sydney, I was puzzled by the tendency of many to gloss over or ignore the landscape of the city and the inner lives of their characters.¹⁵ I realized that what I wanted to bring to my story was exactly a sense of the city’s often strange and haunting ambience and its uncomfortable relationship to its past. For this I turned for inspiration to the psychogeographic writing of Delia Falconer’s *Sydney*, but also a range of other stories (from Ruth Park’s *The Harp in the South*, to Peter Kirkpatrick’s *Sea Coast of Bohemia*, and Peter Doyle’s historical crime capers), which were rich in the sort of descriptive detail I felt was lacking from the

¹³ Richard Rayner says that Chandler was haunted by the real-life story of the wealthy Doheny oil family, and the murder of E.L. Doheny’s son, *A Bright and Guilty Place*, (London: Constable, 2010), p.81.

¹⁴ Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, p. 37

¹⁵ Peter Doyle’s Sydney-based Billy Glasheen novels such as *Get Rich Quick*, *Amaze Your Friends*, *Devil’s Jump* and *The Big Whatever*, are a notable exception, creating a rich portrait of both the city and its history, though each one is set in a historical rather than contemporary period.

detective stories discussed in my earlier Sydney chapter.

Yet my choice of the detective genre was clear. I didn't want to write a literary novel for a purely literary or academic readership. Nor did I want the focus of the novel to be about its own form or writing. Instead, I wanted to use the detective form as a way of touching both literally and metaphorically on Sydney's troubled relationship with its past, with characters facing the consequences of past choices. Furthermore, the detective genre seemed to offer an accessible format, which any reader might pick up and inadvertently discover alternative versions of Sydney.

While I wanted to infuse my detective story with psychogeographic observations of Sydney's cityscape, I was also aware that fiction is not simply about describing locations and their atmospheres, but about characters and plots.

I wanted my characters in *Way to Blue* to experience their present-day Sydney, but also its shadow versions through a prism of their own experiences. Sometimes they may view the city with fondness or nostalgia, but often with fear, anger, regret or simply the desire to forget. For this reason, the plot of *Way to Blue* follows a reluctant detective forced to confront her own past when she is hired to search for a missing teenage girl, while other characters in the novel are confronted with or seek to avoid their pasts.

Translating Theory into Fiction

One of the major challenges of this creative component has been the transformation of the ideas explored in my academic research into a fictional story that requires a certain suspension of critical thought - a process of willed dreaming. As crime writer Walter Moseley has explained in his guide, *This Year You Write Your Novel*, writing fiction is "primarily an unconscious activity". The "connections, moods, metaphors and experiences" we call up when writing, Moseley says, are connected to a place that is larger than the conscious mind.¹⁶

In this way the path of fiction writing can resemble the physical path taken by the urban drifter. We may consciously plan to follow a certain route, like the psychogeographer with an outline drawn on a map, but we may discover along the way that the terrain has other ideas. We follow our carefully mapped-out plot outline but get diverted by an

¹⁶ Walter Moseley, *This Year You Write Your Novel*, p. 8.

interesting side street or colourful character. It may turn out that the road we are on doesn't look like the one we saw on the map, and we get lost and try to double back, but find ourselves in an unfamiliar neighbourhood. When we look at our writing plan, the ideas we had at the start may no longer seem to work, but a chance encounter along the way has sparked a new direction.

I wrote *Way to Blue* with the intention of capturing Sydney's complexity, its shadow sides and its haunted qualities, and noir detective fiction seemed to offer a useful starting point for exploring and connecting these disparate elements.

However, along the way the characters I wrote had their own ideas about how the story should be told and started leading me in unexpected directions. For example, in an earlier draft, I wrote a whole section of the novel from the perspective of a police officer, only to find that his personal story held up the pace of the plot, and so I was forced to discard much of it. I initially wrote the character of Darley King, a motorcycle courier turned detective, in the third person and as simply one of a series of characters. Yet her voice became more insistent as I wrote, and eventually I was forced to let her speak in the first person and give her a central role. It was as if she was telling me that she knew the best path through the city and wanted to show me. And so I let her.

The resulting novel also aims to take readers on a journey through a Sydney that may be both familiar and unfamiliar, to draw an alternative map and take them to some unexpected places along the way.

Djuna Barnes once wrote that someone is "whole only when he takes into account his shadow".¹⁷ I would argue that likewise, our relationship to a city is only meaningful when we are acquainted with its shadow sides. Sydney's landscape, urban fabric and cultural diversity are unique but also fragile. Stories that address these issues are one way to avoid or at least resist these harmful patterns of behaviour in the future.

Way to Blue is a detective story about a woman with a troubled past who is forced to face this past when she is hired to search for a missing girl. But it is also an exploration of a city and its inhabitants; a reminder of Sydney's darker undercurrents; an elegy for what we have lost or are at risk of losing. It is only one story about the city for which I

¹⁷ Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood: The Original and Related Drafts*, ed. Cheryl J. Plumb, (Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995) p. 101.

hope many more are being written, because it is through the process of exploring and writing, of telling stories, but also interrogating the official stories we are told, that we truly engage with the places in which we live, rather than simply passing through them.

In homage to the many noir writers and psychogeographers who have come before me, this novel seeks to continue mapping the shadowlands.

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