London Psychogeographies: Three Moments

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Introducing Three Moments

A little over three years ago, I set out for a walk in London. I had no plan, no company, no working cell phone, and I knew little of the city’s landscape. My cousins lived in a flat northwest of central London, in the quiet neighborhood of Kentish Town. I thought to walk towards the River Thames because we had visited it several days prior to celebrate the New Year. It had been a terrible and horrifying night, but I marveled at every second of it. We stepped off the tube and were subsumed by a mass of drunken revelers, herded by police flaunting their truncheons and barking orders into megaphones. Squeezed into the river bank, a short distance from the London Eye, amidst a cacophony of hedonistic celebration and intoxicated agitation, we eagerly waited for the sky to light up with fireworks: the spectacle of the new year. We counted down the final seconds of 2011 with the rest of the city; nothing happened. It was too foggy to see anything but faint incandescent ghosts mocking us from above. New Year’s was suddenly a transparent ploy to bring us here.

I walked towards the Thames to have my revenge, to replace the promised time that had been stolen from me just nights before. The city communicated its past and its future to me in one breath. I walked along London’s capricious streets, passing little alleyways and side streets holding nondescript pubs, tightly packed rows of two-story homes, grand buildings covered with centuries of soot, and colossal council estates tattooed in graffiti. Juxtaposed with these built emblems of London’s dense history were towering testaments to urban “regeneration,” multicolored glass high rises, applauded on listings filling the windows of real-estate agencies. After
meandering east and west for many hours, to Shoreditch then across central London to Hyde Park, I reached the Thames late in the evening. There, I drank a celebratory cappuccino in front of the Tate Modern, across the river from where we had been robbed by New Year’s. Behind me stood a modern art museum built out of a disused power station; before me, the illuminated suspended steel of the Millennium Bridge slowly oscillated in the winter breeze, shimmering in the dusk. Standing there, I knew that London’s time was deceiving me.

In my thesis, I set out to dissect the historic and geographic disarray I felt that day in London. I examine three distinct yet thoroughly interconnected “moments” through four texts that unfold across a span of three hundred years, from the early eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. My readings are driven by the work of the Situationist International, an avant-garde revolutionary group of political theorists, activists, and artists active in France and Europe between 1957 and 1972.¹ To read my text’s geographic and historical relationship with London, I look to the Situationist concept of psychogeography, defined as “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”² I think of my own walk—and its later iterations—in Situationist terms, as a dérive, or drift, loosely defined by the group as “a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society:

¹ To read comprehensive accounts of Situationist International’s activities, art, and theory see Wark (2011) and Sadler (1998). For translations of key texts see Knabb (2006). For a comprehensive bibliography of Situationist works see Ford (2005).
technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances.” The dérive is an unplanned walk within a city or developed landscape, meant to construct a radically experimental—and psychogeographical—experience of urban environments, inspired by the aimless strolls and leisurely explorations of the flâneur in nineteenth-century Paris. When one studies movements through the city using the tools of psychogeography, one is forced to consider the relationship between urbanization and the dynamics of capitalism. Applying the Situationist practice in my readings of four books set in London over three centuries allows me to view their London geographies within the larger historic processes of urbanization and capital accumulation.

In my first chapter, I turn to Moll Flanders by Daniel Defoe (1722). I analyze three geographical fields constructed by the novel’s eponymous protagonist: place, road, and street. I argue that Moll Flanders constructs a path across England and inside London that subverts rational mappability and spatial ordering. Appropriating the power of geographical representation to brand her false appearances and leverage her social mobility, Moll Flanders constructs multiple geographies out of her subjective desires. Moll’s path inscribes the psychogeography of her transgressions against the capitalist modes of social and spatial production organizing the city and the nation, constructing a network of social and economic relations between places.

Chapter two examines Charles Dickens’s Oliver Twist (1837), first published in serial form in an industrial moment accentuated by sharp contrasts between the conditions of the working class slums and the bourgeois suburbs in London. I consider the novel’s thresholds, labyrinths, and connections as psychogeographical fragments of radical urban possibility. The movements and behavior of the novel’s

3 Ibid.
criminal figures inside and outside of the city, read through a Situationist perspective, challenge the novel’s overarching bourgeois morality. Inside clandestine dwellings, the novel’s criminals develop their programs of illicit activity. The characters construct a coded spatial praxis of undetected movement and habitation that suggests an alternative geography of the city that is invisible to the bourgeoisie and the police.

In my third chapter I look at two contemporary works of nonfiction, Iain Sinclair’s *London Orbital: A Walk Around The M25* (2002) and Laura Oldfield Ford’s *Savage Messiah*, published in 2011 as a collection of the author-artist’s zines; both works are produced as artifacts of their authors’ psychogeographical drifts through London. Iain Sinclair’s drift around the margins of M25 motorway takes London’s modern infrastructure border as the starting point for understanding the historic, social, and geographical casualties of the city’s modernization. Laura Oldfield Ford is preoccupied with London’s disciplinary instruments of surveillance, leading her to seek out unmonitored sites and spaces. She drifts to radically resist the colonization of everyday life by the interests of the state and the globalized private market, which she sees transforming late-capitalist London before her eyes. I consider the categories of shadows, margins, and spectacular time in the texts’ treatment of post-industrial London. The authors drift through neglected zones of the city, where they recover repressed fragments of history and use their discoveries to reimagine and radicalize their positions within the spectacle they see as twenty-first century London.

In all of these books, people fight against the geography of London in many different ways but for the same fundamental reason: they reject the overarching realities of everyday life as part of a class struggle. The tension between London’s
geographical order and individual lives produces a series psychogeographical
moments that I read across time and space. I use the texts’ literary psychogeographies
to piece together the displaced time I experienced in my own London drifts. In these
moments, we begin to understand how the city came to be this way.

Why should I use the work of Situationist International as the basis for my
literary analysis? Do I have any right to do this? Does this framework have any
purchase for extending the Situationist critique of the city and reading literature to
analyze London’s evolution? To answer these questions, I turn to Guy Debord, a
founding member of Situationist International, in his famed text The Society of the
Spectacle. Debord argues that “the spectacle is capital accumulated to point where it
becomes image.”5 I look to my texts to trace the spectacle advancing through
London’s time and space. In Debord’s history of the commodity form, the spectacle is
immanent in capitalism:

The development of the forces of production is the real unconscious history
that has built and modified the conditions of existence of human groups
(understood as the conditions of survival and their extension): this
development has been the basis of all human enterprise.... Economic growth
liberates societies from the natural pressures occasioned by their struggle for
survival, but they still must be liberated from their liberators. The
independence of the commodity has spread to the entire economy over which
the commodity now reigns. The economy transforms the world, but it
transforms into a world of the economy.... With the coming of the industrial
revolution, the division of labor specific to that revolution’s manufacturing
system, and mass production for a world market, the commodity emerged in
its full-fledged form as a force aspiring to the complete colonization of social
life.6

4 With the term “literary psychogeography,” I am playfully détourning—in the
spirit of the Situationist International—the field of literary geography. See Moretti (1998) and Moretti
(2005).
1994), sec. 34.
6 Ibid., sec. 40-41.
I locate my Situationist readings of distinct epochal moments in capitalism within London’s “real unconscious history.” In my analysis, this is not a history of narratives so much as one of movements and the production of space. When Debord locates the “spread” of the commodity form in industrialization, he invokes the evolution of the modern city that I wish to explore across the chapters of my thesis. In my readings, the need for societies to be “liberated from their liberators” emerges in a series of class contests over London’s geography, a fight for freedom to construct everyday life, waged between the dominant interests of the evolving commodity form—as spectacle—and the oppressed individuals living, walking, and drifting inside London.
Chapter One: Psychogeographical Mobilities

Daniel Defoe’s novel Moll Flanders (1722) uncovers a city within a city. London is marked by sharp contrasts of wealth and poverty: the social and economic consequences of the burgeoning commodity markets in early modern England that are shaping and reordering the nation and its cities in the image of capital. Moll Flanders narrates her life’s meandering course, from her beginnings as the orphan of a condemned criminal, through a series of failed marriages, adopted and abandoned identities, and periods of criminal success, infamy, imprisonment, transport, and redemptive penitence. Moll’s life reveals its own “psychogeographical” trajectory within the city of London, across England, and into the expanding colonies of North America. According to Guy Debord,

> Psychogeography sets for itself the study of precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The charmingly vague adjective psychogeographical can be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery.

Moll’s movements are predicated on her “study” of the subjective and objective dimensions of her “geographical environment,” allowing her to discern the “precise laws and specific effects” that account for her immediate conditions. Her psychogeographical renderings of narrative space and time dislocate her transgressions from the map.

The map, in my analysis, is the starting point for understanding the novel’s manipulations of narrative space. This geocritical mode of analysis, called literary

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geography, is geared towards opening up the novel and its narrative representations to new channels of spatial inquiry. As Franco Moretti states, “Not, of course, that the map is already an explanation; but at least it shows us that there is something that needs to be explained. One step at a time.” In my analysis, maps highlight the failures of ordered geography to capture and represent the full extent of Moll’s adventures. Moll’s movements, when mapped, suggest an alternative system of geography that thrives beneath the surface of public perception, officialdom, and surveillance. Moll’s life, when mapped, reveals how she manipulates her observers’ objective perceptions of her locations and activities. Maps are the official models of the world Moll is meant to inhabit, but which she determinedly subverts. The factors that motivate Moll’s movements—emerging through her situation-specific decisions geared towards her own self-improvement and socioeconomic mobility—make hers a singular personal geography that cannot be easily located a standard map. Places, roads, and streets are no longer viewed in harmony with maps, as coherent units that frame and order everyday life.

I. Place

Place, in Moll Flanders, is where space accumulates meaning within a set of physical and symbolic parameters. When Moll enters a new place and engages with its everyday life, she shapes her identity to appear within its network of accumulated and accumulating meanings. Both cities and countryside constitute places that are given textual representation as discernible units. Places are constructed and given

meaning in the text by the potential they hold to serve Moll’s mobility. Henri
Lefebvre’s axiom, “(Social) Space is a (social) product,” reflects the abstract model
for the construction of place in the novel that Moll subverts throughout her narrative.9
Lefebvre argues that the social production of space is obscured in part by the “the
illusion of transparency,” in which
the design serves as a mediator itself of great fidelity—between mental
activity (invention) and social activity (realization); and it is deployed in
space. The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as
innocent, as free of traps or secret places.10

Moll scrutinizes spatial designs as she determines her movements and interprets their
consequences for her life. She inserts her varying appearances into the designs of an
array of places, at once feeding illusions for those around her and manipulating the
mechanisms of spatial production for her readers.

Until Moll is incarcerated in Newgate Prison towards the end of her tale, and
repentantly retraces her path, she never fully inhabits a place, always concealing
certain facts about herself and falsely projecting her illusory appearances. She
functions like Mikhail Bakhtin’s novelistic rogue, through whom “we encounter new
forms for making public all the unofficial and forbidden spheres of human life.”11
Moll’s deception and thievery, which shape much of her time in London, highlight
the fundamental tension inherent in place, described by John Bender as “the interplay
between the unbound heterogeneity of population in cities (their polyglot assembly of
voices) and the bounded unity of their walls, fortified compounds, government

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10 Ibid., 27-28.
of Texas Press, 1982), 121-122.
structures, and systems of communication.” The place’s order comes from all directions: power from above, built structures from below, and socialization all around. Moll represents the radical edges between a place’s order and diversity by directly defying its official logic, which demands that its subjects be accountable, obey laws, and generate value through their work. Moll disobey[s] the rational order of place by donning innumerable disguises, committing crimes, and contributing to the circulation of stolen goods within London’s criminal underground. Through the novel, London—as the central “place” of Moll Flanders and of early modern England—is re-ordered and reconfigured by viewing Moll’s life within it. She traces her path through the shadows, cracks, and margins that lie within the city’s geography, out of the sight of its law enforcers. Place becomes discernible through Moll, who situates herself within its design to remain unaccountable to the state, the public, and her private lovers and acquaintances.

When Moll’s married lover, whom she first meets in Bath and later accompanies to London, recovers from his life-threatening illness and subsequently ends their affair, she is left to determine where to live and how to support herself. This situation leads her to reflect on the city and articulate what it offers, in relation to her immediate needs and her new Gentlewoman acquaintance’s description of the country:

There was in the house where I Lodg’d, a North Country Woman that went for a Gentlewoman, and nothing was more frequent in her discourse than her account of the cheapness of Provisions, and the easie way of living in her Country; how plentiful and cheap everything was, what good Company they kept, and the like; till at last I told her she almost tempted me to go and live in her Country; for I that was a Widow, tho’ I had sufficient to live on, yet had

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no way of encreasing it; and that *London* was an expensive and extravagant Place; that I found I could not live here under a Hundred Pound a Year, unless I kept no Company, no Servant, made no Appearance, and buried my self in Privacy, as if I was oblig’d to it by Necessity.13

The primary distinctions that are made between London and the Country concern scarcity and abundance. The Country is promoted for its “easie way of living,” tied to “how plentiful and cheap everything was.” London, on the other hand, is criticized for being an “expensive and extravagant Place.” The word “Place” emphasizes the city’s constitution as a single unit, which can then be ascribed meaning, both in relation to the North Country and to its own interior dimensions. Social and economic concerns, of suitable company and its cost, are linked through Moll’s narration and form the basis for her terse representations of each place. The exorbitant cost of living in London compromises Moll’s ability to maintain her Gentlewomanly appearance, which is contingent on what her “Hundred Pound a Year” calculation negates: “no Company, no Servant...no Appearance.” Moll’s desired self-improvement and social mobility are negated by “Necessity,” which obliges her to forgo life’s pleasures and comforts. For Moll, life in London, as a place, is impossible without the necessary money. London is of no service to Moll if she does not possess the means to propagate her appearances into its design. Her language evokes the imagery of her social death, being “buried ... in Privacy,” where her mobility is stymied. Both London and the North Country remain largely abstracted, as Moll’s narration neglects realist imagery and foregrounds value. The two places are distinguished by how they appear to serve Moll’s self-improvement and mobility.

13 Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (London: Penguin Classics, 1989), 183. All further references will be given parenthetically in the running text.
The intersectionality of space in Lefebvre’s analysis locates the construction of place that Moll both inhabits and subverts herself through “symbolic representation,” which “serves to maintain these social relations [of production and reproduction] in a state of coexistence and cohesion. It displays them while displacing them — and thus concealing them in symbolic fashion — with the help of, and onto the backdrop of, nature.”\(^{14}\) The “representational spaces” that Moll inhabits, “linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life,” operate at the concealed intersection of space determined through the relations of production, with its materially and legally signified external order, and space made legible and accountable through social reproduction and performance.\(^{15}\) Moll situates herself within the produced spatial dimensions of place, but her movements are coded to maintain symbolic obscurity, defying space’s produced logic of accountability and surveillance.

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams links the rise of the novel as a culturally significant form in England to emerging processes of land development for profit and private investment in the eighteenth century. He argues that Defoe does not try to realistically represent human relationships and everyday life, as Dickens and many others will do in the next century, but rather he abstracts his world in order to relay the prevailing spirit of the time, of self-improvement and value-making. The narration’s descriptions of London and the North Country in this short passage directly express what Williams identifies as “the open ideology of

\(^{14}\) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 32.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 33.
improvement...most apparent in Defoe."

The attention Moll pays to details concerning the financial—and consequently social—advantages of living in the North Country as opposed to London reflect the essence of the improvement that she is after, in which she continually seeks to gain control over her circumstances. The city is tied to downward mobility, as it slowly alienates Moll from her financially grounded conception of herself, while the country epitomizes the opposite effect. The London that faces Moll is for Williams reflective of the larger problems facing England:

A dominant part of the life of the nation was reflected but also created within it. As its population grew it went into deficit, not only in food but in the balance of material production; but this was much more than compensated by the fact of its social production: it was producing and reproducing, to a dominant degree, the social reality of the nation as a whole."

Moll evidently feels the burden of the growing nation within London, yet the North Country is situated outside of these issues. The North is foreign to Moll, who at this point in her life, has yet to travel north of Oxford and Gloucester. The “social reality of the nation as a whole” can be viewed as the impetus behind Moll’s geographical movements, as she travels from place to place, seeking to escape the nation’s gravity.

Places are hollowly constructed in the text by Moll’s passing impressions of their social and economic livelihood, and her stated motivations for traveling. Though she visits and inhabits many distinct places across England—Oxford (105), Bath (156-157), Bristol (158/166), Shepton in Somersetshire (164), Lancashire (196), Liverpool (196), Warrington (197), Chester (200/238), Hertford (238), Tunbridge and Epsom (336), Suffolk (336), Cambridge (337), Ipswich (337), Harwich (337-338),

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17 Ibid., 147-148.
and Colchester (342)—Moll has almost nothing to say about them. Bath, where Moll lives for a brief period, following her return from her disastrous marriage with a man whom she discovered to be her own brother, receives little description beyond being “a Place of Gallantry enough; Expensive, and full of snares” (156). She then says, “I went thither indeed in the view of taking any thing that might offer,” situating her stay in Bath through her drive towards accumulation, of what the place “might offer.” Bath, as a place, is represented through Moll’s indeterminate motivation; Moll needs to gain something, but she does not know what it is or how to go about gaining it. To enter a place is to become part of its process of exchange and accumulation, which for Bath is qualified by extravagant costs and temptations. Moll distills Bath into its social and economic conditions: and this distillation is repeated, in varying degrees, in the novel’s treatment of the other places that she visits, which are viewed through her highly motivated, self-interested intentions and actions, as opposed what she sees, smells, and hears.

The secret nature of Moll’s path informs the novel’s distinct realist (or non-realist) representation of place. As I will demonstrate in my discussion of roads in the following section, Moll’s true path is only discernible to herself and to her readers, not to her friends, acquaintances, lovers, and observers. Moll must conceal more and more of her past as the novel progresses. Moll’s appearances destruct when she is arrested and incarcerated. Her abstract descriptions of places, central to how she propagates her appearances, are replaced by her sensory descriptions of confinement.
Once Moll is sent to Newgate Prison, after being apprehended in a private home for trying to steal linens, she describes it with sensorial language previously absent from her accounts of other places in the novel:

when I look’d round upon all the horrors of that dismal Place: I look’d on myself as lost, and that I had nothing to think of but going out of the World, and that with the utmost Infamy; the hellish Noise, the Roaring, Swearing and Clamour, the Stench and nastiness, and all the dreadful croud of Afflicting things that I saw there; joyn’d together to make the Place seem an Emblem of Hell itself, and a kind of Entrance into it. (348)

Newgate finally unites Moll’s senses within its walls, demanding it appear as a tangible place in which she cannot surreptitiously conceal herself. She hears the prison’s din made of “hellish Noise,” “Roaring,” “Swearing and Clamour,” reflecting the space’s dissolution of language and communication into expressions of pain, anger, and confusion. Moll smells a “Stench” and feels “nastiness;” she sees “the dreadful croud of Afflicting things.” Newgate reduces prisoners into flattened objects of punishment.

John Bender argues that Defoe’s representation of a “subjective order—the structure of feeling” in the narration of Moll’s experience inside Newgate informed the development of the penitentiary in the eighteenth century.18 Within the physical confinement of the prison, Moll is forced to occupy the space as no one but herself, stripped of her disguises, and defined by the terms of the space. It is in the prison where Moll’s path dissolves into its absolution. Moll’s penitent inscription of her life both marks and authorizes her text. To Bender, the prison signals liminality because it locates, despite its dishonest and incompetent officials, Moll’s “secular rehabilitation,” in which she goes from stealing to generating value, once she restarts

18 Bender, Imagining the Penitentiary, 45.
her life on the colonies with her former husband, with whom she reunites in Newgate.\textsuperscript{19} The prison’s liminality is not incompatible with my designation of it as a fully constituted place, for Newgate is a transitional site for Moll. A penitential transformation of Moll’s subjectivity in Newgate is enacted through the terms of the space and by the puritanical doctrine of repentance. Before Moll enters Newgate, she is able to transform herself by shaping her self-presentation in relation to specific places. In Newgate, the power of the prison blocks Moll’s self-determination in these terms. Newgate’s distinctiveness from all other places represented in the novel helps us see Moll’s disordering of place elsewhere. Whereas the prison confines Moll within its physical limits through the power of law, the other places of the novel fail to account for her, much like how she fails to account for their livelihood in her discourse and instead conveys a notional sense of their governed order. Moll refuses to acquiesce to the ordering of a place, until the walls of the prison confine her.

Moll’s construction and subversion of place across England sharply contrasts with place’s production and ordering of her subjectivity inside Newgate. The diversity of a place’s subjects and their activities is erased by the programmatic confinement of the prison. The interplay between systems of powers and spatial subjects produce Moll’s narrative realizations of place. The parameters of place that confront Moll are viewed not only in their objective, material dimensions, but in the power of Moll’s subjective construction to reproduce place along the terms of her self-advancement.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 47.
II. Road

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theorization of the “chronotope of the road,” or the time-space unique to the novelistic road, is helpful for situating the particularities of Moll’s employment of the road in her story:

The chronotope of the road permits everyday life to be realized within it. But this life is, so to speak, spread out along the edge of the road itself, and along the sideroads. The main protagonist and his turning points are to be found outside everyday life...It is always the case that the hero cannot, by his very nature, be part of everyday life; he passes through such life as a man would from another world. Most often this hero is a rogue, a man who changes his everyday personalities as he pleases and who occupies no fixed place in everyday life, who plays with life but does not take it seriously.20

The constructions that Moll manifests on the road reflect her existence “outside everyday life,” as she reads the objective dimensions of the road and consciously reconfigures herself within them. Moll Flanders recognizes the power of roads to function as seemingly objective signifiers of truth, and she uses them as tools for masking the facts of her private life and attaining social agency and mobility. The roads that traverse England are shared and recognized by its population, a fact that Moll uses to her advantage. In the eighteenth century, England’s roads were vastly overhauled and improved after the implementation of the Turnpike Toll system, which allowed coach and private carrier services to proliferate, standardizing and accelerating how people traveled on land and communicated over large distances.21

By visualizing the locations both visited and inhabited by Moll, we see how England’s roads link together all of her destinations, providing a general visual logic for her movements from place to place (figure 1.1).

20 Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 121-122.
Figure 1: Moll's England. Locations where Moll Flanders lives for any portion of her life are marked in red. Places that Moll only visits or passes through and mentions are marked in blue. Map source: Robinson (1948, 212)

The map illustrates the standardized routes for travel by coach and carriage, and for communication by mail, which would be familiar to travelers at the time of Moll’s narrative. The image also highlights the gravitational centrality of London within the developed geography of early modern England, a factor that informs Moll’s movements since her path repeatedly returns her to the city. She is a close reader of
England’s established roads and methods of transportation. Moll’s detailed knowledge of how her travels are observed by others enables her to construct and deploy false narratives about her geographical whereabouts and activities; she appropriates the road’s objectivity. Moll becomes a geographical poacher, manipulating the objective logic of England’s roads—as viewed on the map—to serve her demands, taking a path that only she can trace. In the novel, the road is viewed through the relationship that develops between its objective dimensions—distance and time, modes of transportation, and the transient accumulations of travel—and the subjective constructions that Moll projects onto it.

After Moll’s disastrous yet genuinely romantic marriage and subsequent separation from the posturing gentleman whom she meets in the North Country, she returns to London and finds her way into the care of the old governess, a perceptive and discerning midwife and pawnbroker who comes to care deeply for Moll, learning much, but not all, of her private past—and path. The governess convinces Moll that the best thing she can do for herself is to permanently separate from her newborn child by sending it to a woman in Hertford (237), about 30 miles north of London. Having done so, Moll is freed to set into motion her relationship with the banker whom she had met before she last departed London. To conceal the true nature of her path—including her recent marriage, child, and her stay with the midwife in London when her new lover believed her to be in Lancashire—Moll uses the road to construct believable false explanations for her previous whereabouts and destinations:

I then began to write to my Friend at the Bank in a more kindly Style, and particularly about the beginning of July I sent him a Letter, that I had purpos’d to be in Town sometime in August; he return’d me an Answer in the most Passionate Terms imaginable, and desir’d me to let him have timely
Notice, and he would come and meet me two Days Journey. This puzzled me
scurvily, and I did not know what answer to make to it; once I was resolv’d to
take the Stage Coach to West-Chester on purpose only to have the satisfaction
of coming back, that he might see me really come in the same Coach; for I
had a jealous thought, though I had no Ground for it at all, lest he should think
I was not really in the Country, and it was no ill-grounded Thought as you
shall hear presently.

I endeavour’d to Reason my self out of it, but it was in vain, the
Impression lay so strong in my Mind, that it was not to be resisted; at last it
came as an Addition to my new Design of going in the Country, that it would
be an excellent Blind to my old governess, and would cover entirely all my
other Affairs, for she did not know in the least whether my new Lover liv’d in
London or on Lancashire; and when I told her my Resolution, she was fully
perswaded it was in Lancashire.

Having taken my Measures for this Journey, I let her know it, and sent
the Maid that tended me from the beginning, to take a Place for me in the
Coach; she would have had me let the Maid have waited on me down to the
last Stage, and come up again in the Waggon, but I convinc’d her it wou’d not
be convenient; when I went away she told me, she would enter into no
Measures for Correspondence, for she saw evidently that my Affection to my
Child would cause me to write to her, and to visit her too when I came to
Town again; I assur’d her it would, and so took my leave, well satisfied to
have been freed from such a House, however good my Accommodations there
had been, as I have related above. (238-239)

In this passage, the road is viewed in terms of time and transportation, both
constituting objective dimensions of the road, which Moll closely reads and subverts
for her own advancement. Moll’s “Friend at the Bank” represents the distance he
believes to be between Moll and himself in units of time traveled on roads: “two Days
Journey.” He suggests an understanding of roads that is governed by time, rather than
by geographical distance. The distance, which is roughly 250 miles on today’s roads,
is collapsed into the amount of time that it would take Moll’s lover to cover it.

Transportation is viewed through the lens of class divisions; the governess suggests
that her maid accompany Moll “to the last Stage, and come up again in the Waggon.”
The stage coach is for those who have money and status, and the waggon is for those
who are poor or in the service of others. The vehicles of the roads are signifiers of a
system of class relations. As Kirstin Olsen remarks of the period, “Just as no one who could afford to ride would walk, no one who could afford to ride in a coach would ride in a waggon.” Moll’s knowledge of coach routes, which emerges as she discusses how she “was resolv’d to take the stage coach to West-Chester on purpose only to have the satisfaction of coming back,” reflects the body of knowledge that she deploys in her subjective construction of the road. She envisions how her travel will be read by the banker, and acts in illusory accordance with the road’s objective logic.

Moll’s recognition of how others understand travel enables her to construct multiple false paths and appearances, which she can project onto the road and falsely embed within its objective dimensions. On the road, Moll’s appearance is informed by her envisioned path. By laying claim to paths that do not represent the true origins and destinations of her travels, Moll can maintain the appearances she needs to keep her private path intact. One path is constructed for the banker, who must believe she is returning from Lancashire because he plans to intercept her on the route back to London. Another path is made for the old governess, who “was fully persuwaded it [Moll’s lover’s location] was in Lancashire.” Moll forms the latter path to detach herself from the artifacts of her past, especially the emotions stemming from her affection for her child, which threaten to compromise her new, ostensibly advantageous affair. Moll and the governess are both concerned with the affective aspect of her travel, the persistent psychological traces embedded in the place where she is leaving. The necessary totality of her subjective construction of the road could be undone if she were to “write” or “visit” the woman when she returns to London,

agreeing with the governess not to communicate in order not to undermine Moll’s appearances. Her paths and appearances are subjective constructions that she embeds, or rather writes, onto the road. Her path is unchallenged by its intended audiences, the banker and the governess, to whom the road communicates Moll’s path just as she desires it to appear.

The false “Design” that Moll makes with her knowledge of travel and transportation constitutes her subjective construction of the road. Moll’s construction is oriented around the language of sight and vision. Moll needs her lover “to see [her] really come in the same coach” and she is satisfied when she perceives that her plan is an “excellent Blind” to her governess. What Moll’s observers can and cannot see of her path amounts to the multidimensional appearance that she constructs to ensure that she is untraceable. Roads are not objects for everyday scrutiny, so much as passages between distinct zones of seeing, that is, places. The road’s subversive strength for Moll is located in the fact that it is a transitional passage in which people and goods are continually moving in and out of sight. Moll sees roads as latent fields of action, and grasps that most others do not see them in this way. She uses her knowledge to construct a seemingly objective path for her observers before she embarks on the road. Writing to her suitor about the details of her arrival in London and telling her false “Resolution” of traveling to Lancashire to the governess, who is “fully perswaded” of its veracity, Moll geographically inscribes her falsified movements for her audience. Once she is on the road, she is out of sight and can safely transition her appearances and pursue her private path.
The “Measures” that Moll takes to conceal her private path, hidden from both the banker and the old governess, underscore the calculated basis for Moll’s subjective construction of her appearance through the road. The word “Measures” implies the rational, material logic of roads that Moll appropriates and undermines when she conceals her path. Moll’s path is defined by its own obscurity. It is constructed through Moll’s subjective demands on her world, which ask that the path’s true nature be hidden under her own “Design” and “Measures.” She constructs her false paths and appearances so that they are supported by the objectivity of the road. The act of traveling on the stage coach is a visual confirmation of Moll’s appearance, allowing her to conceal its falseness, and continue forward on her path.

Once Moll puts her plan into action, her “Designs” and “Measures” successfully gain their forms on the road:

I took the Place in the Coach not to its full extent, but to a place call’d Stone in Cheshire, I think it is, where I not only had no matter of Business, but not so much as the least Acquaintance with any Person in the Town or near it: But I knew that with Money in the Pocket one is at home anywhere, so I Lodg’d there two or three Days, till watching my opportunity, I found room in another Stage Coach, and took Passage back again for London, sending a Letter to my Gentleman, that I should be such as certain Day at Stoney-Stratford, where the Coachman told me he was to Lodge.

It happen’d to be a Chance Coach that I had taken up, which having been hired on purpose to carry some Gentlemen to West-Chester who were going for Ireland, was now returning, and did not tye it self up to exact Times or Places as the Stages did; so that having been oblig’d to lye still a Sunday, he has time to get himself ready to come out, which otherwise he cou’d not have done.

However, his warning was so short, that he could not reach to Stony-Stratford time enough to be with me at Night, but he met me at a place call’d Brickill the next Morning, as we were just coming into Town. (239-240)

By not taking the stage coach “to its full extent,” Moll deviates from the path that she has constructed for the governess. It is in the act of subjectively manipulating the road
by taking it in the direction that her appearances claim to be headed, towards Lancashire, that her constructions are officially stamped for their intended observers. The road allows Moll to conceal her private path and detach herself from the artifacts of her past that threaten to compromise the integrity of her latest facade, made to secure her new lover. Her new location, Stone in Cheshire, provides the safety of anonymity, with Moll’s claims to have “no Business” and no “Acquaintances” in the town. Safe from any exterior scrutiny of her appearance and locked within the road’s network of movements, Moll is able to shed one identity and assume another.

Stone becomes part of the road for Moll by containing the moments of fleeting accumulation that characterize the road’s transitory process. The financial transaction enabling Moll’s stay in the town is emblematic of the spectrum of her continuous movements on the road. “Money in the Pocket” secures Moll the road’s temporary surrogate for social life, the sense of being “at home” in the lodge. The lack of permanence implicit in the act of lodging contributes to Moll’s successful transitions between her assumed identities, absent from external social perception or any prior engagement with Stone as a place. The continual process of the road allows Moll to be swept up by the “Chance Coach” and brought to her destination in Stony-Stratford. The road, a spectrum of interrelated processes of travel and exchange, does not possess the mounting social accumulations that characterize Moll’s life within the places of the text, where she inhabits everyday life with an array of appearances. Instead, the road allows her to transition identities by embedding her subjectively constructed appearances and paths—her “Designs” and “Measures”—within the road and subverting its objective dimensions. The transience of the road’s processes
suggest its particular malleability to its close reader, Moll, who is able to manifest her constructions on the road, while keeping at bay the latent threats posed by her private history.

III. Street

Once her banker husband dies after he is unable to bear the misery of losing his fortune, Moll lives in London for two years and enters an impoverished state of “Distress” (254) and “Temptation.” Moll’s condition brings her out into the streets of London, not with an explicit directive to steal, but rather with an implicitly charged listlessness, informing her “Wandring...by an Apothecary’s Shop in Leadenhall-street” that leads to her first theft. Unlike traveling on the road, the street embeds Moll within London as a place, in its built structures, economic livelihood and social life, and its official oversight. The street is within the place, but Moll’s movements suggest that the street beholds its own logic in relation to its subjects. Moll cites her location with a dreamlike detachment and indifference. It is the city and her circumstance inside it that have led her to where she is and have inspired this theft: “I remember, and shall never forget it, ‘twas like a Voice spoken to me over my Shoulder, take the bundle; be quick” (254). She is figuratively spoken to by indefinite and opaque voices, arising from the dynamic and antagonistic tension between Moll’s agency, her alien circumstances, and the force of the city. Responsibility is cast away into a sphere of battling powers: individual, social, and spatial. This contestation of powers, none of which are explicitly delineated, loosely coalesce to form Moll’s personhood inside of the city, informing her movements and decisions.
The aftermath of Moll’s first robbery, from the apothecary's shop, places her inside the geography of London, where she challenges the explicit spatial determinations delineated in a mapped perspective of the city. Moll lists three clearly defined geographic points of reference for the incident: *Leadenhall-street*, *Fenchurch-street*, and *Thames-street near Billingsgate* (figure 1.2). The map of her movements, in relation to the language she uses, displays her unspecified path southward. By only naming these three streets, major commercial thoroughfares, Moll gives her path little clarity, yet she states its explicit parameters. Moll’s description of her movements suggests that she herself does not know exactly how she gets from one street to another:

> When I went away I had no Heart to run, or scarce to mend my pace; I cross’d the Street indeed, and went down the first turning I came to, and I think it was a Street that went thro’ into *Fenchurch-street*, from thence I cross’d and turn’d thro’ so many ways and turnings that I could never tell which way it was, nor where I went, for I felt not the Ground, I stept on, and the farther I was out of Danger, the faster I went, till tyr’d and out of Breath, I was forc’d to sit down on a little Bench at a door, and then I began to recover, and found I was got into *Thames-street near Billingsgate*: I rested me a little and went on, my Blood was all in a Fire, my Heart beat as if I was in a sudden Fright: In short, I was under such a Surprize that I still knew not whither I was going, or what to do. (255)

Moll’s movements are recounted as though the city is directing her away from the apothecary, offering up its “so many ways and turnings” for a quick escape. If the major streets carry the danger of exposure, their unnamed secondary and tertiary arteries are Moll’s friendly interlocutors, beckoning her with their powers of obfuscation, so she cannot “tell which way it was” that she is heading. The relationship that Moll develops with her immediate geography is premised on her shock and “Surprize” from committing the robbery. The city conspires with Moll in
her heightened state, forcibly offering places to rest like a “little Bench at a door” in the half-mile distance between Leadenhall-street and Thames-street. The narration faithfully wavers between representing Moll as subject—“I crossed,” “I stept,” “I went,” “I rested”—and situating her as object, once the particulars of her movements are emptied of agency; she recounts not knowing “not wither [she] was going, or what to do,” despite being in the process of running away. The London that Moll momentarily creates for herself is not geographically accountable, because between her three stated markers of location exists a path of unknown shape and form, not only to her, but also to the citizens and officials who are presumably in search of her. Moll effectively embodies her disappearance (or disembodiment) from the mappable—and traceable—London, as she “felt not the Ground,” but still “stept on,” in a contradictory process of spatial and physical dislocation. The mappable city is partially deconstructed by her psychological and physiological state, as her “Blood was all in a Fire,” and her “Heart beat as if...in a sudden Fright,” which eclipse Moll’s material surrounding—the expected signifiers of place. The image of “a little Bench at a door” is the full extent of her physical representation of urban space after committing her theft. This absence of any other concrete urban images, in contrast to the access granted to Moll’s interiority, complicates the relationship between the instrumentalized map of the city and the individual’s movements taking place inside the map’s geographical inscriptions of space.

The map I have edited to show Moll’s movements following her theft highlights the opposition between inscribed geography and embodied path, which become irreconcilable through Moll’s narration. What does the map tell us without
revealing Moll’s path? All it shows is a static network of streets, alleys, squares, courts, and buildings all of varying shapes and prominence. The map reifies the space, by providing names for streets and certain buildings, giving the viewer a sense of how all the objects represented relate to each other, by program, direction, and scale. The map is then a guide to the city, as imagined from above and officially inscribed.

Figure 2.2: Moll's Escape. Map source: Rocque (1749)

Moll’s path, as imposed on John Rocque’s 1746 map of London, is largely unarticulated. The narration of Moll’s movements runs counter to the map’s highly detailed representation of London geography; her path is anti-geographical. The arrows imposed on the map show her general direction as South toward Thames-street, which is the extent to which Moll’s geographical path can be gleaned from the
text. The narration of Moll’s path represents the city not as a geographically mappable entity, but rather as a fluid intermediary between Moll’s subjectivity and the social processes taking place within the city’s physical order, subject to her interpretation and dynamic adaptation.

The episode concludes after Moll gets tired of walking and goes home at “about Nine a Clock at Night” (255), signaling the presence of time, previously been absent from the narration. Moll’s robbery, loosely traced onto London’s space and dislocated from the city’s everyday time, represents geographical qualities of the city that are unmappable for Rocque. The London of the map is one in which the individual cannot hide, yet Moll’s disembodied path suggests an urban substratum of “so many ways and turnings” that resists the map’s structured representations, and instead dissolves the city into obfuscating networks of psychological, spatial, temporal, social, and economic movements.

IV. Moll’s Psychogeography

Moll Flanders’ penitent yet glib narration of her own life, through and across early modern England, is the basis for my psychogeographic reading of Defoe’s cities and nation, in the mode of the Situationist International. McKenzie Wark describes psychogeography as

a practice of the city as at once an objective and subjective space. It is not the city as a mere prompt for surrealist reveries. Nor it is a thing apart, to be dissected by social science, no matter how well-meaning...The city has subjective qualities that are nonetheless interpersonal...The city is an aesthetic practice irreducible to the interests of the state or market.”

The “subjective qualities” of London that surface through Moll’s narration stymy the
city’s rational mappability and make the novel an ideal candidate for a Situationist
reading. By viewing the city as an “aesthetic practice,” the Situationists illuminate
vast networks of complex relations that help conduct one’s movements around urban
space, evoking the “interpersonal” relations that shape an individual’s relationship to
the city, beyond its immediate physical presence. Moll embodies this practice by
largely failing to depict London beyond certain geographic markers such as streets
and notable locations. Moll’s representation of other places in the novel bears a
further removal from conceiving of objective space as such, through her abstractions
of locations into their economic and social interests to serve her subjective will. Moll
makes her path indiscernible to the mappable city and nation, yet her movements are
contingent on her close readings of how places, road, and streets are officially ordered
and unofficially re-constituted by the actions of their subjects. Moll inscribes her
subjectivity into her structured surroundings, as though she is planting a virus that
compromises the nation’s ability to maintain its ordered appearance by revealing its
failure to fully account for the lives of its most underground and elusive subjects. It is
not Moll who conducts all her movements within London, to it, and away from it;
rather, it the reshaping patchworks of subjective and objective relationships between
the protagonist and her environments that constitute the path that she at once obscures
and inscribes, from the standpoint of the map—and its places, roads, and streets.

Viewing Moll as a psychogeographer of early modern England allows for
various revolutionary suggestions to be read out of her movements, in line with the
goals of the Situationist International: “We need to flood the market—even for the
moment the intellectual market—with a mass of desires whose fulfillment is not beyond the capacity of humanity’s present means of action on the material world, but only beyond the capacity of the old social organisation.” Moll’s path renders a transgressive fulfillment of her desires as she practices crime and fraud through her everyday movements. She seeks social mobility at a repressed moral cost, paid for in penitence and quickly redeemed when she attains honest wealth and satisfaction in Virginia and Maryland. There she is away from her “old social organization,” where the relations of capital only allowed for Moll’s improvement through her simultaneous spectacularization and criminal negation of material value—we will label it as “degenerative consumption”—a result that is endorsed, if not lauded in the Situationists’ politics. Guy Debord argues, when articulating how the city can be radically reconceived of through psychogeography, that “nothing really new can be expected until the masses in action awaken to the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them.” The path of Moll’s text psychogeographically inscribes the “conditions that are imposed” on her life, beginning at the lowest possible rung of society, as an orphaned child, born in Newgate with no wealth and a stained status. As she moves inside London, around England, and to the colonies, she at once reveals and subverts the ordered powers embedded in geography, advantageously reconceiving her relationship to capitalist modes of spatial and social production.

25 Ibid., 11.
Chapter Two: Labyrinthian Possibilities

The transformation of the environment calls forth new emotional states that are first experienced passively and then, with heightened consciousness, lead to constructive reactions. London was the first urban result of the industrial revolution, and the English literature of the nineteenth century bears witness to an increasing awareness of the problems of the atmosphere and of the qualitatively different possibilities of a large urban area. (“Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s,” Internationale Situationniste #3 December, 1959)

Charles Dickens’s second novel, Oliver Twist; or the Parish Boy’s Progress (1837), is the story of a young orphan boy who goes to London to improve his miserable life, only to be captured into the criminal depths of the city, where he is forced to become a pickpocket. Oliver ultimately receives his lost fortune and achieves bourgeois comfort and happiness, but only after his forced participation in Fagin’s and Bill Sikes's crime schemes bring the boy outside of the criminal lairs and urban labyrinths that hold him, and into London’s suburbs and its surrounding countryside. The narrative discourse of Oliver’s captivity by the criminal gang inside London’s nineteenth-century slums reflects the effects of the city’s built environments on how subversive movements are crafted. Oliver’s captors possess a distinct geographical fluency in the urban labyrinths where they operate, which I argue can be read as “heightened consciousness” in the Situationists' terms. Reading the novel’s slum narrative from a Situationist perspective (and therefore against Charles Dickens’ own intentions), I will show how the movements and dwellings of Fagin’s cast of criminals can be interpreted through their behavioral adaptations within the city, which challenge the tale’s presiding bourgeois morality by presenting the “different possibilities of a large urban area.” The text’s criminal lairs then
embody “constructive reactions” emerging from their subversive practices, which must remain hidden inside the city.

1. Thresholds

Oliver is brought to London by the Artful Dodger, who helps him after observing the boy’s frail, starved, and defeated condition. Encountering Oliver in the town of Barnet, ten miles north of the city, the Dodger is “one of the queerest-looking boys that Oliver had ever seen” having the marked appearance of an everyday boy of working-class birth, combined with “all the airs and manners of a man.” This paradoxical man-child buys Oliver food and beer, and offers him free lodgings in London with a “spectable old genelman as lives there.” Oliver has no option but to go with the Dodger; any lodging would mark an improvement over his current vagrancy, having run away from his apprenticeship with a coffin-maker that is preceded by his dismal existence inside a corrupt workhouse. Furthermore, the Dodger’s ironic and heavily accented foregrounding of his criminal overseer Fagin’s reputation and generosity locates their destination in London and constructs a set of expectations for Oliver. The boys’ passage into London is situated by the Dodger’s promises of change, possibility, and mobility, not only from their geographical location north of London, but from Oliver’s withering condition, both of which had become insurmountable barriers to his own advancement into the city.

The path on which the Dodger brings Oliver into London is narratively forged, first, across two-dimensional geographic space, as the pair moves across the

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26 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 59. All further references will be given parenthetically in the running text.
city, navigating distinct neighborhood zones. While the pair’s movements are directed across space, they are also captured within the experienced dimensions, both hidden and shown, of their built environment, situated between them and their destination inside Fagin’s lair. Their journey into the city suggests subversive possibilities within the slum’s labyrinthine space, not only through the complexity of the Dodger’s route to the lair, but in Oliver’s felt experience of moving inside the city. A Situationist reading of the labyrinth recovers its significance as what Asger Jorn calls the “in-between realm,” in which the absence of spatial visibility combined with the constancy of motion, create a paradoxical “labyrinthian clarity.” The displacement of order held in the unfixed dimensions of the labyrinth allows for the reconception of everyday life through the spontaneity of movements, interactions, and activities fostered by the environment. The inventiveness of the Dodger’s movements through the labyrinth and into the lair can then be read against the bourgeois morality of the novel’s slum discourse.

The novel traces the route into London down the streets of suburban Islington and Pentonville, and into the labyrinthine slums of Saffron-hill:

It was nearly eleven o’clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from Angel into St. John’s-road; struck down the small street that terminates at Sadler’s Wells Theatre; through Exmouth-street and Coppice-row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron-hill; and so into Saffron-hill the Great: along which, the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace: directing Oliver to follow closely at his heels. (59)

The narration describes the boys’ arrival and subsequent descent into London by situating the spatiality of their precise movements between geographical locations.

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Both the boys and the city pose unique problems and solutions for their path into the London. Islington represents the threshold of their path into London, “the turnpike” being “reached” at the hour the Dodger deems it safe to enter, signaling the symbolic gate into London created by the city’s suburban periphery. Angel, a coaching inn used by travelers seeking to avoid the dangers posed by entering London after nightfall, contextualizes the boys’ “cross[ing]” through the Dodger’s calculated defiance of Victorian travel norms in their passage “into St. John’s road.”28 The Dodger views the pair’s visibility to others as a threat to their successful movements into the city, so he appropriates the chaotic opacity of nightfall for their travel. After the boys cross the threshold of London, prepositional phrases indicate the pair’s movements between set positions in space: “into,” “down,” “through,” “across,” “thence into,” “so into,” and “along” the streets inside the city’s established limits. The prepositions spatialize the contours of the boys’ geographical path into the city, accounting for both the horizontality of their movements through a network of specified streets and landmarks, and the verticality of their descent to Fagin’s lair. Each geographical node manifested in the narration as a street or as a landmark like “Sadler’s Wells Theatre” represents a new object to be entered into the Dodger’s internal calculations. His solutions are presented in the unique route on which he leads Oliver, while their physical interactions with the city’s geographical environment are shown in the narration’s spatialization of each movement, in relation to the geographical locations appearing before them. The solution that the city offers the Dodger lies in the downward pull of its streets on their movements, as though the

natural and artificial topography of the city invites the disappearance necessary for accessing Fagin’s lair.

Figure 2.1: The Artful Dodger’s path into London. (59-60) Map Source: Cary (1837)
A map of their movements, with each arrow placed on locations identified by the narration (figure 2.1), juxtaposes the boys’ geographical path with their actions and decisions constructed inside narrativized space. The map shows the coincidence of their precise movements—with arrows—alongside many alternative routes. A less circuitous path, carried out by simply continuing down St. John’s-road would be more efficient. The specificity of the Dodger’s movements, however, represents the key to unlocking Fagin’s lair. The Dodger’s course constitutes what Moretti terms a unique “narrative matrix.” Moretti argues that “each space determines its own kind of actions, its plot—its genre.” The suburban threshold that the boys cross is visualized by the first arrow on the map, where the perpendicularly ordered streets of Pentonville and Islington, directly above the Angel, pose a start contrast with the maze of streets, courts, and alleys through which the boys will weave on their way to the lair. While the labyrinthine space of the slums provokes interactions between the boys and their urban environment, the northern suburbs do not have the same effect on them. The Angel is simply “reached,” in contrast to how the streets the boys enter are “struck down” and how the Dodger “scudded at a rapid pace.” The tangle of movements lead by the Dodger, which precede their relatively straight approach of Saffron-hill, suggest another liminal threshold specific to accessing their destination, held in the disorienting experience of the city. Before they can access Fagin’s lair on Field-lane, the Dodger’s actions illustrate that the boys must first disappear into the city, into its urban geography and under the cover of the night. The map shows what readers can see and follow but what pedestrians presumably cannot perceive.

30 Ibid. 84.
The Dodger’s path into London invites a Situationist reading of how the boys physically interact with their environment between set points in urban space. The engagement with which the Situationists aim to imbue within the city can be read in *Oliver Twist’s* discourse of space inside the labyrinthine dimensions of London. The Dodger determines the boys’ route into London, his actions carrying psychogeographical implications about his local geography related to “the exploration of fixed spatial fields.” The phrase comes from Guy Debord’s essay, “Theory of Dérive,” in which he writes that such exploration “entails establishing bases and calculating directions of penetration.” The boys’ passage across the suburban threshold of London, into the geographically complex environment of the slum, shows how the Dodger’s cultivated relationship with the city informs his cloaked “penetration” of its environs; his decisive movements into the city seem to go unnoticed. The Dodger knows the time they should enter and perceives how best to continue moving down to the lair. By “directing Oliver to follow closely at his heels,” the Dodger forces his acquaintance to mimic his movements. Their successful descent to Fagin’s lair is proof of his psychogeographical literacy with the labyrinth. The arrows on the map show the path constructed by the Dodger in response to the neighborhoods’ distinct geographies, threats, and opportunities.

Simon Sadler writes that “psychogeography offered a sense of violent emotive possession over the streets. Exotic and exciting treasures were to be found in the city by those drifters able to conquer her, able to overcome the euphoria and exhaustion of

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the drift.” By moving in the city in a manner that is at once calculated and spontaneous, the Dodger’s route maps a set of actions geared towards properly accessing Fagin’s lair, as though it is one of the labyrinth’s “exciting treasures.” Their movements, mapped across the city, provide a partial explanation for how the course of their travels creates a behavioral state suitable for accessing the lair. The discourse of geographical space is supplemented by the discourse of experienced space, through which the narrator establishes the relationship between the active, living environment of the city and the affect it generates from movement through, rather than across, space.

Oliver’s experience of following the Dodger down Saffron-hill, in its built environment and past its contained social activities, highlights the production of affect by what he feels through his movements inside urban space. What “that great large place!” (54) represented to Oliver as he sat next to a milestone seventy miles away from the city, starved, tired, and scared, quickly becomes viewed through its poor sanitation, feral children, and working class aimlessness. Inside the labyrinthine network of streets in Saffron-hill, directly preceding Fagin’s lair in the southern extension of the neighborhood by Field-Lane, the narration shows not only how the city is seen, but also how it is felt:

Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping sight of his leader [the Dodger], he could not help bestowing a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier, more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy; and the air was impregnated with filthy odors. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out of the doors, or screaming from the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper, amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them, the lowest order of the Irish were

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wrangling with might and main. Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; cautiously emerging: bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands.

Oliver was just considering whether he hadn’t better run away, when they reached the bottom of the hill. His conductor, catching him by the arm, pushed open the door of a house near Field-Lane, and, drawing him into a passage, closed it behind them. (59-60)

Through Saffron-Hill, the narration juxtaposes Oliver’s tightly fixed path behind the Dodger with the power of the neighborhood’s spatialized environment, highlighting his experience of approaching Fagin’s lair and his emotions upon entering it. Oliver is unable to stick to “keeping sight” of the Dodger, as the sensorial experience of his “pass[ing] along” forces the boy to pay “a few hasty glances” to the spaces and actions adjacent, “on either side of the way,” to their path. Fredric Jameson’s distinction between affects as “bodily feelings” and emotions as “conscious states,” helps us situate the relationship that is forged between Oliver and the environment of the slum as he passes through it. The metaphor of “air impregnated with filthy odors” directs the sensation of smell into the natal depths of the body, rather than the systematized headspace of emotion and of Oliver’s conscious state. It dislocates Oliver’s consciousness from his narrative, by situating his embodied affect within the disembodied production of the neighborhood's spatial experience of passing. What Oliver sees cannot be disconnected from what he smells, as his perceptions of the neighborhood as “a more wretched place” posits the limits of sight, of what “he had never seen,” to account for his emotional experience of urban space. The alienating unity created by sight, smell, and sound—of “children screaming” —emanating from the unseen “inside,” produce what Jameson describes as the “global waves of

generalized sensations” of affect, which counter Oliver’s narrative of movement by detemporalizing his presence through the feelings generated in the environment.  

The narration of Oliver’s movements through Saffron-hill registers the power of the unseen and unknown, as the locus for his experience of the city. The experience of reading Oliver’s movements through the neighborhood reproduces the affect forged in passing between the built environment and activities of the slum, as the language of the narration confronts the limits of articulating the totality of the space. Oliver’s experience of the environment culminates when he is “considering whether he hadn’t better run away,” as his emotional reaction is ultimately represented in the language of the discourse, through a conscious decision he is unable to make, due to the Dodger’s timely intervention.

The neighborhood constitutes a field of constant motion within Saffron-hill’s labyrinthine physical environment, the action taking place on the threshold between spaces visible and obscured. The boys’ narrative path into London remains intact as they travel through Saffron-hill. However, the spaces and activities that their movements pass between, highlight what Raymond Williams describes as Dickens’s depiction of “the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured,” which he argues is “the true significance of the city, and especially at this period of time, as a dominant social form.”  

The movements of children, “crawling in and out of the doors” of shops, marks the tension between their physical visibility and obscurity within their built environment. Inside they are “screaming,” but the reasons for their sounds remain hidden behind doors. Bourgeois forms of work and leisure can hardly

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34 Ibid. 26.
take place in this environment, the actions described in the narration simply negating the ethical order of capitalist production. Adults in the environment are shown “cautiously emerging” from the obscurity of “covered ways and yards.” These adjacent spaces, not perceptibly ordered, suggest geographical randomness and narrative illegibility, being located “here and there,” but remaining systematized and connected to the main street from which they “diverged.” Adults’ “filth” unites them with the general state of the environment. Their activities, or “errands,” to which they are “bound” are implicitly illicit, not shown, but noteworthy because they are not “well-disposed or harmless.” Inside the neighborhood, actions take place through spatial thresholds lining the boys’ path, entering Oliver’s field of vision. The indeterminacy of what these viewed actions actually mean for Oliver, and to the reader knowing as little as he, situates a unique power in the Dodger, whose participation in the obscured world of the labyrinth allows him the possibility to work with the built environment of the city to stay concealed, even when moving through its visible terrain.

The discourse of what is unseen, unknown, and implicitly assumed, calls attention to what D.A. Miller describes as the “the coherence of delinquency, as a structured milieu or network” in *Oliver Twist.* The Dodger brings Oliver into the neighborhood’s delinquent order when he forces him into the passage leading to Fagin’s lair. Their entrance into the lair mimics the field of action viewed in the slum, where children and adults alike cross thresholds into and out of obscured spaces. George Cruikshank’s etchings in the novel notably do not show the threshold of

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events; they reveal actions taking place, such as the scene Oliver beholds upon entering Fagin’s lair (figure 2.2).

![George Cruikshank's illustration for “Oliver’s reception by Fagin and the boys”](image)

Figure 2.1: George Cruikshank’s illustration for “Oliver’s reception by Fagin and the boys” (122)

In the etching, Oliver makes timid eye contact with Fagin, while a group of sinister looking boys stare at their guest with expressions of contempt and amusement. The lair where they are lies beyond the threshold; its windows are covered in fabric to seal it off from the outside. Moving through the city involves passing through and viewing a series of thresholds: shifting from suburb to slum, transitioning from visibility to obscurity on the Dodger’s circuitous path, observing the slum’s illicit thresholds adjacent to their path, and passing into Fagin’s lair. Once Oliver enters the lair, activities are underway, and he unknowingly starts participating in Fagin’s game.
David Craig argues, “Dickens systematically detaches Oliver from his urban surroundings, the subjective world from the objective.”37 The spaces adjoining the boys’ route are identified with their inhabitants, their humanity reduced to the spectacularized behavior associated with their poverty and urban dereliction: alcoholism, violence, and crime. The affective relationship between the labyrinthine slum and Oliver’s consciousness marks the formal detachment highlighted by Craig. Oliver’s subjective experience is exhibited by his visceral reactions to spaces and in the activities mediated by peoples’ movements between thresholds of visible and hidden space. The Dodger’s path, covertly leading Oliver into London, undergirds my reading of the psychogeographical implications of the labyrinth’s spatiality; the particularity of the Dodger’s route systematizes the relationship between his subversive intent, held inside the lair, and the way the built environment of the city supports his movements.

II. Lairs

In *Oliver Twist*, Clandestine lairs are the beating heart of London’s labyrinths. The spaces occupied by Fagin and his cohorts mimic the urban labyrinth’s defiance of temporal linearity, geographical locatability, and spatial coherence. The lairs are cut off from the rest of the city, dissolving into the decaying infrastructure underlying impoverished slums, obscure within the labyrinthine zones early Victorian London. In the novel, the lairs at once antagonize and forcefully animate Oliver, through his confinement and his indoctrination into Fagin’s “game.” Fagin’s lairs seal Oliver off

37 David M Craig, “The Interplay of City and Self in Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Great Expectations,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 16 (1987), 17.
from achieving his rightful wealth and status until he is forced to assist his captor’s colleagues, Bill Sykes and Toby Crackit, with an attempted home robbery in the countryside, which, failing, leads to the boy’s abandonment and subsequent savior by the moral, bourgeois Maylies. The boy’s escape from the lairs and labyrinths is contingent on his forced participation in the realm of criminal activities which in turn expose Oliver to people external to the slum—Brownlow, the Maylies, and Dr. Losberne—who have the power to save him.

*Oliver Twist*’s London narrative contains four distinct lairs, all of them defined by being deliberately hidden by their proprietors from the rest of the city. Two belong to Fagin: one in Saffron-hill, to which the Dodger first brings Oliver, and the other in the neighborhood of Whitechapel, where Oliver is dragged by Sikes and Nancy after being captured on his way to pay back the bookseller on Mr. Brownlow’s behalf. The built environment of Fagin’s Whitechapel lair highlights the rapidly transforming social geography of London. Oliver’s observations within the narration about the lair reveal Fagin has repurposed the space within the labyrinth’s spatial and material distortions of time, as he concludes “it had belonged to better people, and had perhaps been quite gay and handsome: dismal and dreary as it looked now” (139). The social history of the house presents layers of contrasting ambience, “gay” to “dismal” and “handsome” to “dreary;” the way the building “looked now” maintains traces of its past to be read by the boy. Bill Sikes keeps his lair in Bethnal Green, where he lives with Nancy and commits her gruesome murder. Fagin walks through a maze of streets before reaching the alley holding Sikes’ lair, “lighted only by a single lamp at the farther end” (147-148). The lair is situated within a passage of
darkness, producing the disintegration of accountable space integral to the lair’s positioning inside the city. Jacob’s Island holds the ultimate lair of the story. It surfaces a furious crowd—in lieu of the police—invades its remote grounds, in pursuit of Sikes. The narration’s description of Jacob’s Island signifies the social and historical trajectories leading up to its decrepit built manifestation in the novel:

Thirty or forty years ago, before losses and chancery suits came upon it, it was a thriving place; but now it is a desolate island indeed. The houses have no owners; they are broken up, and entered upon by those who have the courage; and there they live, and there they die. They must have powerful motive for a secret residence, or be reduced to a destitute condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob’s Island. (404)

The lair on the island mirrors Fagin’s Whitechapel lair through its prior status as a “thriving place” and its present condition as a “desolate island indeed.” The narration’s assertion that the island’s dwellers possess a “powerful motive for a secret residence” links the built composition of its environment with the subjectivity of its inhabitants, constituted by their transgressive “courage” and “powerful motives.” People living on the island are not “owners,” but they reconstitute the island’s environment around their subjective demands to hide, conceal, and obscure themselves through the labyrinthine mode of spatial unaccountability. The lairs achieve their sordid forms by facilitating modes of occupation and activity contingent on hiding from the disciplinary measures of the city and protecting criminals’ privacy.

While the moral frame of Oliver Twist condemns and pathologizes the lair and its position inside the labyrinth, a Situationist reading of the spaces within the text can reclaim them as literary models for reinventing everyday social relations within the city. In the same Situationist essay that I presented at the beginning of this chapter,
titled “Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s,” the group posits its theoretical model for reinventing urban space, which idealizes the subversion of the ordered, rationalized city, much like the geographical disordering enacted by the novel’s lairs inside London:

UU [unitary urbanism] is opposed to the temporal fixation of cities. It leads instead to the advocacy of a permanent transformation, an accelerated movement of the abandonment and reconstruction of the city in temporal and at times spatial terms.... UU is opposed to the fixation of people at certain points of a city. It is the foundation for a civilization of leisure and play.38

In their critique of the pragmatic theorization and development of urban space in the popularized practice post-war Urbanism, the Situationists refer to nineteenth-century London as represented through the writing of Thomas De Quincey and Robert Louis Stevenson, whose literary wanderings through the city expressed the deeply disorienting experience of trying to navigate its labyrinthine slums. The group was attracted to the sense that London’s urban labyrinths created the endless possibilities for engrossing adventures that enable the discovery of new modes for everyday life.

The activities emerging from Fagin’s lairs embody the Situationists’ “permanent transformation” of the city within its local environment.39 They develop a set of behavior and activities contingent on renegotiating the everyday terms using London. The acts of entering, occupying, or exiting the lair requires a “de[fixation]” from accountable urban space. The terms set by Fagin, however, do not prevail in Oliver’s tale. At the end of the novel, Fagin’s gang lose their “game” and are punished, by death, for playing it. However, out of the residue of their defeat, a Situationist search for urban adventure and possibility can be read from their

39 Ibid.
construction of activities inside the novel’s labyrinths and lairs. The activities that are planned within the obscured space the novel’s lairs generate powerful methods seeing and using the city. By turning the city into a game, Fagin constructs a city that is only visible to him and his cohorts. The act of working as a pickpocket involves developing an acute understanding of how the built environment of the city can accommodate the removal of valuable objects from visible space, the subsequent disappearance of the thief within the city, and his or her removal back into the lair.

III. Connections

*Oliver Twist* delineates a network of both interconnected and scrupulously demarcated slums and suburbs traced by movements across and between different zones of the city. Different neighborhoods of the city are delineated in the narrative by the class positions of their occupants. The novel illustrates the barriers between the high-class suburbs and countryside inhabited by the Maylies, Dr. Losberne, and Mr. Brownlow, and the criminal, and working-class labyrinthine slums occupied by Fagin’s gang. However, Nancy’s movements conducted across the city effect a collapsing of the London’s internal borders, unifying its fragmented geography by forging connections with her movements. Nancy constructs psychogeographical connections in the city through refusing to be controlled by either the illicit obscurity of the labyrinth or the visible bourgeois order and morality of the suburbs.

The economic interactions described in the novel taking place between distinct neighborhoods in London suggests how the city grants exchangeable objects more freedom and mobility than it affords individuals. When Oliver is taken back to
Mr. Brownlow’s home in suburban Pentonville, one of the first planned suburbs of London that originated in the late eighteenth century, he asks the servant to sell his clothes to a Jew (102). When Oliver is recaptured by Sikes and Nancy after taking a wrong turn on his way to Clerkenwell to pay back the bookseller for Mr. Brownlow (114), both the geography of the city and the social body found in the streets restrict Oliver’s free movements by delivering him into the hands of his adversaries. Oliver’s inability to avoid his capture inside Clerkenwell highlights how he cannot freely move inside the city:

Overpowered by the conviction of the bystanders that he really was the hardened little wretch he was described to be; what could one poor child do! Darkness had set in; it was a low neighborhood; no help was near; resistance was useless. In another moment he was dragged into a labyrinth of dark narrow courts, and was forced along them at a pace which rendered the few cries he dared to give utterance to, unintelligible. It was of little moment, indeed, whether they were intelligible or not; for there was nobody to care for them, had they been ever so plain. (118)

While the “conviction of the bystanders” initially suppresses Oliver’s truthful claims over his identity and purpose, the united social and physical effects of the “low neighborhood” ultimately render the boy’s “resistance useless.” The objective construction of the slum traps Oliver’s “few cries” in its “labyrinth of dark narrow courts,” just as its locals’ misguided notions of justice bind the boy to his captors. Oliver’s cries are useless because “there was nobody to care for them,” which suggests that the social body of Clerkenwell has developed a collective behavior immune to such sounds of terror. The objective built environment of the neighborhood also compromises the authentic urgency of Oliver’s cries by physically diminishing their resonance so that his sounds become “unintelligible.” Oliver’s

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40 Weinreb and Hibbert. The London Encyclopaedia, 590.
capture back into labyrinth further establishes the immobility he experiences when he first enters London with the Dodger. While this episode illustrates the impossibility of Oliver moving freely about the city, the clothes he sells off quickly return to Fagin, having been “the very first clue received, of his whereabouts” (128). The city’s internal economy appears to circulate things according to a different logic than people, whose geographical mobility is restricted by what is collectively allowed within their local environments.

Oliver’s wrong turn in Clerkenwell leads him to a situation in which his objective environment becomes inseparable from his identity when he appears before others. This episode recalls the way Oliver is falsely accused of robbing the bookseller earlier in the story by a collective mass eager to prosecute someone for the crime. Oliver’s objective proximity to the labyrinth negates his claims over his identity, robs him of agency, and bars his free movement through the city. The labyrinth, in contrast to the ordered suburb he has walked from, not only encourages Oliver to get lost within its complex geography, but it also motivates his alienation from its everyday activity. Oliver remains beholden to the courses mapped out for him by others, because he loses all power when he enters the labyrinth. As Jim Barloon argues, “the nature of the city, which offers so many opportunities for concealment, only compounds the difficulty of maintaining a hold upon one’s genuine identity.” In the labyrinth, Oliver is further estranged from his “genuine identity,” which the novel locates in the bourgeois company of Brownlow and the Maylies. The geographical connectivity of the movements made by Nancy stands in

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contrast to Oliver’s constraints in moving around the city, as she travels from slum to
suburb, first to serve Fagin’s interests and then to serve the boy’s.

The figure of Nancy is not unlike that of Moll Flanders, as the courses of their
criminal lives form paradoxical connections between their social positions and
prevailing moral convictions. Nancy Armstrong argues that “Nancy is the figure of
illicit sexuality; her behavior confuses money with sex.”\textsuperscript{42} Moll Flanders, on the other
hand, expresses no such confusion in her story, as money is her object, and sex,
sometimes sold, is just one of her many means of obtaining it. Moll’s movements, as I
have argued, are conducted through her appearances, which take on many forms in
line with how she needs to situate herself in a given setting or situation. When Oliver
gets arrested following an incident with the Artful Dodger and Charles Bates at the
bookstall, Fagin elects the reluctant Nancy to don an innocent disguise consisting of
“a clean white apron tied over her gown, and her curl-papers tucked up under a straw
bonnet.” (98) The group anticipates how she will be read within the police-office if
she comes dressed as she is among them, so they assist her visual transformation so
that she can safely inhabit the authority’s threatening space. Unlike Moll, whose
appearances are linked to her pursuit of gentlemanly agency, Nancy is directly acted
on and shaped by her immediate social and urban context.

With Nancy, we see how the city itself shapes her movements, by effecting
specific behaviors and informing her appearance. Nancy returns from the police-
office having failed to learn any news about Oliver, other than the fact that he has
been taken by his prosecutor (Mr. Brownlow) back to his home in Pentonville:

\textsuperscript{42} Nancy Armstrong. 	extit{Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel}, (Oxford: Oxford
In a dreadful state of doubt and uncertainty, the agonized young woman staggered to the gate, and then: exchanging her faltering walk for a good, swift, steady run: returned by the most devious and complicated route she could think of, to the domicile of the Jew. (99-100)

The scene witnesses her exaggerated subjective transformation within the space of the city, in her “exchanging“ forms of movement, from a distraught sister’s “faltering” to a clandestine criminal’s “steady run.” The “devious” and “complicated” way Nancy travels back to Fagin’s is geared towards making her movements illegible to the outside observer, which encompasses the narration, its description foregoing geographical realism in favor of palpable obscurity. The way that Nancy travels through the city highlights her calculated defiance of its objective measures of control, much as Moll Flanders does when she flees the scenes of her crimes.

When Nancy travels across London to speak with Rose Maylie in Hyde Park, to alert the woman about what she overheard Sikes telling Fagin about Oliver’s stolen fortune, her movements reflect her practiced negation of the subjectivity forced upon inside the labyrinths. Rather than cloaking her movements by adapting to the objective conditions around her, she is entirely visible:

She tore along the narrow pavement: elbowing passengers from side to side; and darting almost under the horse’s heads, crossed crowded streets, where clusters of persons were eagerly watching their opportunity to do the like. “The woman is mad!” said the people, turning to look after her as she rushed away.

When she reached the more wealthy quarter of town, the streets were comparatively deserted; and here her headlong progress excited a still greater curiosity in the stragglers whom she hurried past. Some quickened their pace behind, as though to see whither she was hastening at such an unusual rate; and a few made head upon her, and looked back: surprised at her undiminished speed; but they fell off one by one; and when she neared her place of destination, she was alone. (319-320)
Nancy forcibly interacts with the disordered commercial environment through which she first passes by “elbowing passengers,” and disobeys the rules of pedestrian traffic by refusing to wait in order to cross “crowded streets.” Her aberrant movements attract a collective response from “the people,” signifying her complete separation from the urban practices instilled in her by her overseer Sikes. Entering the suburban “wealthier quarter of town,” Nancy continues to attract pedestrians’ attention, and even curious pursuers who fail to match her “undiminished speed.” The extreme force with which Nancy moves across London concludes with her reaching the Maylie residence “alone,” as though her defiance of both pedestrian and criminal codes of movement has invented a new paradigm for disappearing from accountable public space through overwhelming visibility.

Her course leads her through what Debord refers to as “bordering regions” in the city that circumscribe “different unities of atmosphere and dwelling.” The narration of Nancy’s path from Sikes’ lair in Bethnal Green to Hyde Park, a distance of over four miles, posits her psychogeographical victory over the forces ordering movement in the city. Nancy’s explicit destination makes her course lack the unplanned spontaneity underlying the practice of the dérive, but the narration of her path gestures towards the Situationists’ eagerness to enact “the constant diminution of these border regions, up to their complete suppression.” A psychogeographical map that I have made from Nancy’s movements illustrates how she forges connections between separate zones of London (figure 2.2).

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The irreverence that Nancy pays to the ordering of London through her devious movements collapses the city’s “border regions” into the unaccounted time and space of the discourse. Distance and time are secondary to Nancy’s foremost concern: helping Oliver. In the narration of her movements, the suburbs are simply “reached.” The verb situates her journey as a detemporalized passage across a single threshold,
from the chaotic environment of the slum to the “comparatively deserted” atmosphere of the suburb. Nancy’s path corresponds with the “north-west passage” that famously eluded Thomas De Quincey—and inspired the dérive—on his opiate-clouded walks across nineteenth-century London, where he found himself lost within and mystified by the city’s obscured labyrinthine terrain. De Quincey’s metaphor, of London as an indeterminate network of interconnected waterways, is realized in the imagery of Nancy’s movements, in which she seemingly dives into and swims through the city’s crowded streets.

The novel’s moralistic attribution of individual and collective behavior to geographical locations inside the city is most pronounced in its depiction of Nancy. Her efforts to help Oliver by communicating her knowledge of his stolen inheritance to Rose Maylie are compounded by her refusal to leave her London behind when she is offered a way out, for which she and readers are both punished through her brutal murder. Barloon claims that the course Nancy’s life takes in the novel reflects Dickens’s realization “that as long as parts of London remain off-limits and unknown to the respectable classes, they will continue to serve as an inexhaustible breeding ground for the sort of ‘vermin’ who pose the greatest threat to the social order.” Nancy’s movements across the city, intended to help restore Oliver’s stolen fortune, complicate Barloon’s blanket assertion that the inaccessibility of the slum perpetuates a cycle of pathologized social reproduction. In offering Rose Maylie her unique knowledge about Oliver’s fortune, which she acquires in the lair by eavesdropping on

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Monks and Fagin, Nancy connects suburb and slum, mobilizing Rose Maylie and Oliver’s course to fulfillment and happiness.

Justin Eichenlaub argues that the divisions and connections between London’s suburbs and slums in the novel, exemplified by Nancy’s itinerary of movements, “construct a symbolic, metaphorical, and social network of knotted spaces that is as much a product of Dickens’s allegorical imagination as it is of the realities of urban space in nineteenth-century London.” Eichenlaub shows how movements across London trace a partial social geography of the city—the contrasting built environments, the labyrinth's spatial incoherence, the suburb’s rational order—command certain sets of behavior driving the novel’s entangled urban narrative. Lynda Nead describes the streets of Mid-Victorian London as “indirect, narrow, and obstructed. Rather than facilitating the flow of movement, they constituted an aneurism in the most vital parts of the metropolitan body.” The built condition of London present in the discourse of Oliver Twist facilities movements that are not only tangled within neighborhoods, but between separated parts of the city, as Nancy’s movements across the city illustrate.

**IV. Labyrinthian Possibilities**

The way we see criminals moving through London in Oliver Twist constructs an experience of the city’s psychogeography. The Situationists’ drifts were practiced in order to discover anti-capitalist modes of existence inside the city, in which the

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oppressive binary between work and leisure could be resolved through its embodied negation. The Dodger’s path into the city shows how the psychogeography of the labyrinth is contingent on different urban thresholds between the visible and the obscure, while the discourse of Oliver’s experience following the Dodger inside the city represents the affect conjured by moving inside the labyrinth. Lairs in the novel sit behind the partially visible fields of the labyrinth, generating distinct modes of seeing and using the city, emblemized by Fagin’s “game.” I argue the illicit, anti-capitalist modes of life practiced by Fagin’s gang are enabled by the lairs’ hidden locations within the built dimensions of the city’s labyrinths. The paradigms of the labyrinth and the lair spatialize the gang’s lived negation of bourgeois order and morality, correlating with the Situationists’ practice of the dérive and Jorn’s theorization of unitary urbanism. Nancy’s movements collapse the barriers to travelling across London. In Nancy’s defiance of the prevailing terms ordering movements and structuring everyday life, both in the slums and suburbs, she alienates the geography of London from its realist adaptation in the novel, showcasing a radical renegotiation of urban space inside Victorian London. Whereas Moll Flanders shows its unlikely hero’s subversive achievement of social mobility through her appropriation of geographically embedded power relations within and around London, Oliver Twist locates the escalating tension between the individual and the built environment of Victorian London, becoming rapidly reshaped by what Nead describes as “the forces of two urban principles: mapping and movement.” ⁴⁸ The movements that emerge out of the city’s obscure terrain resist the disciplinary order

⁴⁸ Nead, Victorian Babylon, 13.
imposed by mapping, allowing readers to glimpse disordered fragments of labyrinthine possibilities integral to imagining the Situationist city.
Chapter Three: Drifting Late-Capitalist London

Where is London almost three centuries years after Defoe penned *Moll Flanders* and nearly two centuries years after Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist*? Is it a travesty of rampant urbanization, overaccumulation of capital, and conservative governance that systematically suppresses generations of urban resistors in the service of a globalized capital economy? Or is it a post-industrial playground of endless leisure and hidden attractions, providing margins and liminal zones that catalyze a radical recovery of memories? The answers provided by two contemporary London psychogeographers, Laura Oldfield Ford and Iain Sinclair, are held in the writers’ strikingly ambivalent relationships with London’s past, present, and future conditions. The two works that I explore in this chapter highlight the inadvertent construction of London’s hidden zones, marginal spaces, and meaningless landscapes as the geographical side-effects of capital accumulation in the epoch of globalization. These environments allow persons, groups, and communities to temporarily reconceive everyday life, becoming integral to the class struggle against the institutional and commercial powers both disciplining and gentrifying the city: residential and commercial development, automobiles and roads, public transportation, corrupt bureaucracy, near total CCTV surveillance, and the invasive spatial interests of the ruling class. *Savage Messiah* is Laura Oldfield Ford’s collection of self-published zines from 2005 to 2009, published in book form in 2011. The author-artist drifts about different postal codes in the city, visually depicting her experience in collages made from her photos, drawings, and collected images and quotes, combined with historical vignettes of radical resistance, spatialized personal anecdotes, and
experiential details of the sites she visits on her drifts. In *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25*, Iain Sinclair circumnavigates London’s most prominent built margin, the 117-mile long M25 motorway, a Thatcherite relic of transportation infrastructure, and a symbol of the post-industrial sovereignty of the automobile over the pedestrian. Both authors practice psychogeography in order to recover lost narratives of resistance within the hidden and marginalized zones of their drifts. The practice of walking and writing psychogeographically leads them to animate spaces and locations that are otherwise ignored in the discourse of the contemporary London, challenging the city’s presiding capitalist narratives by summoning dormant counternarratives of dissent and agitation.

Oldfield Ford and Sinclair look to the past to trace the origins of the city’s present conditions and cast ominous doubts about its future. Representing and historicizing the experience of urban spaces that are otherwise perceived exclusively for their absence of life and activity, *Savage Messiah* and *London Orbital* are works of postmodern geography, locating the authors’ obscure zones of engagement within a larger process of globalized change. Edward Soja writes, “It may be space more than time that hides consequences from us, the ‘making of geography’ more than the ‘making of history’ that provides the most revealing and tactical theoretical world. This is the insistent premise and promise of postmodern geographies.”  

In their act of narrating (in Oldfield Ford’s case, also photographing and drawing) the experience of drifting in London, the authors construct their own psychogeographies, in which the “consequences” of late capitalism are spatialized and embedded in drifters’

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experiences. They explore the spatial detritus of London’s post-war urbanization, the process of urban growth and expansion, which David Harvey argues “played a crucial role in the absorption of capital surpluses and has done so at ever-increasing geographical scales, but at the price of burgeoning processes of creative destruction that entail the dispossession of the urban masses to any right to the city whatsoever.” Oldfield Ford and Sinclair perform “the dispossession of the urban masses” by situating their drifts throughout London’s marginalized urban zones, in which ignored and dilapidated spaces are viewed as the geographical symptoms of excessive capitalist urban development. Their works illuminate the challenges of leveraging self-determination against the postmodern acceleration of capital, which they see shaping the city to serve the elite, globalized interests and ideologies of the capitalist ruling class.

Oldfield Ford and Sinclair represent the postmodern experience of the city while they resist submitting to its realities. Psychogeography becomes a tool for the authors to subvert postmodern time and space by using the drift to uncover the subjugated narratives of London. The writers carry on the Situationist project of turning the city into a playground for the imagination, resisting the dominant ordering of everyday life in London by committing themselves to generally unseen and unexperienced urban spaces. By recovering lost narratives, they locate new radical possibilities for everyday life outside of the dominant structures of order and discipline. In his pre-Situationist essay, “Formulary for New Urbanism,” Ivan

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50 David Harvey, Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution (London: Verso, 2012), 22.
Chtcheglov highlights the latent historicity that permeates one’s experience of the moving inside the city:

All cities are geological. You can’t take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a closed landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain shifting angles, certain receding perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary.  

As psychogeographers, Oldfield Ford and Sinclair set different parameters for the “closed landscape[s]” of London that they explore, but their encounters with the city yield equally “fragmentary” historicized experiences of space. Their accounts discover fleeting yet powerful moments of resistance against the gentrification of the London, in and across spaces both created and largely abandoned through the process of urbanization, sites engendering subversive enjoyment and radical historical recovery for the psychogeographers to experience.

In this chapter I will consider three conceptual fields of resistance that Oldfield Ford and Sinclair’s works discover through their psychogeographical drifts inside London: shadows, margins, and spectacular time. As Oldfield Ford drifts inside London, her discourse unfolds inside shadowed spaces, forgotten by time, abandoned by industry, and unwatched by London’s disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance. These shadows correlate with the labyrinths and lairs of Oliver Twist, as they bear the subversive freedom to experience and explore life outside of the city’s dominant structures. Margins exist on both the geographical and social borders of everyday life, encapsulating London’s transitional zones and liminal spaces, the unseen edges of the city unaccounted for because they are experienced in passing. Sinclair explores the

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M25 as though it is London’s ultimate margin. By drifting around the motorway, he delineates the radicalism of marginal space: the possibility of recovering lost narratives and forging new meanings in spaces where they are otherwise absent. Through Sinclair’s text, and Oldfield Ford’s own contributions the discourse of margins, we can better see how Moll Flanders enacts her own marginalization as a subversive device, allowing for her unlikely mobility to unfold along her own terms. Oldfield Ford and Sinclair write against what Debord calls “spectacular time,” the notion of “time spent consuming images and in the broader sense as image of the consumption of time.”\textsuperscript{52} In Sinclair's historical analysis of every turn in his journey, and Oldfield Ford's evocation of her experiences and the history of radical action in London, the task of representing the experience of the city becomes a matter of uncovering/recovering memory through psychogeographical presence, outside structures of discipline and control. The construction of the city of the future, seen in London's spectacularized gentrification and development, is détourned by the radical poetics of the authors’ psychogeographical recoveries.

I. Shadows

How does it feel to know you are always being watched? Where can you go to escape the omnipresence of surveillance? What does it mean to go off the map when the geography of the entire world can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection? These questions are the anxious currents drifting alongside Laura Oldfield Ford as she walks through London. In the case of the Artful Dodger,

disappearance is as easy as turning into a dark alley, but for Oldfield Ford it poses a much more formidable task. A subheading from an article in The Telegraph from 2013 proclaims, “Britain has a CCTV camera for every 11 people, a security industry report disclosed, as privacy campaigners criticised the growth of the ‘surveillance state.’” Moll Flanders and Fagin’s gang worry about being observed when they are moving around London, but they did not have to worry about more than 7000 public CCTV cameras capturing their movements. Oldfield Ford enters the city’s figurative and literal shadows in order to escape her everyday anxieties over surveillance, finding refuge and space for reflecting on the effects of gentrification. She discovers the power of unintended infrastructural shadowscapes, of removing oneself from the city and discovering unique forms of leisure, passion, danger, and excitement, which can only exist away from the disciplinary accountability of the city.

Figure 3.1: Heading from the first page of Issue 3 in Savage Messiah

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In Issue 3 from *Savage Messiah*, Oldfield Ford walks the three-and-a-half mile length of the Westway, a hulking elevated dual carriageway extending from Paddington to North Kensington, constructed in 1970 to relieve travel congestion for cars entering central London. On the top of the first page of the zine, the words “A Perambulation Through the Shadowscapes...” are sloppily scribbled in bold, block capital letters, marking the tension between visibility and movement at the heart of her experience walking in the shadows of the Westway (figure 3.1). Her large letters teeter on illegibility, mimicking the partial obscurity of the narratives that she is at once recovering and discovering in her writing and psychogeographical collages of drawings, photos, and détourned quotes and images. Oldfield Ford’s experience walking under the Westway, as she represents it through her language and images, exposes a radically subversive territory beneath the carriageway, an unintended byproduct of the city’s modernization:

Terra Incognita, this world is hidden from view; dank corridors defying panopticon mapping. The A-z shows the Westway slicing through Paddington rooftops but not the shadowscape beneath. I watch the glowing particles of my desire float and explode across the city. In that underpass, a ghostly portakabin, names etched with fervour and destruction. The fabric of the city is erotically charged, a multitude of red dot locations on the map. The tissue between desiring and acting disintegrates. Schizoid antics, a matrix of possibilities, those dangerous moments when promise is pushed forward and all those little fragments of desire scuttle across the face.

In naming the zone under the Westway “Terra Incognita” Oldfield Ford evokes de Quincey’s intoxicated explorations of Victorian London, as the accounts from her drifts are often tied to her own history of altered states of consciousness. The shadowscape under the Westway reveals its opposition to the towering road as the

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55 Laura Oldfield Ford, *Savage Messiah* (London: Verso, 2011), Issue 3. All references to *Savage Messiah* will be to zine number and will be given parenthetically in the running text. Grammar, quotations, and spelling appear as they do in the zines.
unlikely product of generative absence; being “hidden from view” and “defying panopticon mapping,” the space allows for uncharted feelings and experiences to unfold in ways the open city would never allow. The metaphor of the shadowscape as a “ghostly portakabin,” a modular building commonly used on construction sites, highlights the transience encapsulating experiences under the Westway. The characteristics of lacking permanence and outward visibility become the sources of the zone’s power and allure for the author, similar to the way the labyrinths and lairs of Oliver Twist’s London offer Fagin’s gang the freedom to develop their “game” as an illegal yet exciting and profitable practice of seeing and using the city.

The Westway symbolizes the prioritization of automobiles over pedestrians in the development of the modern city, a process that deeply unsettled the Situationists. In the “Situationist Theses on Traffic,” Debord writes,

> A mistake by all the city planners is to consider the private automobile (and its by-products, such as the motorcycle) as essentially a means of transportation. In reality, it is the most notable material symbol of the notion of happiness that developed capitalism tends to spread throughout the society. The automobile is at the heart of this general propaganda, both as supreme good of an alienated life and as essential product of the capitalist market.⁵⁶

The area below the Westway is not only the shadow of an elevated carriageway, it is a shadow hiding from capitalist values. The preeminence of the automobile modernity, as a “material symbol of the notion of happiness,” is negated underneath the Westway. Instead, the act of drifting through this space allows the city to gain a texture of feelings, as a “fabric” that undermines the commodification of desire and happiness by being “erotically charged.” The significance of the shadow is therefore

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not only in the space’s denial of outward visibility and disciplinary accountability; it also comes from the dissolution of social structures ordering everyday life. Oldfield Ford locates a zone of hidden experience and activity, where “a matrix of possibilities” is necessarily “dangerous.” The “possibilities” are about disrupting structured everyday life, unlocking radical “promise” and “desire” underneath the Westway. The wild, disorienting euphoria that the shadowscape unlocks is a response to the “general propaganda” that Debord fears is invading the city with automobiles and roadways. Oldfield Ford foregrounds the spectacular violence of the roadway, but her drift allows her to see, feel, and recover lost spaces and their intertwined narratives of resistance.
Figure 3.2: Collage from Issue 3 in Savage Messiah
Figure 3.3: Photo page from Issue 3 in **Savage Messiah**
The images that Oldfield Ford creates out of her drift under the Westway are visualizations of her relationship with the shadowed space and the memories and feelings that it allows to covertly surface (figures 3.2 and 3.3). In figure 3.2, we see a self-portrait of Oldfield Ford appearing somber and blasé. Above her is a photo of her traveled shadowscape below the Westway; pasted in the shadowscape is a blurry photograph of a man with a scribbled heart floating above his head, looking towards the drawing of the author with an amorous expression. In between Oldfield Ford and her admirer is a diagram of Củ Chi tunnels, an extensive underground system used by the Viet Cong to carry out clandestine operations against Americans during the U.S. war in Vietnam. Oldfield Ford’s appropriation of the image suggests the insurrectionary ideology of her spatial practices. The collage represents the intersections of hidden spaces, insurgent resistance, and erotic feeling that the artist’s drift discovers in the shadows of the Westway. In figure 3.2, the striking contrast within the photograph of the space beneath the Westway, between the overexposed edges of the highway and the underexposed shadowscape cast in darkness, highlights the zone’s invisibility. By invisibility, I mean a contrast with the hypervisibility of the adjacent neighborhoods from their CCTV surveillance and thoroughly mapped qualities. The collection of images creates an impression of the “matrix of possibilities” exclusive to the shadowscape, where Oldfield Ford finds euphoric refuge from the city.

This contrast, between exposure and concealment, is also evident in figure 3.3, from the same issue of the zine. A person can be seen crossing the threshold between darkness and light, as viewed from below the Westway. Beneath the image
is a photograph of a wall covered in graffiti, with two indiscernible faces posing for the camera. The image corresponds to the text from its facing page, pasted below a photograph of two tall council housing towers: “Pass Warwick estate, peer up at the 18th floor of Wilmcote House where Mick Jones lived with his Nan. The Westway tilts as it skims the Grand Union. I drift slowly in its shadows, the towpath is broad here, elegant graffiti slinks across a high brick wall.” The verbs that Oldfield Ford employs replicate her process of interacting with the city from the vantage point of its shadows, emulating psychical gestures in the built environment. She “pass[es]” and “peer[s],” while the Westway “tilts” and “skims,” and the graffiti “slinks.” These subtle movements of the physical environment contribute the fluid psychogeographical experience of the shadowscape, where space is mysterious and ever-shifting in relation to its subjects. The passage unites with its paired and adjacent images, framing the different types of revelations, activities, and feelings that the shadowscape contains and creates, against the city it is hidden from. Drifting under the Westway, for Oldfield Ford, means seeing different sites from a fixed distance, such as the Warwick estate, Wilmcote House, and Grand Union canal. Each location has the potential to surface a stream of memories, folded into the present experience of the drift. The shadowscape is a zone where Oldfield Ford is free to experience, imagine, and recall the unmappable London.

II. Margins

Margins exist between the geographical and social borders of everyday life in the city. In London’s postmodern geography, margins are found by its transitional
zones and liminal spaces, the unseen borders in and around the city that are unaccounted for by everyday experience because they are witnessed only in passing. *London Orbital* and *Savage Messiah* find power in the marginal inbetweeness that the authors access by drifting. Oldfield Ford finds margins within the city and delineates the subversive freedoms hidden within shadowscapes. Sinclair’s project looks to the M25 to find the ultimate margins of London, exploring the edges of the city limit imposed by the motors of modernity. By drifting London’s inbetween zones, the authors delineate the radicality of marginal spaces: the ability to disappear from the city, while remaining within its official limits; the power to temporarily escape and reconfigure the ideological structures congealed in place.

When Sinclair foregrounds his project walking around the M25, he expresses a desire to locate a formless, undefined territory, where he is free to both discover and produce experiences that cannot be found anywhere other than London’s margins. His mission is prompted by the expansion of what Neil Smith describes as the “gentrification frontier,” the result of concurrent place-making and profit-making that “absorbs and retransmits the distilled optimism of a new city, the promise of economic opportunity, the twin thrills of romance and rapacity; it is the place where the future shall be made.” Sinclair finds a place where no “future” is being “made,” instead he is interested in understanding the spatial byproducts of the gentrification frontier. By drifting around the M25, Sinclair discovers alternative frontiers that can be recovered from capitalism’s colonization of urban futurities:

I want to walk around the orbital motorway: in the belief that this nowhere, this edge, is the place that will offer fresh narratives. I don’t want to be on the...

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road anymore than I want to walk on the water; the soft estates, the acoustic footprints will do nicely. Dull fields that travelers never notice. Noise and the rush of traffic, twenty-four hours a day, has pushed “content” back.  

Sinclair juxtaposes the uncharted experience of his walk with the prominence of its backdrop, of which it is at the defining “edge,” and set against geographically. The margin that his walk traces goes “around the orbital,” which itself circumscribes the city of London. He dislocates his path from the fixed meaning and program of the motorway, of efficiently circulating people and things around the city, by harnessing the qualities of the roadway that render its adjacent landscape a “nowhere.” The transitory nature of the road leaves its neighboring spaces, which “travelers never notice,” devoid of accumulated meanings, so they can “offer fresh narratives.” The consistency of the roadway’s sound and movement, its “noise” and “rush,” contrasts with its innocuous bordering land, “soft estates” and “dull fields.” In Sinclair’s conceptualization of his walk, he situates the indeterminacy of M25’s margins as the special power they will offer him as he drifts on foot.

Sinclair and Oldfield Ford’s engagements with London’s marginal zones and spaces highlight the centrality of mobility and transience in resisting the structuring of the urban everyday in the late-capitalist city. The way in which Moll Flanders leverages agency, authenticity, and power in her life is by constructing different identities as she moves between places, using her perceived path to confirm her fabricated narratives for others. The road becomes a powerful margin for Moll to use as a tool, just as the motorway’s margins fulfill Sinclair’s search for narratives, and the Westway’s shadows invite Oldfield Ford to participate in its clandestine freedom.

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Oldfield Ford expresses the radical qualities she attaches to marginal space: “To desire placelessness it to defy authority” (Issue 6). It is in the escape from the accountability of everyday life in the city that the author’s invocation of “placelessness” asserts its radicality. Her “desire” is for spaces that defy the spectacular place-making of gentrification in London, in which the city reflects the ideological order of neoliberalism and urban geography is produced as economic space. Sinclair’s relationship to the M25 suggests that the margin must be subjectively transfigured before it can reward its participant:

The M25, previously known (through brief trespass, shorthauls to Gatwick or Heathrow), was a thing to be tolerated, endured rather than experienced. The trick was to move back, step away, treat the road as a private entity, a metaphor of itself. Enlightenment came with distance, detachment. (13)

Sinclair’s prior history with the roadway is as its everyday subject, a means to travel from one place to another; but to truly access its offerings, he removes himself from its program. He situates the roadway as a figurative object for playful participation. Drifting the space, Sinclair sees a “metaphor of itself”: the margin of the margin.

*London Orbital* accesses the repressed territory around London’s modern infrastructural fence in order to experience and convey the poetics of its marginal space and to critically reflect back upon London’s buried past, present, and commodified future. Alastair Bonnett argues that Sinclair’s drift of the M25 produces a subversive way of seeing the city that is propagated through its psychogeographical experience:

Sinclair’s double mapping of modernity and loss is narrated as an engagement with alienating, often brutally instrumental, landscapes. These places (or non-
Bonnett is right about the landscape’s “disorientation and disharmony” spurring radical criticism by disclosing a politics of postmodern urban space; however, he neglects to account for the plasticity of Sinclair’s “Enlightenment” from drifting the M25. Sinclair’s drifts not only inform critical perspectives on power and the production of space; they also produce what Debord terms “a beauty of the situation,” the euphoria of perceiving the dynamic interactions happening in space, at all scales, which he calls a “sum of possibilities.”

Oldfield Ford and Sinclair are poetically engaged with London’s marginal non-places, where they remain critically removed from the everyday.

The margins and their corollary shadows are the only spaces left in the city that offer the freedom of structurelessness, indeterminism, and disorder. As Oldfield Ford walks along the River Fleet, the most prominent subterranean river in London, “The repressed desires of the city flow through hidden pipes and conduits become counter narratives, a described jouissance in a euphoric engagement with the city” (Issue 6). The river’s concealment foregrounds Oldfield Ford’s figuration of it as a hidden margin within the city, allowing her to experience “a euphoric engagement” that is at once subversive and playful. The poetics of the Fleet’s pathway emerges from perceiving the relationship of its instrumental infrastructure—“pipes and conduits”—with the everyday “repressed desires of the city.” The radicality of this intra-urban margin derives from the psychogeographer’s ability to craft a profound

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and beautiful experience in unsuspecting zones, by discovering the spatiality of its “counter narratives.” The radical insights of the London drift are contingent on the cathartic release of discovering lost meanings and hidden relationships that have become relegated to urban margins. Patrick Keiller highlights the historical backdrop to the poeticization of post-industrial margins that we find in Sinclair’s and Oldfield Ford’s works:

As Individuals, we can’t rebuild the public transport system, or re-empower local democracy, but we can poeticize our relationship with their dilapidation. Perhaps this is the legacy of the 1980s when, in London at least, large parts of the city were visibly altered by a political force that was shocking...the impulse to poeticize landscape in this way always coincides with times of heightened political tension.\(^6\)

Oldfield Ford’s and Sinclair’s gravitation to London’s margins both as acts of historical recovery and of poetic, psychogeographical discovery are responses to London’s neoliberal “legacy of 1980s.” The M25 and the Westway are examples of how the city was “altered by a political force” serving the late-capitalist production of urban space to accommodate the automobile, creating unnoticed modern margins in and around the city. In this nowhere, Oldfield Ford and Sinclair find the unstructured freedom to draw their insights about London’s transformation. They extend the Situationist project into the margins of contemporary London, beyond, between, and beneath its anodyne developments. The authors relocate the radical power of marginal inbetweenness leveraged by Moll Flanders and Fagin’s gang, to what the British geographer Tim Edensor refers to as the “industrial ruins” of the city, which “serve as an uncanny space amidst a familiar realm. But precisely because they are regarded as forbidden or dangerous spaces, they become spaces of fantasy, places in which

unspeakable and illicit acts occur, places of unhindered adventure."\(^{62}\) Oldfield Ford and Sinclair capitalize on the “fantasy” of defamiliarized everyday life in the city, experienced within, beside, and underneath its “familiar realm[s].” The margins they explore in their drifts both inspire and radicalize the authors, allowing them to recover the narratives of the city that are lost in time. By raising these narratives to the surface and reassessing them within the experience of the everyday, the authors detemporalize London’s spaces and conceive a radical poetics of urban margins.

### III. Spectacular Time

Oldfield Ford and Sinclair drift to rescue London from itself. Viewing their drifts as psychogeographical battles to radically re-historicize the late-capitalist city, the authors recover time from London’s spectacularized illusions. The London they dream of is one where individuals are in free possession of their own time, rather than the subjects of what Debord terms, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, “spectacular time,” defining it as “the time of a real transformation experienced as illusion.”\(^{63}\) Everyday life in London is subject to a totalizing commodification of time and history produced by private capital, enforced by the state, and consumed as the spectacle. The authors drift in spaces where they can momentarily resist the spectacular temporality imposed by capital, against what Debord views as the spectacle’s “reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time…in effect a *false consciousness of time.*”\(^{64}\) The illusory and “paralyzed” nature of London’s spectacular time is what the authors undo.

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\(^{63}\) Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 113, sec. 155.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 114 sec. 158.
through their drifts. Sinclair pieces together the historical fragments displaced by the
M25, while Oldfield Ford evokes and reimagines London’s history of radical action.
The ending of London Orbital forms Sinclair’s response to spectacular time, by
uniting the connections through the city’s history resurrected by his drift, into the
construction of his text as a radical situation. Sinclair positions his documentation of
the drift as a self-enclosed historical production, in which his circumambulation of
the M25 serves to reconstitute the narratives displaced by the spectacle.

Sinclair completes his drift December 30th, 1999, on the eve of the new
millennium, a point in time both dreaded with apocalyptic fear of a digital
apocalypse, and celebrated as the dawn of a new era of prosperity. The author’s posse
arrives at a pub where they are able to spy on the rehearsal of the inaugural event of
the Millennium Dome, a massive events complex embroiled with controversies over
corruption during its publicly funded development, and criticized for its ugly design.
The celebration of the new millennium at the Millennium Dome, a symbol of the
collusion of private capital and state power, represents the production of spectacular
time that Sinclair retaliates against in his drift. Read through Debord’s terms of
spectacular time, the event is one of society’s many “mass pseudo-festivals, with their
travesty of dialogue and parody of the gift,” which he argues “may incite people to
excessive spending, but they produce only a disillusion—which is invariably in turn
only offset by further false promises.”

The passage of time is an orchestrated event
to be viewed by the entire city, situated inside society’s prevailing historical narrative,
and written by and for the interests of capital. In the book’s final moments inside the
pub, Sinclair positions his drift as a disavowal of the spectacle:

65 Ibid., 113, sec. 154.
We couldn’t get drunk, but we were very mellow. Boneless. It took a long time to lift a glass. Anna had driven us through the Blackwell Tunnel at the start of this and she was there for the last rites. We hadn’t walked around the perimeter of London, we had circumnavigated the Dome. At a safe distance. Away from its poisoned heritage. Its bad will, mendacity. The tent could consider itself exorcised. This was a rare quest for me, one that reached a fitting conclusion. Here at last was the grail. Up-ended on a swamp in East London. Glowing in the dark. (457)

In Sinclair’s account, the Dome is a synecdoche for London. The city is distilled into a single building, which itself functions as a historic symbol for the “Millennium” and enters into the spectacular narrative of capitalist opulence as urban progress. Sinclair situates the conclusion of his drift using religious language; the group conducts their “last rights,” the Dome is effectively “exorcised,” and “the grail” is finally reached. The drift assumes ritualistic qualities that are juxtaposed with the celebration of the Dome, which the group sees being rehearsed. Not only did the margins of the M25 separate Sinclair from the Dome—and the city—“at a safe distance,” they removed the author from London’s “poisoned heritage,” by granting sight and transparency to the everyday production of history. The Dome embodies the spectacle’s contaminated time through its “up-ended” location amidst the toxic post-industrial wasteland of East London’s Greenwich Peninsula. Its artificial “glowing” marks its unnatural intrusion into the cityscape, as though the alienation experienced within time can now be traced back to the Dome’s illuminated surface. The drift around the M25 allows Sinclair to construct a situation of momentous clarity, where spectacular time and the instruments of its production coalesce into a singular event: the new millennium.

Sinclair’s book ends by situating the psychogeographic industry of its own production. When the author claims that he and his group “circumnavigated the Dome,” he is tacitly asserting that his text is the product of a historical and
The full drift around the city’s margins enables Sinclair to enclose his presence within the form of radical consciousness delineated by his passage’s ritualistic completion.

*Savage Messiah* and *London Orbital* are radical poetic encounters with the spectacle of consumerism in London. Laura Oldfield Ford and Iain Sinclair remove themselves from the spatialized disciplinary order of London by locating their drifts in the shadows and margins of the post-industrial cityscape. Away from the instrumentalized surveillance of urban space and adjacent to the spectacular territory—and temporality—of everyday life, their psychogeographies are produced by subverting the commodified space and time of late-capitalist London. Oldfield Ford seeks spaces, such as the zone beneath the Westway, where she can inhabit individual freedom and cultivate collective resistance. Sinclair’s drift of the M25 is a

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66 Ibid., sec. 161.
self-enclosed production of radical counter-narratives to be read against London’s spectacular time. In *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Raul Vaneigem locates the concealed, individualized radicalism underlying the two authors’ experiences of urban space as the fundamental essence of revolution:

> The real demand of all insurrectionary movements is the transformation of the world and the reinvention of life. This is not a demand formulated by theorists: rather, it is the basis of poetic creation. Revolution is made everyday despite, and in opposition to, the specialists of revolution. This revolution is nameless, like everything springing from lived experience. Its explosive coherence is being forged constantly in the everyday clandestinity of acts and dreams.67

Vaneigem’s view that “demand” for revolution is “the basis of poetic creation” helps us to situate Oldfield Ford and Sinclair’s participation in “the everyday clandestinity of acts and dreams” within the “explosive coherence” of the class struggle in London. The revolution can only be achieved by constructing situations to change everyday life by emancipating it from its present alienation under the capitalist state and the private market. When Oldfield Ford calls for a “mass return to the labyrinth” (Issue 7), she insists on rupturing the disciplinary fabric of the city through the geographically independent and concealed construction of the situation, as a realm of transgressive activity and pleasure glimpsed in the criminal underworld of *Oliver Twist*. While Sinclair presents his drift around the M25 as a self-enclosed situation, the author’s radical recovery and production of counter-narratives against the gentrification of London, Oldfield Ford provides the reader with a call to action to treat the city as she has, by subverting its spatial discipline and cultivating collective resistance within the city’s shadows and across its margins.

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Conclusion

The traditional goal of aesthetics is to produce, by means of art, impressions of certain past elements of life in circumstances where those elements are lacking or absent, in such a way that those elements escape the disorder of appearances subject to the ravages of times. The degree of aesthetic success is thus measured by a beauty that is inseparable from duration, and that even goes so far as pretensions of eternity. The goal of the Situationists is immediate participation in a passionate abundance of life by means of deliberately arranged variations of ephemeral moments. The success of these moments can reside in nothing other than their fleeting effect. The Situationists consider cultural activity in its totality as an experimental method for constructing everyday life, a method that can and should be continually developed with the extensions of leisure and the withering away of the division of labor (beginning with the division of artistic labor).

(Guy Debord, “Theses on Cultural Revolution”)

What is to be made of the psychogeography latent in *Moll Flanders* and *Oliver Twist* and realized in *Savage Messiah* and *London Orbital*? Through these texts, we see London over three centuries: the fragmented growth of the spectacle. I have not attempted to give a historical account of London through my psychogeographical readings. Instead, I have aimed to situate the production of space and the construction of movement against the totalizing spectacle of the city and of the everyday. In keeping with the Situationist spirit, I have positioned my three moments within the “disorder of appearances subject to the ravages of time.” By looking closely at the psychogeography inscribed by movements, activities, and built environments in my texts, I have tried to register multiple radical iterations of London. The practice of reading psychogeographically, I have argued, allows us to observe subversive geographies existing beneath London’s overarching historical narratives and in opposition to its mechanisms of discipline.
The Situationist International’s revolutionary method demands that we engage in “a passionate abundance of life” both to labor against history and to construct alternatives for the future. Framing my project in Debord’s terms, it is the “deliberately arranged variations of ephemeral moments” that locates “success” in “their fleeting effect.” My approach to my three moments hints at alternatives for viewing London’s geography and history in textual instances of “immediate participation” with its time and space, movements and geographies waged against the advancing spectacle.

The indiscernible private path of Moll Flanders, the labyrinthine possibilities of Oliver Twist, and the shadows and margins of Savage Messiah and London Orbital all constitute confrontations with urban geography and everyday life produced under the pressure of capital accumulating in London. Reading three psychogeographical moments across three centuries of London’s time and space, I have attempted to situate the tension between geographical order and individual movement within the class struggle that determines the city’s transformations. I have viewed the evolution of the spectacular commodity form from the early eighteenth-century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, spanning the emergence of the modern commodity market, industrialization, and the latest epoch of globalization.

These moments return me to questions raised by my own drifts in London. How can London’s spectacular historicity be reconciled with its geographical experience? What will London’s future look like now that space and time have become its dominant commodities? We can envision a dystopian future for London when its geography is further colonized to serve the interests of global capital—the
mass consumption and reification of the spectacle. However, countering this grim vision persists a legacy of radical possibilities for London, which the Situationists have helped me recover through my readings. My own London psychogeographies, with their subversive constructions of everyday life, have returned the time that had vanished before me into the slate-grey fog of New Year’s. The texts I have explored point us to forms of clandestine movement, space, and activity that, century by century, individual by individual, refuse the spectacle, creating new urban possibilities—and perhaps some fireworks.
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