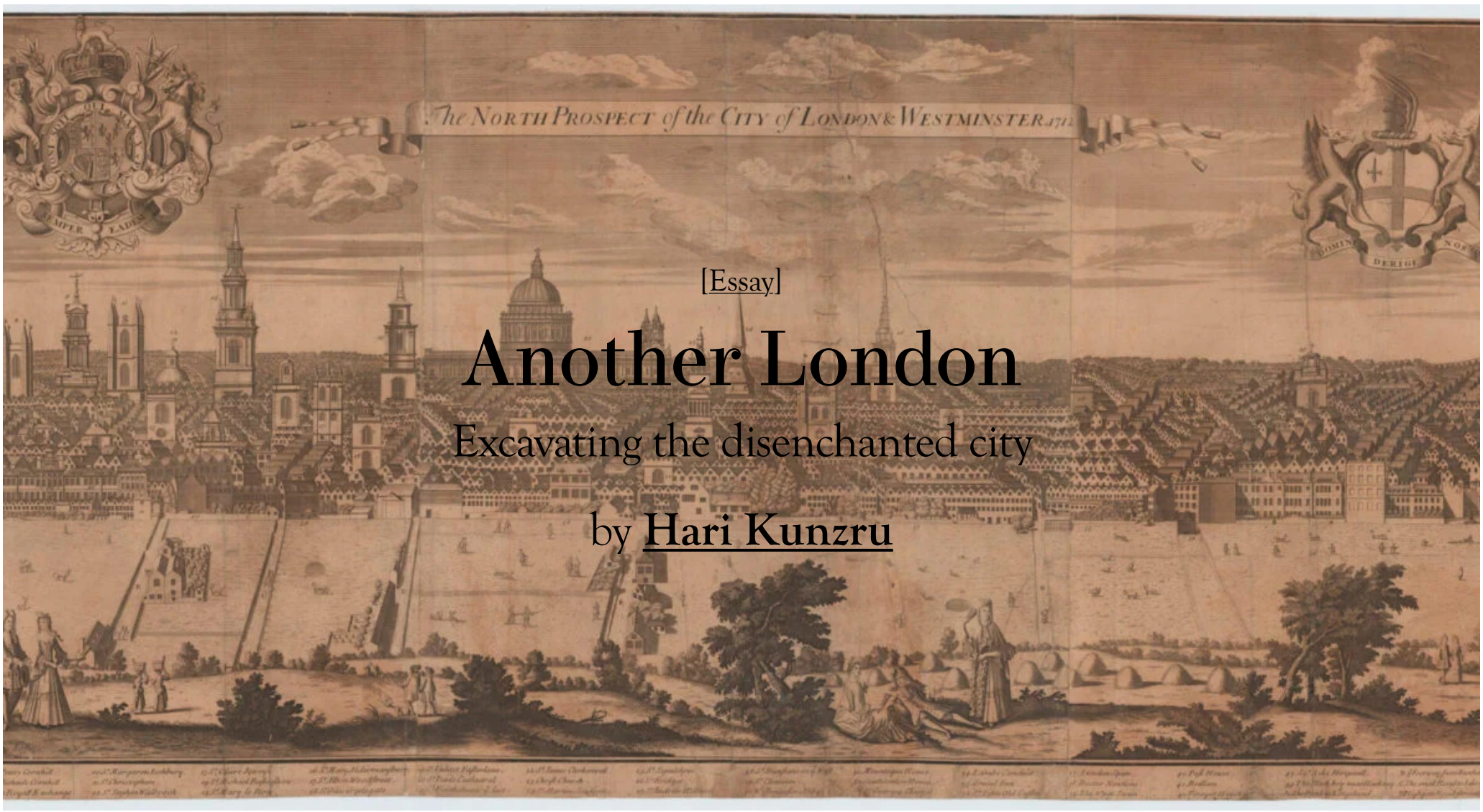


[Essay]

Another London

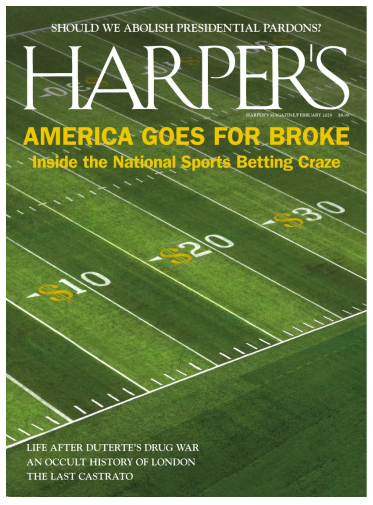
Excavating the disenchanted city

by **Hari Kunzru**

The North Prospect of the City of London and Westminster (as seen from Parliament Hill), 1712, detail of an engraving by an unknown artist © The Trustees of the British Museum.

It's not so much *where* to begin as *when*, though in London the distinction between time and space broke down centuries ago. There's a cast of wanderers, visionaries, and itinerants, the self-educated and self-published, a long lineage of cranks and outcasts, mostly

A painting depicting the arrival of Brutus to England, the slaying of giants, and the founding of a city, possibly London, fifteenth century, by an unknown artist © The British



opinionated, stretching away into the mists of pseudohistory. If you go back far enough you end up right at the beginning, with King Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas, defeating a clan of giants and founding a settlement he named New Troy. The giant Brân the Blessed's head, which spoke for many years after it was severed, lies buried under a white hill, on top of which the Norman conquerors built a fort, known to later generations as the White Tower, or just the Tower of London. The name London comes from the Llandin, a sacred mound now called Parliament Hill. *The* London. Or perhaps it originates with King Lud, the carnivalesque warrior and giver of feasts who was bold enough to rename New Troy after himself. Kaerlud became Kaerlundein, and eventually London. Of course, if you indulge in such etymologies, you'll find yourself chased down alleyways by angry professors and cornered in the rookeries, the most intellectually disreputable of the city's slums. Nothing about this London, *the* London, survives the scrutiny of decent folk. It is a hive, a warren, lousy with junkie poets and readers of tarot cards, autodidacts prone to exaggeration and outright deceit.

Brân's head was buried facing France, though some say King Arthur dug it up and threw it into the sea, because he wanted everyone to know that he and he alone was the protector of the island kingdom. Without Brân's watchfulness, it was probably inevitable that the French would sneak across the Channel. You can see them in a grainy photograph taken in September 1960, outside the Sailors' British Society in Limehouse, eight men and a woman, walking toward the camera, dressed in tweeds and overcoats. They are Parisian intellectuals—and not just French; they are Belgians, Dutch, Danes, and Germans, participants in the fourth conference of the Situationist International, an avant-garde group fond of the trappings of bureaucracy, heckling at boozy meetings, and denouncing one another for

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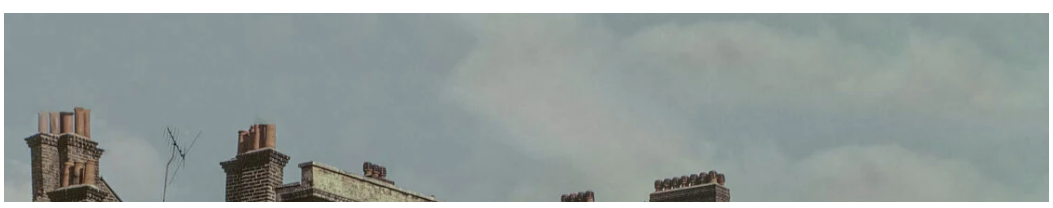
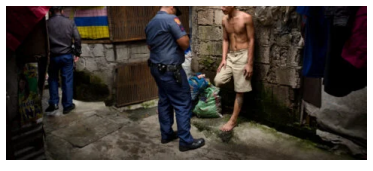
and shabby warehouses, associated in the popular imagination with Asian sailors, white slavery, and cholera. In 1955, some future Situationists had written to the editor of the *Times* of London, complaining about the redevelopment of the area, which had been pulverized by the Luftwaffe during the Blitz:

> It is inconvenient that this Chinese quarter of London should be destroyed before we have the opportunity to visit it and carry out certain psycho-geographical experiments we are at present undertaking.

In the first issue of the publication *Internationale Situationniste,* "psychogeography" is defined as "the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals." This might sound bloodless, but for the Situationists it was part of a utopian revolutionary program. The small band of café radicals sought to overthrow not just a government but the entire global system, which relied on what they called the "organization of appearances," or simply "the Spectacle." As the explosion of consumer society followed a period in which totalitarian propaganda had mobilized millions for war, they were among the first to understand mass media as a subtler means of social engineering. Advertising, film, television, fashion, and pop music were, they theorized, useful to the interests that controlled them because together they wove a kind of fascinating screen—or Spectacle—behind which the *actual* operations of power could be hidden. Pacified citizens had been reduced to dazzled consumers, unable to even see what was going on, let alone understand or oppose it. "The organization of appearances is a system for protecting the facts," one member, Raoul Vaneigem, wrote. "A racket."





[Letter from Manila]

The Sanctuarium

The Philippines reckons with its war on drugs

by **Sean Williams**

"Whitechapel High Road, 1965," by David Granick. © London Borough of Tower Hamlets/Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Sixty years later, the Spectacle saturates us in ways the Situationists never imagined. Online platforms structure our personal relationships; algorithms nudge us toward the platform owners' preferred choices. "Intelligence" is embedded into everything from our phones to our kitchen appliances. But back in the Sixties, the Situationists saw the physical environment of the city as an expression of the mass society created by consumerism and governed by the Spectacle, and they felt power closing in around them: "All space is occupied by the enemy. We are living under a permanent curfew. Not just the cops—the geometry."

As a teenager growing up in London, I experienced the Spectacle's rapid intensification. I would go out with friends to a burger restaurant in Covent Garden that had video screens on the wall, a stunning innovation in Eighties Britain. In between MTV clips, a camera would roam the room, and we would fleetingly see ourselves onscreen, an experience that felt edgy and utterly modern. Then we would go home on the Tube, waiting on platforms strewn with rubbish because the bins had been removed to stop the IRA from placing bombs in them. Later, after some major terrorist attacks on financial targets, the City of London erected a security radius known as the Ring of Steel. By the mid-Nineties, London was said to have more security cameras than any other city in the world.

In the years when the Ring of Steel was growing

was also in the air. Everyone seemed to be interested in exploring the fabric of the city, trying to excavate its strange atmospheres and hidden meanings. I knew people who were teaching themselves urban climbing, trespassing into abandoned buildings as a form of artistic action. Others were involved in an anticapitalist movement called Reclaim the Streets, or were steeping themselves in countercultural histories. My friends and I cycled along canal towpaths and danced at warehouse raves that were advertised on pirate radio stations whose transmitters were concealed on the rooftops of council tower blocks. There was a sense that a change was coming to London. We told ourselves it was the impending millennium, the new thousand-year cycle that the government was celebrating by building a giant dome on the Greenwich Peninsula. In retrospect, I think we sensed that we were living our last moments in the material world, before all our visions migrated online.

I left London for New York eighteen years ago. For a long time I didn't miss it. Recently I have found myself thinking about it more often, and sometimes even dreaming about it. In these dreams, I walk down alleyways toward mysterious glowing lights. I wait outside the kind of seedy minicab offices that used to exist before the advent of ride-hail apps. My old friends have moved on; the places I used to know are gone or have passed on to the next generation. I am not nostalgic, exactly, but lately I have been preoccupied by something that I used to believe I had found in London—a city within the city, above and beneath and between the everyday. This visionary city had a history and geography that didn't correspond to the official version. It was a prism, a maze in which I thought I discerned possibilities, things that might have been or ought to have been, or that I could imagine into existence. In the era of GPS and social media, where every location has already been rated and reviewed and nothing is real unless it is captured by a cell-phone camera, is it still possible to fall

For many years, as I took the train to Portobello, I would pass a giant piece of graffiti running along a wall between Westbourne Park and Ladbroke Grove stations. It had been there since at least the Seventies, long enough to have become a landmark: SAME THING DAY AFTER DAY—TUBE—WORK—DINNER—WORK—TUBE—ARMCHAIR—T.V.—SLEEP—TUBE—WORK—HOW MUCH MORE CAN YOU TAKE?—ONE IN TEN GO MAD—ONE IN FIVE CRACKS UP. It was the work of a group called King Mob, effectively the British chapter of the Situationist International until its members were expelled in one of the frequent purges. Malcolm McLaren, future manager of the Sex Pistols, supposedly participated in an early King Mob action. Jamie Reid, the graphic designer who made the famous image of Queen Elizabeth II with a safety pin through her mouth, did the cover for the first English-language Situationist anthology.

Reid's promotional poster for the Pistols' single "Pretty Vacant" shows two buses, their destinations NOWHERE and BOREDOM. In "God Save the Queen," John Lydon snarls that there is "no future." With this lyric, he channeled the Situationist critique that shopping and entertainment were somehow substituting for a more vivid and authentic life into the nihilist posturing of punk—but the full line is "there's no future *in England's dreaming*," which hints at something altogether more romantic and less rational. When Situationism came to London, it fused with a subterranean current of mysticism that flows through the city like one of its "lost rivers," the Fleet or the Tyburn, long since buried under

A "God save the Queen" button based on the 1977 artwork by Jamie Reid © Mick Sinclair/ Alamy

In Derek Jarman's 1978 film *Jubilee*, the punk-scene celebrity Jordan cheekily refers to a Situationist slogan that had appeared on the walls of the Latin Quarter in Paris during the uprising of May 1968.

> Our school motto was *Faites vos désirs réalités.* Make your desires reality. . . . In those days, desires weren't allowed to become reality, so fantasy was substituted for them: films, books, pictures. They called it art. But when your desires become reality, you don't need fantasy any longer, or art.

The end of alienation would mean nothing less than a reenchantment of reality. In the film, Jordan is literally a magical vision. *Jubilee* opens with Queen Elizabeth I summoning her court magician, Dr. John Dee, to ask him for "some pretty distractions which you call angels." Dee looks into the black depths of his scrying mirror and summons a spirit who grants the queen a vision of the future. The film cuts to a desolate South London street, the sound of machine-gun fire in the distance. A gang of punk girls is beating someone up. Elizabeth II, whose Silver Jubilee was celebrated with much pomp and circumstance in 1977 (giving the film its title), is mugged inside a shed on some waste ground, her crown stolen by feral punks. Transported to the scene, her royal ancestor looks down in horror.

Dee's black mirror is now in the British Museum. As a child, when I wanted to be an archaeologist, the museum was one of my favorite places. My mother would sit outside reading a book while I wandered the halls, visiting the Rosetta Stone or the helmet and sword from the Anglo-Saxon ship burial at Sutton Hoo. In my twenties, I would sometimes write in the museum's Round Reading Room, a huge open space beneath a dome inspired by the Roman Pantheon. Ghosts of previous readers flitted around the card catalogues: Arthur Rimbaud, Mark Twain, Karl Marx, Marcus Garvey, Bram Stoker, Virginia Woolf. If London had a psychogeographical center, it was not Trafalgar Square or Buckingham Palace but

that for more than a century was also a magnet for the kind of oddballs who liked to "do their own research."

A photograph of the Reading Room of the British Museum while under construction, 1855, by William Lake Price © The British Library/Bridgeman Images

The reading room closed in 1997, and the library moved to new premises on Euston Road. Dee's mirror is easy enough to find, lying in a case with other magical paraphernalia, including a knife used as a prop by a charlatan alchemist, the tip of the blade "transmuted" into gold. The mirror is actually an Aztec ritual object, a polished obsidian disk brought to Europe soon after the Spanish conquest. Small and undramatic, it is the sort of thing that most tourists pass by. I have come back to London to lose my bearings, to lose myself, but all I can make out in its depths is my own reflection. I remember that in real life, Dee saw no angels. It was his assistant, Edward Kelley, who had—or claimed to have—the gift of sight. I am stubborn. I stare harder, bending down in front of the glass case.

The black mirror is where I begin whatever it is I'm doing back in London. An action, a ritual. Perhaps a spell. The Situationists practiced something they called the *dérive*, usually translated into English as "drifting," an "aimless stroll" that served as a tool for analyzing the "psychic atmospheres that power had

> one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.

What I have in mind is something like a *dérive*, except not quite, because I have a general route in mind, about eight miles southeast to Greenwich, the site of the prime meridian, the line of zero degrees longitude that the British Empire invented to divide the world into Eastern and Western Hemispheres. I will connect the museum to the meridian, two sites of traditional power. And perhaps in so doing I will reenchant reality, or at least my corner of it.

In the streets of Bloomsbury, like barnacles on the museum's huge hull, are shops and services catering to the collecting impulses of the habitués of the old library, the men (and a few women) I used to see huddled over their solitary lunches in the local cafés. There are dealers in coins and stamps and antiquities, and, above all, books. At the Atlantis on Museum Street, an occult bookshop that has existed since the Twenties, I am shown a massive volume of transcriptions of Dee's conversations with angels. It must weigh ten pounds. It's an expensive volume, and I have a long way to walk, so it isn't that hard to say no. I put it back on the shelf and wander toward Soho. This is a detour—Greenwich is in the opposite direction—but of course getting to Greenwich is not the point, and it feels somehow appropriate to start out by going the wrong way.

In 1802, seventeen-year-old Thomas De Quincey, the son of a wealthy merchant, ran away from his Manchester boarding school. He made his way to London, where he slept for a while in an empty house on the corner of Greek Street and Soho Square. "I found," he wrote in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, "that the house already contained one single inmate, a poor friendless child,

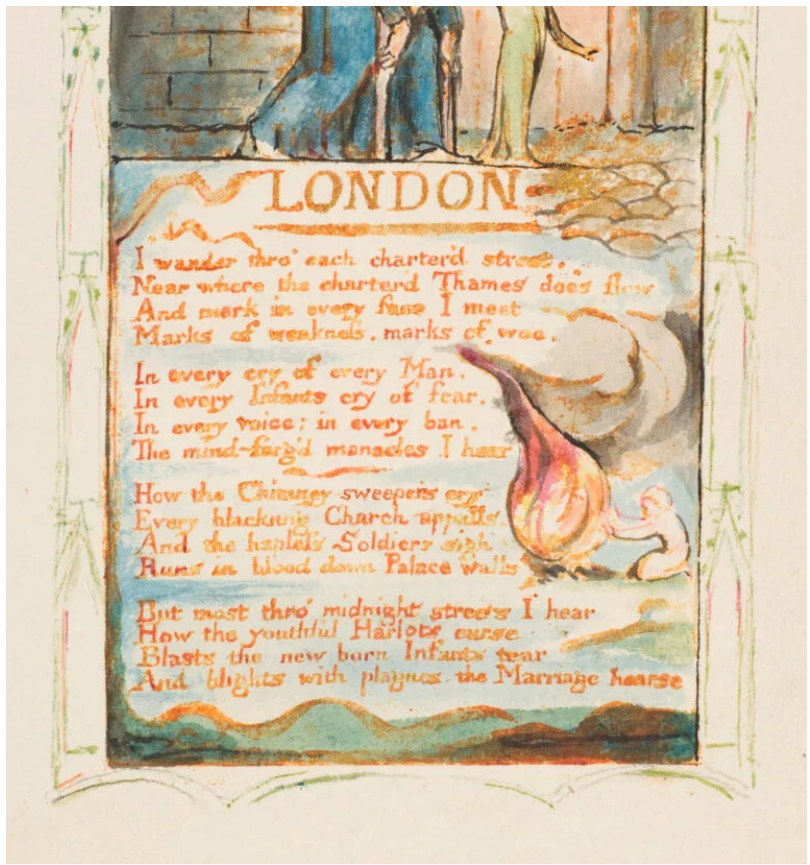
under a scrap of rug and an old sofa cover has since been demolished, replaced by a Barclays bank. As I walk past, someone is asleep in the doorway under a construction of cardboard boxes.

At night, De Quincey would wander up and down Oxford Street, a major East–West thoroughfare. Now one of the busiest shopping streets in Europe, it was in the first years of the nineteenth century a zone of pubs and other places of entertainment, notorious as the route that condemned prisoners took from Newgate Prison on their way to be hanged at Tyburn. De Quincey's companion on these walks was Ann, a teenage prostitute whom he portrays as an almost saintly figure, crediting her with saving his life "when all the world had forsaken me." When he left London, he promised to return and help her, expecting to be back in a week. They never saw each other again. Ann was lost in the "great Mediterranean of Oxford Street." For the Situationists, the pair were the Adam and Eve of a new sensibility. As an essay in *Internationale Situationniste* put it:

> The slow historical evolution of the passions reaches a turning point with the love between Thomas De Quincey and his poor Ann, separated by chance and searching yet without ever finding one another . . . through the mighty labyrinths of London; perhaps even within just a few feet of each other.

This was a form of love and loss brought about by the new social relations of the crowded nineteenth-century metropolis. In the twenty-first-century city, things have inverted. It is trivial for runaway teenagers to stay in touch with one another, but hard to escape the eyes of others—security cameras, facial-recognition technology, and all the rest of the apparatus of surveillance and control.

"If the doors of perception



From *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, copy Y, plate forty-six (orange-brown ink, watercolor, and shell gold), by William Blake, etching 1794, print c. 1825. Courtesy the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1917, New York City

cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite." So wrote the poet William Blake, who is a sort of tutelary spirit for London's seekers and visionaries.

Blake's birthplace at 28 Broad Street has been obliterated by a brown granite tower, a monument to the worldview of the City of Westminster's postwar planning department, but his influence is everywhere in the other London. One of Blake's disciples was a young Welsh writer who arrived in London in the 1880s and took a job trawling through a garret full of old occult books, writing descriptions for a publisher's catalogue. Too poor to attend university, Arthur Machen received his education through bookselling and publishing. Per Machen, the garret contained volumes on witchcraft, Kabbalah, gnosticism, hermetic magic, and much else that "may be a survival from the rites of the black swamp and the cave or—an anticipation of a wisdom and knowledge that are to come, transcending all the science of our day."

Despite his esoteric interests, Machen grubbed up a career as a popular and prolific author. There is, he wrote, "a London *cognita* and a London *incognita*." He considered

> the science of the great city; the physiology of London; literally and metaphysically the greatest subject that the mind of man can conceive. . . . You may point out a street, correctly enough, as the abode of washerwomen; but, in that second floor, a man may be studying Chaldee roots, and in the garret over the way a forgotten artist is dying by inches.

Machen's London was a descendant of Blake's, where angels perched in trees. It was intuitive, antirational, a city of visions glimpsed out of high windows and horrors lurking at the end of dark alleyways. "I didn't buy a map," says one of his characters, recalling his journey of discovery. "That would have spoilt it, somehow; to see everything plotted out, and named, and measured."

Farther east on Bloomsbury Way, I steer well clear of the commodified irrationalities of Serendipity Crystal, with its window display of sparkly geodes. I'm looking for the spire of St. George's, Bloomsbury, consecrated in 1730. You can see it in the background of William Hogarth's print *Gin Lane*, presiding fancifully over the slums of St. Giles. Two lions and two unicorns writhe at the base of a stepped pyramid. On top, instead of a cross, there's King George I, dressed as a Roman emperor. Its architect, Nicholas Hawksmoor, designed six London churches that have acquired a strange reputation. They were designed to have a "Solemn and Awfull Appearance," an aesthetic that the authorities hoped would intimidate the London rabble into faith or, failing that, compliance. Since the Seventies, Hawksmoor, a Freemason and student of ancient Egypt, has been spirited across the border into fiction, reimagined as a sort of dark magus of London, a figure who sought to control the city through architecture, binding it to the will of those he served.

"Hawksmoor was no Christian," says Sir William Gull, Queen Victoria's surgeon, in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell*. Gull is being driven by a coachman on a tour of London

Gradually their route takes the shape of a pentagram. "Encoded in this city's stones," Gull says, "are symbols thunderous enough to rouse the sleeping Gods submerged beneath the sea-bed of our dreams." Gull has been commissioned by Queen Victoria to hush up a royal scandal, but he will exceed his brief and commit the appalling killings ascribed to Jack the Ripper. A psychopathic misogynist and high-ranking Freemason, Gull sees these killings as a "great work," a ritual intended to enforce an ancient patriarchal order. Pyramids and obelisks are sun symbols, and Hawksmoor and his fellow Masons have positioned them round the city. " 'Tis in the war of Sun and Moon that Man steals Woman's power; that Left Brain conquers Right . . . that reason chains insanity." The pattern of spires, obelisks, and pyramids forms a pentacle "wherein unconsciousness, the Moon and Womanhood are chained."

Preparatory drawing (red chalk and graphite on paper, incised with stylus and verso rubbed with chalk) for the engraving *Gin Lane*, by William Hogarth, c. 1750. Courtesy the Morgan Library & Museum, New York City

Moore is best known as the author of the revisionist

source of the Guy Fawkes mask that became the symbol of the Anonymous collective of the 2010s. He is also a practicing ritual magician. Moore doesn't come to London anymore; in fact, he rarely leaves his house in Northampton, the town where he was born. On the phone, he describes to me a "borderland between the world of things that materially exist and the world of things that don't." It is, he says, "a porous borderland, because if we look around us, everything surrounding us started out as an idea in somebody's mind, the chairs we're sitting on, the devices we're talking on, the language we're speaking in, the carpet, the curtains, the view outside. We are living in our unpacked imagination. As I see it, it's the imaginary space which is the foundation of the physical world." I am struck by this. It is an inversion of the generally accepted chain of causality, wherein the material underlies the social and the airy castles of the imagination float somewhere overhead.

In *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot famously described Twenties London commuters as ghostly figures crossing London Bridge "under the brown fog of a winter dawn." His London was an "unreal city" that seems to have migrated out of imagination and into reality, a necropolis watched over by the security cameras of the Ring of Steel. Eliot's ghosts carried on down King William Street to where the clock of St. Mary Woolnoth "kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine." This is the second of Hawksmoor's churches I pass, crammed into a tight space on a corner near the Bank of England and the ancient Roman Temple of Mithras, whose excavated foundations now pulse with mystic power in the basement of Bloomberg's European HQ.

A few minutes from St. Mary Woolnoth is Leadenhall Market, a quaint covered arcade tenanted by little food shops and pubs frequented by city workers. The market is a high Victorian confection of glass and iron, popular with filmmakers seeking a little heritage color. Pass through it and there's a

of the Situationist "division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres." The Lloyd's building next door is the hub of a different kind of market, the global insurance trade. The vast tower is like something you'd find on a prog-rock album cover, a postmodern steel god veined with external pipes and ducts. Going from Leadenhall to Lloyd's feels like a particularly violent kind of time travel, as if you're an H. G. Wells character spat into the future, except that it's some airbrushed Seventies fantasy version of it. The Lloyd's building is strong evidence for Alan Moore's contention that the imaginary is the foundation of the physical world. The engineers of the City of London seem to have been engaged in a collective hallucination, bringing the capitalist future into being out of the ether. Currently, they are devoted to financing (and insuring, and calculating the risks of) giant data centers and rockets to Mars, eruptions out of dog-eared science-fiction paperbacks into the real world.

Outside Liverpool Street station, a pedestrian crossing marks the invisible border that separates all this money and power from the poverty of the East End. Turning off Bishopsgate, I am confronted—that would be the word—by the pale façade of Hawksmoor's Christ Church Spitalfields. Even on a sunny day it is chilling, a bone-colored mass topped by a cruelly sharp spire. It seems impossible that such a building could be allowed to fall derelict, but by the Sixties it came very close to being torn down. Supposedly built over a plague pit, Christ Church looms over the Ten Bells pub, where at least two of the Ripper's victims were said to have drank before they were murdered. This is the kind of connection that vibrates in the psychogeographical imagination, which is essentially a form of productive paranoia, an experience of intense interrelatedness, of being at the center of a story that doesn't really want to be a story, that would probably rather be a map or a diagram.

Growing up nearby, the painter Leon Kossoff, son of

presence of the church, alien and haughty, in a district that had become an almost entirely Jewish quarter. One of Kossoff's charcoal drawings of Christ Church hangs in the living room of the writer Iain Sinclair's house in Hackney, a gift from the artist. John Berger compared Kossoff to Beckett, and a sense of existential terror *is* present in the drawing, a kind of darkness that tugs at me as I drink my tea. Sinclair is probably the most adept living navigator of London's subterranean currents. His mind is a tangle of occult connections, a rat king of red thread. He is also the most robust link between the visionary London of Blake and Machen and the avant-garde mappings of the Situationists. In the early Seventies, he was writing poetry and working as a municipal gardener, cleaning and tending to the public spaces of the East End. He'd met Allen Ginsberg when he came to town in 1967, and remembers sitting on top of Primrose Hill with him, "aware of Blake's vision of Jerusalem being put down there. And being incredibly engrossed by the Post Office Tower—which had just been built—I suppose, as a sort of phallic symbol." Around the same time, he was in a secondhand bookshop "when a woman came out of a room and looked at me and said you should read this." Sinclair produces the book, and I laugh, because "this" is an early edition of E. O. Gordon's *Prehistoric London: Its Mounds and Circles,* first published in 1914. I have a reprint of the same book in my backpack. It tells stories about King Lud and Brutus the Trojan as if they are reliable historical facts. Inside, there is a "plan of the London mounds" with a triangle of dotted lines drawn between Parliament Hill, the Tower of London, and other significant places. *Prehistoric London* was described by one appalled reviewer as a "bewildering pot-pourri of Keltic traditions." Its sources include medieval chroniclers, eccentric antiquaries, and no doubt many denizens of the British Museum's Reading Room. It is utterly bogus, and central to Sinclair's strange refraction of the city.

which at the time were in terrible disrepair, he became increasingly sensitive to Hawksmoor's architecture of terror and magnificence, and to the gruesome history of the area. The result was a book called *Lud Heat: A Book of the Dead Hamlets*, published in 1975, which fuses Gordon and Blake and Ginsberg and De Quincey and Jack the Ripper and Hawksmoor and hundreds more sources into an extraordinary metaphysical cacophony, a vision of a London traversed by lines of occult power. Quoting Yeats, Sinclair tells me, " 'The living can assist the imaginations of the dead.' The great things are unfinished, and our job is to attach ourselves to them and honor them and make them available and carry on." This is an oddly subversive notion of tradition, the past as secret society. *Lud Heat* found its way into the hands of Alan Moore, who was tinkering with inchoate ideas about murder. "That drops into my lap," he remembers, "and suddenly I can see a whole new way of focusing upon place. It knocks my entire prose style sideways for about the next ten or fifteen years." Without Gordon, there's no *Lud Heat.* Without *Lud Heat,* there's no *From Hell.* This is how the living assist the imaginations of the dead, infusing reality with fiction and altering the meaning of a city.

From Sinclair's house in Hackney I cut through Whitechapel to Wapping, past the site of Execution Dock, where the bodies of pirates were displayed on a gibbet just above the waterline, left to decay until the third high tide. The next Hawksmoor church I pass is St. George-in-the-East. During the Blitz, nightly waves of German bombers were sent to destroy the docks. The River Thames bends round in a horseshoe shape, easy for a bombardier to target. St. George-in-the-East was hit, its interior destroyed by fire. In 1964, a new church was built inside the old shell. I walk through a gateway, under yet another of Hawksmoor's stark towers, and find myself in a bright, bland space that is hosting a mother-and-baby

bustle and chatter and civic modernism.

A little farther down the old Ratcliffe Highway, once the scene of murders and press-gangings, is Limehouse. A giant anchor decorates the traffic island outside the old Sailors' Mission, which has now apparently been converted to apartments. According to a very dry report published in *Internationale Situationniste*, the Situationists' time in Limehouse was mostly taken up with formal political debates. The German faction split from the others, calling for an immediate mobilization of avant-garde artists rather than trusting the revolutionary capacities of the workers. Arguments went on late into the night.

Across from the Sailors' Mission is St. Anne's Limehouse, the fifth of the six Hawksmoor churches. St. Anne's served the old neighborhood of Pennyfields, London's first Chinatown. This was a place where other Asians also found a home, notably lascars from India and East Africa, and ayahs abandoned by their English employers after the long sea voyage. The barrackslike Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans, and South Sea Islanders once stood on West India Dock Road, providing assistance (and Christian preaching) to Asian people who had found themselves stranded in a country that considered them alien and frightening.

The dissident German contingent published their impressions of the Situationist conference in their own journal, *SPUR*, a much more fanciful tale than the serious French account. It includes a collaged picture of a turbaned Indian delegation that looks like it was cut out from a magazine. Was this a way of representing people they had met in Pennyfields or, as with Dali, Peggy Guggenheim, and a papal nuncio, just an entry in a list of attendees who were not actually there? Like the French, the Germans were very excited to be in Limehouse, "famous from crime novels." Somewhere in this vicinity is the opium-den headquarters of Sax Rohmer's fictional villain Fu

ambulatory confection of racist stereotypes, Fu-Manchu appeared in a series of pulp novels and films in the first half of the twentieth century. A persistent internet factoid links him, unverifiably, to a mysterious stone pyramid in St. Anne's churchyard, supposedly the entrance to his lair. The pyramid is real, and genuinely mysterious. It is neither a grave marker nor a monument to an identifiable person or event. The best guess seems to be that it was one of a pair intended as ornamentation for the church, but was never mounted. It bears a very worn heraldic crest and the words THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON. Just that, no more. "The Wisdom of Solomon" is the title of a biblical text, but not one that is canonical for Protestants. In other words, it is an inscription that has no business in an English graveyard. An esoteric tradition takes Solomon's wisdom to be the *Ars Goetia*, ritual magic used to summon and bind demons.

Leaving St. Anne's, I follow a riverside path down the western side of the Isle of Dogs. After the Blitz, there was virtually nothing left of the old docks that had connected London's merchants to the Empire, or the foundries and yards where great ships had been launched. It languished for decades; redevelopment didn't really get going until the Eighties. The life of the modern Isle of Dogs is away from the water, in the commercial zone around Canary Wharf. It has been years since I walked this path; I remember the obelisklike tower of One Canada Square as the ruler of the skyline, a monument to the financialization that followed the deregulatory Big Bang of the Eighties. In Iain Sinclair's Docklands novel, *Downriver*, published in 1991, a few months before the building's grand opening, the tower is imagined as an occult center in a near-future London that lies under the control of "the Widow," a grotesque avatar of Margaret Thatcher. Nowadays it's hedged in by other tall buildings, many bearing corporate logos; these labels

A photograph of Blitz air-raid damage inflicted on the west side of Eastern Dock, northerly view from the south end, London, by John H. Avery & Co., September 8, 1940 © London Museum/PLA Collection/John Avery

During the Nineties, there was a revival of an organization called the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA), which had briefly existed in the Fifties. The new LPA was understandably obsessed with the Isle of Dogs and the rapid transformation it was undergoing. After the election of a neofascist politician named Derek Beackon to the local council in 1993, the LPA released a pamphlet with the headline NAZI OCCULTISTS SEIZE OMPHALOS. An *omphalos* (Greek for "navel") was defined as "the psychogeographical centre of any culture, myth structure or system of social dominance." "Beackon is a dedicated Nazi occultist," wrote the LPA. "British nationalism is a psychic elemental which drains energy from living people in order to maintain itself as a sickly caricature of life." The LPA claimed that Beackon and his cronies had taken control of this magical site and were using it to win political power. The new councillor was in fact an "adept of Enochic magic," a follower of none other than John Dee, who had come to the Isle of Dogs in 1593 to perform a magical ritual to found the British Empire. All those great ships, their holds full of human cargo, had been conjured up in an unremarkable spot in present-day Mudchute Park. Now, with its fantasies of mass deportation, the British National Party was tapping

In the other London, truth is slippery. The "omphalos" in Mudchute Park, a little circle of cobbles visited sooner or later by most of London's psychogeographically inclined, can date to no earlier than 1868, when the dock was first developed. In Dee's day the site was featureless marshland. Alan Moore is frequently contacted by people who believe that the pentagram he drew across London in *From Hell* reveals some real ancient conspiracy. He lets them down gently. "If you've got a small enough map and a thick enough magic marker, any three points are in line. To me it's not so much about ley lines or earth energies or whatever, because I don't see how that works. What I do see is that if you link up three places on a map, then you are drawing a line between three points of information, points which perhaps were not connected before. You are considering those points of information in relationship to each other."

On a deserted stretch of walkway at the southern tip of the Isle of Dogs, I spot a man hanging over the water, clinging to the railing. I worry that he's about to jump off. Then I see that he's hanging on to the fence with one hand and wielding a trowel with the other. He is planting something in the narrow strip of earth in between the metal railing and the lip of the embankment. The sight is so strange, and he is so intent, that I hesitate to break his concentration. I hover, and when he finally looks up, I ask him what he's doing. They're succulents from his garden, he tells me. If they take, they'll grow all the way along. We are completely alone, in an eerie non-place of silent streets and residential blocks with maritime names. The only other people I've seen for some time were a group of young East African men taking pictures of themselves next to a sports car.

I am on the stairs that lead down to the Edwardian foot tunnel that runs under the river from the southern tip of the Isle of Dogs when I realize that the gardener is the one I've been looking for. Here is

abundant, a vision he is dreaming into being. I should have talked to him properly, but I have missed my chance. My footsteps echo on the tunnel's white tile as I trudge along, knowing that it's too late to go back. At the southern end, I take an elevator and find myself in Greenwich, surrounded by tourists. After the sepulchral silence of the Isle of Dogs, it's a shock. I walk across a sort of piazza, under the tall masts of the clipper ship *Cutty Sark*. The last of the Hawksmoor churches is just around the corner. This is a wealthy neighborhood, bustling with shoppers. I look at St. Alfege, which is trim and well-kept, though just as stark and bony as its sisters. In the graveyard, I sit down on a bench, then get up to help a couple chase an excitable terrier, which they've foolishly let off the leash.

In this story, I should continue my walk up the hill through Greenwich Park to the prime meridian, making the magical link to the British Museum. I should describe how a circuit is completed; how a metaphysical light switches on in my head. But something has shifted, some energy has drained away. At times on my walk, I have felt like a ghost, existing more in the past, or an imaginary past, than the present. High on a wall on Fournier Street, beside the arrogant spire of Christ Church Spitalfields, I had seen an eighteenth-century sundial bearing the inscription UMBRA SUMUS: "We are shadow." *Yes,* I thought as I walked underneath it. *That is all I am.* I have passed an unusual number of street-corner memorials, laminated sheets of paper attached to railings, surrounded by wilted flowers and candles; photos of smiling young men who met untimely deaths in nondescript spots, deaths that the city will forget as soon as the memorials are taken down. Then I met the magus planting his hanging garden by the river, but I wasn't sharp enough, quick enough, to catch his message. Now the sense of being in touch with life and death has gone, and I can feel normality falling over me like a blanket.

important to reenchant these places that we live in, to actually give back the energies that have been bled out of them. An empowered landscape creates empowered people, and the reverse is also true. A disempowered landscape, stripped of its history, stripped of its meaning, will produce people who are stripped of their history, of their meaning. So yes, if magic is anything, it has to be political."

Though I have fallen away from my intention, failed to complete my quest, I have convinced myself that the other London is still possible to find, and it is important to keep looking for it. But for now I am standing at the bus stop, waiting for the number fifty-seven. It begins to rain.

Hari Kunzru's latest novel is *Blue Ruin*. He teaches in the creative writing program at New York University. This essay is part of a series supported by the John Templeton Foundation.

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