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Ghost Storage—Between Archive and Ash: The Case of Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room*

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Abstract: This reading of Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room* (1999) accentuates the tensions within their collaborative work to explore how the text produces alternative versions of the spectral within the global city. The importance of *Rodinsky's Room*, it argues, lies in the fact that it is one of the few texts to demonstrate the necessity of understanding the contemporary metropolis not only as differently cultured but as differently haunted. To this end the article distinguishes between a Freudian 'strategy of time' that identifies the spectre with the displacement of the past by the present and an embryonic 'theory of ghosts' sketched by Adorno and Horkheimer which views ghosts rather as problems of storage within a functionalist economy and relates them thus to a strategy of space. The essay explores the interrelation of these two strategies in Lichtenstein and Sinclair's text which presents itself as both a narrative of the archive and an archive of narratives.

Keywords: spectral cities, memory, archive, diaspora, Holocaust, immigration, globalisation

In a note titled 'On the Theory of Ghosts' collected in the back pages of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972) identify a 'disturbed relationship with the dead—forgotten and embalmed—[as] one of the symptoms of the sickness of experience today' (216). That 'sickness' they attribute to the fact that '[i]ndividuals are reduced to a mere sequence of instantaneous experiences which leave no trace, or rather whose trace is hated as irrational, superfluous, and "overtaken" in the literal sense of the word' (216). They then go on to sound the familiar note of high-modernist nostalgia for an impossible past when, drawing on all the bitterness of their own personal experience of intellectual and geographical displacement, they write:

What a man was and experienced in the past is as nothing when set against what he now is and has and what he can be used for. The well-meaning if threatening advice frequently given to emigrants to forget all their past because it cannot be transferred, and to begin a completely new life, simply represents a forcible reminder to the newcomer of something which he has long since learned for himself. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972: 216)

The thought that modernity makes migrants of us all may be both a critical cliché and an emotional indulgence, but it also registers a moment of instability at the categorical divide between the *a priori*s of space and time which Kant installed as the borders of a Western Logos (Clifford 1994; Lefebvre 1991: 2). As such, the 'Theory of Ghosts' serves a reminder that any attempt to separate the synchronic from the diachronic, to examine the spatial without regard for the temporal, is to summon the ghost of the excluded: that to invoke the one is to be haunted by the other (Huysen 2003: 12).

The beauty of Adorno and Horkheimer's theoretical oddment is that it reverses the normal ontogeny of the haunted house. Whereas we tend to think of hauntedness as marking the refusal of place to submit to the exigencies of function—the resistance of a certain spirit to the claims of the present—Adorno and Horkheimer suggest rather that we are haunted because we live in a space that makes no provision for that which we bring with us. In what is in effect a materialist theory of the immaterial, they suggest that it is the unacknowledgeable despair at the rationalisation of a space which subordinates everything to its own functionality that leads the living to summon up the dead. For the ghost is in Adorno and Horkheimer's view simply the manifestation of an anger at the reduction of experience to functionality which can never be articulated because it evades the categories of rationalised expression.

It is, however, the position of this 'Theory of Ghosts' as a remnant or remainder within Adorno and Horkheimer's treatise which is most striking. For in a world where to be real is to be quantifiable and value is always in terms of value-for-another, the remnant itself becomes one of the most immediate expressions of the spectral. As such the theory as remnant in its own performance of the spectral confronts us methodologically with its own question: what can we *do* with the dead, where can we put their remains, and more generally, how can we bear theoretical or creative witness to the past in a space which has everywhere been rationalised and subordinated to the needs of the present? In this it reminds us that ultimately the problem of ghosts comes down to a problem of storage; as well as stories of possession, ghost stories are stories of possessions, of holding on and letting go.

It is instructive here to contrast this embryonic and seemingly aporetic theory of ghosts with the more familiar and more fully-developed Freudian model of the haunted psyche as it is sketched by Michel de Certeau. As de Certeau points out, the 'strategy of time' invoked by psychoanalysis figures the present as the occupier of a space to which the past, as that which has been repressed, seeks constantly to return. Consequently, says de Certeau, there is 'an "uncanniness" about this past that a present occupant has expelled (or thinks it has) in an effort to take its place' (1984: 3). As a result,

[m]ore generally speaking, any autonomous order is founded upon what it eliminates: it produces a 'residue' condemned to be forgotten. But what was excluded re-infiltrates, it troubles, it turns the present's feeling of being 'at home' into an illusion, it lurks—this 'wild,' this 'ob-scene,' this 'filth,' this 'resistance' of 'superstition'—within the walls of the residence, and, behind the back of the owner (the *ego*), or over its objections, it inscribes there the law of the other. (de Certeau 1986: 3–4)

As a 'strategy of time' the Freudian ghost story turns on a temporal struggle for a space which is understood as constant: the private space of the bourgeois interior whose tasteful furnishings are bought at the expense of neurosis. Adorno and Horkheimer, however, encourage us to think of ghost stories as strategies of space, to attend to the ways that the production of space involves the production of the spectral. In de Certeau's story the possession of a space is defended against a feeling of prior claims to possession, of a home that is threatened by the *unheimlich*. In Adorno and Horkheimer's version the home can never be possessed: it is rendered unhomey by its over-determination by the market of interpersonal relations which insist that being can only be being-for-another. It is tempting to configure these stories around emblematic figures and locations such as the native and the migrant or the home and the hostel, but in this essay I want to examine their confections and transmutations as strategies of space which mark the production of London as a global city which has to be understood not only as differently cultured but as differently haunted.

It is with the tension between these two ghost stories in mind, and how that tension informs our understanding of the globalised city that I want to approach *Rodinsky's Room* (1999), the collaborative work in which writer and film-maker, Iain Sinclair and visual artist Rachel Lichtenstein attempt to explore the significance of the eponymous Rodinsky's room: an abandoned garret in a decommissioned synagogue in the East End of London. It is a text which has already been well served with academic commentary standing as it does at the nexus of critical concerns with diasporic identity, memory studies and London writing. Alex Murray (2007) and Susan Alice Fischer (2001) have both devoted thoughtful essays to the work while the growing recognition of Sinclair's importance as a writer and explorer of the globalised city means that it has figured in commentaries by, among others, Brian Baker (2007), Peter Brooker (2005) and Andrzej Gasiorek (2005). However, perhaps inevitably, the gravitational pull of Sinclair's name on the title page has resulted in the work being read in relation to the novelist's wider oeuvre and concern with urban memory. Fischer is unusual in taking the cue for her encounter with the text from Lichtenstein's 'often manic, yet ultimately very moving, testimony of her attempt to track down David Rodinsky' (2001: 121) and focusing on the creative dimensions of the text. Like most commentators she too notes a tension between Lichtenstein's 'obsessed' relationship with the room and Rodinsky, and Sinclair's more 'cynical' account of the room's significance within the context of "a mythology to underwrite the East End's burgeoning property values" (2001: 124). In this paper my focus is on *Rodinsky's Room* as a text which is less collaborative than one in which different spectres are forced to cohabit, and in whose discordance we can better understand the relationship between the heterological space contained within Rodinsky's room and that of the global city.

Rodinsky's room is located in the garret at 19 Princelet Street in Spitalfields, London. From 1932 to sometime in the late 1960s the room, once a Huguenot weaver's workshop, was home to a family of Jewish immigrants from Kushovata, a shtetl, or small town, in the Pale of Settlement on the periphery of the Czarist empire near Kiev. The mother and father, Haicka and Barnett Rodinsky, had fled persecution in Russia to join the well-established Jewish ghetto in Whitechapel sometime in the 1920s. The father, a tailor, survives only as signature on a birth certificate and a sepia photo. Contemporaries only remember Haicka bringing up two children on her own in the Princelet Street garret: a daughter known variously as Bessie, Bertha or Brendall and a son David, born in 1925. Following the death of Haicka and incarceration of Bessie in the Claybury Mental Hospital, Woodford, North London, David Rodinsky lived in the room alone until he 'disappeared' sometime in the late 1960s. With the dispersal of the East End Jewish community to the suburbs, the synagogue was decommissioned and abandoned, and the room was left untouched for fifteen years until it was 'rediscovered' in 1981. When it was opened, along with Rodinsky's personal effects, his clothes, his wallet, his spectacles case, and 'stiffened pyjamas and fossilized blankets' the room was also found to contain hundreds of heavily annotated books in numerous languages and a vast collection of personal writings scrawled in exercise books, on chocolate wrappers and scraps of paper of every conceivable provenance, again in a variety of living and dead languages (Lichtenstein and Sinclair 2000: 27).¹

Inevitably this *mise en scène* was interpreted as an originary absence that demanded a narrative recuperation. Within the symbolism of urban space this garret that textualises itself became the stuff of local legend, the stuff, that is, of the legend that produces a locality. For as de Certeau observes '[i]t is through the opportunity they offer to store up rich silences and wordless stories, or rather through their capacity to create cellars and garrets everywhere, that local legends (*legend*: what is to be *read*, but also what *can be read*) permit exits, ways of going out and coming back in, and thus habitable spaces' (de Certeau 1984: 106). No longer a synagogue, 19 Princelet Street becomes the perfect place for staging a synagogue, and it is this space that determines what can be read. As a lighting technician working on a production of *The Golem* in the 'deactivated' temple tells Lichtenstein on her first visit: "I heard that when they first opened the room, a mummified cat was found sleeping in [Rodinsky's] bed. There were hundreds of books up there, containing mystical formulas, and it is believed he managed to transport himself out of the rooms without ever leaving." The lighting man leaned closer. "His boots were still there, standing in the corner, filled to the brim with dust" (22).

Lichtenstein and Sinclair, however, are drawn to the room by very different forces and thus encounter two very different *legenda*. For Lichtenstein, the granddaughter of Polish Jewish immigrants, Rodinsky's room is a last remnant of the all-but-vanished Jewish community of the East End into which her grandparents, Gedaliah and Malka Lichtenstein, had settled in the 1930s. For Lichtenstein the room thus represents a connection with her own past, with the 'colourful characters' who had both 'fascinated and terrified' her as a child, and, through them, with the lost traditions of the Ashkenazi. As such, the room is a further means of re-aligning her own diasporic identity with the collective narrative of twentieth-century history, 'the black spider of the holocaust', as Sinclair puts it (86). This process of realignment began, she writes, on the death of her grandfather when she was seventeen: 'When he died I panicked, realizing that with him was buried the key to my heritage. I

became determined not to let it die with him. A week after his death I took the first step towards a reconnection between my past and my present and reclaimed by deed poll the surname Lichtenstein' (19).

In the room and in the name Lichtenstein itself we can thus recognise the lineaments of the *lieux de mémoire*, the realms of memory or 'memory sites', whose existence Pierre Nora suggests is indicative of the destruction of lived tradition by modernity, those sites both physical and symbolic which 'exist because there are no longer any *milieux de mémoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience' (1996: 1). For Lichtenstein, both the room and her name express a sense of the past which is symptomatic of the loss of lived tradition. They are the products of a world where, as Nora writes, echoing Adorno and Horkheimer: 'The equilibrium between the present and past is disrupted. What was left of experience, still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silences of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, has been swept away by a surge of a deeply historical sensibility. [...] Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists' (1996: 1).

A similar perception of spatiality as an expression of a structural disruption of the relation of past to present, is evident in Sinclair's description of Rodinsky's room—the first of many—in a piece he wrote for the *Guardian* in 1988 titled 'The Man who Became a Room' quoted in *Rodinsky's Room*:

Patrick Wright has alerted me to a fable that is acquiring great potency in the amoebic principality of Spitalfields—the myth of the disappearance of David Rodinsky. Rodinsky, a Polish Jew from Piotsk or Lublin or wherever, was the caretaker and resident poltergeist of the Princelet Street synagogue [...]. He perched under the eaves, a crow, unremarked and unremarkable—until that day in the early Sixties when he achieved the great work and became invisible. It is uncertain how many years passed before anyone noticed his absence. He had evaporated, and would remain as dust, his name unspoken, to be resurrected only as a feature, a necessary selling point, to put alongside Nicholas Hawksmoor in the occult fabulation of the zone that the Eighties demanded to justify a vertiginous inflation in property values. (qtd. Lichtenstein and Sinclair 2000: 32)

Unlike Lichtenstein, however, Sinclair's interest lies in the room's function as a nexus of narrative and capital and consequently, its place in the constant reconfiguration of London as a field of energy at once imaginary and real. Despite the dismissive tone of the *Guardian* piece the potency of the fable within Sinclair's text is evident from the frequency of its recurrence, being visited on separate occasions in *Downriver* (1991), *Lights Out For the Territory* (1997), *Dark Lanthorns* (1999), and *Dining on Stones* (2004).

As is clear from Lichtenstein and Sinclair's distinctive lines of approach, Rodinsky's room marks a complex site within the figuration of place and temporality in a postmodern urban topography. In one direction it gestures towards the Holocaust and the question of representation of a time which is irredeemably post-Auschwitz: which, as Huyssen notes, 'has become a cipher for the twentieth century as a whole and for the failure of the project of enlightenment' (2003: 13). In another direction it points to the iconoclastic assault on ideas of community and tradition launched by free-market economics under the banner of Thatcherism in 1980s Britain.

Historically, this fragmentation of narrative is tied to the rise of the archive whose conceptual prominence from the 1990s is due precisely to a perception of the failure of any grand narrative to represent the multiple dimensionality of spaces and texts such as *Rodinsky's Room*. Thus, where the loss of nostalgia for the lost grand narrative defines the postmodern condition for Lyotard (1984: 41), 'the obsession with the archive' is its corollary for Nora:

The less memory is experienced from within, the greater its need for external props and tangible reminders of that which no longer exists except *qua* memory—hence the obsession with the archive that marks an age and in which we attempt to preserve not only all of the past but all of the present as well. The fear that everything is on the verge of disappearing, coupled with anxiety about the precise significance of the present and uncertainty about the future, invests even the humblest of testimony, the most modest vestige, with the dignity of being potentially memorable. (1996: 8)

As such the archive provides an obvious figure through which to read *Rodinsky's Room* as a space of dissensus. Like Rodinsky's room, the archive is another space whose dimensions measure a crisis of temporality. The character of that crisis is identified by Derrida in his essay commemorating the opening of the Freud museum in London when he notes that the archive as *arkheion* is from the outset aporetic. It is aporetic because the word *arkhe* 'names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*': it names both the command to remember, to archive, to keep, and the commencement of an institution of archivization (Derrida 1996: 1). Or, in Dragan Kujundzic's paraphrase: 'Remember: no memory or testimony is possible without the archive! Remember: memory and testimony are possible only without the archive!' (Kujundzic 2003: 166). The commencement of the archive signals the end of memory, the externalisation on a material substrate of what was internal and living for the purpose of preservation. The command to remember is thus the command to let go, to forget. As such the archive is thus always the graphic materialisation of an absence, a trace whose subject is temporality.

The rise of the archive thus signals not only the absence of 'living' tradition but, in historiographical terms, the absence of any narrative grand enough to stitch together past present and future. At the same time it comprehends too a shift in the material substrate of temporality. The narrative in its unilinear progress seems inadequate to contemporary perceptions of spatiality, whereas the archive opens out directly onto cyberspace (Mackenzie 1997). In this situation the plurality and democracy of the archive seems to offer an alternative means of storage and of transmission, preserving the past and the present for an eventual retrieval. However, the very openness of the archive is its limitation. As Nora notes:

Now that historians have abandoned the cult of the document, society as a whole has acquired the religion of preservation and archivalization. What we call memory is in fact a gigantic and breathtaking effort to store the material vestiges of what we cannot possibly remember, thereby amassing an unfathomable collection of things that we might someday need to recall. (Nora 1996: 8)

As the site of memory postponed, even as it promises to preserve, the archive denies the possibility of transmission. For if, as Derrida suggests, the 'archive has always been a pledge, and like every pledge, a token of the future' it is a pledge which can never be honoured (Derrida 1996: 18). Whereas the logic of narrative through the

prospect of closure holds forth the promise of an ending that will retrospectively determine the significance of every incident, the plurality of the archive which is in its very nature unbounded, always admits the possibility of further additions. The archive archives 'the material vestiges' of a departed intention. It archives the material inscription of that intention and the faith in the possibility of transmission. The transmission, however, depends on the technologies of classification and retrieval and these are precisely the technologies thrown into question by the drive to archive. As Derrida points out, the idea that the archive preserves the past is illusory for the archive is constituted through the technologies of classification and retrieval: 'the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event' (Derrida 1996: 17). As such the materialisation of Rodinsky's room as an empty chamber, a room which is not merely empty, but which points, Marie Celeste-like, to its own emptiness, becomes the emblem of the emptiness of the 'material vestige' and of the archive itself. It is full of its own emptiness.

The imperative of an age which is compelled 'not only to keep everything, to preserve every sign (even when we are not quite sure what it is that we are remembering) but also to fill archives' (Nora 1996: 9) is already at work in Rodinsky's room when Lichtenstein arrives upon the scene. The logic of archive has already erased any trace of origin: 'The room no longer existed in its original state, as an abandoned tomb. The room had been dismantled, the contents boxed up by the Museum of London, then taken to storage rooms to dry out in stable conditions before being returned to the synagogue' (27). Lichtenstein, however, invests that logic with a religious force. Confronted by a text without any natural boundary—which literally runs up the walls in faded inscriptions on the wallpaper behind the door and is even inscribed on the piano: 'faint traces of pencil on the ivory keys: strange indecipherable symbols, written in his own hand' (27)—Lichtenstein becomes obsessed with preserving and cataloguing every slightest trace of Rodinsky's presence in the chamber. In the process her fervour works a strange transformation upon the object she collects—archiving produces as much as it records the event. Thus marks, which should naturally be understood in terms of simple use value, once touched by emptiness take on a fetish quality: 'In the centre of the wooden ceiling was a rusty gas lamp, surrounded by a charcoal halo from constant use [...]. The floorboards were bent and cracked next to the enamel sink where I presumed he had washed every day' (27).²

In Lichtenstein's fetishisation of the trace we see how the severance of any organic link between present and past, the loss of those 'ideologies that once smoothed the transition from past to future', effectively sets in train a binary logic for the arbitration of worth. Either everything is worth saving, or nothing is worth saving (Nora 1996: 2). In the absence of any ritual or narratological means of determining what from the past should be preserved, we enter a world structured by the polarities of archive and ash, total recall or total annihilation. In Lichtenstein's text those polarities are literalised in the comedy of the rubbish bags: 'A large amount of Rodinsky's clothes, saucepans, shoes and other personal items were thrown away. I arrived one day to find them bagged up on the street, and sneaked them back upstairs' (28). The shuffling to and fro of garbage bags measures the ontological gulf between the sacred and the profane that must be subsumed within the archive. In a world without saints, everything has the potential to be a contact relic: even a bus

ticket can be sacred. Indeed *Rodinsky's Room* archives this principle itself in the form of the legend of the *lamed vavnik* which Lichtenstein learns is 'a pre-Hasidic myth about the thirty-six righteous men who always live in this world. Their good deeds stop the world from being destroyed. Their power rests on the fact that no one knows who they are or where they live. They do their work in secret and are not rewarded. When they die another is born' (242). Or, in Sinclair's take on the same myth: 'any spittle-flecked ranter might be a millennial messenger' (196).

The comedy of the garbage bags reveals too the intimate association of theology and epistemology. For if we do not know which questions to put to the archive because we do not understand the nature of the mysteries it contains, anything and everything could turn out to be the 'vital' clue (with the implication too that the archive always harbours evidence of crimes yet undiscovered). In both its theological and forensic aspects the archive insists that nothing is immaterial.

As such the archive confronts us with the problem of interpretation, of how to make sense of this compendium born out of the fear of forgetting. Lichtenstein's response to this problem of reading is essentially modernist in its combination of the theological and epistemological. In the fragmented text of *Rodinsky's room* she sees the absence of a human figure and consequently she attempts to make sense of that absence by restoring the missing figure in the form of an authorial intention. After immersing herself in Rodinsky's poly-lingual text which to her seems Joycean in its range, stretching from Irish drinking songs to transcribed jingles, she concludes: 'It was my belief that he was trying to write a book on the structure of language itself' (98). In so doing, perhaps inevitably, Lichtenstein invokes the trope of prosopopeia: 'Gradually, over time, through careful examination of his vast collection, a faint image of a man began to emerge: a scholar harbouring secrets, a meticulous annotator of texts, a comedian, an enigma' (28). And once invoked, the logic of prosopopeia is invincible: no sooner has she endowed the absent with a face than she feels its gaze upon her neck: 'More often than not the cold, or the overwhelming sensation of being watched, would drive me out of the room, with the hairs on the back of my neck prickling. But every day I would be back at the table, fascination overcoming fear' (28). The trope closes the circuit between the obsession with possessions and the sensation of possession.

Insofar as the archive lays upon the present the obligation to preserve the past for the future, prosopopeia is the trope of archival retrieval as J. Hillis-Miller suggests when he notes that '[r]eading is one major form of the responsibility the living have to the dead' (1995: 75). The archive confers upon the act of reading if not the giving of life, a strange kind of efficacy—the ability to animate the dead:

For Plato, as for Yeats, such shades are able to keep in existence only because, so to speak, they have drunk the blood of language spoken by the living. They exist only so long as we go on giving them our blood in individual acts of reading and in individual acts of prosopopoeia, ascribing a face, a voice, and a personality to those inanimate black marks on the page. The moment no one, anywhere, is reading Plato, all the figures in his dialogues will die again. (Hillis-Miller 1995: 74–5)

However, while the archive is predicated on this obligation of the living to the dead, the localisation of that unified voice, the voice of the father, of the patri-archive, once it is inscribed in physical media and has surrendered itself to interpretation cannot survive its dispersal, no matter how often the garbage bags are taken back

upstairs. As Kujundzic notes, 'Every archive has something of the jealous God. It imposes the keeping of the idiom, the name of the singular event, close to itself and one with itself. But, at the same time, the archival impulse requires inscriptions, writing, graphic traces and translation, in order to launch itself into historical and material existence' (2003: 174). No unitary meaning can ever be recovered from the archive, and that is in Derrida's psychoanalytic reading of the archive as the vehicle of monotheism, the crime or repressed fact adduced by every bus ticket and annotated chocolate wrapper it contains.

In Lichtenstein's case, however, the prosopopeia uncovers not a face within the archive so much as a face upon the archive. She figures Rodinsky's features not from his writing but from his reading, suggesting that he has drawn his self-portrait in the passages he chooses to translate from an English to Hebrew dictionary (301). Rodinsky reveals himself through his transcriptions, his annotations, his movement across the texts of others. Rodinsky is less a voice than a diasporic trace across numerous dead and living languages. To embody that text Lichtenstein believes it is necessary to trace it back to an origin, to go back to the place from whence it came. Inevitably it is in the journey back along the bloodline to Poland and the borders of the Ukraine that Lichtenstein confronts the logic of the archive in its full complexity.

For Lichtenstein, Poland is the product of the archive. As her plane descends she is physically assaulted by the memory of '[p]hotographs retrieved from cardboard boxes in Warsaw, Jerusalem, London and New York. Images that burn into the skull and cannot be erased' (204). Despite her resolve to 'experience Poland in the Nineties' (206), it is these images which define her vision of the country. As she joins two-dozen American Jewish academics for a conference and tour of Poland's Jewish sites, they travel the country looking out on a world seen entirely in terms of its missing Jews. So too the Poles with whom she feels most comfortable are those that share that perception: 'Poles who feel the loss, who see the footsteps of the former Jews embedded into their streets, hear the whispers in their music, taste the remnants in their food' (211). Without that perception of absence, she reflects, 'we become invisible time travellers, our activities totally alien from the lives of the Poles we see through the rain-smearred windows of our bus' (232).

She is in no doubt of the purpose of the trip: 'Somehow our presence on this blood-saturated earth was necessary because our being there meant that the bones of the people beneath our feet were not entirely forgotten' (233). Poland is a place of memory and violence against memory. At one unnamed 'site' in Galicia, she writes, 'We hear how Jews were shot here after being forced to smash up the gravestones of their families then pave the roads with them' (229). And in the landscape of the archive the ultimate crime, it seems, is against memory itself. At the site of the Rabbi Eli Melech's tomb, the group wanders through the cemetery translating the names on the gravestones until they learn 'that what we see is not as it seems'. Again the headstones had been used as pavement material and then been brought back after the war but have been 'replaced randomly in the cemetery' (231). The corruption of the archive effectively becomes a greater evil than the original crime: 'Fake histories are everywhere' (230).

But in Poland too she confronts the ambivalence of the archive in the form of an unease at the relationship between industrialised murder and industrialised remembrance: 'For the first time I recognized that I was not alone in my obsessive pursuits but part of a worldwide phenomenon in my generation' (212). And although

she welcomes that sense of community, there remains a constant sense of the incongruity of this 'horror tour' (227). She records her vision of the 'Grisly tourists, speeding through the sodden countryside, stopping to pay homage to the deserted sites of where our ancestors once lived' (233). The archival instinct becomes the focus of that unease: 'As we arrived at each site, most of the Americans would jump in front of the monuments, swapping cameras with each other, to catch on celluloid the moment of "being there". Warped tourism, horror snapshots' (233). The same bureaucratisation of experience that structures the memory industry is also that which made the Jewish Holocaust possible. As Kujundzic notes, 'the first computer, the IBM-owned Hollerith machine, was first put to use on a grand scale for the systematic archiving of the European Jewry in rounding it up for the concentration camps' (2003: 178). So too the efficiency of Dutch bureaucracy is frequently cited as an explanation of the Netherlands' deportation of 107,000 of the 140,000 Dutch Jews. 'There is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive', suggests Derrida. As such 'archive fever verges on radical evil' (Derrida 1996: 19–20).

Inevitably in a landscape understood primarily in terms of the mass graves lying just below its surface, the return to Poland is figured as a return of the repressed. But the return is double. A return to the scenes of horror encoded in her and Rodinsky's families' histories is motivated by the need to remember and give names to the nameless victims of history—to lay ghosts to rest. But in returning to a Poland which seems to have been untouched by modernity, the affluent descendants of Poland's persecuted migrants sporting Nike trainers and free to travel where they please confront both the remoteness of the past and the possibility of its revenance. Looking out on the medieval landscape familiar to their ancestors—'the wooden houses, their yards teeming with chickens, and the peasant women at work in the fields' (229)—the Western tourists are also haunted by the spirit of anti-Semitism that this archivalised landscape has seemingly preserved intact. A workman intrudes his presence between the travellers and the synagogue they want to explore: 'He was grinning inanely, pointing at us and asking, "Juden?"' (223). Because the archive does not allow the possibility of decay, because it preserves intact, it is, in the Derridean sense, the source of the spectral. In abolishing the division between past and future it constantly confronts us with the possibility of the return of that which we had thought we had left behind.

Poland, in other words, confronts Lichtenstein with the problem of storage, for apart from the grinning spectre of a revenant anti-Semitism, Poland also serves as a reminder of the economy of memory. 'Yiddishkite is in vogue in Poland at present', (223) notes Lichtenstein while one woman from San Francisco aims to retrieve as much Judaica as possible from Eastern Europe to give as wedding presents: 'They should be in Jewish homes' (210). The irony of this aspect of Lichtenstein's encounter with the *lieux de mémoire* is suggested in Adorno and Horkheimer's poignant observation that '[t]he respect for something that has no market value and runs contrary to all feelings is experienced most sharply by the person in mourning, in whose case not even the psychological restoration of labor power is possible' (1972: 216). According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the functionalism of an exchange economy where worth is always measured in terms of value-for-another denies anything more than 'sentimental' value to those objects whose worth is known only to the mourner, for mourning 'becomes a wound in civilisation, a social sentimentality, showing that it has still not been possible to compel men to indulge solely in

purposeful behaviour' (1972: 216). Yet, as Lichtenstein discovers in Poland, the industrialisation of mourning means that even the mourner must haggle in the market place: 'I had never been brave enough ... to walk away crossly from the rudeness of some of the Poles I met, who would treble the price of Jewish artefacts on a market stall or try and gain a fee for showing you around an old building that could have been your grandfather's home' (224).

In Poland Lichtenstein discovers that the *lieux de mémoire* is already inscribed within the rationalised space of a functionalist economy, indeed it is a product of that economy. As his *Guardian* piece suggests, it is the relationship between the realms of memory and the realms of capital and their territorialisation through narrative that interests Sinclair. He is less concerned with the absence of Rodinsky than with the creation of absence itself. Thus he focuses on the process through which the impotency of a casual disappearance, 'unremarked and unremarkable', assumes the potency and (economic) power of the Invisible: an absence which can provide a motor for a particular kind of fiction—'the occult fabulation of the zone that the Eighties demanded to justify a vertiginous inflation in property prices' (32). For Sinclair, Rodinsky's 'disappearance' thus signals more than the simple loss of the 'warmth of tradition, the silence of custom' (Nora 1996: 1); it marks a further reconfiguration of a city which is constantly being remade through telling and selling, which is the product equally of tale and retail.

For Sinclair, Rodinsky's story is a local instance of a wider economy of stories: it registers the shifting relation between territory and temporality within the zone that separates the financial centre of the City from the proletarian quarters in Whitechapel, the ghetto home to successive waves of Huguenot, Irish, Jewish and Bangladeshi immigrants. As such it occupies a highly symbolic place within the context of the shifting narrative topography of London to be understood within the context of the more general economic context created by Thatcherism. As it plays out within the sphere of memory, the Thatcherite assault on notions of community—'there is no such thing as society'—corresponds to the systematic destruction of *milieux de mémoire* in favour of *lieux de mémoire*. The reconfiguration of society in terms of consumption rather than production, the transformation of workers into consumers, paves the way for the commodification of memory, the creation of the past 'as the final colony in the American World Empire', as it is caricatured in *Dining on Stones* (Sinclair 2004: 100).

To indicate the strategic position of this story within the wider transformation of the city, Sinclair approaches Rodinsky's room in Princelet Street via his memories of working in the ullage cellar of Truman's Brewery on nearby Brick Lane in the 1970s. For a writer 'thirsty for stories', the ullage cellar 'was the ultimate resource, a living metaphor' (61). Sinclair's ullage cellar is in effect a proletarian Eden where the warmth of tradition takes the form of hammocks slung between the hot water pipes and the silence of custom is marked by the 'brewery bells' that let the plumbers know when to 'pop down the betting shop to catch the last race, before signing on for overtime' (62). It is here amidst the inefficiencies of a yet-to-be-rationalised, pre-Thatcherite industry structured by collective labour agreements that the stories that constitute communal memory thrive. The brewery exemplifies Nora's *milieux de mémoire*. A repository of the male lore of the East End, it also shows the relationship between memory, story and ownership. For within the interstices of its soon-to-be-archaic collective-labour agreements are woven the collective memories of violence that marks a working-class community's relationship to the territory, turf and earth it occupies but does not own except through story. As Sinclair writes:

They remembered nights of fire-watching, the bomb that landed in the Jewish burial ground, depositing shattered corpses on the roof of the gravedigger's shelter. They remembered everything about the war. There was a Ripper specialist who photographed with a plate camera, all the relevant sites. There were Cable Street marchers, pro and anti-Mosley. There were geezers who had made up the numbers with veteran gang boss Jack Spot, and honoured him for his raids on the blackshirts. (63)

In this memory economy, the story of Rodinsky's room is conspicuous by its absence: in all the 'formless afternoons in the complementary bar' there was no mention of the vanishing caretaker of Princelet Street (63). It is not simply that the room had not been discovered. The room could not be discovered:

This was an unrequired story. [...] Rodinsky was an empty space, a lacuna; that which was not to be uncovered, something sealed and forgotten. [...] He wasn't visible or invisible. He had neither presence nor absence. His story hadn't been formulated. It was too early to fit into the Spitalfields canon. It belonged to an era that had not yet been rediscovered, or reinterpreted. Like the ghetto itself, the floating zone between the City and the covert world of the East End, the myth was on ice. In limbo. Unactivated. With the reimagining of the area that the developers, the energy pirates, of the Eighties would enforce—the need to ground their presumptuous brochures in a neverworld of Huguenots, dancing Hasids, and blandly sinister Masonic serial killers—Rodinsky, his curious history and his spontaneous combustion, would be dragged into the light. (63–4)

As an Eighties' story, it forms part of the process through which Spitalfields is territorialised as a potential area of investment, the conversion of a zone of transit into an area with its own marketable identity. It is part of the process through which a number of synecdoches are unified in a proper name. Sinclair recalls: 'I'd heard no mention of the tale in the Seventies—because it hadn't been formulated. Spitalfields was still an antiquarian conceit. The area, when I spoke of it was Whitechapel. Friends referred to "Brick Lane" or "Cheshire Street." "The market". "The bagel shop". "The back room of the Seven Stars"' (67).

Having become a locus of gentrification, Whitechapel reincarnated as Spitalfields is no longer a place *of* immigration but becomes *about* immigration. The past is lost through its reinvention, for example, in the vague plans to turn 19 Princelet Street into a 'museum of immigration and false memory' (8) but more spectacularly in the recreation of a 'Huguenot experience' in the Severs house in nearby Folgate Street. In place of rituals that assert the continuity of past and present the Severs House sacralises faux rituals which pointedly assert the lack of connection: "'Leave ash be," says a warning note pinned to the side of the fire-place. "It's about what you have just missed"' (10); where the paying guests 'don't know how they are expected to behave. They want to signal their appreciation that *they* understand, but they've been forbidden speech' (9). Rodinsky's disappearance thus becomes the means of transforming a zone of transit into a neighbourhood, but a neighbourhood without community and a neighbourhood whose past has been manufactured, artificially arrested by blue plaques at a particular moment. As such it is symptomatic of the wider vision of the city elaborated in Sinclair's work as simultaneously centripetal in its concentration of capital and centrifugal in its tendency to disperse and alienate communities. As Robert Bond notes, in this reading Rodinsky's story takes its place in the process analysed by Henri Lefebvre in which 'the urban core

becomes a high quality consumption product for foreigners, tourists, people from the outskirts and suburbanites' (2005: 175). As Sinclair writes,

Composed. Contrived. Authenticated. Grant us a ghost in the attic, a broken weaver's loom, and we will do you a dozen kosher Georgian units, at 200k a throw, for the Far Eastern catalogue. Hong Kong bankers were buying up Heneage Street apartments, site unseen, before Chris Patten had got his dogs out of quarantine. (64)

At the same time the original proletarian inhabitants of the urban core are displaced to the amnesia of the suburbs as part of the creation of a memory-owning democracy whose relationship with the past is manufactured by the heritage industry.

For Lichtenstein as a re-immigrant, returning from the amnesia of the suburbs in quest of her own identity this reconfiguration of tradition poses particular problems. Her attempt to rescue Rodinsky's story from the heritage fables of property developers and reterritorialise it in the darkness of the twentieth-century brings her into conflict with the 'inappropriate and inconsequential rituals' (79) of an artistic economy in which she inevitably becomes a figure. Sinclair recognises the trap when, disrupting a performance in the synagogue which involves ripping up sacred texts left abandoned in the building, Lichtenstein 'snatched back the relics, thereby becoming part of the show' (79). Sinclair himself attempts to negotiate this tension between the creative and memorial practices at work within the archive by relating Rodinsky's story to other ghostly presences in the narrative ecology of East London. He advertises his method in the opening paragraph of the 'Witnessing Rodinsky' section in *Rodinsky's Room*:

I pillaged legends, stole names (Swedenborg Gardens) back from their well-earned obscurity. Understood how men became places. How they could be recalled from the great dream, where proper human beings with birth certificates mingle with immortal fictions, with Sherlock Holmes, Fu Manchu, Dr Jekyll, Dr Mabuse and with the Golem of Prague. (61)

This easy movement between the fictional and historical is accomplished through Sinclair's characteristic disruption of the opposition between syntagmatic and paradigmatic linguistic operations. In his account of the room he makes use of associations which are metaphorical and purely contingent and in the process makes full use of the uncanny qualities of coincidence.

One such trajectory begins with the wardrobe in a Danny Gralton photograph of Rodinsky's room which is perceived in its paradigmatic or metaphorical aspect as the emblematic space of the refugee and an avatar of Rodinsky: 'part barrier, part entrance to a parallel dimension (the mirrored panels access the worlds-within-worlds aspect). Takes its place in the mythology of the Holocaust. The secret space that becomes a room for refugees' (69). From this room in which fugitives 'vanish into their clothes, as in a Magritte painting' Sinclair moves to David Hartnett's depiction of a fictional Jewish Ghetto in the novel *Black Milk* (1994). He notes the thematic correspondence of a young woman who moves from being a detached observer into a participant and eventually a prisoner of the tale, before finally disappearing into a wardrobe, and notes too the coincidence of the heroine's name: Rachel. But it is the cover picture which provides the link. The photo depicts a 'performance of a Rachel' (73) standing against a brick wall located in the flat of the photographer, Marc Atkins. Atkins lives in the apartment of a former rabbi in another deactivated synagogue in nearby Heneage Street. A letter from the son-in-law of the rabbi arriving out of the

blue informs him that he had met Rodinsky in that room in 1948—the wall in the picture belongs to the room in which Rodinsky ‘was seen for the last time’ (73). Atkins, Sinclair notes, ‘by whatever accident, had found the perfect location in which to photograph an absence’ (74).

By concentrating on the analogous and the coincidental, Sinclair opens up a new space within the archive—creating a technology of retrieval that is able to reveal the presence of Rodinsky as absence in settings as unlikely as the stage-set of Harold Pinter’s *Caretaker* (1960) and Nicholas Roeg and Donald Cammell’s *Performance* (1970). David Rodinsky becomes Davies, Pinter’s tramp—‘[h]is consciousness stretches as far as the limits of the metropolitan imagination, to the outer edge of Rodinsky’s *London A–Z*’ (77)—modelled on the disappearance of Pinter’s Ashkenazi uncle Judah. He becomes the legendary ‘chat artist’ David Litvinoff—whose silent presence connects the popular and gangland cultures of late Sixties London emblematised in Mick Jagger and James Fox’s role reversal in *Performance*. Within this associative web in which Rodinsky is discovered as an absence within the cultural spore of a wider diaspora that is in turn revealed to contain Rodinsky’s room, Sinclair installs Rodinsky at the heart of the founding myth of the creative. Rodinsky’s absence incarnated as that of David Livitnoff becomes the type of what John Sears terms the ‘central modern myth, that of the unrecognised and now only posthumously acknowledged creative genius’ (2005). In this translation of Rodinsky into a creative demiurge, Sinclair most clearly suggests the possibility with which *Rodinsky’s Room* constantly flirts: that the text itself is haunted by the presence of an invisible third author for whom the other two simply act as scribe (Sears 2005).

It is with this conceit that we return to the initial problem of where to place *Rodinsky’s Room* as a text whose dramatic interest lies in the structural tension between a narrative about the archive (Lichtenstein’s text) and an archive of narrative, a compilation of anecdotes, a constellation of London’s collective memory (Sinclair’s text). In the interleaving of these two texts, narrative and archive struggle continually to contain one another in a contest which breaks the bounds of the original text in which they are forced to cohabit. Within *Rodinsky’s Room* itself space is carefully apportioned: Sinclair gets the first word in the section revealingly titled ‘Rachel Lichtenstein in Place’, Lichtenstein concludes the first edition with ‘David in Focus’. Sinclair, however, circumvents that perspective in *Dark Lanthorns* (1999)—the record of his walks along routes marked in Rodinsky’s own copy of the *London A–Z*. Lichtenstein then incorporates that text within the ‘Afterword’ to the second edition of *Rodinsky’s Room* (2000). Sinclair revisits the topic in the 2004 novel *Dining on Stones* and cameos Lichtenstein in the 2002 film *London Orbital* (Petit and Sinclair 2004). As a tour guide to the Jewish East End, Lichtenstein effectively takes possession of the Rodinsky material. Sears suggests that his compulsive return to Rodinsky’s empty chamber ‘acts as a metaphor for the apotropaic function of all symbolic repetitions, the warding off of death, its totemisation and reduction to something repeatable, therefore momentarily conquerable’ (2005).

Inevitably, however, the theory of ghosts decrees that the explanation of Rodinsky will lie in a simple administrative error. The creation of a modern myth out of a misplaced social-services file—the elevation of this tale of dereliction and urban alienation into a London legend rests on confusion about the status of Rodinsky’s tenancy within the synagogue. Like his sister, Rodinsky—Lichtenstein discovers—was eventually committed to a mental institution where he died after the community in which he ‘made sense’ had abandoned the East End for the suburbs, leaving his room

as a small and incomprehensible piece of the Ukraine transplanted intact into London. She concludes that '[t]he Rodinsky family did not successfully make the transition to the new world. Their attic room became a microcosm of the mystical world they had left behind, but in Whitechapel their sentiments were deeply misunderstood' (232). Rodinsky's secret thus proves to be that of Adorno and Horkheimer's modern migrant: he was simply unable to leave the past behind. As Sinclair writes in *Rodinsky's Room*:

And then, very gradually it breaks on us: the room *is* the drama. Rodinsky will never appear. There is nothing he could say. He is an absence. He doesn't belong in his own story. The incontinent clutter of things, uncollectable sub-antiques, displaces his consciousness. He is represented by whatever has survived his disappearance. The room is the map of a mind that anyone capable of climbing the stairs can sample. Rodinsky's life has been sacrificed to construct a myth, mortality, ensuring immortality. (174)

Notes

1. All subsequent references will be to this edition unless otherwise indicated.
2. One of these traces will eventually be recuperated in the narrative economy. In the final paragraph of Lichtenstein's 'Afterword' to the 2000 edition she writes: 'Just before we left the grounds Monty invited us all to wash our hands. He explained the significance of this for those who did not know: 'The ritual act of cleansing our hands symbolizes our resolve to improve ourselves and our lives, and to put thoughts of death and decay behind us.' Then he said to me: 'You have set him free, now it is time to move on'' (339)

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