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Noise, neoliberalism and Iain Sinclair

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Chapter 3: Parasitic poetics: *Lud Heat* and the noise of genre

Bristling with scare quotes, Allen Fisher's review of *Lud Heat* (1975), Sinclair's long poetic mythography of East London, published as a letter to Sinclair in *Place*, Fisher's even longer poetic mythography of South London, provides an exemplary instance of a noisy reading:

> Your symbolic attachment to place is not merely that place given meaning by inherent attraction, by "magic", or by unaccountable attachment to soil. Nor is it solely the pyramidic structure of any of your "key" buildings . . . Your concern is energetic and about energy where the place becomes symbol of ourselves . . . (153)

Punctuation here signals a fear of contamination. Fisher deploys his quotation marks to quarantine terms and ideas from which he wants to defend his own text: the notion of "magic" the idea that "key" buildings can actually "generate" energy. Sinclair's terminology is allowed into his text on sufferance: he acknowledges the existence of this other language but hurries on as quickly as possible to the comfort and safety, the presumed common ground, of abstraction: "your concern is energetic and about energy". The quotation marks register, in other words, a break of communication and of community between the two poets: they mean something like "I think I know what you are saying but I hope what you really mean is . . .". In this insistence on translation Fisher identifies a resistance experienced by many readers of Sinclair's poem. Namely a sense that within this late-modernist exploration of metropolitan life there lurks a pre-modern commitment to magic and the occult; that *Lud Heat*'s fascination with systems of arcane knowledge is intended not as conceit or commentary but as an expression of the poet's genuine conviction.

As the noisy signifiers of a break in community these quotation marks have a double reading. Whereas other readers may be able to sit back and enjoy Sinclair's occult

speculations, Fisher cannot do this because in other respects Sinclair's language is Fisher's own. Both *Lud Heat* and *Place* are the products of what has come to be known, thanks largely to the efforts of Eric Mottram, Ken Edwards and Barry MacSweeney, as the "British Poetry Revival": to the tradition of experimental poetry, that is, which represented a continuation of modernist technique in opposition to the consensual language of the verse associated with the Movement. For Fisher consequently the language of *Lud Heat* represents a form of return of the excluded, of that which he cannot speak because it represents a worldview which is incompatible with his own poeisis. It is the nature and consequences of this rupture that I want to explore in this chapter.

Background noise: *Lud Heat* and its contexts

Punctured by the spires and towers of Hawksmoor churches, the skyline of *Lud Heat* serves as the signature of a Gothic imaginary which has since the 1980s come to seem almost ubiquitous in the representation of London. The idea, first developed in Sinclair's poem, that the churches built by Nicholas Hawksmoor (c1661-1736) between 1712-1730 form the focus of a system of occult energy at work in the heart of the modern metropolis was taken over directly by Peter Ackroyd in his novel *Hawksmoor* (1985), and forms an important visual and thematic element in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic serial *From Hell* (1991-98, 1999), from where it travels into the film of the same title directed by Albert and Allen Hughes in 2001. More generally, the poem's preoccupation with the place of the occult in contemporary London, of the secret causalities connecting its monuments and thoroughfares, has been echoed in novels as diverse as Alan Moorcock's *Mother London* (1988), China Mieville's *King Rat* (1998), Will Self's *How the Dead Live* (2000), Michele Roberts' *In the Red House* (1990), Geoff Nicholson's *Bleeding London* (1997), Nicholas Royle's *Director's Cut* (2000) and, from a different perspective, Neal Stephenson's Baroque cycle. Consequently when Roger Luckhurst asks "[w]hat is it about contemporary London that apparently defeats cognitive languages or proves resistant to Realist representation and thus encourages the occult

imagination to flower?" ("Occult London" 336), *Lud Heat* is a good place to go for answers.

As a product of the "British Poetry Revival", *Lud Heat* slots easily into a history that seems all too susceptible to analysis in terms of the locative effect of noise. It is, in literary historical terms, a product of the battle for the meaning of Britain which raged across numerous anthologies, little magazines and poetry journals from the mid-1950s onwards.[37] The critical role of noise in that battle and the construction of corresponding notions of Britishness is heard in Al Alvarez's sniffy dismissal of experimental poetry in his introduction to *The New Poetry* (1962) where he writes that "the experimental techniques of Eliot and the rest never really took on in England because they were an essentially American concern" (21). In response, Michael Horovitz's *Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain* (1969) gathered some sixty poets who, while rejecting the "baleful Shadow" (316) of Eliot's influence, gleefully embraced the lessons of "the rest"[38] to demonstrate not only that experimental techniques were flourishing in British poetry, but that they could be used as tools to dismantle the restricted notions of Britishness that the Movement sought to naturalize.

Despite its ebullience, however, Horovitz's counter-blast did little to contest the Movement's ownership of what constituted poetry or what constituted Britishness and Alvarez's gesture of denial was repeated with contemptuous ease by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion's assertion in the introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982) that their anthology marks "a shift of sensibility" which "follows a stretch, occupying much of the 1960s and 70s, when very little - in England at any rate - seemed to be happening . . ." (11).

Given the transparently exclusionary logic through which the "Movement Orthodoxy" sought to normalize its own aesthetic by dismissing any "vaster range of poetry, with a wider range of poetic practices" (*Poetry of Saying* 2) as un-British, un-interesting, or simply invisible, it is tempting to produce a counter-history that is defined by that

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[37] For a detailed account see Peter Barry's *Poetry Wars* and Robert Sheppard's review at http://jacketmagazine.com/31/sheppard-barry.html accessed 16.09.10.

[38] The line that runs through Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson.

exclusion. Thus, as Peter Barry writes, "[u]ntil the 1980s contemporary British poetry was usually mapped as a stark oppositional polarity, with a conservative (that is, anti-modernist) *mainstream,* which is implacably opposed to the excluded, embattled and experimental *margins*" (*Contemporary British Poetry* 11).

The construction of this oppositional polarity, however, even as it produces the excluded as the noise which sustains the identity and coherence of the Movement, produces the Movement as the noise that endows the excluded with an (illusory) identity (in difference). Thus, where "that alimentary spasm, the Movement" (Sinclair, *Conductors* xv) is constituted in the first instance through its exclusion (or evacuation) of Modernist techniques, then Robert Sheppard's "vaster range of poetic expression" only becomes available as an object of discourse or for marketing anthologies through its rejection of the orthodoxy - the "past metrics, self-satisfied irony, the self-regarding ego and its iambic thuds" (Eric Mottram, in Alnutt *et al*. 131) - represented by the Movement.

To place *Lud Heat* within an oppositional narrative that ranges the Movement against the poets of the British Poetry Revival, effectively replicates the polarization of space which, it will be argued, is interrogated by the poem itself. Thus while historically *Lud Heat* may belong to the moment of the British Poetry Revival, and indeed may be one of its key texts, we should also recognize its critical stance towards that (op)position - its sensitivity to the ambiguities involved in the construction of any identity. As Sinclair suggests in the introduction to his anthology of "elective outsiders" (xvi), *Conductors of Chaos* (1996) the history of contemporary British poetry can be all too easily recuperated as the plot of a bad feel-good movie: the story of the "pick-'n'-mix shambles of has-beens, headcases and emerging chancers who will put one over on the All Blacks" (xiii). This ambiguity must be born in mind as we consider the construction of place in *Lud Heat* which in this reading will be considered both as a British Poetry Revival text, but one where the dynamic of noise and signal is not limited to the articulation of its difference from the centre ground of the Movement.

The politics of noise are less convoluted at the level of technique. As Alvarez makes clear, mainstream post-war British poetry defines itself through the rejection of any

poetic technique which focuses attention on the noise of its medium. The result is a post-war poetic orthodoxy which "privileges a poetry of closure, narrative coherence and grammatical and syntactic cohesion, which colludes with the process of naturalization" (*Poetry of Saying* 2), or as Andrew Crozier puts it:

> the poets who altered taste in the 1950s did so by means of a common rhetoric that foreclosed the possibilities of poetic language within its own devices: varieties of tone, rhythm, of form, of image, were narrowly limited, as were the conceptions of the scope and character of poetic discourse, its relation to the self, to knowledge, to history, and to the world. Poetry was seen as an art in relation to its own conventions - and a pusillanimous set of conventions at that. It was not to be ambitious, or to seek to articulate ambition through the complex deployment of its technical means: imagery was either suspect or merely clinched an argument; the verse line should not, by the pressure its energy or shape might exert on syntax, intervene in meaning; language was always to be grounded in the presence of a legitimating voice - and that voice took on an impersonally collective tone. To its owners' satisfaction the signs of art had been subsumed within a closed cultural programme. (12)

The techniques excluded from this common rhetoric are united variously in their tendency to disturb the communicative function of poetry; they are techniques which privilege, in one way or another, principles of resistance. Sheppard supplies a useful inventory when he writes that non-Movement poetry is characterized by "techniques of indeterminacy and discontinuity, of collage and creative linkage, of poetic artifice and defamiliarization" (*Poetry of Saying* 1).

Sheppard also illustrates the direct correlation between technique and the production of space when he notes that almost half of the poems in *New Lines,* the first Movement anthology, used the first person plural (*Poetry of Saying* 22): invoking therewith an implied community of poet and reader, a world of shared assumptions which is at once specifically that of English middle-class men but is extended through the "moral embrace" of the third person plural to include humanity in general. A poetry so dependent on the production of assent cannot risk the deployment of

techniques which problematize or disturb that assumption of communication grounded in a shared, or common, sense.

But again, a simple oppositional account of the techniques deployed in non-Movement poetry can obscure productive tensions between different elements within the repertoire of indeterminacy gathered under the name of modernism. If the third person plural underpins the moral rhetoric of community in Movement poetics, modernist poetics may also be susceptible to similar rhetorical strategies. Before examining how Sinclair deploys specific techniques of resistance in order to figure the relationship between textual and topographical space in *Lud Heat*, however, it is useful to consider the more general relationship between noise and place in modernist poetics.

The "charting instinct": long poems, big cities

Emphasising literature's social function as a form of cognitive mapping, Steven Johnson suggests that, for their original readers, the urban novels of Dickens, Balzac and Zola formed an important "interface" with the new and disorientating complexity of the nineteenth-century city: "The Victorians had writers like Dickens to ease them through the technological revolutions of the industrial age, writers who built novelistic maps of the threatening new territory and the social relations it produced" (*Interface Culture* 19) . Extending Johnson's concern with the cognitive aspect of the relation between text and social context to the encounters with the urban found in the canonic texts of literary modernism, it is evident that coherence and any concomitant affect of readerly reassurance have been largely abandoned. Instead of trying to make sense of the complex reality of late nineteenth- and early twenty-first century urban environments, the modernist text mimics in its own structure and practices of signification the uncertainties and complexities found in the urban environment. On a first encounter texts such as *The Waste Land* (1922), *Ulysses* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *USA* (1938), *Paterson* (1946-58), and even Ezra Pound's "In a station of the metro", exhibit the same bewildering semiotic complexity as the world they describe. Their organizing principles are obscure, and even when their general structure has

been apprehended, there are still countless points of local detail which remain more or less impenetrable. If, as Peter Barry notes, the city as a topic in British poetry is more or less exclusively the preserve of modernism, this is testimony to the homology of text and subject (*Poetry and the City* 5). Reflecting its defining concern with the (im)possibility of knowledge, Modernism figures the city as an epistemological problem, as ultimately unknowable, or, as an arena in which knowledge has to be actively produced by the reader.

Formally at least, *Lud Heat* is a typical example of the modernist paradigm. At 141 pages and composed from meditative free-verse lyrics, journal entries, essay sections, maps, diagrams and a scattering of Egyptian hieroglyphs, *Lud Heat* falls naturally into a tradition which stretches back to *The Waste Land* and *Paterson*, while its more direct predecessors include Roy Fisher's *City* (1962) and Allen Fisher's *Place* sequence begun in 1970, with Lee Harwood's rather shorter *Cable Street* (1968) forming an even closer geographical neighbour. As Sheppard notes, the "poetic inheritance of the work is largely American": it takes from William Carlos Williams and from Pound not only the perception that poetry has the permission to include blocks of prose, but the recognition that this "ragbag approach is arguably well suited to capturing the cluttered physical collage of urban space" (Sheppard, *Lud Heat*). As we will see, that suitability is due in part to the text's manipulation of the degrees of noise inherent in different linguistic modes: the juxtaposition of prose with its emphasis on communication, and free verse, with its hermeneutic of indeterminacy, replicate within the text the idea of an environment which is variably accessible and resistant. The poem, in other words, uses communicative noise to replicate an urban environment experienced in terms of channelled movement and areas which are more, or less, readable. Similarly the mixture of pronominal stance typical of lyric and essay reflects the multiplicity of the urban environment, in contrast to the third person plural that typically defines and stabilizes the space of Movement verse.

However, it is in its relationship with Charles Olson and the Black Mountain credo of open field poetics that the poem most clearly displays the ambiguity of its affiliation to its modernist and American inheritance. As formulated in Olson's "Projective Verse" manifesto of 1950, open verse involves the rejection of "'closed' verse, that

verse which print bred and which is pretty much what we have had in English & American, and have still got despite the work of Pound & Williams" (613) in favour of poetry based on "the kinetics of the thing" (614), the belief that a poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations, by way of the poem itself, to, all the way over to, the reader" (614).

In the manifesto Olson maps the form of this verse through a series of binary oppositions: open verse is a poetry of the breath rather than the word, of sound rather than intellect, of direct perception and affect rather than intellection; its unit is the syllable, it is the poetry of man in an environment; poetry as practice rather than commodity; poetry fully integrated into life as a distinctive form of perception or a deroutinization of response, rather than a verse produced for a social purpose or as a commodity. As Sheppard notes, Olson had a profound effect on British poetry's thinking of place outside the national consensual rhetoric practiced by movement poets: his "local universalism" offering poets a way "to define themselves against geographical structures . . . as a way both larger and intimate [sic] than concerns with nationality" (*Poetry of Saying* 59). It is this ethos that informs Allen Fisher's monumental *Place* project with its identification of an "I, not Maximus, but a citizen of Lambeth" (11) and characterisation of his work as

<div style="text-align:center;">an essay</div>

    in fragments   that brought together

        bring about their own symmetry

    their own chaos. (9)

Olson is certainly a presence in *Lud Heat*, he provides an epigraph - "life, /with a capital F'" suggesting a poetry immersed in life - and is name-checked in the essay on Stan Brakhage (57, 119). Ed Dorn's, Olson-inspired injunction in *North Atlantic Turbine* for British poets to escape inherited constructions of space by "naming themselves and the rocks" (Dorn 41) provides an obvious background to the section on John Ford that contains the lines:

    the city is not like *The Searchers*

        strangers

rush the frame & clutter the composition (90-91)

However, read as narrative *Lud Heat* is less an application of Olson's projective credo than an account, in part at least, of its protagonist's failure to write such poetry. The journal entries and lyric sections, describe the frustration of the poet's desire "to construct a more generous sentence" (94), his inability to achieve that consonance with his environment which, for example, he sees and envies in the poet Chris Torrance's "neat fast physical descriptions" and "elasticity of vision/ deepest/ confession of ecstasy" (65). At some level, we are to understand, this failure is due to the malign influence of the Hawksmoor churches which seem to follow the poet across London as he tends the parks, cemeteries and other public places of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in the 11 months between May 1974 and April 1975. Instead of an Olsonesque identification of poet and place, the poem thus describes the poet's growing consciousness of his antagonistic relationship with his environment expressed in his "Theory of Hayfevers" and culminating in the sunstroke he suffers while eating his packed lunch in the churchyard of St Anne Limehouse. Instead of identification with place the poem charts a sense of possession by occult powers. In opening himself up to the world of mid-1970s London the poet finds the "Heat" commemorated in the title too much to bear. Its final lines seem to have been lifted from a Gothic novel: "So again we service the dead, complete the stifled gesture, grasp at the arm raised in salute from the choked ground" (141).

Lines which directly contravene Olson's demand that poetry leave the past behind in order to concentrate on the matter of living.[39] It is no coincidence that the final section of the poem should be a prose postscript dated 24/7/75 - i.e. outside of the period identified in the title, for the prose sections effectively provide the lyric and journal entries with a narrative plot centred on the Hawksmoor churches. For this reason, *Lud Heat* has a far more novelistic character than Fisher's unfinishable investigation of the same areas.

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[39] Articulated, for example in a 1951 letter to Robert Creeley: "And had we not, ourselves (I mean postmodern man), better just leave such things behind us - and not so much trash of discourse & gods?" (*Collected Poems* 79).

Overlying and containing the Olsonesque sections the elaborate occult schema centred on the Hawksmoor churches, thus seems to problematize the poetic affiliation of the lyric sections. For this reason *Lud Heat* effectively resembles a failed *Künstlerroman* in that it is a work which describes its own failure to come into being - a failure marked in the inter-title which identifies the work as "Book 1" - thereby signalling its incompletion with a stifled gesture to an absent second book.

Thus, while the interplay of poetry and prose may be formally familiar from earlier encounters between the long poem and the city, in *Lud Heat* their interplay complicates the dynamics of the poem's American inheritance. Here the juxtaposition of poetry and prose does more than mimic the variety of the "cluttered physical collage of urban space", it also amplifies the uncertainty and indeterminacy of the poem as a whole, raising a number of questions about the relationship between the separate elements in the work. Is the prose to be read as an explication of the poetry?[40] Is "the narrator" (96) to be identified as the author of the essays, the journal entries and the free verse? Are they to be identified with Sinclair, or is *Lud Heat* better read as a form of dramatic monologue, or generic mutation, with the Olsonian project being relativized by an other figuration of the city? In raising these questions the mixture of poetry and prose provides the poem with its epistemological drama and its most clearly modernist aspect: the tension between the compulsion to resolve chaos into order, on the one hand, and, on the other, its apparent unease about the status of any order produced by that compulsion.

This tension between the search for pattern within the city's manifest contingency, and anxiety about the city as a site of signifying excess is explicitly marked even in the more expository sections such as the lengthy opening essay, "Nicholas Hawksmoor; his churches" which provides a "brief and nervy synopsis" (21) of the Hawksmoor material and, given its position in the text, seems to present itself as the interpretive schema through which we should read the rest of the poem. In the essay we are told that the eight churches for whose location Hawksmoor, as surveyor and architect, was directly responsible together mark out a "major pentacle star" (15), which also incorporates other cardinal points in London's topography including the

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[40] According to Sinclair the prose sections were completed after the poetry (Jackson 97).

British Museum and Greenwich Observatory: "The locked cellar of words, the labyrinth of all recorded knowledge, the repository of stolen fires and symbols, excavated god forms - and measurement, star knowledge, time calculations" (15). The constellation mapped by the churches can then be extended to take in Bunhill Fields, effectively the dissenter's Westminster Abbey, "plague pit, burial place of William Blake, Daniel Defoe, John Bunyan" (15), and on to incorporate a variety of other "subsystems".

The intricacy of the web of buried spatial energy thus plotted, however, is less interesting than the pronominal dance of the paranoid subject registered in the essay's constant shifts between assertion and discovery, conjecture and revelation. In this the subject exploits the ambiguity of the essay as a form which is at once authoritative and speculative, folding its mobility of viewpoint back into the public space in whose construction it was, historically, such an important agent, in order to ground in fact an assertion which can only be comfortably entertained as a conceit. Sinclair constantly exploits the impersonality of the form in order to try its own credence against its assertions - "what we are talking about is not accident" (14), and again, "We must examine the detail" (15) - in preparation for huge leaps of imaginative transformation: "The power remains latent, the frustration mounts on a current of animal magnetism, and victims are still claimed" (15). These (un)easy shifts between speculation, suggestion and assertion express the dynamic of a consciousness caught up in the movement of its own conjectures, watching with a mixture of excitement and disbelief as the world arranges itself around its suppositions. The general indeterminacy of this process is registered in the auxiliary verb "can" in the following sentences: "We can mark out the total plan of churches on the map and sift the meanings. We can produce the symbol of Set, instrument of castration or tool for making cuneiform signs" (16). And again in the uncertain nature of the word "possible" here and the weight of conjecture carried by the verb "did": "From what is known of Hawksmoor it is possible to imagine that he did work a code in the buildings, knowingly or unknowingly, templates of meaning, bands of continuing ritual" (17).

Where the moral embrace of the first person plural shapes the space of Movement verse, Sinclair's terrain is given form in the opening essay by the idea that the ley line

acts as a link between the spatial and narrative sense of plot by providing a key to the coding and decoding of the topography of London as a signifying system. Once a ley line, or "line of escape" (17), is set in motion by its passage through two significant points, it will transform everything it subsequently touches into new data, discovering hidden causalities and occluded relationships in the city's contingencies: "The web is printed on the city and disguised with multiple superimpositions" (16-17). The lines so constructed are spatial, but also temporal, for in Sinclair's scheme "[e]ach church is an enclosure of force, a trap, a sight block, a raised place, with an unacknowledged influence over events created within the shadow-lines of their towers" (20). The unacknowledged influence selects any violent crime in their shadow-line as confirmation of that influence, and the events so selected stretch from the Ratcliffe Highway "slaughter" of 1811 to "the battering to death of Mr Abraham Cohen, summer 1974, on Cannon Street Road" and, of course, include that staple of London noir, the "Jack the Ripper" murders of 1888: the "whole karmic programme of Whitechapel" which "moves around the fixed point of Christ Church" (21-22). The spatial and temporal in turn become textual as the essay pursues the traces of this "unacknowledged influence" into Blake's visions in *Jerusalem* and the prose style of Thomas De Quincey's account of the Ratcliffe Highway murder in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*: "digressing obsessively towards overlapping versions of the truth, [he] couldn't help getting in among the authentic substrata. Unconsciously he offers hieroglyphs, disguised and smudged Egyptian ritual detail" (23). Ultimately, once it is set in motion, everything can be interpreted in light of this pattern. Confirmation of his "hunch" that sites of the churches are related via earlier burial sites to "the four Egyptian protector-goddesses, guardians of the canopic jars" (28) takes the form of the bout of sunstroke contracted at Limehouse church - guarded in his scheme by Selkis, the scorpion goddess "associated with the scorching heat of the sun" (28).

However, the natural limits of this paranoid style become apparent when, after a detailed description of the layout of St Anne and its relation to Egyptian ruins, the narrator, as if chastened by the weight of evidence he has uncovered, pulls up short:

> The speed of the track increases and information fattens to excess. It is the
> greasy slope of madness, time-bends, over-stimulated blood hooks at the high

air. Blake is too bright to be looked into - even at this distance. The whole structure becomes top-heavy and falls beyond control. Mark out a possible ground-plan for further and more calmly detailed studies. Speak of the excitement that is still there. Acknowledge energy. (36-7)

The "excess" of meaning which opens out onto "the greasy slope of madness" reveals the pathology inherent within the charting instinct. In this instance it marks the recognition that the patterns of significance generated in the attempt to bring order to chaos can assume an autonomy which threatens that of the ordering consciousness, plunging it back into chaos. Clearly an interpretative system which can endow a "goat and several collections of chickens" (29) kept in the back gardens of the houses surrounding St. Anne Limehouse with a ritual significance is too powerful as an interpretative schema: in generating meaning, it returns everything to noise.

In this dramatization of the pathological dynamic at work in the transformations of signal and noise, *Lud Heat* extends and complicates William Paulson's account of the role of difficulty in literature discussed above ("Literature, Complexity, Interdisciplinarity"). The difficulty of *Lud Heat* lies not so much in the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the verse fragments - the noisy element of traditional modernist poetics - but in the prose, which, here, itself seems to constitute an adaptive reading strategy, a determination to impose order regardless of the psychic cost. Extended over 141 pages the effect of this textual dynamic is queasy and vertiginous: the journal excerpts and fragmentary lyrics deny the reader the critical distance required to contextualize the narrative which appears to describe a progressive mental breakdown, while the prose sections, instead of providing context or perspective, reinforce that sense of breakdown through their relentless over-determination. *Lud Heat*, in other words, exploits the dynamic relations between signal and noise to convey the claustrophobic sense of city life as an interpretive crisis, of city life as immersion in a semiotic economy where adjustment requires the right degree of selection and filtering: an environment whose illegibility is a function of both illiteracy and over-literacy.

The anxiety about the status of the order the poem conjures into being is amplified by uncertainties of register and genre. Tonally, *Lud Heat* veers from the authentically

lyrical to mock oracular to just plain portentous.[41] Its generic instability is signalled in the sub-title - "*A book of dead Hamlets*" - which, in addition to its topographic reference to the borough where it is set, gestures simultaneously to the Egyptian Book of the Dead and to the pin-up boy of Western melancholic introspection, (and possibly, given its concern with the detritus of mid-70s London and culture, a well-known brand of cheap cigar).[42]

It is tempting to see Sinclair's ostentatious deployment of the ideas of occult patterning at the outset of his poem as an extension and terminus to the modernist experimentation with what T.S. Eliot termed "the mythic method" (177)[43] - the use of inherited structures and narrative paradigms as devices to give a form to the contingency of modernity. Where *Ulysses* deploys the narrative framework of the *Odyssey* to structure the random wanderings of a schoolteacher and an advertising canvasser in Dublin, Sinclair ransacks the Abacus catalogue for an esoteric equivalent to Joyce's Homeric scaffolding. However, any reading which attempts to naturalize *Lud Heat* as a late modernist epistemological fable is problematised by its generic heterogeneity and Sinclair's own frequently affirmed commitment to the reality of his unreal city - his conviction that the bands of continuing ritual at work in contemporary London traced in his poem are more than a simple conceit.[44] As Karl Miller notes in his review quoted on the cover of the Granta edition, "Sinclair means his dark stuff". *Lud Heat*, in other words confronts the reader with a spatial problem and any reading must address its refusal to quarantine its sacralizing impulse within

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[41] The mock oracular and just plain portentous elements are most evident in the "The Vortex of the Dead! The Generous!" section. "It was his pleasure and his duty to speak to the visitors who recrossed the seas in ancestor pilgrimage" (100-101).

[42] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIckHmwZAeI&feature=related accessed 21.07.11.

[43] "In manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe that Mr. Yeats to have been first contemporary to be conscious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythic method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art" (Eliot 177-178).

[44] See, for example, http://www.forteantimes.com/features/interviews/37/iain_sinclair.html accessed 21.07.11.

the secular enclosure of art, to reduce the occult to aesthetic strategy. The fact that Sinclair "means his dark stuff" confronts us with the darkness of meaning within a postmodern poetics.

"These facts fade. The big traffic slams by": art in absolute and abstract space

As an encounter between the long poem and the big city, then, *Lud Heat* is recognizably modernist in its exploration of the tension between imposed order and revealed meaning, and typically modernist too in its deployment of resistance to imitate the semiotic confusion of the urban environment within the text. Unusually, however, it is the promotion of occult patterning within the prose sections rather than the indeterminacy of the poetry that generates the greatest resistance insofar as it troubles the familiar partitioning of discursive space which ordains that the occult should remain within its genre; should remain, as a conceit, framed by the secular discourse of art. The noise of *Lud Heat*, in other words, alerts us to the awkward co-existence of two kinds of space within the semiotic economies of city and text. To further demarcate these spaces and their modes of historical and discursive interrelation, we can usefully draw upon the distinction between absolute and abstract space described by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* first published in French in 1974.

In Lefebvre's terms, Sinclair's primary concern in *Lud Heat* is with mapping absolute space, that is with a space which, originally derived from features of the natural landscape, comes to be invested with symbolic meaning. Most obviously spaces such as these include churches, cemeteries and other sacred sites, but places such as crossroads, gallows or market places can also function as types of absolute space. Absolute space is distinguished by the fact that once invested with a symbolic meaning and thus separated from the spatial continuum (*Production of Space* 48), it serves to organise or structure that continuum (234). This occurs within cities, which Lefebvre suggests, tend to be generated from fragments of absolute space. However, the notion of absolute space is also crucial to the role of the city within the wider

spatial economy in that, as concentrations of power and information, cities organise their surroundings both physically and symbolically:

> The city state thus establishes a fixed centre by coming to constitute a hub, a privileged focal point, surrounded by peripheral areas which bear its stamp. From this moment on, the vastness of pre-existing space appears to come under the thrall of a divine order. At the same time the town seems to gather in everything which surrounds it, including the natural and the divine, and the earth's evil and good forces. (*Production of Space* 235)

Grounded in absolute space, Lefebvre's city is both real and symbolic: it presents itself as an image of the universe, or *imago mundi* (235) which organises a spatial economy in which everybody knows their place. It is this vision of the city that Sinclair registers in the skyline punctured by Hawksmoor churches - a city of parishes where the secular and sacred topographies appear to coincide and it is this city he attempts to map through the use of ley lines, which, as we have noted, serve as a plotting device that link topographical and textual space.

According to Lefebvre, absolute space is displaced by the emergence of an abstract or secular space in the cities of twelfth-century Europe as a result of the commercial revolution instigated by the development of primitive capitalism. Whereas in the feudal period, the "basis of wealth was still real property, ownership of the land" the advent of primitive capitalism in Medieval Europe "brought commerce inside the town and lodged it at the centre of a transformed urban space" (265). For Lefebvre the emergence of this new kind of space is consequent on the relationship between accumulation and Logos:

> The space that emerged in Western Europe in the twelfth century, gradually extending its sway over France, England, Holland and Italy, was the space of accumulation - its birthplace and cradle. Why and how? Because this secularized space was the outcome of the revival of the Logos, and the Cosmos, principles which were able to subordinate the "world" with its underground forces. Along with the Logos and logic, the Law too was re-

established, and contractual (stipulated) relationships replaced customs, and customary exactions. (263)

Insofar as the abstract space, predicated on the abstraction and fungibility of value, was dependent on contractual relations it was thus intimately bound with the authority of the written - and hence transportable - sign. As such, at a fundamental level, abstract and absolute space represent the opposition of the written and the spoken; the authority of speech and the power of the word.

In Lefebvre's psychoanalytically informed account, abstract space, the space of the Logos, of contract and calculation, does not replace absolute space, but drives it into a feminized underground which is defined in opposition to abstract space as the space of speech: "Religious space did not disappear with the advent of commercial space; it was still - and indeed would long remain - the space of speech and knowledge" (266). Thus, for Lefebvre, as for Sinclair, the modern European city contains two radically different kinds of space whose relationship is figured in almost identical terms. Thus when Sinclair writes, "These facts fade. The big traffics slam by. A work ethic buries ancient descriptions" (26), it reads like a stenographic version of Lefebvre's:

> Even today urban space appears in two lights: on the one hand it is replete
> with places which are holy or damned, devoted to the male principle or the
> female, rich in fantasies or phantasmagorias; on the other hand it is rational,
> state-dominated and bureaucratic, its monumentality degraded and obscured
> by traffic of every kind, including the traffic of information. It must therefore
> be grasped in two different ways: as absolute (apparent) within the relative
> (real). (231)

For both writers the burial is physical (new buildings replace old), cultural, (contractual relations replace customary relations), and, particularly for Lefebvre, psychological: absolute space comes to occupy the position of the repressed, a position which he describes as heterotopical:

> With the dimming of the "world" of shadows, the terror it exercised lessened
> accordingly. It did not however disappear. Rather it was transformed into

"heterotopical" places, places of sorcery and madness, places inhabited by demonic forces - places which were fascinating but tabooed. (263)

Adopting Lefebvre's terminology, the prose sections in *Lud Heat* can be characterized as explorations of the heterotopical spaces of topography and culture. In "Rites of Autopsy", an account of Stan Brakhage's film *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* shot on location in the Allegheny Coroners Office, the cadaver with the "awful revelation of meat" acts as heterotopia. The conflation of body and city as forms of absolute space underwritten by the idea of the city as *imago mundi* is explicit: in this "confrontation of the body's most deeply held fears. We move down into the very heart of the city labyrinth, breaking the first seal" (54). The most extended and explicit encounter with the dimensions of absolute space occurs in the essay "From Camberwell to Golgotha" - an account of his visits to sculptor Brian Catling's exhibition at the Camberwell Art School in June 1974. Opposing the sculptor's understanding of absolute space to that of the "art fanciers who stroll through" (78), the essay describes how Catling works with a vision of "architectonic wholeness . . . total invention . . . not small, isolated artefacts, but a sense that the sculptor has managed to realise one detail from a whole that goes to the horizon and beyond" (81). Like absolute space itself, Catling's artefacts organize space as a totality, a space which extends from the enclosure of Camberwell art school to Dorchester, from the city into the country and into the earth. The section is itself structured as a form of double chamber with the account of a visit to Catling's exhibition in Camberwell - predicting "the emotion I will feel in Dorchester, the following February" (79) where, revising his notes he receives "from the sculptor in the city" (82) an account of his expedition to St Anne, Limehouse dated February 7, 1975. This narrative chamber within a chamber takes us into the crypt of St Anne and also the spatial perception of the sculptor:

This place is also like the pyramids, the isolation here is total and with candles it even looks like one of those early prints of the discovery of the king's [sic] gallery. Dead geometric persistence. What the masonry holds beyond decayage. Compressed, the fear of form. (86)

What Brakhage and Catling offer Sinclair are images of artists who have successfully incorporated absolute space into their media. Brackhage's art is depicted in terms of the artist's self-sacrifice: "We are seeing something old, but corrupted. Not performed in a sacred state of grace, to high purpose - it becomes through Brakhage's sacrifice, grace-filled" (57). Eschewing the "spurious search for 'originality'" (77) the sculptor's engagement with the qualities of space itself offers the poet a vision of the pre-abstract space produced by unalienated labour: "The eye/hand relation is brotherly. The sculptor is at ease constructing an oven or beating out a ritual weapon. The incantations he chants are the natural sounds of these hill ridges" (81).

For the protagonist of *Lud Heat*, this ability to place art in relation to absolute space remains a problem, and, read as a failed *Künstlerroman*, *Lud Heat* is partly about the desire to write such a poetry in London and the impossibility of doing so. The intimations of artistic crisis ripple through the text, and that the narrator's non-specific sense of dread articulated through Hawksmoor's churches reflects his recognition of the historical impossibility of the projective project - of developing a verse which is true to its immediate location. The spoken space of a speech-based poetry invoked by Olson, is tied to the lost heterotopic geography of London's absolute space. A geography which is overwritten by the imperatives of abstract space: "A work ethic buries ancient descriptions". The space of a poetry integrated into life, has been usurped by Max Weber's spirit of capitalism. The space of open poetry has been taken over by the city's own communicative system for the abstract space which defines the poet's environment is in Lefebvre's terms the space of network:

> The space which established itself during the Middle Ages, by what ever means it did so, whether violent or no, was by definition a space of exchange and communications, and therefore of networks. What networks? In the first place, networks of overland routes: those of traders, and those of pilgrims and crusaders . . . The communications network was simply the physical reflection - the natural mirror as it were - of the abstract and contractual network which bound together the "exchangers" of products and money. (266)

The distinction between absolute and abstract space is thus critical to the poetics of *Lud Heat* as an attempt to find a place for poetry within the space of abstraction and informs the poem at a much more fundamental level.

"[I]n there for the duration": poetry as workplace

This concern with the difficulty of placing poetry in a social and political context
is signalled from the outset in the poem's dedication to Sinclair's fellow
workers, "Joe, Arthur, Bill and the others who are in there for the duration" (7). At
once a statement of solidarity and separation, the dedication articulates the ambiguous
relationship between "the narrator" (96) and the world he describes, amplifying the
profound sense of spatial unease within the poem and transferring that to the poem as
an artefact. Positioned at the work's textual and ontological threshold, the dedication
registers an awareness that, as artefact, the poem marks the poet's exclusion from
a space of collective labour. The diegetic "there" tropes simultaneously on the
traditional idea of art's ability to confer immortality upon its subjects, and the idea
that, as the objects of both textual and capitalist economies, as characters and
unskilled manual labourers, "Joe, Arthur, Bill and the others" lack the reflective
consciousness to escape their objectified condition, and, consequently, are condemned
to endure "the duration" of those whose time is never their own. However, the fact
that the space of labour is, in this instance, both a garden and the final vestige of the
public sphere further complicates the poet's exclusion from the spaces articulated
through the poem.

The entanglement of those spaces is already evident in the aspirant gardener's first
meeting with the foreman, "Mr L. Wood, the red, vein-faced, Geordie boss-man" (39)
who warns of "'rough and ready language'" (39) and claims a geographical solidarity
with the narrator on the basis that his fellow workers are "not friendly like us
northerners" (39). This gesture of inclusion in the community of outsiders is an
unwelcome reminder of the narrator's exclusion - in geographical and, more
importantly, social terms - from the ground on which he wants to "construct a more
generous sentence" (94), the world in which he wants to locate his art. The "Geordie
boss-man" thus stands as the sign of a more general bad-faith that frustrates that
ambition of generosity: he reminds us that, whatever the narrator's post code, *Lud
Heat* belongs to the long tradition of writing which exoticises the East End: its

apocalyptic vision of rats swarming over St Anne a distant echo of Jack London's image of the peopled abyss. While the characters are "in there for the duration", the narrator is merely down there on a visit.

The suture marked in the dedication informs the representation of space throughout the poem. Where the spires of Hawksmoor's churches articulate a lost world where spiritual and secular topographies coincide, the topography mapped out by the narrator is marked by non-identity. This is most pronounced in the poem's inversion of the spaces of work and home. Whereas the bothy, or hut, the narrator shares with his fellow gardeners is intimate and homely, even drawing Joe back from sick leave into its circle (45), the domestic world is, in contrast, shadowy and alien, a place of "rapid sexual gratification/ in the corridor" (64). Instead of providing a shelter from the outside world, home seems to attract the forces which diminish the narrator's already precarious sense of self, or "egoic grip" (62). Thus, while he tries to write, "in another room the electric serial/ loud & raw/ has taken something from his eye"; whereas work is described in terms of companionship, at home company is reduced to its metonyms "so many call/ so many coffees wines" (42). Even parenthood as the ground of identity and provider of direction seems under threat: "look: with/ my daughter's dungarees they give you a compass" (60).

The social/sexual disorientations evident in the inversion of the spaces of work and home are amplified by the park's uneasy place within the geography of intimacy. In the poem this is further reinforced by the dog handler from the menacingly indeterminate "brown sex police" (43), who patrols the boundary between public space and private passion. Presenting himself as "part of some more massive & paternal scheme" (43) the dog handler "caresses his images" and his lurid tales of "Miltonic banishment" (44) are marked by their projected sexual violence: "A swift tongue of lust flicks through his yarns" (43). The intrusion of the dog handler with his serpentine language reveals the park to be that abstract form of the absolute space of the garden:

> These urgencies. Sharpest imperatives & oldest instincts are broken into.
> Citizen's privileges upon their own ground are destroyed. The open lands are
> chained & bolted. The handler pets & fondles his wolf. (44)

The oldest instincts, the poem makes clear, include not only sex but any creative engagement with being and as such the chains and bolts include those instituted by *The Parks Department Manual* handed him by the foreman which contains "such nuggets as:

> *7. Writing of Books. While occasional literary or artistic work is permissible, special consideration would have to be given for the writing of books for payment on subjects relating to an Officer's or employee's work for the Council.'* (39)

The easy comedy generated by clumsy bureaucratic attempts to regulate artistic production should not disguise the seriousness of the poem's concern with the relationship between writing and labour, poetry and belonging and the different kinds of space opened up by different forms of discourse.

Finding a space for poetry involves the reconciliation of two incommensurable forms of temporality: the flash of poetic perception and the routinized response demanded by abstract labour:

> - rake the sandpit of dead flies
> - cut off the signalling of groundsel
> - find yellow surprising (49)

The desire to write his "more generous sentence" measures the narrator's unease in spatial terms, for his inability to accommodate reflects his inability to achieve that level of belonging and possession which is a precondition of generosity. But the spatial is also temporal insofar as the generosity of the sentence he desires to construct chimes in turn with the heresy of Origen invoked at the beginning of that section: the "unlikely hope" (92) that the damned will burn for a fixed term, rather than eternity, and hence echoes once again the "duration" of the dedication. The poet figures himself as providing access to the temporality of redemption: the flash of perception which will open up another temporality within the, administered time of labour:

he has a car (Ford Capri, GT)

but asks often for the time

& that becomes my function (50-51)

The poet can be figured as the giver of time because the flash of sudden perception which breaks through patterns of routinized response is only possible through the noise of poetic diction. But fulfilling that function, writing a poetry which can disrupt the logic of commodification and rediscover the surprise of yellow, entails finding a place for poetry within the world of abstract space. In this desire to integrate poetry into the rhythms of labour the poet confronts the problem that "it is what we don't notice/ that is worth remarking, & without insistence" (51), that the recorded perception is already devalued.

In this we recognize the familiar articulation of "the poetic" as a means of disrupting routine perception, of the poetic as noise. However the poet's desire to achieve a more generous sentence a sentence which can accommodate the abstract space of labour and commodification and thereby ameliorate the sentence of those who are "in there for the duration" is subjugated or blocked by the writing of Hawksmoor: his attempt to be in the here of breath and voice is blocked by the perception that his "here" is the city as Hawksmoor's text, a city of signs.

> The old maps present a skyline dominated by church towers; those horizons
> were differently punctured, so that the subservience of the grounded eye, and
> the division of the city by parish, was not disguised. Moving now on an
> eastern arc the churches of Nicholas Hawksmoor soon invade the
> consciousness, the charting instinct. (13)

Hawksmoor's skyline signals both the presence and inaccessibility of absolute space because it points to the city as the construction of the abstract space of the sign. If the poet cannot simply open his verse to the space in which he finds himself, it is, the poem suggests, because that space has been already textualised by the writing and re-writing of Hawksmoor: "He had that Coleridge notebook speed, to rewrite the city: man, recognising some distillation of his most private urges in the historical present,

is suddenly, and more than anybody around him *there* - had more to say than the 8 churches could use" (14). He is a writer moreover with a vision of the city as a form of order in chaos. Sinclair quotes Hawksmoor's letter to Dr George Clarke "'we have noe City, nor Streets, nor Houses, but a Chaos of Dirty Rotten Sheds, always tumbling or taking fire . . .'" (14). But in imposing his vision of the city onto this chaos he gives London its modern form through the use of "risky quotations" (14) from pre-classical architecture. The quotations are risky for ecclesiastical architecture, but also because they import the language of form into London. Unlike his more patrician mentor Christopher Wren, Hawksmoor never travelled to Europe to view the masterpieces of European baroque *in situ*. Instead he ransacked the burgeoning architectural literature for examples from an eclectic range of pre-classical architecture, reflecting Europe's developing Orientalism. Hawksmoor's "risky quotations" from Egyptian monuments are thus doubly disconcerting - they import motifs from the pre-classical world into modern London and they do so through textual transmission, through the transmission of print. Hawksmoor's skyline thus speaks of Britain's emerging imperial/Orientalist reach and its difficulty in articulating its national identity over and against the architectural language of power in Europe. But it also indicates the role of writing as a distinctly urban technology. With the transmission of images from Ancient Egypt, London inscribes itself within a system of cities - international but also inter-epochal.

In this suggestion that the city has not only been textualised by Hawksmoor, but that his rewriting of London contains messages that he does not understand, that his writing, or citation, is the unwitting vector of a message from older cities, Sinclair introduces the idea of the parasite, of the writer as host, which recurs in various forms in the text, most obviously in the narrator's sense of being doubled by R.L. Stevenson who is also presented as a channel for the double aspect of London:

> We stumble into the realisation of a doppelganger principle. The feeling was already present, of a secondary personality developing, Ka assertion, inhabiting this body shell. "Not quite myself today;" I am host to motivations that cannot be understood . . . As the ego breaks I am host to another being, who pushes through and not with the pink tenderness of new skin - but with

old flesh, hard as wood. The earlier "I do not know who I am" virus is confirmed, as this terminal caricature eases out of my face . . . (109-10)

The sense of being doubled by Hawksmoor on the part of the poet leads to a "loss of egoic grip" a sense of himself being lived by other forces:

And worse is to follow. Another of Anna's casually recounted, but vital dreams: that there are two creatures, one is her husband, the supposed protector, who is sitting upstairs in a wicker chair, while the other, also with my face, kicks down the door. Hyle is straining his collar. (110)

For Serres the parasite is the figure of noise because it instigates a shift in the perception of information, it is a reminder that what is noise at one level is information at another. It is this shift that troubles the narrator: the sense that any sense of the here is undone by other imperatives of which he is ignorant. Sinclair's account of the city shows a similar shift in scale, from the individual to the species: "The patients are not individual, are a strata that curves through the alternating times of the earth" (109). One of a series of images where the dissolution of the individual ego opens out onto the perspective of the species, where the ontogenetic yields to the phylogenetic, and even grander flows of energy and matter: "We are invaded by a virus bearing the message of the stars" (110). Thus we are reminded that from the perspective of the species, the individual is only interesting by virtue of its errors, its genetic noise. Natural selection teaches that "it is only our faults we have to offer" (103); and again, "the pages/ of his script/ are individually handed out/ we stumble through/ 'walk on by'" (93). Similarly from the phylogenetic perspective "Death is the fuel we are using up; its smell not unlike petroleum" (105) a perception which relates us directly to the Hawksmoor skyline which was paid for by a tax on the coal imported into the city to meet its energy needs.

More importantly however, *Lud Heat* shifts scale in terms of its poetic practice: it effectively undergoes a form of generic mutation so that the poet becomes a character in his own poem which ends up looking more like a novel, thanks to its mythologisation of London. Like the Victorian novel, *Lud Heat* provides an interface with the city but it is an interface which explores the dynamic, mutually constitutive

relationship between city, consciousness and text. In confronting us with the noise of the occult and the difficulty of making sense of "outmoded" beliefs within a modern secular environment *Lud Heat* confronts us with the difficulty of accommodating secular and sacred topographies within the same spatial language.

A text which registers this incommensurability or disagreement must fracture the community of which it is itself a part, the community of genre or mode, of poetry itself. Formally, this strain is registered at numerous points in the text. The shift between the meditative, confessional intimacy of the free verse section which concludes with a quote from Rimbaud: "'*j'ensevelis les morts dans mon ventre*'" (95) and the bombast and uneasy comedy of the mock-heroic prose of the following section announced with the title, "THE VORTEX OF THE DEAD! THE GENEROUS!"[45] provides a particularly marked example. Here the open-field, ambiguous, multilayered confessional text abuts a parodically monomaniacal voice that literally screams its paranoid vision at the reader. Formally, this juxtapositon may seem fairly unremarkable: the division between, on the one side a text which seems to ask to be read as lyric and on the other a text which might be read as problematising that request - is familiar enough. The juxtaposition of these two voices as the lyric and the satiric - works to ironize and thus destabilize any fixed perspective within the poem in a manner familiar from classic modernist texts such as *The Waste Land, The Cantos, Ulysses,* etc. etc. Formally it inserts a gap between any perspective within the work and that of the work as a totality which we, as readers have no problem in identifying as the indeterminacy that constitutes the work of art. So there is no difficulty in reading across that border and recuperating the formal break within a conventionally poetic economy - of treating "The Vortex of the Dead" as a metaphor for the organizing power of myth, for example. However, as Fisher's letter attests, there are real problems with resolving these two versions of the poetic - the multilayered, ambiguous and open, on the one hand, and the monomaniacal and

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[45] "The Vortex of The Dead" seems to be a reference to the theory first expounded in 1911 by Russian "heliobiologist" Alexander Chizhevsky that human behaviour, and hence human history, are directly influenced by solar cycles, so that solar-storms or peaks in sun-spot activity coincide with upsurges in violence and an intensification of international conflict. Chizhevsky was sent to a Gulag by Stalin in 1947 for promoting this theory but it has continued to circulate being resurrected most recently by Raymond Wheeler, at the University of Kansas whose work informs the apocalyptic predictions focused on 2012.

paranoid on the other - within the same frame. Alongside the familiar version of poetry as a relatively open field of signification we are confronted with a version of poetry as a compulsion to impart a particular vision which the sharer knows will isolate him or her from their community. It identifies the poetic with a desire to confess a vision which will lead to the speaker's rejection by the community that validates his or her language. It is a formal division that in effect presents an alternative version of the poetic as a language that simultaneously reveals the interdependence of individual and community, ego and collective, and puts that relationship at risk.

The juxtapositions of these voices within *Lud Heat* present us with two versions of the poetic whose relationship is dissensual, which won't add up or be contained in a single frame: on the one side a poetic which is plural and multivalent, on the other a poetic which is mantic or "vaticinal" - which points to an aporetic dimension within the poetic as a form of communication which dissolves community: a sharing which produces separation. It's this dissensual aspect of Sinclair's un/poetic that is registered in Fisher's concern about the extent to which Sinclair "means" his metaphors. Fisher is troubled by Sinclair's literalism, his insistence on the matter of his mythology, and suggestion that buildings actually generate energy, and his letter registers the ways in which *Lud Heat's* literalism disturbs the proper relationship between the poetic and the mythic described by Eliot's insistence that the "mythic method" is "a way of making the modern world possible *for* art". For Eliot in other words myth is an operative principle, a mechanism for rendering coherent that which would otherwise be incoherent. In this it implicitly identifies the proper relationship of poetry to myth as one of subordination. Poetry contains myth as a gesture towards a lost coherence. It points to a lost moment of plenitude, a fiction of origin. And as such myth functions as the sign of signs, of an absent that engenders the present of modernity.

Consequently, in disturbing that proper relationship between poetry and myth, by presenting versions of the poetic which refuse to occupy the same frame, Sinclair is also, implicitly challenging that modernist narrative about the relationship of (fragmented) present to (organic) past and (alienated) society to (immanent) community. In effect, by refusing to treat myth as the sign of absence, of a lost

immanence, he is pointing to the ways it continues to operate in producing immanence in the form of essentialised communities.

This concern with the operation of community is evident in the content of Sinclair's mythic method. Informing *Lud Heat*'s occult topography is the fact that "The Romans regarded East London not as a place for the living but as a necropolis for the dead" (27). This fact serves as a reminder of the important relation of funerary rites to the construction of community. As Jean Luc Nancy (1991) has argued, funerary rituals are how communities essentialise themselves, and take control of the perception of finitude by which they are constantly threatened. Rituals are in Nancy's terms a machinery for the playing back of immanence. An idea echoed in Sinclair's description of Hawksmoor's churches: "We are pushed towards the notion of these churches as Temples; and as cult centres. Courts and gardens where the living communicate with the dead and receive wisdom from them". (28)

In this sense *Lud Heat* becomes an excavation or recovery of the connection between community and the production of death, a connection which, although forgotten beneath the abstract space and time of capital, remains, as we have seen, inscribed in London's topography: "These facts fade. The big traffics slam by. A work ethic buries ancient descriptions" (26). The boundaries marked out by the pattern of Hawksmoor churches are in this sense then typical of boundaries in general. They are the lines through which community reproduces itself as the same through the production of an Other, an other whose repeated murder is performed in ritual. And, as the point of entry for successive populations of immigrants, East London is the area where the management of the border is most acute and where the dangers from essentialised notions of community as "blood-land" (47) are consequently always nearest the surface.

Lud Heat registers the actuality of this concern in its depictions of the crumbling welfare state -"who will pay the surgeon" "rats scale the rubbish on the South Downs" (94) - and by carefully recording the electoral triumph of the recently founded, whites-only political party, the National Front in the neighbouring borough of "Hackney South & Shoreditch" (130).

In other words, myth as an essentialising force for group cohesion is still very much operative in East London in 1974. And Sinclair's mythic topography effectively transforms myth from a signifier of rupture and absence into the marker of the intimate connections between immanence and violence which persists in the contemporary political landscape.

Where Victorian novelists sought to provide an overview of the new social reality of the industrial city and modernist writers sought to involve the reader in the active production of meaning, Sinclair in *Lud Heat* performs a generic mutation: invoking a space which is fundamentally topological: where the active consciousness of the poet producer/reader becomes a character in the city which he produces. He thereby reveals the mutual implication of the city in the sign and the sign in the city. Sinclair's subject has abandoned the exclusive communalism of the British Poetry Revival where poet and reader are united in the activity of producing meaning, for a more compromised and complicit existence in the chaotic edges of cultural production, a region where the gated communities of high modernist difficulty are forced to re-engage with the semiotic hoi-polloi of Hawksmoor's "chaos of dirty rotten sheds". The Hawksmoor skyline - part modernist difficulty, part Gothic schlock, and part demotic chaos thus becomes the signature of a new city where the compromise of commodification attendant on any truck with the sign is explored as a constitutive element of the urban rather than denied in the name of community.