III. The Poetics and Politics of Rambling in Iain Sinclair's *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*

Sinclair's scenography is the microcosm of a London borough called Hackney. The title of his book is a combination of the grandeur intended by the borough's Town Hall and the rose red color and name of the music hall, the Hackney Empire. The former represents (for Sinclair) the city council's undesired interference in Hackney's future, while the latter stands in for Hackney's cultural heritage.[1] *That Rose-Red Empire* is born out of the conflict between the city's authorities and a certain milieu of the borough over the gentrification of the borough in preparation for the Olympic games of 2012. To put it in ANT terms, if we will handle this conflict as an actant or agency, Sinclair's book presents us some of this agency's figurations. Specifically, we encounter an intricate semiotic interplay of the material and the metaphoric, which strives to evoke the memory of the Hackney community that is being lost through the loss of the space it occupies. The thrust of the narrative is thus to counter the mainstream discourse that advocates the gentrification of the borough. To read *That Rose-Red Empire* as an ANT-like enterprise, we must 'travel' through the borough through Sinclair's own stories of forty years of life in Hackney. We traverse Sinclair's Hackney also through the stories and memories of the people he interviews, who relate to and share the on-going and future 'loss' of the borough as they cherish it. The book is structured like a series of diary entries and consists of the author's views, his nostalgic recollections about his past in Hackney, but also of interview transcripts of the people reminiscing about their time in Hackney. In keeping with the psycho-geographic tradition, Sinclair also maps the borough by his walks of it, visiting and documenting different streets and landmarks that he

1 | The Hackney Empire becomes an emblem for the cultural heritage of Hackney in Sinclair's book not only as a stage – an actual physical location, but also as a metaphor. These aspects will be discussed in more detail later.

fears will disappear in the wave of regeneration brought about by the Games.[2] The prose is thus liberally interspersed with his sardonic raving and ranting about the 'regeneration' of Hackney.

That Rose-Red Empire is thus a very dense and yet fragmented book, much like a picture collage of different elements from different repertoires.[3] There is, however, a strong sense of materiality in Sinclair's mapping. As he so elegantly put it at his book launch: "Here, for me, is a *museum of words* reintroduced into the world, language-sounds becoming objects and images. So it folds and unfolds, the slippery narrative of memory and myth."[4] The oxymoron (see emphasis) indicates Sinclair's unifying perspective. It is emphasized by the 'slippery' interplay of materiality and the non-material throughout the book as he weaves together characteristic descriptions of physical places in Hackney and their various associations, his own memories, photographs and diaries, testimonies of denizens reminiscing about Hackney and so on. The non-material (testimonies, memories) invokes the material such as pubs, streets, personages or celebrities, or cultural artifacts linked with Hackney, and these recall, conversely, the myths or heritage of Hackney.

Sinclair uncovers interesting trivia such as traces of famous people who visited or passed through Hackney (a highlight of these seems to be the former RAF member, Astrid Proll), or artists who have incorporated this disputed terrain in their work such as Godard with his filming of a naked lady walking down steps in a house in Hackney, accompanied by a voiceover by Sheila Rowbotham, or a unique and not yet aired footage by Orson Welles shot in Hackney. Visuality of this narrative collage is maintained by a change of script to indicate change of 'voice'. These textual fragments are the transcribed testimonies or oral histories of people for who Hackney was or still is a home and of people who are in some way connected to Hackney. Etched maps and hand-sketched drawings by Oona Grimes accompany chapter headings. These chapter headings coincide with different parts of the borough, which can be traced on the map provided as a book cover. The dust jacket of the hard cover edition is a foldable handmade map designed by Nathan Burton and produced by Handmade Maps Ltd., a commercial artwork studio specializing in illustrated and 'handmade' maps. The

2 | Sinclair counts as one of London's prominent psycho-geographers, but he differentiates his own practice as "psychotic-geography" in order to emphasize the permanent effects of events on a place. It is this quality of the city that he would like to discover and document. See Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, Introduction; See also Martin, *Iain Sinclair.*

3 | Peter Ackroyd has, in a similar vein, referred to Sinclair as being a master of the literary collage. See "Reviews for Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire". My comparison to a picture collage, however, renders the book visual, an issue that will be elaborated later in this section.

4 | Arnaud, "Rose-Red Empire – Iain Sinclair Book Launch and Exhibition," my emphasis.

artwork lends the book a hint of nostalgia, but more importantly, it indicates the author's determination to create a cultural artifact.[5]

Sinclair's ANT-like method is plotted as a detective story, albeit in the broadest sense of the genre. The subtitle *A Confidential Report* alludes to Orson Welles' detective movie *Mr Arkadin*, which first appeared in Britain as *A Confidential Report*.[6] Hackney's past being in light of its future as yet unwritten, this detective story is an investigative report on the borough that will 'populate' Hackney with its past:

"I knew where the body of our poor borough was lying and who had killed it, but I didn't know why. The previous history of the corpse was blank [...] Hackney had no beginning, no end, its boundaries were strategic; they expanded or contracted in accordance with the political whims of the moment."[7]

This Sinclair is quick to recognize as opportunity – to make the "political whim of the moment" his own – a chance to delve deep into the borough's history and his own personal 'archives' to fill in this emptiness, to darken the lines of his own Hackney 'map'. Just as Mr Arkadin, the tycoon in the film, wants his past investigated, Sinclair can now investigate the borough where he has lived the past forty years. Like the detective in the movie, Sinclair must follow the networks of Hackney and trace the various associations to 'uncover a shape', to ultimately 'erect' a specific heritage for Hackney.[8] Sinclair situates his narrative in the real world, in the 'now', establishing its empirical anchorage first through an explicit statement. As this passage draws to a close, we are introduced to his first interviewee,
Sidney Kirsch, "Alive in Victoria Park, in all worlds, at this time. Our time, today: 12 January 2006."[9]

The first part of this chapter discusses the rhetoric of the author's prose and articulates its agenda, perhaps more clearly that the author has done himself.

5 | We will return to a more detailed discussion of the book cover later in this chapter.

6 | Hoberman, "Welles Amazed."

7 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 32.

8 | In his seminal study of literary memory in narratives from the "black Atlantic", Lars Eckstein has shown how the idea of accumulating and generating cultural meaning is part of the functional aspect of dialogism (the intersection between literature and memory), aside from the ontological and descriptive aspects. He insists that for a crucial understanding of a politics of literature alongside that of aesthetic and poetic strategies used, we must analyze intertextuality as much as the material conditions and perspectives. My analysis follows a similar modus operandi. See Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 3–59.

9 | That is, first in the order of appearance in the book. There are no explicit pointers to the chronology in which these interviews have been carried out. Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 33.

The challenges faced by a reader of Sinclair's prose are anticipated as reflecting difficulties faced by the author himself in his writing, both of which will be investigated briefly and tied up with urban issues and documentary aspects. We will also discuss the narrative and documentary strategies Sinclair uses, and whether or how they may be used to conceive of a more tangible ANT method. In the second part, we may thus be able to trace and describe the various figurations and associations we encounter by following Sinclair. Finally, in the third part, we can assess whether and how such a representation of Hackney is able to articulate matters of concern. My analysis strives in its entirety to achieve a portrait of its own – of the intricate topography of the London borough, that Sinclair's book offers us, or perhaps, after all, of the elaborate and exaggerated re-enactment of the author and his 'kin', a desperate last attempt at self- realization before being declared superfluous.

Strategies of Literary Documentary: The 'Art of Describing'[10]

Sinclair's prose has been described in reviews as being "thrillingly alienating" or "vertiginous and polychromatic" – this is a tongue-in-cheek warning for a reader unacquainted with Sinclair's style, that it may take some getting used to.[11] A description of Hackney's landscape begins as follows:

"Lines of trees outrank us, their bulk is astonishing. Skins encrusted with witness: patches of green over grey, over fleshy orange. Scars, carcinogenic lumps. Hawser roots suck at dirt […] Aisles of Neo-Romantic branches. A blood meadow: London Fields. Public ground for the fattening of herds and flocks, Norfolk geese, before they are driven, by very particular routes, to Smithfield slaughter. Chartered markets service drovers, incomers. They exist to peddle, plunder, and to fleece the unwary."[12]

Grammatically, Sinclair's sentences often function without recourse to verbs.[13] His descriptions, especially of the landscape of the borough, are reproduced in the manner of a moving camera. It is as if Sinclair is walking and simultaneously

10 | To borrow from Latour: "[the] Art of Re-describing matters of fact to stop the 'fraudulent export' and uptake 'what is given in experience'". See Latour, *What Is the Style of Matters of Concern?*, 46.

11 | "Reviews for Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire". See specifically the reviews by Sandhu and Ackroyd.

12 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 7.

13 | See also Gallien, "The Politics of the Line in Bruce Chatwin's and Iain Sinclair's Travel Narratives."

showing us this scenography, filtered, however, through his perception of it. His reproduction of what he 'sees' and how he sees it is rooted in the present, the now. We have a rather straightforward, non-dialogic narration of "Lines of well rooted trees", which at the same time becomes a flashback, drawing the 'gaze' of the reader from the present backwards into the past: "A blood meadow: London Fields. Public ground for the fattening of herds and flocks, Norfolk geese, before they are driven, by very particular routes, to Smithfield slaughter." This thematized narration emphasizes the various associations of the lines of well rooted trees, personified as long standing witnesses (well rooted and scarred) to the park's history as a grazing ground for livestock before it passed through to the markets. The short and choppy sentences, together with this narrative denseness renders the prose "vertiginous", as Ackroyd puts it, and perplexing for the reader. This style can be attributed to Sinclair's artistic vanity to stand apart as the author himself implies. Writing about a film collection he has been asked to curate as part of a commemoration of his 70th birthday, he says,

"Now this, not another strategic menu compiled for film buffs, but a year-long curation on boats, in shop windows, parks and palaces. In effect: an anti-list. I wanted to avoid any notion of balanced judgment: most significant, loudest, longest, dullest, funniest, or most delightfully awful. My choices were, to a degree, influenced by on-going conversations with the film-essayist and novelist Chris Petit. We had been playing with the idea of an anti-pantheon, a difficult thing to define. These were films that struck us as having energy, attack, context – but which stood outside the usual registers of excellence, either as achieved works of art or as smartly delivered industrial product."[14]

What holds true for Sinclair's curating of the movies collection, also holds for his Hackney portrait: an eclecticism in his selection and handling of content and context, his thrust to create an "anti-pantheon, a difficult thing to define".[15]

On the other hand, it is precisely this strong sense of character in which his prose is steeped that lends Sinclair's work its incisiveness with regards to his political agenda (a harsh critique of the Olympic Plan while he documents and holds on to as much as possible of 'his' Hackney, fervently.) It is a sort of no-nonsense attitude that strides to get to the point, albeit with a couple of inevitable detours. Describing a pub in Hackney, which he anticipates may soon be lost, Sinclair describes the associations that the picture evokes and sets the tone of his Hackney magnum opus:

14 | Sinclair, "An autobiographical journey in film".

15 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 16.

"Havelock, the unbending officer of empire, revenger of Afghan outrages, blacks up to confront Hackney's shanty-town sprawl. Bowels excavated, he is white as a worm. Erased from history. A man forgotten. And a pub that is about to become a minor property speculation: aspirational flats with slender, bicycle-decorated balconies and an ecologically approved deficiency in parking space."[16]

The biting irony of the description of the seemingly "unbending" and intimidating historical Havelock (who is white as a worm as a result of a bad stomach and lives on as a pub in London's 'unwanted borough') continues into Sinclair's speculation of the scene that will replace the site of the pub. In merely a sentence, Sinclair anticipates a very precise picture. Namely, a fashionably rebranded and marketed sense of eco-living, which will, in a final step, wipe away all traces of the 'great Havelock', the man as well as the pub, named after him. The fact that the cause will be a 'minor property speculation' highlights the overwhelming injustice of urban regeneration that will push out, most probably even wipe out, what makes up (Sinclair's) Hackney. This 'speculation' by Sinclair deems property developers and allied politicians the 'common enemy'. Here, Sinclair is indicating that this is a debate, and establishing his own position within this debate, thus fulfilling Latour's specifications for matters of concern – that they must be debatable and that it must be indicated for *whom* they matter.

An Artistic Intervention: The Rhetoric of Rambling

The opening passage of the book challenges the reader to get past Sinclair's style of prose:

"We are the rubbish, outmoded and unrequired. Dumped on wet pavings and left there for weeks, in the expectation of becoming art objects, a baleful warning. Nobody pays me to do this. It is my own choice, to identify with the detritus in a place that has declared war on unconvinced recyclers while erecting expensive memorials to the absence of memory. This is a borough that has dedicated itself to obliterating the meaning of shame."[17]

There is no reader address or formal introduction of the author as the narrator or information provided as to who is being referred to or who is being addressed. The strategy is intricately woven into the text. The brusque tone and the emotions in the prose is our key to the author's alliance. The prose is interlaced with anger and sarcasm, obscuring in the first sentences the source and object

16 | Ibid., 9.

17 | Ibid., 7.

of the emotion. Then, the narrator aligns himself metonymically with the "rubbish" that is being ignored – the "unconvinced recyclers" who refuse the 'recycling' being propagated. The articulation of the conflict as a war, between those who do not buy into the propaganda and those who are trying to 'recycle' or regenerate Hackney (the developers trying to gentrify Hackney), intensifies this polarization, as it does not seek reconciliation. It also indicates, again, for *whom* his matters of concern matter. On the other hand, it is also opening up the black box of environmentalist propaganda. Sinclair's ironic exaggeration in the following quote is an expression of his exasperation at the deceit and falsity of the propaganda.

"Eco defaulters, those who refuse to compost, are the latest criminals. If you don't separate your tea bags from your plastic mineral-water bottles, you'll be prosecuted, fined, evicted. Early morning streets are dressed with every shade of bucket and bin, stacked with nearly new white goods, vacuum cleaners, CDs in cellophane, computers, lavatory bowls that nobody wants. This is not property, this is antimatter of a virtual world subject to hourly revision. The flotsam and tidewrack of cyberspace."[18]

The anti-consumerist backlash reveals but one figuration of the presence of the Olympic games in London – it debunks what Sinclair holds to be the myth of modern day recycling.[19] Hackney is its people, and if the place loses its people, there will be no memory left. In a place where there is no memory, there can be no shame. The real stifling irony and tragedy of the Olympic games then is that for the people of Hackney, the stadium becomes a sort of cenotaph, signifying and enhancing the absence of memory of the place being 'cleaned up' for the Olympic games.

There is, admittedly, some difficulty in decoding Sinclair's wordiness, which may be analyzed under two separate registers and attributed to two different

18 | Ibid., 17.

19 | Another author who has emphasized and perhaps even politicized the role of "rubbish" is Michael Thompson in *Rubbish Theory*, albeit in a different discipline than Sinclair. Thompson discusses the creation and transformation of the "value" of goods, of which "rubbish" is a stage in the "social life" of an object. What resonates from considering the "value" of a good or object as a result of ways of seeing rather than being an inherent quality is the fluid and dynamic notion of practice in the process of "value creation". See also Parsons, "Thompson's Rubbish Theory". The continuity of this deconstruction of notions of value can be traced in Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*. These works reinforce my own Latourian reading of Sinclair's mission of opening up "black boxes" (the proclamation of something as "rubbish" by the Hackney Council) to "follow the network" away from the readily accessible and visible "rubbish", to the more "invisible" aspects related to it. .

reasons. One is Sinclair's own artistic intention of being eclectic – to provide access to this part of London through sometimes basic cognitive operations, describing an overwhelmingly enormous array of everyday objects and life-as-lived through memory or observation, instead of choosing or deciding for the reader what is important or relevant. It is an active refusal to attribute importance to one particular thing, person or event. This is, of course, an authorial narrative strategy that pretends not to be selective in what it represents and reads as rambling. Heavily tainted as we have seen with emotion and laden with metaphor, Sinclair's rambling gives birth to a paradox – its quasi non-selectivity should ideally point to its objectivity. Yet, it is the subjectivity of Sinclair's perceiving glance that is emphasized and drawn into focus, and the rambling rendered subjective. Seen as a mimesis of process, it works at disorienting readers in order to undo automatisms of 'seeing' Hackney. The process mimesis is didactic in that it forces readers out of their habitual practices of reading or 'seeing' and challenges them to keep up with Sinclair's urban drift.

"Forty years and I have learnt nothing, nothing useful, about the people, factories, politics and personalities of Hackney. The name has declined to a brand identity. A chart-topper: worst services, best crime, dump of dumps. A map that is a boast on a public signboard, a borough outline like a parody of England. My ignorance of the area in which I have made my life, watched my children grow up, is shameful. I've walked over much of it, on a daily basis, taken thousands of photographs, kept an 8 mm film diary for seven years: what does it amount to? Strategies of avoiding engagement, elective amnesia, dream paths that keep me submerged in the dream."[20]

Sinclair admits to being shaken out of the dream of his life in Hackney by the Olympic Park project but also by this opportunity given to document the borough. This is a rhetorical strategy and Sinclair's reflections convey a sense of chronicler's pride. He has *forty years* worth of documentation on Hackney that, however, is still not enough – not enough for the author and not enough to save the borough. The author's wake-up call is the reader's caveat. It conveys the urgency to take stock once more of what is important, a romantic adherence to a place before it disappears completely, lost to development plans. If you see in Hackney simply the "brand identity" to which it has been reduced, then this is Sinclair challenging us to 'see' otherwise. He wants to break with this kind of reductive 'seeing' to expose all the miniscule details and processes of life in Hackney, or as Latour says, the "innumerable series of humble *mediators* that alone give it its meaning and scope".[21] The result of this ANT is, however, a sort

20 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 31.

21 | Latour and Hermant, "Paris: Invisible City, Electronic Script," 101.

of seemingly disjunctive rambling. There is no clear chronological progress or similar conventional structuring device for the narrative. Much later on in the book, speaking of the artist, Ian Breakwell, Sinclair tells us "His genius lay in a trick I never mastered, knowing what to leave out."[22] True to his self-professed inability to edit, Sinclair's prose is highly elliptical, making it, as the earlier mentioned review says, "thrillingly alienating"; it is as if Sinclair were conversing with a close friend, using intimate jargon and cross references to other people in common, to books, movies and places (familiar to him and his imaginary 'friend'), all without any explanations.

What evolves nonetheless is a tension between his agenda of exposing the ominous politics surrounding the Olympic games and his eclectic style that resists constraint and would like to 'show' the reader the complexities and sundries of 'real life' in the borough. There is a forward thrust to his urban drift – an urban sense of being singular and yet, through intimate associations in Hackney, a part of a bigger whole. The attrition of structure in the narrative should remind readers of the subjectivity and hence fragmentary nature of our perception of real life. At the same time, Sinclair's rambling aspires to be as informative about the borough as possible, and about its artistic milieu as a way of endorsement for them. Furthermore, as we will see in the following sections, despite the peculiar and arduous means of decoding and procuring the knowledge through Sinclair's prose, we have valuable insights into the past and present of the borough. In its entirety, Sinclair's technique is admittedly one that allows the author to be true to himself as an artist as well as his role as the borough's chronicler. The question as to why Sinclair should maintain his elusive prose style is thus related to the author's pull in two different directions – to be true to himself as an artist or author, and at the same time, to 'perform' as a chronicler for the borough.

Another aspect reflected in a reader's struggle with Sinclair's prose is tied up with the challenge of documenting urban space in general, one which Sinclair himself has to grapple with as chronicler and author. The quote above also poses questions pertaining to feasibility and technique. How does one grasp space which is living and changing continuously? Are these photographic or filmic methods efficient or sufficient? Moreover, what is it worth then, when one does try? I have already begun to describe various authorial strategies we encounter in the book. In the following section, we will continue this description of Sinclair's documentary strategies. We will describe different narrative, empirical and self-reflexive aspects or strategies in the text. These undoubtedly overlap, and can therefore also be thought of as strands only artificially disentangled for the analysis. For the sake of structuring my own study, in the following section, I will first take a look at the persons appearing in the book. Through this step, I hope to show how Sinclair capitalizes on all the associations and entanglements

22 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 462.

they represent to build a cultural heritage for Hackney. This is then followed by a description of the book's material focus, and Sinclair's self-critical moments in his endeavor. Our discussion will always take into consideration the specific social and historic conditions surrounding the author and thus describe how certain social or historic events (that is, the context) enter the text. These aspects that will be discussed are the representational and documentary means of the author, and may be considered as additions towards a more concrete ANT methodology.

Populating the 'Scenography'

Francis Yates' history of the organization of memory reveals a long and continuing tradition of a means of arriving at knowledge or a comprehension of the world, by combining significant memories of reality with signs, symbols and images (of reality).[23] These two tools, *memories* of reality and *signs, symbols and images* of reality, point us to Sinclair's own use of mnemonic strategies (signs, symbols and images of reality), of which his montage of testimonies (memories of reality) is the most obvious. In order to carry out a systematic reading of Sinclair's 'rambling', let us see if we can first systematize Sinclair's recourse to mnemonic resources in his narrative.[24] In his analysis of narratives from the 'Black Atlantic', Lars Eckstein distinguishes between two categories of narratives based on their specific use of mnemonic strategies, the choice of either of which he sees to be performative on the part of the author.[25] *Testimonies* are texts which point to a recourse to *mental* resources and lay claim to reconstruct an event by means of *immediate experience* while a text performs as *Palimpsest* or "second-degree

23 | Francis Yates, in his book on "The Art of Memory", expresses beautifully, the notion of the human memory as a source of knowledge of the world: "The Leibnizian monads, when they are human souls having memory, have as their chief function the representation or reflection of the universe of which they are living mirrors". Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 388.

24 | For this, Paul Ricoeur would appear to be the most logical starting point as he insists on the discursiveness of memory and employs the category "testimonies" to capture the nexus between memory (texts) and history (real life events). See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. However, since we encounter a number of mnemonic strategies, for a more general conceptualization, I refer to Lars Eckstein's analysis of narratives from the "Black Atlantic"; See Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*.

25 | In his analysis of narratives from the "Black Atlantic", Lars Eckstein posits that "there is a fundamental connection between memory as ars – in the sense of a text's perceivable structure of dialogic reference – and memory as vis – in the sense of its identity- giving potential, directed at a specific historical reality." See Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*. These two notions of how memory enters and functions in the realm of narration gives us the means to follow through with our own analysis, of other mnemonic strategies in *That Rose-Red Empire*.

narrative" when it draws on other sources. Even though Eckstein uses images and music in his own analysis, the nature of these 'other sources' is essentially left open.[26] In reading Sinclair's narrative, one could argue in favor of a range of 'other sources' such as works by other authors, photographs, etchings, movies, movie footage, newspaper cuttings, pub-signs, shop names, graves, and so on, some of which will be discussed in the current analysis. We will see in the current section that *That Red Rose Empire* cannot be strictly divided into one or the other type of text but rather, that the author makes use of both styles. Eckstein's observation of his own corpus may prove instructive in anticipating their usage:

"The difference between testimonies and palimpsests is neither ontological nor epistemological, but is essentially performative in nature. What comes in guise of a testimony and what in the guise of a palimpsest will therefore largely depend on the choice of certain rhetorical strategies of representation, strategies which, in turn, owe much to the specific historical conditions and social processes of memory and forgetting surrounding an author."[27]

The strategy of representation is itself performative as it bears witness to a narrative construction. Both, the associations invoked by testimonies and the intertextuality implied by the author's use of mnemonic sources to describe various historical occurrences, places or people, point to a discursive manipulation.[28] We will therefore see how Sinclair draws on the power of both in order to articulate and describe Hackney's networks of people, events and places.

The 'Scavengers'

> Human dramas that informed the room in which we were sitting, with the clutter of photo-graphs and trophies.[29]

When we shift our own gaze to the machinery of Sinclair's theatre, the first thing we notice is the numerous "human dramas" to which readers become witness. They are a sign of his unwavering focus on people, but also on the "clutter of photographs and trophies" – their material associations and entanglements. Sinclair's most visible empirical strategy to enrich the scenography of Hackney is to literally 'populate' it. He fills the space with persons alive and dead, including

26 | Ibid., 12.

27 | Ibid.

28 | Thus, the "factuality" of the narrative is not deciding but rather, what is chosen to be shown and how it is shown or represented. See ibid., 18–25.

29 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 37.

testimonies of those he interviews, and his research on the ones who are no more but have left their traces in Hackney.

"We shift with the geography; […] At the start of it, this journey into a borough too large and strange to define, we were blank pages. Nothing in ourselves, but politicized by the connection with Ridley Road, sonar-echoes of Mosley, counter-currents of necessary opposition […] History infects us."[30]

A strange sort of geographical-social-historical association is being traced here, linking place, people and a historical event – the beating of fascist leader Oswald Mosley and other members of his anti-Semitic Blackshirt group.[31] On the one hand, we have an abstract representation – that of "counter currents of necessary opposition" to Mosley. On the other hand, as "sonar echoes" they are linked with the physical location of the event, Ridley Road (in Hackney).

Thus, the histories and memories of a *distinct* assortment of people feed into Sinclair's 'politics of place construction'.[32] These "counter currents of necessary opposition" have been united once more to speak up against the manipulation of the image of Hackney by capitalist development by recalling and retelling their experience of the borough. In an interview, Sinclair tells us:

"This (his project of a book on Hackney) would involve talking to 30-40 people, and recording them at length, weaving these recordings into some sort of random topography. To get a pattern of how exile worked, of why people came here, why they left – and to make a record of the *significant cultural figures* that moved through the borough."[33]

Sinclair's portray of Hackney is a paradoxical composition of specificity and randomness; the testimonies of a specific round up of "significant cultural figures" and eccentric non-conformists play into his "random topography": "I was too fond of flaws, eccentricities. Characters who subverted any role assigned to them. Fictional projections who grew real flesh."[34] These are not anonymous, elusive entities as Sinclair so often suggests is the case when dealing with

30 | Ibid., 295.

31 | "Violence Flares at Mosley Rally."

32 | Hayden, *The Power of Place*.

33 | "At Home with Iain Sinclair", my emphasis; Sinclair has often invited criticism for not "truly" representing the people of Hackney for the book makes no mention of its various, resident ethnic groups. With the above statement, however, Sinclair explicitly indicates what we should expect Fox, "Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire by Iain Sinclair – Review."

34 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 32.

contemporary corporate giants. In Sinclair's portrayal, we have instead "real flesh" – the scavengers:

"Scavengers have abandoned the skips of our neat inner-city villages, the steady gaze of the energy police, for the *deregulated* wastelands of the emerging Olympic Park. They're all out there with bicycles, handcarts, vans, with pliers, bolt cutters and knives, asset-stripping ruins, peeling electricity cables, getting the price of a drink together. So that they can settle on a companionable bench, with a view of water, to smoke and chug in ruminative silence. Absorbed in the landscape they occupy, pilgrims and sadhus of the immediate. The ordinary. The last self-funding, self-motivating human machines in the borough. Lost ones on their first days to heaven."[35]

Even as the passage creates imageries of the "neat inner-city villages" and "deregulated wastelands" somewhere 'out there'; it exposes on the one hand, that the 'waste' that people think is being recycled, is merely being pushed out from the inner-city to the wastelands of the Olympic Park. An ideological charge accompanies this narrative representation of space as it denounces modern patterns of consumption while it gives evidence of a moment of resistance in which certain subjects ("scavengers") undermine the imposed power relations ("the steady gaze of the energy police"). Embedded in this attempt to emphasize the absurdity of the 'new' recycling hype that has overcome the borough, is a reminder of a 'truer' way of recycling, of people whose existence is defined by it, and therefore, an urgent reminder and an endorsement of alternate ways of living.

Hackney's Artists

In the following two tables, I attempt a schematic catalogue of the "significant cultural figures" we encounter, maintaining the differentiation between persons alive and those who are no more, but have contributed in a way significant enough to be 'honored' an entry into Sinclair's 'archive' of Hackney.

35 | Ibid., 16, my emphasis.

Alive (In a rough order of appearance)

NAME	OCCUPATION	HACKNEY associations
Stewart Home	Artist/writer/filmmaker	Hackney author
Anna	School teacher	Sinclair's wife/ Denizen
Peter Ackroyd	Biographer, author	Prolific writer about London
Mick Cohen	Underground filmmaker	Worked in Hackney
Renchi Bicknell	Artist	Denizen
Astrid Proll	Previous member of Baader-Meinhof gang	Her hideaway: lived and worked under assumed identity
Julie Christie	Actress	Retreat in Hackney
Rachel Lichtenstein	(Jewish) Artist, author	Authored book highlighting Jewish heritage of Hackney
Mole man of Mortimer Road	Hackney 'eccentric'	Denizen
Owl Man	Hackney 'eccentric'	Denizen
Oona Grimes	Artist	Her artworks feature Hackney
Will Self	Author	Collaborated with Sinclair in Hackney
Ken Warpole	Author on architecture	Denizen
Sheila Rowbotham	Social activist/ feminist	Work set in Hackney
Nigel Fountain	Author	Collaborated with Sinclair in Hackney
Godard	Filmmaker	Work set in Hackney
Hari Kunzru	Author	Lives/lived in Hackney

Gone but not Forgotten (References to them and their work)

NAME	OCCUPATION	HACKNEY associations
Dr. David Widgery	Doctor/activist	Worked in (Bethnal Green)
John Minton	Artist	Mare Street
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (referred to as a Highgate exile with a bad mouth)	Author	Highgate
Joseph Conrad	Author	Retreat at German Hospital
Orson Welles	Author/Film director	Worked in Hackney
Alexander Baron	Author	Raised in Hackney
Marc Karlin	Political filmmaker	Lived in Hackney
William Boroughs	Author	'In exile'
Samuel Richardson	Novelist	Lived in/worked out of
William Blake	Painter, poet	Lived in/worked out of
Roland Camberton	Novelist	Writings set in Hackney

This categorizing visualizes Sinclair's empirical strategy of drawing together a specific cast of people – their names appearing in his book along with their occupation and their books or films function as mnemonic elements as they represent for the most part, a 'leftist' political culture. The names invoke by mere mention, their artistry and genius (Blake, Welles, Conrad, Godard), social and political activism (Widgery, Karlin, Rowbotham) their rebelliousness (Proll), eccentricity (Coleridge) or an off-the-grid existence (the Owl Man, Swanny). Though many of these may not be alive or currently living in the borough, it is this power of their names to conjure a specific image of a lively borough, their "identity giving potential" (Eckstein), that Sinclair taps into and uses, for an acquisition and commemoration of Hackney's 'cultural heritage'. Here, Sinclair draws once more on his strategy of a moving camera which captures the present

but which changes into a flashback carrying the reader backwards into Hackney's past. This strategy also shows how an empirical strand, bearing witness to and commemorating the present and past, also functions as a narrative device. Sinclair sees evidently little prospect for the borough in the future so he has to link up the present with the past instead and builds an epitaph, something 'to remember it by'; how *he* would like it to be remembered. The future being dominated in the book by "the blue fence" of the Olympic site, "that shadow, the imposition of future memory"[36], covered by computer generated pictures, a hyper reality of the future of Hackney.[37]

"I bump into a neighbour who throws me by asking, with some hesitation, if I could supply her with a poem about the future […] I comb through notebooks, things published and unpublished, but I can't find a single poem that touches on the future. Everything is absolutely nudged by the now, under the drag of an invented past. I'm sorry, Harriet, I have no idea what the future holds. Or what it is. The architect Erich Mendelsohn, who was responsible for the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, said: 'Only he who cannot forget has no free mind.' In Berlin they labour to exorcize the past. *In Hackney we must train ourselves to exorcize the future*."[38]

This then makes Sinclair's portrait of Hackney rather exclusive. In the representation of a space which is otherwise stigmatized as being "the worst place to live in", Sinclair imports and inserts the testimonies of a living and practicing community of artists or "cultural producers", while simultaneously invoking mnemonic elements that hark back to the borough's artistic 'ancestors' and their legacy.[39] Sinclair's narrative montage of testimonies and past 'heritage' into a text composed to commemorate is a mnemonic strategy with political reverberations. It introduces ruptures in the negative discourse about Hackney, through which the space becomes interspersed with the associations that these 'characters' fill in: the vibrancy of a diaspora of cultures passing through, an exhaustive wealth of artistic personalities with their eccentricities and social activism – progressive and innovative, and an unexpected sense of comradeship through their 'non-

36 | Ibid., 442.

37 | "This is a kind of ethnic cleansing, the imposition of the computer-generated, virtual-world fiction over the grungy reality that has always been here. In the same way that on the blue fence around the Olympic Park you have perfected visions of the future, which are completely fictional." "At Home with Iain Sinclair," my emphasis.

38 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 25, my emphasis.

39 | Or worst place to have a car in: "Hackney once again topped the list: its official, according to this morning's statisticians, we are the worst borough in London for car crime. License dodging. Petty theft. Taking without the owner's consent." Ibid., 439.

conformism'. It gives rise to a rhetoric of 'Us' (radical authors and artists of an 'old East End') versus 'Them' (probably everyone else, especially ignorant but nonetheless powerful politicians). The politicization of the borough by a voice that has spoken itself into being representative of 'artistic' Hackney, as a place that has 'long' been home to so many creative figures, ensues the politicization of the discourse surrounding the borough in the context of the Olympics of 2012. Sinclair invites these people in his interviews to recall how they came to Hackney and to compare how it used to be with the 'now'. This "dredging of memory" is an empowering activity challenging a unified notion of history, rendering it ambiguous and intangible, wherein the history of Hackney becomes what (these) people remember; there is not one version of the past of Hackney but rather, many different (personal) histor*ies*: "It was habitual now, this *dredging of memory*: houses, work, movement. *A city obscured by revelation*."[40] In a period of an alleged 'crisis of memory', literary critic Aleida Assmann has already foretold the importance of art and literature as surrogates.[41] Assmann engages with different forms and changes in cultural memory and in this context, discusses a paradigm shift in research related to memory storage and the neurosciences, whereby the notion of memory via durable inscription (script or the written word) is being replaced by the principle of constant overwriting (virtual memory storage).[42] Sinclair's book, which is itself a complex ensemble of mnemonic montage, displays a playful twist within this paradigm shift, functioning as a written archive which nevertheless overwrites other attempted representations of Hackney. However, as Assmann rightfully asserts, and what holds true for Sinclair's book is that "the archive is not only a place where documents from the past are stored but also a place where the past may once more be reconstructed or even produced."[43] There are obviously ideological implications of 'lifting' older resources into new texts and contexts.[44] In this particular case, the memory of the text resides in this inter-textuality. We have in *That Rose-Red Empire* an allusion to a book called *Rain on the Pavement* by a lesser-known author, Roland Camberton (real name: Henry Cohen), and its political projection against a historical reality. It is a well-reviewed account of orthodox Jewish life living in Hackney but which has faded into obscurity. Sinclair describes this book, even praises it alongside say works

40 | Ibid., 521, my emphasis.

41 | Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 22: "It is apparent […] that the arts turn towards memory precisely in the moment when society is in danger of loosing it or tries to get rid of it. […] Today, it is mainly the arts that have discovered the crisis of memory as their particular theme and try to come up with new forms in which dynamics of cultural memory and forgetting manifest themselves."

42 | Ibid., 22.

43 | Ibid., 22, my translation.

44 | See also Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, xv.

by Jean Luc Godard or Orson Welles. The individual work is thus alleviated to a 'body of texts' on or set in Hackney, displaying the identity giving potential of this body of texts and highlighting the role of *That Rose-Red Empire* as a collection of the traces that point to the borough's cultural heritage.

Streets, Sounds and Sights: Hackney and its "subterranean mythology"[45]

> That after many wanderings, many years/Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,/ And this green pastoral landscape, were to me/More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake[46]
>
> There were more Hackneys, stepping off my usual path, than I could ever know.[47]

In Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, nostalgia in narrating a place is linked to the realization of the absence of the original experience of the place. In *That Rose-Red Empire*, it becomes linked with the anticipation, or perhaps with the acknowledgement, of its *future* loss. Nostalgia is conveyed as a driving force resulting from the knowledge that the borough as Sinclair would like it to be remembered, is already no longer there, what is possible now is to hold on to the *memories* of the original experiences. This nostalgia is the impetus to take stock of the place that was or is 'home'. In the interviews, Sinclair conducts, he asks people to recollect how or why they came to Hackney. Specificity comes not only by limiting the testimonies to those of "cultural figures" but also by localizing this specific mnemonic strategy – by collecting memories of a specific period in those persons' lives. Sinclair's narration of Hackney as a place of exile, where one went in order to be forgotten or to hide is indeed reflected by the testimonies. At the same time, the testimonies themselves also reveal distinct networks or flows within the borough. Therefore, we have on the one hand a representation by Sinclair and on the other; a representation implied within the testimonies, that is, a signification by these cultural figures.[48]

Let me draw on Michel de Certeau's ideas in order to discuss these networks or the processes of navigation within the borough, and describe the experience

45 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 44.

46 | Wordsworth, William, "Tintern Abbey," Vol. ii, 85.

47 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 50.

48 | This idea reflects Bakhtin's notion that the meaning of novel has to be approached by negotiating its individual voices horizontally. Even though Sinclair's voice and narrative strand pushes to stand out or apart and threatens to overwhelm the reader, the analysis attempts to temper Sinclair and flatten out the 'individual voices' to try to juxtapose them.

of the material city engaged with the symbolic attached to it. De Certeau points out that *names of places* semantically order the surface of a city but these names lose their original ability to signify the geography of the city. Instead, people appropriate them as their meeting points. They become vested with meaning(s) associated with some memory of that place in people's lives, diverse meanings that may or may not be commonly acknowledged by others.

"Linking acts and footsteps, opening meanings and directions, these words (place names) operate in the name of an emptying-out and wearing-away of their primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second poetic geography on top of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement […] Things that amount to nothing, or almost nothing, symbolize and orient walkers' steps: names that have ceased precisely to be "proper"."[49]

The connection between the symbolizing and spatial practice (of walking) is contained within these 'symbolizing kernels' (place names which have ceased to be 'proper') and characterized by the following functions: the name *recalls* the 'original', which over time and usage becomes '*emptied out*' of its original meaning, thus offering itself to a new designation. It permits and thus *acquires a 'new' meaning* or rather meanings. De Certeau calls the discourse arising from such an act of signification of place names, a "local authority" or "local legend", which is a "crack in the system that saturates places with signification".[50] This is then precisely that property of urban space that 'techno-structure' wishes to exterminate, and if they succeed: "There isn't any place special, […] nothing is marked, opened up by a memory or a story, signed by something or someone else." Therefore it is these 'local legends' that offer "ways of going out and coming back in, and thus habitable spaces […] *One can measure the importance of these signifying practices (or legends) as practices that invent spaces.*"[51]

The process of signification in *That Rose-Red Empire* is recognizably produced by Sinclair walking different paths in the borough, naming place names, 'emptying out' the original meaning, 'filling it' with his or other people's memories and stories. He thus appropriates the space of Hackney discursively or invents a discursive space for Hackney. Here, narrative and empirical strategies mingle. The 'solid' knowledge of people's names, different dates are data that empirically anchors the different testimonies and Sinclair's own heterogeneous

49 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 105.

50 | Ibid., 105–6.

51 | Ibid., 106, my emphasis.

text. On the other hand, however, de Certeau has already warned us that a 'map' of walking signifies an absence. It can only trace a path that is not there anymore in the moment of it's tracing: "The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place. In this place that is a palimpsest, *subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence* and makes it "be there", Dasein."[52] Sinclair is aware that the territory will not be there anymore. Even as he researches and writes about it, Hackney, as he knew it is gone (if it isn't gone already). Just as he will be gone, and the people he has interviewed, who make Hackney into what he would like to remember it as. This foreboding, the burden of the anticipation of the absence feeds the nostalgia, which inflects this Hackney narrative.

Early in the book, during the previously discussed episode on the pub named Havelock, Sinclair notices that people around him, himself included, often navigate their terrain by the name of pubs.

"Plenty of Hackney old-timers, I discover as I conduct interviews for this book, navigate their memory-terrain by way of pubs. *Do you remember?* Being on first name terms with the vampire landlady? Crowblack [sic] fright wig, purple talons, heavy gold manacles on thin wrist. Villainies of yesteryear: smoked ghosts propping up afternoon bars, sentimental about dead gangsters, shoplifting grannies. Holloway Nan. Shirley Pitts. Or revived literary societies in back rooms? Politics, conspiracies, pool. The Havelock is an anachronism. The coal fire fug, dirty glasses and recidivist linoleum. These old brown boozers are London fictions in embryo, waiting for the right ventriloquist: Patrick Hamilton, Derek Raymond, T.S. Eliot. Listening is also writing. First the pubs, then the petrol stations: they are declared redundant."[53]

With its "coal fire fug, dirty glasses and recidivist linoleum", this "boozer" clearly belongs to an age long gone. Yet, in this narration, the pub name, functioning as a mnemonic element, becomes a key to the "memory-terrain" of a specific clique of Hackney dwellers or what de Certeau has called "fabric of alternate geography". Sinclair uses it to invoke a picture of an almost enviably intimate space of "politics, conspiracies, pool" and "villainies of yesteryear". In terms of documentary, we are presented with an experiential, but also mnemonic mode of gathering empirical data – through the collective memory of a life lived, shared or remembered. Reality here is a stipulated sense of familiarity and habitual culture in and of a pub that is reinstated each time by its recollection – a revisiting of the past to re-establish where you are from. Then we have the signatory Sinclairean critique of the regeneration project: These hubs of creativity

52 | Ibid., 109, my emphasis.

53 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 8–9, original emphasis.

have been made redundant – the pubs that have long been "London fictions in embryo" (Hackney's artistic milieu), contributing to London's literary heritage.

The depiction of a pub as a desirable and strangely intimate public space begetting creativity is reflected very precisely once more in the lengthy testimonial of a certain Douglas Lyne. Lyne being an "archivist and Chelsea habitué", Sinclair interviews him in order to investigate a forgotten Hackney author, Henry Cohen, aka Roland Camberton.[54] As it turns out, Lyne was friends with Henry Cohen and this is how the lesser known author surfaces in his narration:

"For five years this was the center of my life. A spectacular melting pot, Soho. Fitzrovia. Rathbone Place. The Wheatsheaf. Every pub had its own clientele […] Henry was with me. This was the atmosphere in which I got to know him. He was no doubt pursuing a course of his own. When peace came, film and arts people all got together. Johnny Milton, as a painter and a drinker, was one of us. He did the covers, the dust wrappers for Henry's books […] I was disenchanted with Soho when I met Henry. In the Pier Hotel. All the Chelsea mandarins were lolling about – with the great Henry. An extremely distinguished-looking Jewish man. Like a great composer, a huge brow. Hector introduced me to Henry […] You change your house, you change your pub. Henry didn't like the Surprise. Which was what you might call our *watering hole* […] We used to go to a club called the Caves de France. It was quite close to the Colony Club. And the Mandrake. And the Gargoyle. *It was quite a nice pub crawl*."[55]

This is Sinclair's quest within a quest: for Henry Cohen in Hackney, the man behind the name Roland Camberton – an elusive, solitary author figure with a traditional Jewish background who published under a different name in order to "keep the shame of this literary habit from his orthodox family".[56] Of course, Lyne's testimony leads him away from Hackney as this quest is entangled with and simultaneously unfolds the post-war pub culture in a different part of London. The social geography of Soho in those days is rendered as a "spectacular melting pot". Lyne's testimony then inscribes this space with the names of different pubs and evokes their particular atmosphere. The Fitzrovia, Rathbone Place and The Wheatsheaf, with their own specific 'clientele', form the coordinates of a specific Soho pub crawl. Lyne's testimony gives us first hand information about who's who at a particular pub at the time. The image produced by the language, of "Chelsea mandarins" "lolling about" with "the "great Henry", who was "distinguished-looking […] like a great composer, a huge brow", renders the Pier Hotel affluent

54 | Ibid., 485, my emphasis.

55 | Ibid., 490–8, my emphasis.

56 | Ibid., 486.

and distinguished. The "nice pub crawl" described endorses Soho's reputation further as being a place of drink and social gathering for the "film and arts people", which on the other hand highlights Hackney's status as a 'place of exile' for the elusive author Roland Camberton.

A rather different picture of the pub-frequenting artist is offered up by the testimony of Jock McFadyen, a contemporary British urban landscape artist, and still a faithful Hackney denizen. For McFadyen, the pubs bring back quite different memories, being associated more with a lonely period in his life. The same mnemonic element generates, on the contrary, a fairly bleak imagery:

"I tried the pubs around the [Victoria] park. I'd sit there, not knowing anyone, feeling totally pissed off. Drinking slow pints and thinking: 'What the fuck am I doing here?' Feeling fucking miserable. I was young. I used to drink and drive in those days. I used to get in my yellow car and drive down to the pubs I knew in Bow, in the days when I was happy. I went to the Five Bells & Blade Bone, by Limehouse Church – which I started! I started the artists going in there. Before me it was just Czech car thieves and tarts, a real dive.

I'd go every night, the Blade Bone. I got to know the landlord. A Scottish family ran the pub. I told all my friends to stop going to the pub on Flamborough Street, off Salmon Lane. A nice Young's house. I wanted to frequent the Blade Bone […] Sometimes I'd be sitting in the Caprice with patrons, famous names, the movers. Then I'd rush back to the Five Bells in Limehouse, tap on the window, and drink until three in the morning. Get up late, start work. Like living in Berlin, I suppose."[57]

A linkage of very different kinds of mnemonic elements and spatial perception of Hackney comes from Anya Gris, an architect who provokes debate with her designs rather than having them built.[58] Anya's Hackney harks back to a time when it was still a "garden suburb".[59] Her testimony is the story of her first, big romance whose beginning and end is mirrored metaphorically in her "Dyonisiac tribute" to the rave club called Labyrinth.[60] She tells us of a generation that experimented with rave music and drugs. Her testimony begins with her entering the smoke-filled "black cavernous space" for the first time with her big love: "I was with a man I was madly in love with. He gave me three ecstasy tablets

57 | Ibid., 522.

58 | "Not one building Anya designed has been built. Construction was never the point, she provoked debate." Ibid., 139.

59 | Ibid., 140.

60 | Ibid., 145.

– which could've killed me."[61] However, reminiscing about the different flows of energy, rhythm and conviviality of the parties drives the architect to proclaim:

"The city became a site of visions and possibilities, wild utopian schemes: gardens to plant, rivers to uncover, schools to rescue, asylums to be thrown open. We saw what lay beneath the stones and the dirt and the anger and the noise and the bad will of all those who refuse to recognize what is lying around them. Hackney is actually heaven!"[62]

Then, as her experiences turn darker, so do the associations with Hackney's labyrinthine spaces. We find out that Jonathan was much older, married and had kids. She tells us how the relationship ended when he was addicted to stronger drugs and lost his grip on life. And also of how, at the same, she was living in a cellar in Smithfield researching what she calls 'blood roads' – trails of animals brought to London for slaughter. The initial heartbreakingly "ruined grandeur" of the old cinema that was the night club turns into doom: "What happened next to the Labyrinth Club, at the time jungle music came in, was much darker […] and the drugs got darker. I thought then the building was doomed. It was over. For all of us. For Dalston."[63]

On the one hand, the supposed mimetic presentation of testimonies gives the reader the impression of being direct witness to these testimonies. This narrative strategy is, of course, performative. The testimonies or mnemonic references and the associations these spaces generate in people's minds, thus presented, semantically order the surface of a city. This 'topographical mesh' is made up of very different layers and characterized precisely by the different emotions and associations thrown up within these testimonies, but held together by Sinclair's own narrative strand which disappears in the moment of the testimony but re-appears consistently throughout the book (even if as only a small comment in between testimonies). The testimonies could almost be said to provide a break from Sinclair's incessant narrative voice. In the following section, this authorial relentlessness will be explored and analyzed by speculating that its origins lie in the dilemma of documentarism in first person.

61 | Ibid., 141.

62 | Ibid., 142.

63 | Ibid., 144.

Mimesis of Process and Self-reflexivity in Sinclair's ANT

The guilty writer energized by these crimes, these rumours.[64]

The ekphrastic description in the following quote draws on the semiotic power of artifacts to fixate, de-familiarize or destabilize social relationships. It allegorically renders a set of values, which it at first glance appears to endorse (see emphasis). [65]

"I've grown quite fond, lately, of that sculpture, a civic intervention, […] a lifeless Pearly King and Queen; who sit, silent witnesses to so much agitation and hallucinatory folly. Crowned with bowler hats, eyes made red, they offer dishes of fruit from generous laps. A frozen tide encloses them, sea pebbles, pebbledash. Mosaic altars have been decorated by school kids: lobsters, flying fish, crabs. In beds of lavender. Buddhas of the city, the statues survive, untargeted by fundamentalists, iconoclasts. *The oracular indifference of this couple is a virtue.* They are assembled from chips and splinters of bright tile: reconstituted damage. The ruins of demolished terraces, which once ran to the edge of the Fields, have formed themselves into twinned, male and female, votive presences. They are authentically regal, divinely righteous, impervious to bribes or flattery. And they have adapted, graciously, to where they are, among rippling concrete dunes, troughs of hardy perennials, a backdrop of public housing."[66]

The ethical dimension of the history of the Pearly King and Queen may indeed be inspirational to Sinclair's narrative scope and political goals.[67] Their description as being assembled from "reconstituted damage", their characterization as "authentically regal, divinely righteous, impervious to bribes or flattery", having "adapted, graciously, to where they are", could almost be written off as Sinclair's modernist tendency to present a feeling of place (or placelessness) through an estranged point of view – that of the "lifeless Pearly King and Queen" or, in a broader representative sense, that of a marginalized community. It recalls his opening sentiment to identify with "the rubbish" or the 'common' people of Hackney. However, there is more than a little irony to be read into these supposed

64 | Ibid., 128.

65 | Latour, "Which Politics for Which Artifacts?"; See also Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"; Joerges, "'Do Politics Have Artefacts?'"

66 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 8, my emphasis.

67 | "The History of the Original Pearly Families": "The Pearlies never forget their own history. Anyone can fall on hard times. What counts is making the most of the good times while they last, doing all you can to help others and having the support of your own kind when the going gets tough."

"votive presences", those "silent witnesses". They are the exact opposite of what Sinclair has become in the context of the Olympic Project and in his book. He cannot, and will not, be a silent observer to "so much agitation and hallucinatory folly", and indulges in the role of what he calls the "guilty writer energized by these crimes". This passage highlights Sinclair's relentless omniscience in the text once again.

On the other hand, this is precisely Sinclair's strategy of reversible black boxing, or undoing what has come to be accepted as common sense. We can analyze its narrative realization by imagining this to be the mimesis of process in Sinclair's ANT-like method – a moment in his narrative that leads the reader on to commit a folly in his or her way of 'seeing'. It is a denaturalizing of the most banal aspects of everyday life, to re-assemble the social by offering up new connections, interpretations, and implications to the reader. This attention to detail enables him to see his own project and its impact realistically. His omniscience is alleviated by his reflexivity in terms of the limitations and effectiveness of his own role as chronicler, interviewer and author:

"It's a horrible contract, mutual exploitation; the way compliant authors indulge predatory characters, take them on expeditions, buy them drinks, hoping for the worst: a new story. Without a tame scribe, the unwritten of London become desperate, pushed into excesses that propel them towards secure wards, straitjackets, tiled cells – in the hope that somebody, anybody, will give form to the howling mania of their non-existence. And then they are sold short, misrepresented, ugly words put into their mouths."[68]

This self-reflexivity draws attention to the practices of experiencing, documenting and representing (see emphasis), but it does so also in the interest of establishing the text's empirical anchorage. The underlying strategy of self-deprecating irony only strengthens Sinclair's authenticity. It is assisted by a sense of self-implication, for Sinclair could almost be describing himself with the words "howling mania of (their) non-existence", and he is anything but a "tame scribe". The reiterative use of these strategies in Sinclair's representation ultimately introduces a level of epistemological skepticism into the narrative that, however, interrogates the author again, rather than more global or universal issues.

There are numerous similar introspective instances throughout the book. On finding and reading Doctor Widgery's memorial, Sinclair confesses, "Widgery's dynamism was intimidating. I had been sleepwalking through the same territory, struggling to read the signs but *achieving nothing braver than keeping my own family more or less afloat and publishing a few booklets*".[69] While praising the

68 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 236, my emphasis.

69 | Ibid., 302, my emphasis.

activist Sheila Rowbotham, Sinclair says: "*So many men of the 1960s had creased and crumpled*, waiting for the tide to turn. Incubating disaffection. Nourishing unpublished memoirs, boxes of dead photographs. Unrequired confessions."[70] Quoting what Anya said about Swanny: "Treat him with discretion, please. He's been stitched up too many times by people who can't differentiate between truth and fiction. *Fools who think cobbled-together interview transcripts make a proper book*."[71] This sentiment culminates in the fear of being eliminated from his own Hackney portrait – a fear really of being banished from his beloved territory, perhaps for a lack of any grand social or political achievement like Dr. Widgery's: "Realism has no part in the story. Depicting Hackney, through manipulated biography, the author is airbrushed from his own script."[72] This is, obviously and glaringly, a rhetorical strategy, a strategic authorial exaggeration. Towards the end, this sentiment becomes even more specific and personal: "Those who embark on a London Quest begin in a pub. They yarn, they misquote, improvise. They walk out, eventually, through a one-off topography *they are obliged to shape into a serviceable narrative*. Language creaks"[73] Is Sinclair resigned to or reveling in his experience of alienation? Is this perhaps a piqued Sinclair who prefers to leave the scene rather than *be* removed? Or is Sinclair simply indicating the transformation of information that Latour acknowledged in his ANT, and acknowledging its gain as well as the loss. The oscillation of the authorial presence between omniscience, benevolence and instability lets theme and form play into each other to indicate the paradox of this urban enterprise as ANT. In order to unfold and describe the tightly folded inventory of traces of Hackney, the author has, on the one hand, an obligation to produce a "serviceable narrative" about Hackney. However, this can only materialize if he may "yarn", "misquote" or "improvise" and ultimately, the result is either insignificant or discomforting as "language creaks".

On the other hand, Sinclair exploits the possibilities this form of inquiry generates, and succeeds in enhancing the 'documentariness' by simply denying the reader the satisfaction of any traditional sort of closure.[74] Instead, the author seems to take leave from his readers with a sort of encrypted message. The book ends with a chapter called the Blue Fence with an interview with the former RAF-member, Astrid Proll, after which the author describes his walk with Proll to the Olympic site, the 'blue fence', still under construction at the time. In her interview with Sinclair, Proll looks back on what brought her to Hackney in 1974

70 | Ibid., 288, my emphasis.

71 | Ibid., 432, my emphasis.

72 | Ibid., 483.

73 | Ibid., 552, my emphasis.

74 | Levine and Beaumont, "Literary Realism Reconsidered: The World in Its Length and Breadth," 21–22.

and her life in the borough under cover and also, her life in London after 2000, where she went back to work after prison in Germany. Her interview reads as a fantastic synopsis of her biography, first as a member of the militant group, of her rejection of them, and also of her as a person as she acutely describes the borough through many of her first experiences of arriving in London and her life in Hackney. Towards the end of her transcript, there is a passage, which I must take the liberty to quote:

"People are now more aware of an archive. An archive has value. It's a thing about history. History is business. In England you have heritage. You have so much media. Most people take their history from commercial outlets. Others take their work more seriously, they try to gather up all the evidence you find, in objects, in images and recordings.

Isn't age important here? Don't the ones who give commissions say, 'Please, we only want young people. Innocents who are not tainted by history or memory. Save them from books and the old lies of unreliable witnesses.'"[75]

With laden references to the "archive", "history" and "heritage, themes running in overdose throughout the book, this last part of Proll's interview sounds almost as if Sinclair is, as the saying goes, putting his own words into her mouth. The author compares Proll to Ishmael from Moby Dick, describing her as "the survivor, the teller of the tale".[76] However, isn't this, in a way, more a reflection of him in her? On the other hand, maybe Proll's appearance in the book is strategic. Iconic, loyal and non-conformist, to convey a last SOS to the "Innocents who are not tainted by history or memory" of the importance of "books and the old lies of unreliable witnesses". Is this perhaps, after all, Sinclair's covert marketing strategy for his own book or an apology to the reader for its complexity and sheer, intimidating size? Through the description of his walk with Proll to the Olympic site in Hackney Wick, we become witness to its 'landscape' made up of "abandoned cars", "half-abandoned plots" and "green tangles that would soon be dug up and flattened to become part of a perimeter fence".[77] An insert in the text tells us that on his next walk to Hackney Wick, the author ran up against the 'blue fence' only to discover that an exclusion zone had been declared, making that last walk with Proll to the area a privilege. The whole episode thus appears staged: of the ultimate physical confrontation of the 'leftist bohemians' (tangible individual speaking beings) and the corporate world (powerful, overbearing and yet elusive – the 'blue fence'). But then, Sinclair chooses to end this grand

75 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 570.

76 | Ibid., 571.

77 | Ibid., 572–3.

Hackney saga by describing banal everyday details, of tea time in his garden with his wife and Astrid Proll: "We watched thieving squirrels bounce along the old wall, headbutting [sic] the last petals from yellow roses. We heard *the scream of the door that can't be shut*."[78] One may be tempted to read a resignation in these last lines (emphasis), a sense of the failure of Sinclair's resistance to save the borough from interfering 'outside' forces. However, the essential open-endedness of Sinclair's process of introspection and interrogation underlines the potential endlessness of actor-networks, and thus justifies our reading of Sinclair's enterprise as an ANT.[79]

The intensity of mnemonic references depends on various factors such as their quantity, selectiveness or communicativeness of the references for the reader, that is, how visible or clearly marked certain references are for the reader.[80] A special way of marking is auto-reflexivity, wherein a text reflects upon and comments on its own mnemonic limitations.[81] This recurrent strand of 'performative' questioning by Sinclair, of the material, the medium and his role as scribe, thus works by extension as a strategy towards moral/ethical persuasion directed towards the reader. At a textual level, the rhetoric of this mimesis of process persuades the reader of the text's authenticity and at a discursive level, convinces the reader of the author's sincerity.[82] Such an authorial reflexivity addresses the issue of narrativization in such a way that the text becomes a space in which the author can contemplate the validity of what he sees, observes and experiences. As we have seen above, the author's repeated performance of deliberating his tasks as chronicler, emphasizing in particular the decision-making, is to reflect his role as scribe (the act of transcribing the interviews and their narrativization into a Hackney story). Such intersections of the documentary venture by authorial confessional tendencies have been described as constituting the narrative means for the figuration of a documentary's subjective pole.[83] Our project argues, however, that the authorial self-reflexivity in our reading of *That Rose-Red Empire* as an ANT works as an authorial strategy of authentication. On the one hand, it rejects the dichotomy of objective-subjective observation, and on the other, reinstates the empirical anchorage of the enterprise through its referentiality to

78 | Ibid., 575, my emphasis.

79 | See also Levine, *Forms*, 22.

80 | Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 48–9.

81 | Ibid.

82 | While my use of the terms sincerity and authenticity is informed by Lionel Trilling, they are being engaged here only in the broadest sense – "authenticity" to refer to a "state", and "sincerity" to refer to a "practice". See Milnes and Sinanan, *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*, 4; See also Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*; For a more recent update and theorisation of "sincerity" as a concept see Bal, van Alphen, and Smith, *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*.

83 | Agrell, "Documentarism and Theory of Literature," 43.

the 'real' world. In the following section, we will see how such categories and strategies are established or used by Sinclair, and then flouted in order to create his own dichotomies. In showing this, my project suggests that such strategies are, in their capacity to problematize, vital to an effective ANT method.

Maps and Mappability: A 'Not Telling' in Hackney's 'Space War'

Tracing various instances of mappability in *That Rose-Red Empire* will enable us in this section to show how the author transgresses common ideas of mapping and thus problematizes the notion of objectivity. What emerges in its place will be discussed as a viable strategy for an ANT method. The section harks back to and draws heavily on de Certeau's theorization of two different perspectives on a city and his linking up of the difference in modes of representation of urban space with the differences in these viewpoints. Against this theoretical back-ground, we can analyze notions of perspective implied in *That Rose-Red Empire*, and likewise, the nature of the urban topographies that they map. De Certeau has long established a dichotomy of 'up' and 'down' with regard to the positions from which the city can be viewed. He embodies first the position of a spectator, the "voyeur" who looks at the city from above, while the "walker" is an 'ordinary practitioner' of the city who moves about at street level.[84] Sinclair introduces a similar split in perspectives or vantage points from which to view the city. However, unlike de Certeau who denies full power to any one viewpoint, Sinclair allows a distinct bias, but uses his position to overthrow the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity. Hackney is, of course, not New York, and there is no sky scraping building (in Sinclair's Hackney) from which it would be possible to look down upon it. Inclusion in Sinclair's portrait of the borough depends on whether the person lives or has lived in Hackney, or has contributed culturally or artistically so as to contribute to the borough's cultural heritage. De Certeau's clear-cut dichotomy of "up" on top of the Empire State building and "down" on the streets among the people transfigures in *That Rose-Red Empire* into a dichotomy of "living/lived in" Hackney versus "living outside/elsewhere". For the ease of articulation, let us refer to it as a dichotomy of inside-outside perspective.

84 | Certeau, "Walking in the City"; See also Gurr and Raussert, *Cityscapes in the Americas and Beyond*, 150. The authors imply that de Certeau empowers the elevated spectator. In my reading of de Certeau, however, neither positions are given preference or "power", as will be seen further in the chapter.

Sinclair's Distrust of Maps and Mapping

In a chapter about Dalston Lane, Sinclair draws into his narrative another author who previously wrote about the area:

"Even before it went out of print, Wright's book reversed Joyce's boast about Ulysses: that an obliterated Dublin could be rebuilt from his words. Patrick's long-breathed elegy, delivered by a man who is functioning on one lung, was a blueprint for destruction. He brought attention down on a place that had done its best to cultivate obscurity, as a necessary camouflage. Once a street is noticed, it's doomed."[85]

Patrick Wright's account *A Journey Through Ruins: The Last Days of London* brought ruin to Dalston Lane, because it brought with it corporate speculation and lasting disputes over ownership of the land and its properties.[86] In an ironic turn of fate, the book that served to destroy Dalston Lane becomes the last valuable account of its thriving culture or heritage. What White's account did for Dalston Lane, the Olympics have done for Hackney; the Games brought attention to a borough and with it, the wave of change, which according to Sinclair is obliterating rather than enriching the vitality of the borough. In *Ghost Milk*,[87] Sinclair comes back to and explicitly attacks what he has nicknamed the "Grand Project" – the Olympic Plan:

"The good thing about Hackney, over the last forty years, was that nobody cared. Nobody noticed the place. Transport was hopeless, it was better to walk. A reasonable burden of debt hobbles the politicians, tempers their excesses. The trouble began when our crapness [sic] began to be celebrated with a post-ironic fervour: we manufactured enamelled badges with broken hearts. And then the Olympics arrived to swivel a search light on the dark places, to impose a fraudulent narrative. Everything they boasted of delivering, as legacy, after the dirt and dust and inconvenience, was here already. It had always been here, but they didn't need it, they lived elsewhere. They lived

85 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 126.

86 | Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins*; The disputes were especially between Hackney Council and the denizens of Dalston Lane, and remain unresolved to date. Hackney Council first neglected the area and later sold it to an offshore developer for demolishing and redevelopment. Due to intervention from Dalston's community, the City's conservation committee has investigated and stopped the demolition. The conservation of the "heritage" buildings of Dalston Lane and maintaining of affordable housing is still, however, a pending issue. See Dalston, "OPEN Dalston."

87 | Sinclair, *Ghost Milk*.

inside their illusions. Hackney ceased to become a game reserve and became a career."[88]

The "fraudulent narrative" imposed by Council officers living "elsewhere" sells the borough out to a fate subject to the Council's highly questionable conduct, snatching away a Hackney culture of self-determination and self-sustenance. The mere visibility and the ensuing mappability of 'his territory' are threatening for Sinclair. It is a violent colonization of territory, an essentialization, a fixing or pinning down that constricts the vibrancy of lived space and reduces it to flatness – to two dimensionality, a mere diagram.[89] (Matters of fact) As long as a place remains unmapped and unnamed, its coordinates ambiguous and blurry, the boundaries elastic, the territory and everything held within it remains 'safe'.

"Hackney is this: cameras and bicycles. On thin balconies of recent flats. Chained to fences. In the windows of council front-operations, Tfl promotions. Sponsorship of bicycles and cameras. The folded maps in the London Fields cycle shop, highlighting cycle paths, are free: propaganda. They demonstrate how territory can be invaded by any determined special-interest group and how all maps are political, they are about *not telling*."[90]

Here Sinclair dwells explicitly on the 'dangers' of mapping and maps: the artificial 'green' promotion of cycling and the cycle paths in the borough are nothing but the treacherous wolf (special-interest group) in disguise of a so-called eco- and borough-friendly operation. He exposes the masquerade – its all simply propaganda. As repetitive as it may sound, and Sinclair cannot seem to stress it often enough, the truth of the matter is that the Olympics put Hackney in the limelight, exposed its potential and vulnerability, and held it up for exploitation through "special-interest group(s)". The Games imposed that "fraudulent narrative" – the "not telling" which a map fulfills, and of which it remains a painfully concrete manifestation.

This event, on the other hand, highlights and confronts the author with the borough's connectivity – its position within the bigger city of London. Embedded in this desire for invisibility, a longing for obscurity, is the wish to live isolated from the main city of London, to be self-determining and autonomous, to be separated from it like an offspring come-of-age from its parents. Only, 'unfortunately' for Hackney, the parent city London wishes to re-claim its forgotten and neglected borough. The mythological map of the dust jacket of

88 | Ibid., 101, my emphasis.

89 | Magister, "New York und die Macht der Karten: Kartographie von Migration, Urbanisierung und Ethnizität," 341–382. (Die Karte als Metapher kolonialer Fortifikation).

90 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 23, my emphasis.

the book visualizes this longing for independence. It opens up into an illustrated map artwork, depicting Hackney as a massive island-state (the Empire), a bit like England itself, in the midst of cerulean blue waters and Victoria Park a separate islet to its southeast.[91] The map is complete with a scale, a numbered and lettered grid, a compass dial and hand drawn illustrations of prominent landmarks. This, together with the use of colors typical for lithography from a different age, calls to mind medieval maps used by navigators or seamen on expeditions.[92] On the extreme right, we have the book description along with the book's List of Contents in the manner of a legend. Internally (inland), all streets, main roads, parks etc. are duly marked and coincide with other maps of the area. The legend invites the reader to search and locate different places on the map. We have advertisements such as for the "Philosophical Society of Hackney" and "Sidney Kirsch's Gentleman's Barber" or highlights such as an announcement for a guided tour to see the "World Famous Mortimer Road Tunnels with the Mole Man" and "Wanted Extras: for Carol Reed's Odd Man Out". These are set aside in square boxes and respectively indexed D6, F7, C6 and D8 so the areas may instantly be located on the map provided. The marking of landmarks onto a map communicates a semanticization; it establishes a boundary between 'mere' geographical space and 'symbolic' semantic spaces only to flout it.[93] The breach of the boundary consists in collapsing the distinction between two separate spheres of space conception that have just been established, and thus lays the groundwork for Sinclair's narration.[94]

The map of the borough, which is by itself without 'sujet' (non-narrative), becomes a narrative, setting into motion a process of familiarization tied up with a sense of knowledge of the space being mapped and an intimacy with it. The searching and locating of place names or businesses/ tours on the map 'populates' the flatness and fills it with meaning. One is briefly led to think that this activity helps a reader or tourist to identify more solidly with the area as it appears to invite an alternate form of voyeuristic consumption of a city (for e.g.,

91 | Sinclair himself also suggests the fact that the borough's mapped outline is similar to the outline of a map of England: "The borough, as I pointed out when we checked my collaged map, was made in the shape of England." Ibid., 442; The dust cover may be viewed online: "Hand Made Maps Ltd. Magazine: 'Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire' by Iain Sinclair" The beauty of the online version is that viewers can scroll a magnifying lens over the map in order to "read" it.

92 | See also "Hand Made Maps Ltd. Magazine: 'Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire' by Iain Sinclair."

93 | Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*, 340 Lotman shows how the crossing of a boundary becomes a pre-requisite to narration. See also Löbbermann, "Weg(be)schreibungen, Ortserkundungen: Transients in der Amerikanischen Stadt," especially 273–5.

94 | Ibid.

to 'discover' the 'underground' of Hackney), offering up authentic 'secrets' about the borough. However, we have a mimesis of process at work here again. This 'beautiful' map of Hackney, however, has no intention of allowing easy access to the borough. Rather, it teases the reader even as he or she realizes that they are a part of a parody being played out – of a typically touristic activity of 'exploring' and 'consuming' the city. There are no visible connections to a 'mainland', that is, the city of London. We are offered only 'sea routes' marked by little boats travelling into different directions – The City, Tower Hamlets, Hackney Marshes, Finsbury Park and Islington, which are all a stand-in for *possible* but non-existent connections of public transportation into or out of Hackney. This 'mapping' adheres on the one hand to an older tradition of capturing 'place' geographically onto paper. On the other hand, the act of literally 're-drawing' and personalizing the map of Hackney in this peculiar manner, visually and wishfully liberates the borough, from being invaded by tourists, and from the clutches of a dominant and dictating City Council.[95]

The Destructibility of Space and its Discursive Appropriation

Sinclair's antagonism towards mapping denounces the so-called objective 'view from above'.[96] Such an observer is scathingly discredited by Sinclair in a slandering description of Tony Blair looking at architectural models made by a collaborative school project called the Building Exploratory[97]: "Blair rises over a dwarf principality: a blue-suited King Kong, close-shaved, Max Factored. A sweat-slicked moon-face with rictal grin pressed against the tiny windows of a faithfully reproduced miniature of one of the detonated Holly Street towers."[98] This and a reference to the street-view from a window offered by the dustcover of Roland Camberton's book *Rain on Pavements* are brief instances in the book of an elevated viewpoint, if they may truly be called 'elevated' at all, in the sense of de Certeau's use of the word. As of date, there is no strategically situated building in Hackney tall enough to physically allow the kind of observation de Certeau's spectator is capable of from the top of the Empire State building with

95 | Sinclair has admittedly not done the designing or drawing himself. Here, it is his sanctioning and subsequent use of it as a dust cover for his book that is being alluded to.

96 | This phrase has come to be associated with the work of Michel de Certeau, from whom I borrow it as well. We will come back to a more detailed analysis of de Certeau's dichotomy of perspective over the city as this chapter proceeds, to see how this differentiation is still relevant.

97 | A participatory program within the larger project Discover Hackney, which involves school children, local residents, partner organizations and private companies, and explores buildings and spaces. See "The Building Exploratory."

98 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 92.

its architectural height of 381m. De Certeau's spectator looks down upon the city from so high up that the "gigantic mass is immobilized" and he experiences the transformation of the concrete city of New York into a "texturology" from which he reads "a universe".[99] But unlike the inscriptions that he sees, "of architectural figures of the *coincidatio oppositorum* formerly drawn in miniatures and mystical textures", Tony Blair is a spectator of the architectural miniatures themselves, which have trapped in them "ghosts skins" and "disembodied memories" of places in Hackney that were demolished and do not exist anymore.[100]

As de Certeau determines, the elevation between the city 'down below' and the spectator 'up' on the roof of the Empire State Building does not imply mere physical distance as much as it does a distance in the sense of a conceptual separation between spectator and the object. On having freed himself from the distracting bustle of the streets, the spectator is capable of a panoramic view, and becomes a "solar Eye" that makes the fiction of objectivity possible.[101] For, "the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" and "the voyeur-god created by this fiction, who, like Schreber's God, knows only cadavers, must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make himself alien to them."[102] De Certeau thus associates this sort of charting of city space with the activity of urban planners or cartographers (a bird's eye view) and rejects it at the same time as a simulacrum, not of the 'thing' or 'space' itself, but more as an illusion of objectivity. De Certeau's 'view from above' is extended and associated in *That Rose-Red Empire* to a 'politics from above', embodied among other things by the "blue-suited King Kong", Tony Blair. Blair's politics works with a myopic view of the borough offered by maps and architectural models. These physical objects, rather than being a *representation* of space, become associated with the *destruction* of space. The Holly Street project, the miniatures of which Blair is ogling at, was originally planned as a solution to housing problems in Hackney. It has now ironically come to symbolize a failure of urban planning and is held up as an example of the incompetence and whimsical nature of state-related decision making: "If there is a fashionable way of getting urban planning wrong, Holly Street has tried it."[103]

The destructibility of space thus associated with the act of mapping is made possible due to the visibility and readability of space that the process of mapping brings about.[104] As de Certeau points out, the cartographer's map is a "transparent

99 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.

100 | See respectively ibid.; Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 93.

101 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

102 | Ibid., 92–3.

103 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 92.

104 | In an analysis of Thomas Pyncheon's Mason & Dixon, Stockhammer highlights the destructibility of space through cartography by juxtaposing its exactitude alongside

text", the mapping (with a 'view from above') "makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text".[105] It makes of the city, "imaginary totalizations produced by the eye."[106] There exists for de Certeau another city, a "migrational, or metaphorical, city [which] thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city."[107] The map is thus linked to a concept of the 'city', but there exists an elusive element – the 'everyday'. This 'everyday' is characterized by "ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity", an "invisible beyond".[108] The act of walking provides, however, a link to the elusive everyday. By comparing walking to enunciation (a speech act), de Certeau arrives at the "phatic" aspect of walking.

"This location (here-there) (necessarily implied by walking and indicative of a present appropriation of space by an "I") also has the function of introducing an other in relation to this "I" and of thus establishing a conjunctive and disjunctive articulation of places. I would stress particularly the "phatic" aspect, by which I mean the function, isolated by Malinowski and Jakobson, of terms that initiate, maintain, or interrupt contact, such as "hello," "well, well," etc. Walking, which alternately follows a path and has followers, creates a mobile organicity in the environment, a sequence of phatic topoi."[109]

Seen within the framework of enunciation, walking becomes an act to establish social contact. Walking gives rise to an unlimited variety of operations similar to the endless possibilities of combinations of language, which cannot be reduced to a graph or map. This strategy of Sinclair's is a viable method of ANT – the means by which he, on the one hand, creates the network, and at the same time, traces the network. As in language, one may *turn a phrase*; the 'walker' composes a path. In language, a turn of the phrase gives birth to tropes in rhetoric, which

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the possibilities of adventure and fantasy which unmapped space allows. On a quote from Pyncheon's book: "Als Analyse der kartographischen Macht ist dieser Satz genau, als Geschichte vom Niedergang der Phantasie folgt er einem konventionellen und verbrauchten Muster der Aufklärungskritik: der melancholischen Erzählung von der Zerstörung der Mythen, Träume und Möglichkeitne durch Exaktheiten, Wachheiten und politisch stratifizierte Tatsächlichkeiten." Stockhammer, "Verortung. Die Macht der Karten und die Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert," 338–9. Read as a critique of so-called scientific factuality, this could almost have been written by Latour himself.

105 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92–3.

106 | Ibid.

107 | Ibid.

108 | Ibid., 95. These nevertheless form his starting point for a theory of spatial practices, which in the urban context he specifically refers to as "tactics" and "strategies".

109 | Ibid., 99.

are 'deviations' from a 'literal meaning', and thus 'divert' and 'displace' meaning. The comparison enables de Certeau to go a step further. He applies the rhetorical operations synecdoche and asyndeton to the act of walking:

"Synecdoche makes more dense: it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole. Asyndeton cuts out: it undoes continuity and undercuts its plausibility. A space treated in this way and shaped by practices is transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands."[110]

Such an analysis of the act of walking gives rise to a "swelling", "shrinking" or "fragmentation" of space. We have a 'spatial phrasing' through which the act of walking becomes endowed with a power to displace "coherent proper meanings of urbanism."[111]

A look at de Certeau's attempt to locate this inaccessible 'beyond' through an analysis of walking as a means of 'creating' space helps us clear up at least some of the perplexity with Sinclair's prose. Read against this theoretical background of walking as an act of enunciation, and therefore, of endless possibilities and combinations, one is no longer baffled by the author's style. It is no wonder that Sinclair should, faced with the task of composing a portrait of Hackney, draw on his social contacts to various artists of the borough. This 'activating' of his social network, a rounding up of the cultural producers of the borough, is nothing but a kind of subversive 'walking', which creates fine networks that take us all across the borough's map. These networks trace all the myriad associations of the people and places of Hackney, collecting their stories, the phatic aspect allowing a coming-into-being of the author himself in relation to his 'kin' and vice versa. The author's movements trace 'intimate' pathways in his 'map' of Hackney, "diverting" and "displacing" meanings, allowing the boundaries of Hackney to "swell" and "shrink", giving way to gaps, which appear along the "imaginary totalization" (de Certeau) of the cartographer's map of Hackney and crack and splinter it like a fissure in an iceberg. The destructibility of space threatening Hackney is thus defied discursively. Sinclair's 'walking' gives rise to a swelling and shrinking of the outlines of Hackney, which displaces the 'proper' meaning of the borough, rejoicing and maintaining in this manner a certain elusiveness about the place that keeps it from being over-determined or controlled.

110 | Ibid., 102.

111 | Ibid.

Here 'in Hackney' and out there 'elsewhere'

What we had to identify was the language of heritage.[112]

We have seen so far that Sinclair's aversion to cartography points us to his attitude towards the power and control entailed by the science/discipline. His own subversive use of the mythological map as a dust jacket for the book may almost be dismissed as a symptom of nostalgia for times gone by. However, as the analysis has illustrated, Sinclair personalizes the process of mapping in order to maintain a stronghold on his 'territory', making it a part of the author's artistic subversion against the dominance and suppression that geographical mapping has assisted. We have here in *That Rose-Red Empire*, possibly the oldest and classical juxtaposition of two separate methods of localization of space.[113]

Maps and similar methods of fixing space such as the architectural miniatures are the physical manifestations of *geographical means*. They signify abstractions of geographical space (matters of fact) as they document natural, physical or political elements of landscape, places, countries or continents in a specific time period.[114] Even within their own discipline of geography or cartography, they underline different registers the discipline uses to organize physical space. The objectivity and power infused in them has been questioned and problematized by recent theoretical debates that have termed them "imaginative geographies" or "scientific abstractions of geographical realities".[115] As Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift argue, maps utilize the illusion of objective description in order to disguise the power that they propagate:

"The practices of visual representation of the map serve to disguise the power that operates in and through cartography. Maps are not empty mirrors, they at once hide and reveal the hand of the geographer. Maps are fleshy: of the body and of the mind of the individuals that produce them, they draw the eye of the map-reader. Maps are framed, marked with text, are simplifications,

112 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 215, (Patrick Wright's testimony).

113 | For a lucid and detailed discussion of the 'non-mappability' of space and various modes of mapping as they appear explicitly or implicitly in literature, see Stockhammer, 'Verortung. Die Macht der Karten und die Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert'. The modes of cartography examined by Stockhammer include terrestial and celestial mapping in Thomas Pyncheon's *Mason & Dixon* (1997), or visual and tactile as suggested in Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940). Lewis Carroll's design of a map, which is "a perfect and absolute blank", would be an example of a representation of non-mappability of space in literature.

114 | Magister, "New York und die Macht der Karten: Kartographie von Migration, Urbanisierung und Ethnizität," 341.

115 | Massey, Allen, and Sarre, *Human Geography Today*, 17.

fabrications. They raise to visibility, behind the map, around the map, in the map they consign invisibility."[116]

The map thus considered, precedes 'territory' and paradoxically renders it (the territory) invisible to the map-reader.[117] De Certeau puts this differently: for him, the 'readability' of the city is possible only from a distance. It is the objectivity of the "solar Eye" which transforms the complexity of the city into "texturology". Of course, he then dismisses this "transparent text" as "a way of keeping aloof" by the space planner, urbanist, city planner or cartographer. The panorama city is a "theoretical (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short, a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices."[118] In discourse, the concept 'city' itself is an ideological concept – a totalizing nexus of socio-economic and political strategies that is kept in existence by the "language of power".[119] However, subverting de Certeau's concept 'city' are "contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power."[120] Locating these "movements" allows us to explore the *discursive strategy* of localization of space in *That Rose-Red Empire*.

The various elements that characterize Sinclair's perambulations in Hackney such as his re-treading of various roads or areas or his use of landmarks, linking people, memories and places, suggest that the discursive charting of territory begins rather tangibly. While Sinclair´s method predominantly uses mnemonic devices (memories and testimonies) to locate and access place, walking is an important strategy. As we saw earlier, its phatic function not only rekindles communal associations and networks, but it also maps the spaces they occupy or signify. The first-person narration and pervasive self-reference and reflexivity overemphasizes and determines the subjective position/perspective even as it establishes authenticity, and through that a sense of objectivity. This allows for a phenomenological approach to space as opposed to the epistemic access upheld by geographical cartography. It is, nevertheless, a rather futile attempt to derive any sort of conventional map by following Sinclair about the borough in *That Rose-Red Empir*e. This difficulty is greater due to the lack of narrative structure in the book. The fact that Sinclair's prose resists reading, coupled with his reluctance to use conventional structuring devices for his narrative, is perhaps a symptom

116 | Pile and Thrift, *Mapping the Subject*, 48, 371.

117 | As Baudrillard's simulacrum precedes (and replaces) the original. It is indeed an ironic coincidence that the fable from which Baudrillard derives and develops his notion of simulacrum should also utilize maps as a narrative trope. Borges and Hurley, *Collected Fictions*, 325; See also Pascalev, "Maps and Entitlement to Territory."

118 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

119 | Ibid., 95.

120 | Ibid.

of the (wishful or real) non-mappability of Hackney that is being drawn into discourse here. On the other hand, much in the sense of Latour's networks, this is also a different way of thinking and charting space than practiced by the conventional discipline. We have *pathways* rather than *coordinates* to mark the contours of the topography of Hackney invoked by Sinclair's narrative.[121] Instead of de Certeau's up-down/high-low dichotomy of 'seeing' the city, we have a catalogue of perspectives in which *Hackney-insiders* and *outsiders* take up two focal points, which coincide with the inclusion or exclusion in (Sinclair's) narrative on Hackney.

Hackney *Insiders* are rounded up and described by Sinclair.[122] They are romanticized and portrayed as eccentric, artistic, rebellious, mavericks bordering on anarchists, the different voices of their testimonials allowing this portrait to become 'polychromatic'. Sinclair's portrait focuses on a certain group of Hackney, 'cultural producers' as they may be called, a generation-specific sub-cultural group, consisting for most part of people who know each other, forming in *That Rose-Red Empire* an 'inner circle' of Hackney, held together by their interviewee, the author, Iain Sinclair. Access to them is allowed by and through Sinclair – the concrete manifestations are the transcribed testimonials appearing in italics, and thus set apart from. But they are also embedded within the main narrative, which reads as Sinclair's own long 'testimonial', his ode to Hackney. The insiders move

121 | Contrary to the first impression of non-mappability of space in Kafka's short story "The Castle", Stockhammer identifies and describes a charting of territory characterized by "pathways". (German: Bahnen) Stockhammer, "Verortung. Die Macht der Karten und die Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert," 325. The road leading up to the castle, that is, the distance between the protagonist K and the castle, is an example of such a pathway for Stockhammer. It simultaneously contains and enfolds a problematic space: while other characters appear to freely move in and out of the castle, this road (or a "path") never allows K, a land surveyor, access to the castle (the existence of which, according to Stockhammer, is also questionable). In an analysis of the semiotic language of high-speed urbanization and industrialization in more recent works, Detlev Ipsen has highlighted, in a similar vein, the semiotic forms islands and corridors. See Ipsen, "Reading Mega-Urban Landscape – A Semiotic Sketch" However, in the case of the present study, the description of space as "pathways" is more suitable because the notion implies flexibility (of space), and still retains an association with structure.

122 | At another level, the author is indeed, a "foreigner" in Hackney, a fact to which he alludes himself: "Hackney suited us both. As displaced Celts, at home nowhere on this earth, we stood apart: witnessing, with cynical detachment, the mess the English had made of it, the way they allowed Edinburgh advocates and Calvinist fanatics from north of the border to destroy the established structure from within." Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 310, my emphasis. But perhaps it is precisely this that makes him such an ardent observer of the borough. The cast of people appearing in the book also consists largely of those who have moved through the borough, a fact that possibly enhances their status of "standing apart".

about in *pathways* in Hackney that allow them to exist in relation to each other, in relation to the borough and in relation to the city (de Certeau's phatic aspect of walking). Thus, these *pathways* chart intimate knowledge about the 'insiders' as well as the borough and the city of London. They point to the existence in this borough through social interaction and community while highlighting the strength and significance of an independent and cultural existence for these 'insiders', with Sinclair as their spokesperson.

The position of one dwelling outside the borough, or the *outsider*, is also determined and described by Sinclair. That is, the author does not allow any sort of direct access to this position. The London city council or the Hackney council, which control decisions about what is to happen of the borough, are the 'outsiders'. I take liberty here to quote at length in order to display how the polarization between insider and outsider is established. The attribution of power asymmetries further strengthens the sense of victimization of the borough (see especially my emphasis):

"I listened, over years, to so many of Anna's stories […] that I experienced, by proxy, the way the system collapsed. The crucial moment being the handover of control from the Inner London Education Authority to Hackney. Budgets were decimated. Bureaucracy increased by quantum leaps. Teachers didn't receive their pay cheques. *And the managers were so remote they didn't even live in London. They were premature multitaskers, running businesses in Manchester and Birmingham*, […] and still finding the odd moment to invent new torments for the *foot soldiers in the trenches: the wretched teachers* […] In cutting loose from Hackney's patronage, my wife found herself coaching the children of aspiring families in tower blocks or teaching English to a constantly shifting group of asylum seekers in Peckham. All of this was at the edge of charity: the willing volunteer in a *collapsing system* that depended on the altruism of good hearted individuals.

Search for what's on offer, given age and over-qualification, and you are soon conducting dubious surveys, door to door in dangerous places. Statistics to be manipulated. The fascination, Anna found, was not in the material she gathered but glimpses of the unknown lives, the way flats were decorated. The stories people told, the lonely confessions. The tea and sweet cakes they offered."[123]

We see here that the unjust, corrupt avatar of authority (outsider) takes shape not so much by way of its description but rather by being singled out as the cause of the system's collapse. Juxtaposing it with "aspiring families in tower blocks" or the

123 | Ibid., 257–248, my emphasis.

"asylum seekers in Peckham" and the "altruism of good hearted individuals" then emphasizes it further. The catalogue emphasizing the two different perspectives thus displays the difference in modes of access to the city, and weakens the notion of one true objective 'reality'.[124] This divergence is magnified by the fact that the 'inside' perspective itself is fragmented by virtue of it being constituted by numerous testimonials. The physical and ideological distance between the two positions represents the discrepancy in ways of understanding the urban space and points, at a more pragmatic level, to the predicament of its development in terms of city planning.

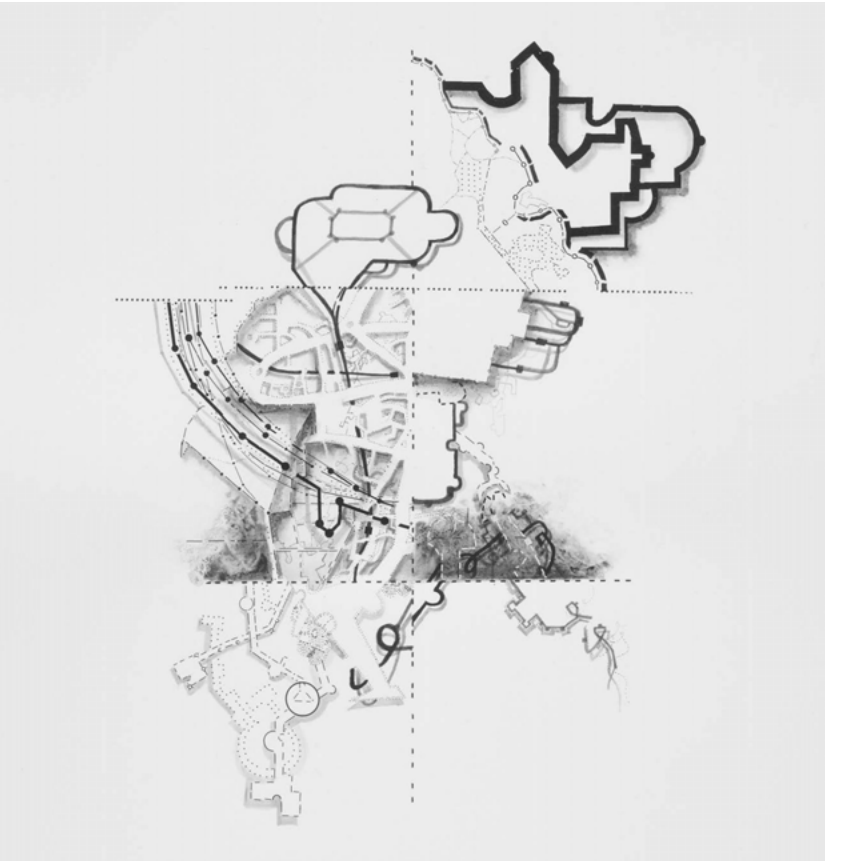
Paradoxically, maps again play an important role as a documentary strategy in the discursive mapping of Hackney, along with images of etchings by the artist Oona Grimes.[125] There are four maps included at different intervals in the book, see for example Image 2: Oona Grimes' Etching of Hackney Map #1[126]. These maps are made up of different registers much like a collage consisting of architectural blue prints, survey maps, transportation maps and street maps with layerings and shadowings, which add depth to the inherent flatness of such images. The dotted lines, which divide the image up into uniform sections, reminiscent of an architectural blueprint denoting different rooms, are perhaps merely lines along which the 'map' may be folded. Alternatively, they represent *ley lines* whose significance (if they are really ley lines and have any significance) is left inaccessible to the reader. They also allow a sort of fragmentation, which fractures the unity of the map as these lines demarcate the boundaries of the register of map used. At a glance, it appears to simply re-sketch a map of Hackney. This conglomerate of different registers of cartography teases the eye. As one compares it to a 'proper' map of Hackney or the map cover that Sinclair does provide us with, trying to pin down which area of Hackney the map may be of, one realizes that this assemblage undoes the integrity of so-called objective mapping. It points us to the fact that even within the mapping system, we have multiple registers/modes of mapping, which materialize in conspicuously altered representations of the same space.

124 | In Baudrillard's terms, an extreme formulation of this idea would claim that the notion of "reality" itself is rendered irrelevant since we only have access to the testimonies or narratives (which are themselves acts of re-construction).

125 | Using ink, gouache & letraset. See "Oona Grimes Homepage."

126 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 1, 229, 433, 576.

Image 2: Oona Grimes' Etching – Hackney Map #1



Source – As it appears in *That Rose-Red Empire*, 1. Copyright © Oona Grimes

The images or drawings are, like the maps, also etchings in black, of various motifs related to Hackney and made on demand after the artist had read some of Sinclair's work that was to appear in *That Rose-Red Empire*.[127] Going along Sinclair's hunch, of the ability of these drawings to lend structure of some sort to his narrative, we find that most of these drawings do reflect the content appearing in its pages.[128] However, the sequence in which the drawings are ordered in

127 | "Interview: Iain Sinclair and Oona Grimes."

128 | "This woman, I realized, might prove salvation of my Hackney project. She could convert the inchoate mess into a formal system. If she could devise symbols for each section of the book, like the intertitles of a silent film, readers would have something on which to rely. Trust the picture, not the word […] Amassed evidence, I tried to convince myself, was moving

relation to the chapters (content) is again jumbled. Thus, as an example, the image on page 27 of the scissors and a gun which is being shot reflects the chapter called Park Barbers, but which appears instead much later on page 77, at the beginning of quite another chapter called Waste. Just as a 'normal' table of contents is expected to structure lengthier texts, this 'scrambling' of 'order' in Sinclair's lengthy narrative and the jumbled up sequence of Grimes' images is, by now, rather predictable and consistent with Sinclair's style. Therefore, I would like to suggest that contrary to their anticipated ability to structure the narrative, these visualizations represent a cultural practice. They represent on the one hand, the artistic tradition of etchings as practiced by William Blake, and thus function as a paean to the artistic heritage of Hackney.[129] On the other hand, they are not simply a substitution for verbal descriptions (Sinclair's narrative) but constitute representations of the author's (as well as the artist's) cognitive conceptualization – his selectivity and individual way of looking at, or conceiving, that which is re-presented in *That Rose-Red Empire*.[130] This juxtaposition of various 'means of mapping' plays a vital part in Sinclair's ANT. This play with images and geographical or discursive 'mapping' positioned within a politics of representation of the 'real' becomes a representation of cultural practices that make it possible to anticipate, to conceive and to understand how they become constructed.[131] At the same time, it is precisely this strategy that points once more to the need to theorize the position of the spokesperson, the one who traces the networks, in Latour's ANT.

towards a mathematical system I would never interpret. But Oona, staying in one place, taking her time, evaluating the Jiffy bags of material with which I would keep her supplied, just might." Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 465.

129 | For a more detailed listing and discussion of the use of photographs, graphics, documents or works of art in novels see Hallet, "The Multimodal Novel" That is, apart from their function as a visualization of the narrative and providing motifs related to Hackney or reflecting Hackney.

130 | Ibid., 136–7.

131 | Ibid.

What is There and Which is Here? That is Fact and this Concern!

> So it folds and unfolds, the slippery narrative of memory and myth.[132]

Generically speaking, we have in *That Red-Rose Empire* almost an exaggeration of typically Romantic elements giving rise to a narrative which is, as we have seen in the current analysis, anything other than the ethno-methodological description involving a planned, structured and deliberated activity of 'observation' that Latour's empiricism would require.[133] These (Romantic elements) include a highly subjective speaker position, a critical stance towards prominent features of the contemporary urban scenario and a longing (I dare say, pining) for redemption "evoked in a synthesis of political and personal terms", which is more than just a little intentional on Sinclair's part.[134] The mediating agency is homodiegetic and yet, omniscient. However, it is an omniscience that hides itself behind the figure of an outraged author/artist and denizen of Hackney. Although not a 'view from above' (also literally from the top of a building), engaging with rival representations, the positioning of the author nevertheless becomes empowering as it works to expose the self-serving myth of a beautiful, gentrified city. Reminiscent of Dickens' critique of the dehumanizing effects of utilitarianism, Sinclair's treatment of corrupt politics and corporate capitalism is relentless and allows it an 'identity' only allegorically, implied in "aspirational flats with slender, bicycle-decorated balconies" or by mention of computer generated pictures on the Olympic fence, of what will replace 'hard and fast' Hackney.[135] Thus we see performed, a 'displacement of point of view' to shake the iron pillar of the 'view from above'. (Latour's words) The poetic of mnemonics in Sinclair's montage of the testimonies of Hackney's "leftist utopianism, and "bohemian collectives" also has an empowering thrust as it renders the borough a living breathing 'organicity' (de Certeau) which wont simply be 'cleansed' away.[136]

132 | Sinclair as quoted in Arnaud, "Rose-Red Empire – Iain Sinclair Book Launch and Exhibition."

133 | 'Observation' itself is an institutionalized or 'scientific' activity. Latour's import of ethno-methodology as a second empiricism in sociology thus needs to be thematized also in terms of the transfer of method that must then occur between two separate disciplines. This in turn would need to acknowledge the 'observer' as a 'variable' – an admittedly subjective position.

134 | Eckstein and Reinfandt, "The Adventures of William Bloke, or: Romanticism Today and How It Got Here"; This is suggested by the explicit allusion to Blake by Sinclair. See for example Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 540.

135 | Sicher, *Rereading the City/Rereading Dickens*, 1–39; Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 9, 331, 559.

136 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 473.

We have seen in the preceding section(s), how Sinclair's project enriches the scenography of Hackney and thus suggests a way of turning matters of fact into matters of concern, presenting, as Latour would have it, a move towards a second empiricism.

Some caution is called for, however, as my own analysis has implicitly shown. Sinclair's narrative also displays how this second empiricism runs the risk of becoming a mere 'hording' of knowledge, an 'inchoate mess' or a documentary 'excess' which resists 'access'.[137] Often, it is characteristically cryptic or simply incomplete – for example, when Sinclair draws a similarity between a Marc Karlin film and his own project. The film in question is a "sort of elegy for a vanishing era", a portrait of, and featuring, the general practitioner and social activist Dr. Widgery and Sheila Rowbotham as they move about in (their) London, going about their work.[138] Sinclair describes the film content and follows it up with what is presumably an insert from the film – a dialog between Dr. Widgery and a patient, and finally, a film appreciation of sorts by Sinclair himself. However, none of this is textually or visually marked as such. Readers are left guessing as to which is what, and which film or footage Sinclair is referring to or how he has access to it. One can safely argue that such 'gaps' in the narrative are often not a 'telling' of anything as much as they are evidence of Sinclair's idiosyncratic style which demands constant deciphering, conveying the feeling that 'less' would have meant 'more'. To borrow from de Certeau, "looking from the shores of legibility toward an inaccessible beyond", Sinclair's narrative as well as the testimonies in the book imply a total lack of communication or at the most, an ineffective or even futile dialog between the counter positions (insider/outsider) we encounter in the book.[139] It implies an unresolvable struggle between these two parties. It is a struggle that will be confirmed and resolved outside the book, as the Olympic development plan pushes forward to 'regenerate' the London borough, thus determining the state's hegemony, and displaying the ineffectiveness of the artistic community as well as Sinclair's project.[140]

137 | Schlote and Voigts-Virchow, "Introduction: The Creative Treatment of Actuality – New Documentarism," 107–8. While defining a culture of pervasive media accessibility which influences documentarism today, the authors identify in "the urban" a culture of universal "axcess", a portmanteau derived from excess and access. See also Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, 239. Lodge analyses Jorge Luis Borges' "Funes, the Meorious": "In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details.", which he describes as a metonymic excess that resists the reconstruction of something "whole".

138 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 46.

139 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 97.

140 | This evaluation is (sadly) rendered even more conclusive when read along Sinclair's following statement: "Transporting a raft of Hackney connected materials across the river to Lambeth is both an act of homage to the local artisan-visionary, William Blake, and an

On the other hand, this is possibly an indication of what distinguishes the contemporary 'urban' experience of this particular London borough or for this author. His 'vertiginous' prose conjures up a hologram composed from an endless sea of stories from an endless number of people, providing in its own way *access* to the urban *excess* that surrounds, engulfs and finally renders itself elusive and remains intangible. The city itself is conveyed as a separate universe and the borough is transformed into a city where people come 'to disappear' (reinforcing the age old belief in the lure of anonymity offered by urban spaces), and through which they pass, leaving traces, collected in Sinclair's book like in a receptacle. Referring to the 'regeneration' that has accosted Hackney, for him an avatar of all evils combined, Sinclair anticipates the 'documentariness' of his project himself:

"Notices around the latest field of rubble boasted of IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF CONSTRUCTION. The thing itself no longer mattered, and barely existed, but the image got sharper and sharper. High definition, finally, absolves content."[141]

This underlines what Hito Steyerl has identified as the documentary *uncertainty principle* in her discussion of the relationship between documentary and representation of 'truth' or 'reality' in the contemporary realm of art:

"Wir sind umgeben von groben und zunehmend abstrakten 'dokumentarischen' Bildern, wackligen, dunklen oder unscharfen Gebilden, die kaum etwas zeigen außer ihrer eigenen Aufregung. Je direkter, je unmittelbarer sie sich geben, desto weniger ist meistens auf ihnen zu sehen. Sie evozieren eine Situation der permanenten Ausnahme und einer dauerhaften Krise, einen Zustand erhöhter Spannung und Wachsamkeit."[142]

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acknowledgement of a certain kind of expulsion: the dark shadow of the Olympic fence, super-malls, art as sponsored interventionism. My book, Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire, offending the index of Orwellian politics and spin, has been banished from its generative territory." It appears to imply that more than just the book has been banished. See Sinclair's statement in Arnaud, "Rose-Red Empire – Iain Sinclair Book Launch and Exhibition"; Such a reading justifies Zygmunt Bauman's use of the metaphor of war over urban space. See Bauman, "Urban Space Wars"; See also Hansen, *Space Wars and the New Urban Imperialism*, who asks "But why use such a heavy metaphor as space wars?", 16.

141 | Sinclair, *That Rose-Red Empire*, 470, original caps.

142 | My translation from the German "die dokumentarische Unschärferelation". "We are surrounded by blurry and increasingly abstract 'documentary' images, shaky, dark or fuzzy structures which display hardly anything except a sense of anxiety. The greater their efforts to appear unmediated, the lesser can be expected to be seen on them. They evoke a situation

Steyerl is discussing the 'documentariness' of contemporary war photography taken (unintentionally) in low camera resolution, which is, of course, quite a different cup of tea than Sinclair's Hackney portrait. What I would like to borrow for our purpose is the attribute that she derives from it of what characterizes 'the documentary' today, that which she terms the 'uncertainty principle'. The low visibility of these pictures paradoxically lends them documentariness, or their unmediated-ness, their authenticity. Inversely, the uncertainty principle reflects Sinclair's assertion that "high definition, finally, absolves content". This condition in an urban context has already been imagined by de Certeau's description of the unreadablity of the city. The "hero flâneur" finds that he is on the streets down below, beneath the "threshold of visibility".[143] If this is what characterizes contemporary documentary in the urban context, then it is logical to read Sinclair's narrative and textual style as an ideological documentary strategy, which resists 'visibility' and therefore, 'readability'. The narrative draws largely on mnemonic strategies or references, that is, sensory data from the personal perception of the people interviewed and the author. In face of the authenticity of the 'source' of information (memory) and the 'sincerity' of the chronicler, the question of the accuracy of its mediation loses significance and is perhaps even rendered irrelevant. Addressing the paradoxes of authenticity, Julia Straub's suggestion is to consider the dichotomy of inside-outside as an irreducible one when speaking about authenticity:

"From the seventeenth century onwards this wedge was driven between the inner, 'real' self and the external, 'fake' self. […] With the onset of Romanticism, authentic selfhood became aligned with emotional honesty and artistic genuineness. Authenticity referred to some deep, internal 'core' of the self, controlled by and ultimately in conflict with expectations from the outside."[144]

Let us, for a moment, juxtapose this inside-outside dichotomy of authenticity that Straub talks of with the insider-outsider dichotomy of perspectives that has been discussed in this analysis. The Hackney-insider perspective is the "inner, 'real' self", which is "controlled by and ultimately in conflict with [expectations from] the outside".[145] When the epistemological tenets that documentary could draw on have been undermined and the 'real' in history or memory is rendered a slippery 'thing', it appears that the means of representation offered by the "emotional honesty and artistic genuineness" of the "authentic selfhood",

of permanent crisis, a heightened state of tension/suspense and vigilance." See Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit*, 7–17.

143 | de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

144 | Straub, *Paradoxes of Authenticity*, 14.

145 | Ibid.

embodied primarily by Sinclair, gain irreducible authority as authentic narratives. On having read Sinclair's enterprise as an ANT-like method, we see that the spokesperson position not only constitutes the means of the method, but also functions as its authenticating authority.

In order to continue our quest into the productivity and applicability of Latour's ANT for a reading of literary documentaries, we will continue to thematize and problematize the position as well as the process of observation within the ANT-framework of analysis by focusing on the observer position and author-narrator. Indeed, it was very difficult to ignore Sinclair's grounding of himself into his text about Hackney – that essential referentiality of his documentation that ironically becomes a measure of authenticity in his literary documentary. An authenticity not so much in the sense of a measure of its truth content, but a means of making visible the connection between the text and its outer material world by showing how the author generates a sense of his own presence in the text and, for that matter, of the tangible and intangible 'world' he inhabits. This presence is, paradoxically, also a testimony to the narrative's subjectivity and a narrative anchor that guarantees its realness in terms of its assumed reality of the empirically anchored author-observer. Sinclair's narrative thus provides us with a particularly thick and layered description of Hackney that does justice to a particular mesh of relations and testimonies that have travelled through time and space, that have gone through a process of reflexivity, that are perhaps continuously changing, but in Sinclair's book, nevertheless, represent different positions from which Hackney may be 'seen'. To be able to reach such conclusions, however, it was necessary to extend the Latourian analogy to include and highlight the position of the observer, who must essentially remain within the network for a self-reflexive, and therefore particularly efficient, ANT analysis to be possible. In terms of measuring the applicability and productivity of Latour's ANT, what the following chapter strives to afford is, therefore, a means to further explore this position of the observer by turning our attention to a counter example to the elusive density of Sinclair's *That Rose-Red Empire*.