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The Enchanted Path: Magic and Modernism in Psychogeographical Walking

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Abstract

Geographers have a developing interest in the place of enchantment and the 'extraordinary' in the modern city. The paper shows that magic has a significant role in the work of many psychogeographical writers, artists and activists and argues that this phenomenon needs to be understood in the context of the wider use of magic as a site and symbol of creativity and subversion in modernist cultural expression.

Drawing on a survey of British psychogeographical forms and a more detailed study of three London literary examples, it examines how psychogeographical walkers have expanded and developed 'magical modernism'. Across the varied terrain of psychogeographical walking magic is used to conjure an openness and vulnerability to voices 'hidden' in the landscape. As well as providing more in-depth discussion of these themes, the three examples of London psychogeography that I explore complicate them by illustrating further specific and diverse uses of magic; namely magic as environmentalist critique; magic as humour/humour as magic and magic as activism

Introduction

Nigel Thrift's paper 'Cities without modernity, cities with magic', published in 1997, offered a stark contrast. Thrift linked magic with the creative, spontaneous and heterogeneous and modernity with the opposite of these enlivening forces. Over the following two decades, as geographers have begun to develop a deeper interest in magic, its intimate and on-going relationship with modernity has come to the fore. A wide range of extra-ordinary phenomena, including haunting, 'occulture' and 'enchantment', have been shown to be a resilient part of modern cities and societies (Holloway 2010; Pile 2005; 2006; Madder and Adey 2008; Edensor 2005; 2008). A parallel debate has emerged on how the 'ghostly' and 'errant' pathways found in contemporary walking-based art works are woven into and against the rhythms of the metropolis (Pinder 2001; 2011). This paper connects and develops these research themes through a particular example, namely the use of magic in psychogeographical walking. It shows that allusions to the magical are a central aspect of the imaginative power of psychogeography and argues that this phenomenon should be placed in the context of the wider use of magic as a practice and symbol of creativity and subversion in modernist cultural expression.

The paper has four sections. The first introduces geographers' developing interest in magic and the critical capacities of walking. The second section demonstrates the utility of focusing on the activities and ideas of the cultural avant-garde; that is, narrowing our attention from modernity to 'modernism'. Twentieth-century modernism took magic as one of its central inspirations and motifs and in this section

I show how a range of writers and artists, including the surrealist and situationist progenitors of psychogeography, employed and deployed magic as a challenging and creative device. The last two parts of the paper turn to the use of magic in British psychogeographical walking. The third section provides a survey of this field (literary, artistic and activist) and the fourth a more detailed study of three London literary examples. It is shown that contemporary psychogeographers have developed and expanded the magical modernist tradition, turning to magic as a way of offering an aura of depth, yearning and possibility that transforms walking into a practice and site of potential and drama. It is also shown that across the varied terrain of psychogeographical walking magic is used to allow, or conjure, an openness and vulnerability to voices 'hidden' in the landscape. As well as providing more in-depth discussion of these themes, the three examples of London psychogeography that I explore complicate them by illustrating further specific and diverse uses of magic; namely magic as an environmentalist trope in *Scarp* (Papadimitriou 2012); magic as humour/humour as magic in *This Other London* (Rogers 2013) and magic as activism in *Marshland* (Rees 2013).

Although there are a number of contested terms in this paper's title, before progressing it is necessary to define the most allusive one, 'magic'. What is magic? Pels (2003, 16) points us towards its omnivorous character when he depicts its 'conceptual slippage', moving between notions of the occult, the irrational and the delightful. Yet this slipperiness can be taken to indicate the lure of the topic rather than its indefinable quality. Even when employed metaphorically calling forth magic promises a glimpse of the transformatory (for example, Thrift 1997; Woodyer and Geoghegan 2012). In this way metaphorical approaches gesture towards stricter

definitions which call attention to the instrumental intent of magic and its codified yet mysterious nature; its promise to alter things in some way through a ritual, spell or ceremony that draws on hidden knowledge. In *The Golden Bough* (1994; first published 1890) Frazer defined magic as a proto-science, an attempt to engage and explain hidden causalities (see also Reinach 1912). He proposed two basic types of magic, homoeopathic or sympathetic and contagious. The former is based on the idea that 'like produces like' and 'an effect resembles its cause' (1994, 12) and may be exemplified by the manipulation of effigies and other symbols. Contagious magic is based on the principle that 'things once in contact continue to act on each other even at a distance' (1994, 12; for example, impaling an enemy's footsteps). The two forms overlap but each is suggestive of how a focus on magic has a particular interest in practices and intentions. Magic is generally an active process; to *do* magic is to enact, perform and conjure. The agency of magic makes it particularly relevant when we are trying to explore deliberate cultural activity, such as art and literature. As we shall see, the practice of walking by psychogeographical artists and writers, its steps, paths, choices and actions, is often narrated as a kind of rite or ceremony, a transforming enchantment of the ordinary world.

Geographies of modern magic and walking

Geography's connection with magic can be traced to ancient landscape myths and traditions of geomancy (Sack 1976; Yoon 1982) as well as the confluence of magic and science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries detailed by Livingstone (1988) and Cosgrove (1990). In 1992 Livingstone (1992, 350) also cited 'recent revisionist work' that was 'beginning to disclose a geographical involvement with the numinous right up into the twentieth century'. He was referring to Matless's (1991) studies of early twentieth century landscape mysticism. However, both Cosgrove and Matless argued against the idea that modern engagements with the 'numinous' may usefully be represented as survivals from an earlier period. In part influenced by Derrida's (1994) deconstruction of metaphors of haunting in Marx, human geography's interest in such themes has grown over the past twenty years along with the conviction that such phenomena must be understood as disruptive but constituent and on-going aspect of the modern landscape (see also Byron and Punter 1999; Wylie 2007; Laws 2016; Bartolini *et al* 2013; 2016; Pile 2012). In 2008 Matless contrasted the 'academic fascination for the spectral' (2008, 349) with the lack of attention given to the 'magical or spiritual or demonic' (337; see also Rolfe 2014). Today this imbalance is no longer so evident, in part because of the overlap between the two areas of interest but also because the debate has broadened. Indeed, in the light of the growing 'extra-geographies literature' (MacKian 2012; Pile 2005; Thurgill 2015a; see also Dixon 2007),¹ Materer's (1995, 26) contention that scholars consider the topic of magic outside the permitted realm of the 'learned and respectable' has itself become anachronistic.

The 'developing ongoing discussions' depicted by Laws (2016, 1) around 'geographies of enchantment, magic and spirituality' are wide-ranging and inter-

connected. They have spread beyond cultural and historical geography and into indigenous and development geographies (Panelli 2009; Hoefle 2009; see also Meyer and Pels 2003), environmental geography (Matless 2009; Gergan 2015) and urban geography (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000). Indeed Woodyer and Geoghegan (2012, 196) use the theme of enchantment to weave together a new story for the discipline, finding a desire for 'wonder' and what they call the 'sensory experience of unintelligibility' running through nineteenth century landscape romanticism and on into humanistic geography, non-representational geography and 'the burgeoning field of "spectro-geographies"' (205). As these themes have become more firmly established in the discipline so too have characteristic approaches to them. With respect to magic, notable amongst these approaches has been a focus upon its everyday and popular forms. In a series of studies of the contemporary city Pile has sought to identify 'occult globalisations' (2006, 15) and 'unsettle the prevalent assumption that Western cities are untouched by magic' (Pile 2005, 305; see also Bartonlini *et al* 2013; 2016). Pile (2005) draws on Benjamin to provide a rich portrait of the late modern capitalist city as a phantasmagoria of magic, consumption and desire. Similarly, when MacKian identifies an 'all pervasive ... shift' towards mysticism in late modern societies and Partridge describes a new 'occulturally curious generation' (2005, 2), they are referring to popular forms of consumption and expression (see also Bell 2012; Perkins 2001; During 2002). Thus what Bartolini *et al* (2016, 10) call the 'the bleed of occulture and modernity into one another' has been taken to reflect both the commercialisation of the occult and its use by ordinary people to explain, subvert and otherwise navigate their way in and against the modern city.

The focus of this work on popular forms opens out many novel areas of inquiry but tends to bypass modernism's long and complex relationship with the magical. The value of turning our attention to modern artists and writers is intimated in Matless's (1991; 2008) studies of modernist mysticism and, more pointedly, by the growth of inter-disciplinary work on magical modernism (discussed in the next section). In geography, these themes have also been brought into conversation in Fenton's (2005) account of the surrealist artist Jean-Pierre Le Goff's attempt to reveal 'the city's cryptogram' (412) through a circular 12-point walk in Paris, 'backward' around the clock. However, although Fenton's study exhibits sympathy for the magical content of this performative event she stops short of bringing either magic or psychogeography analytically centre stage.

Recently established in geography's lexicon (Pinder 2009; Bonnett 2013) 'psychogeography' referred originally to the geographical practices of the Situationists but, since the early 1990s, has become diversified to include a wide range of artistic and literary attempts to re-imagine and disrupt spatial routines. Broadly speaking, psychogeography may be defined as referring to spatial investigations and interventions designed to disorient, provoke and create. It takes a variety of forms but psychogeographical walking – that is walking 'against the grain', avoiding and confronting routines and creating new patterns and situations - is the most typical. Research interest in psychogeography and walking have developed together, with the 'increasing visibility' (Pinder 2011, 672) of the latter, in part, enabled by the disruptive and creative impetus of the former. This connection has helped foster an emphasis on finding ways of representing walking which register its potential as 'an aesthetic practice and critical tool' (Bassett 2004, 397; see also

Lorimer 2011). In 2015 the walking artist and psychogeographer Phil Smith (2015, 3) noted that 'there are so many more of us doing this stuff than there were 15 years ago', whilst among the numerous websites devoted to psychogeographical walking can be found one indicatively titled 'Not Another Psychogeography Blog'. In part this sustained interest may be explained by reference to the institutionalisation of psychogeography. Many arts practice courses at US and UK universities have psychogeography on the curriculum and its methodological pleasures and potential have enabled it to gain a small but significant presence in fieldwork practice in geography (Bassett, 2004) and other disciplines (Bridger 2010; 2013).

Despite all this activity, the place of magic in psychogeography remains almost entirely unexplored. The major overviews of psychogeography and situationist urbanism (Sadler 1998; Pinder 2005a; Bonnett 1989; 1992) ignore magic entirely or write about it as an oddity, depicting it as 'paranoia' and a 'peculiar blend' (Coverley 2006, 123; 129) or as a slender 'stratum' that not only arose in the 1990s but 'peaking in the 1990s' (Smith 2010a, 110) also concluded in that decade. Bonnett's discussion of 'magico-Marxism' (2010) also identifies it with this brief period. These marginalising devices are misleading. Far from being an oddity the theme of magic is an important part of the story not just of psychogeography but of modernist cultural production more generally.

The creative and subversive intent of magical modernism

In this section we encounter the employment and deployment of magic as a symbol and practice of subversion and creation in and against the modern world. This creative and subversive function is shown at work both within the wider community of modern writers and artists and the specific, surrealist and situationist, traditions that established psychogeography.

Without denying the innovative and diverse nature of popular magical traditions, it remains the case that artists, writers and avant-garde activists have been at the forefront of developing new practices, images and narratives that negotiate and explore the radical and creative possibilities of magic. The revivalist and primitivist narratives sometime employed among magical modernists cannot usefully be interpreted as naïve attempts to return to the past. Like many other forms of cultural nostalgia (Bonnett 2015), these narratives conscript and deploy notions of historical depth and lost knowledge. Lōwy and Sayre (2001) chart the diverse ways ‘enchantment’ has been sought by romantic radicals from Morris to Breton; Wordsworth to Debord (see also Landy and Saler 2009). Yet their gallery of cultural enchanters is too narrow to capture the range and importance of magical images, ideas and practices in modern culture. Lōwy and Sayre’s list could be broadened to include poets as diverse and eminent as Yeats, Pound and Hughes (Materer 1995; see also Surrette 1993; Wilson 2013; Sweeting 1987), artists from early romantics to modern performance artists (see, for example, Moffitt 1988; Martin 1989, Tucker 1992) and major novelists, such as Lawrence (Vickery 1959; LaChapelle 1996) and Lowry (Foxcroft 2013).

Wilson (2013) roots modern artists and writers need for magic in their desire to invest words and things with transformatory power and, hence, their ambitious vision of both their own social role and the act of mimesis (cf. Roberts 2012). Thus he explains its appeal by reference to the idea that magic 'fundamentally understood that the mimetic is able to produce, not just an inert copy, but an animated copy powerful enough to enact change in the original' (2013, 1). However, modernism situates magic not only as a site of creation and possibility but also of yearning. When the surrealist poet Jules Monnerot (cited by Lepetit 2012, 251) claimed that 'poetry is magic for the sake of magic, magic without hope' we hear the characteristic melancholic undertow of modernist magic: its evocations of and gestures beyond the 'iron cage' of modernity are framed by a sense of loss and doubt.

Magic in modern cultural production is better summarised as a creative invention and deployment of non-rational, hidden and occult knowledges and practices than as a simple retrieval of the kinds of ancient rituals that interested Frazer. As this implies, the instrumental claims of 'traditional' spell-making are less pertinent here than the emergence of a fascination with the form, subversive power and intangible promise of magic. Thus, to take a contemporary psychogeographical example, when Iain Sinclair writes of his walk around London's outer motorway as an 'Exorcism, the only game worth the candle' (2003, 44) he is evoking rather than literally performing a 'traditional' ceremony. Yet this evocation is taken seriously by Sinclair and, read together with the many other magical ideas that suffuse *London Orbital* and Sinclair's other books (for example, Sinclair 2004), we know it is not a 'throw-away' remark. Rather, this very modern reference to 'old magic' exceeds both 'traditional' magic and post-modern irony: magic is being offered as a resource, a form of counter-

perception, that is seen and felt in the city but also enables its imaginative reclamation.

The adoption of magic by the small cabals of like-minded writers and film-makers that typically accompany Sinclair on his walks, also suggests the pertinence of Mauss and Hubert's emphasis on the exclusive nature of magic. For Mauss and Hubert 'a magical rite' is necessarily 'private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of [the] prohibited' (2014, 102). Magic is esoteric, which may help explain why it has become a site of exchange and sympathy for the disorientating and otherwise challenging ideas and creations often sought by cultural modernists. As we shall see in the next section, this zone of convergence produces a model of the artist, particularly the avant-garde artist, as a latter-day enchanter and shaman.

It may be objected here that there were many literalist uses of magic among modernists and the mystic intellectuals who influenced them. Yet these too were syncretic, creative, and highly adaptive, drawing on and reworking Masonic, European and South Asian influences. From the Rosicrucian Society of England, (founded 1865), the Theosophical Society (founded in 1875), the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (which became active in the 1890s and shaped Yeats's ideas concerning Celtic magic) and later organisations influenced by *The Golden Bough*, such as Gardner's 'wiccan' movement (Simpson 1994; see also Matless 1991), we find the 'deep past' being evoked but also continually re-worked in ways that turned even the most ritualistic and ceremonial events into self-conscious and, not infrequently, transgressive, culturally radical, performances. The bizarre and faux-ancient was produced and managed as an affective atmosphere; one that helped

establish a number of long-lasting creative lineages. One of the more persistent stemmed from the self-styled 'beast', Alistair Crowley, whose 'sex magic' and occultist activities mixed-up ideas from Waite's *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (1911) along with his own invented sources and influenced the avant-garde film maker Kenneth Anger (1963) as well as more recent performance artists (see Kirby 2012).

The lineage of psychogeography whilst touching on many of the groups and artists mentioned so far has one major root, namely to situationism and surrealism (Bonnett 1992). Both the association of magic with pre or anti-rationalism and its transformatory promise and openness to the unexpected made it endlessly alluring to the surrealists. 'Surrealism has always only been a new sort of magic' claimed Artaud (cited by Lepetit 2012, 251). Octavio Paz (1990, 50) describing the most influential surrealist thinker, André Breton, noted that he 'not only made no distinction between magic and poetry; he was also convinced all his life that poetry was a force, a substance or energy truly capable of changing reality'. Breton's life-long interest in magic wove together a varied output of writing, film and visual art. His late magnum opus *L'art magique*, published in 1957, and his contributions to the semi-occultist surrealist review *Médium*, suggest that this interest continued to deepen into the 1950s. Breton was the *éminence grise* of the post-war avant-garde in France and his orientation to magic helps explain both the familiarity and the nervousness towards the topic amongst some of newer strands of the avant-garde, notably the Situationist International, founded in the same year as *L'art magique* appeared. Nevertheless, the emphasis found throughout situationist thought on truth as occluded, as hidden behind a 'spectacle', along with its secretive and esoteric disposition, and strong

attraction to 'primitive communist' ceremonial, notably the Native American 'potlatch', provided fertile ground for the deployment of magical images and metaphors.

Magical themes were particularly important within 'Scandinavian situationism' (Rasmussen and Jakobsen 2011) most fully exemplified by Jorn's *Magi og skønne kunster* (Magic and the Fine Arts; Jorn 1971). Jorn celebrated 'a magical, prelogical mentality' which he linked 'to the idea of a non-hierarchical community' (Müller-Wille 2014, 100; see also Birtwistle 1986). Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (2003; along with Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Vaneigem's book was first published in 1967 and defined situationist politics), is also replete with magical references, both to the occult power of the capitalist spectacle and to magic as a liberating counter force. Thus Vaneigem moves between writing of social alienation as 'based on magic' (2003, 75), to arguing that magic has been appropriated by capitalism (capitalism 'destroys the magical bond between man and nature, but it preserves the magic for its own use', 77) to finally offering magic as the symbol and practice of freedom (his book finishes with a vision of freedom 'like an Aladdin's cave, magical and prismatic in an atmosphere all its own', 271).

This mixture of ambitions can also be seen in situationist psychogeography, which simultaneously attempted to enchant and destabilise urban routines and expectations. Such a combination is to the fore in what is sometimes taken to be the founding statement of both situationism and psychogeography, Chtcheglov's 'Formula for a New urbanism' (1989; first published 1958). 'WE ARE BORED in the city', wrote Chtcheglov, 'there is no longer any Temple of the Sun' (1989, 1). However, Guy Debord, the movement's intellectual leader, had an uneasy relationship with magic. The 'collective establishment of objective facts', he wrote in

1957, is more important to the situationist project than its 'magical tendency'. Debord wanted to distance situationism from Breton and surrealism (Jappe notes Debord's 'near-Oedipal hatred' of Breton, 1999, 56) and his suspicion of magic and the flat descriptiveness of his own psychogeographical accounts (Debord 1989) reflected this ambition. However, the power of magic in the radical modernist imagination was not easily escaped. Debord may have been wary of magical themes but they returned to haunt his texts (cf. Derrida 1994), notably in the spell-like enumeration of things and events that characterise his own walking 'drifts'. Paradoxically, Debord's flight from magic lead him to the kind of 'magical nominalism' that Jay identifies in Kracauer (Jay 2012) and that Adorno objected to in Benjamin's depiction of the city. Adorno's critique of the 'wide-eyed presentation of mere facts' is premised on the contention that it is 'located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched' (Adorno *et al* 1980, 129).² Although a site of disavowal for Debord, contemporary British psychogeography returns to this 'bewitched' spot with gusto. Yet, as we shall see, whilst carrying forward the creative and subversive qualities found in earlier generations in modernist magic, the magical themes found throughout this diverse genre are far bolder.

The place of magic in British psychogeographical walking

In this section I identify the three main currents within British psychogeographical walking – literary, art and activist – and show how they have developed and shaped the use of magic as a creative and subversive form in three main ways. First magic is employed as a way of creating aesthetic and cultural affect and, more specifically,

an aura of depth, otherness and yearning that turns walking into a dramatic and transformatory act. Second, across this field magic is typically non-literalist and undogmatic but, nevertheless, insistent and the fore: it is looked to not as a formula or rigid tradition but as a way of 'opening' the walker to the possibilities that lie fallow in the landscape. Third magic is employed as a practice of ritualization. Thus, for example, psychogeographers have sought to create new rituals in the landscape through symbolic acts of path-making, path-finding and naming. This ritualistic function seems to have a particular affinity with walking, in part because of the way the trance-like repetitions commonly experienced by walkers evoke the physical quality of ceremony.

Although none of these elements is original or unique to psychogeography as practiced in the United Kingdom, taken together they represent a significant and innovative cultural genre spread across the connected realms of literary, art and activist practice. The lineage of literary walking has been described and celebrated by Solnit (2001), Nicholson, (2010), Coverley (2012) and Gros (2014). However, magical themes are marginal or invisible in their accounts. This helps explain why, for example, Solnit does not mention some of the key texts in British walking, notably Alfred Watkins's 1925 account of English ley lines (ancient and mysterious alignments of multiple places), *The Old Straight Track*. Once we acknowledge that magic is present within modern artistic and literary culture not simply, or usually, in the form of traditional spell-making but as a fascination with hidden and otherwise extraordinary forms of power, we will also be inclined to read beyond Watkins's professed scientific rationale (for discussion see Matless 1998; Stout 2008). Indeed, it appears that one reason his work was so readily absorbed into geomancy (Thurgill

2015b) was because it leaves open the deeper meaning of the patterns and places it records. When Macfarlane (2014) writes that 'Watkins re-encharnted the English landscape' he is pointing to the *The Old Straight Track's* latent magical content. Once this is acknowledged, a wider sense of psychogeography's magical literary lineage comes into view, one that includes works such as Belloc's *The Old Road* (1904) and Machen's varied contributions, which ranged from 'earth mystery' novels (Machen 1894; 1907) to accounts of walking that constantly seek out enchantment within the ordinary street (see Coverley 2015). Machen's last book *The London Adventure or the Art of Wandering* loops back to his novels, using his old notes as an aid to search out signs, ciphers and mysteries (1924; see also Burke 1922). The importance of these early works lies not merely in their magical allusions but in the way contemporary psychogeographers draw on them for inspiration. Indeed, even this act, of living authors in 'conversation' with dead ones, can be couched in magical terms. 'I'm having conversations with people who died forty years ago' says Sinclair, adding, 'it's a magical act' (cited by Smith 2015, 17). Smith (2014) has retraced Sebald's digressive account of travelling in East Anglia (Sebald 1998; see also Wylie 2007) whilst in *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* Macfarlane (2013) takes the poet Edward Thomas as his point of inspiration. A critical nostalgia for the lost magical potency of the landscape is particularly clear in Macfarlane's account, which reads and walks Britain's ancient roads as 'potent, magic things' on which one can make 'time as nothing' while 'meandering over many centuries' (Thomas cited by Macfarlane 2013, 21). Macfarlane's meeting with the 'shamanic' sculptor Steve Dilworth produces a telling comment on the melancholic aesthetic often present within literary psychogeography. 'I have spent my life', says Dilworth, 'making ritual objects for a tribe that doesn't exist' (Macfarlane 2013, 167).

In contrast to Macfarlane's attraction to rural landscapes most contemporary psychogeographical literature is concerned with the city, especially its overlooked and marginal spaces. The best known example is Sinclair, whose characteristic style is to seek out and elaborate historical coincidences in the landscape. Sinclair's London books, from *Rodinsky's Room* (Lichtenstein and Sinclair 2000), *London Orbital* (2003), *Downriver* (2004) to *Swimming to Heaven* (2013), all attempt to break what he sees as the spell of neo-liberal consumerism and passivity by enacting a walking-based counter-magic; following paths and making journeys that bring forth the hidden, strange and subversive. This is magic against magic; challenging the omnipotent and high-rise enchantment of the mighty with grounded, foot-sore rites. The 'psychic landscaping' (Pinder 2001, 8) of the films of Patrick Keiller ('London' 1994; 'Robinson in Space' 1997; see also Keiller 2013) provide similarly historically layered, incantatory accounts of walking through the capitalist landscape. Andrew Kötting's (2015) film 'By Our Selves' (featuring Kötting dressed as a pagan 'straw bear' and Sinclair wearing a goat mask) has an overlapping ambition, providing a hallucinogenic and visionary portrait of a 90 mile walk by the poet John Clare (undertaken in 1841) filmed against a background of grinding motorways.

The interlacing of the experimental and political with the magical also finds a reflection in psychogeographical art. A recent collection of artists from the Walking Artists Network (Qualmann and Hind 2015) not only shows the variety of the scene but its insurgent playfulness, with many of the pieces offered as a disorientating game played in the landscape (see also Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Butler 2006.). As this implies, the aura of yearning and the uncanny that Pinder (2001) and

Gallagher (2015) locate in specific artist audio-walks is less typical of recent artists' psychogeography than the kind of ludic and political works Pinder depicts elsewhere as the 'arts of urban exploration' (2005b; see also Middleton 2011; Smith 2010a; 2010b; Rogers 2012).³ However, Pinder (2011) has also warned against reducing art walking to a set of political interventions, arguing for recognition of the artists' poetic and open intent (in his study of Francis Alÿs he notes how he 'he summons shadows and spirits', 684). As this implies, although the magical content of the 'arts of urban exploration' is often less explicit than in literary psychogeography it still makes its presence known. Indeed, an interest in the development of counter-ritual and the magical import of coincidences and place names suffuses many recent examples.⁴ This point can be illustrated by reference to Richardson's (2015) edited collection *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*, which brings together, and blurs the line between, activist, academic and arts interventions. Merchant's chapter mirrors the atmosphere generated in 'By Our Selves', by noting his intention to 'alter my consciousness for the walk' with 'skunk weed' (2015, 50). Magical nominalism and the significance attached to coincidence and symbol is also to the fore in many of the contributions. For example, Rees offers an incantatory recitation of the memorial inscriptions found on park benches. Calling psychogeography the 'embrace of incongruity' (2015, 63) Bennett's chapter seeks out 'mystical correspondences' that evoke 'Qabalistic Writings' (33). He begins his essay with a depiction of the transformation of prosaic matter into enchanted symbol:

there was a single silver hair resting between the pages of the free *Metro* newspaper I found on the seat of the train to Waterloo (Merseyside) Station ...
Signs were starting manifest. (31)

Alert to 'good omen[s]' (32) and 'powerful sigils' (40; a sigil is a 'magical symbol, encoding desire into a visual form', 42), Bennett's wish to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary is echoed across literary and art psychogeography. In both traditions, an attention to symbolism, ritual and naming rites means that walking often takes on the quality of a radically open and undisciplined magical ceremony. In the 1990s and 2000s this attribute gained a certain impetus by association with – or conscious disassociation from – the 'magico-Marxism'⁵ developed by the activist neo-situationist psychogeographers associated with the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA, 'brought back into being in the Rosicrucian Cave at Royston Herts' in 1992: Tompsett 1998, 1) and kindred groups.⁶ In contrast to art and literary psychogeography, this revolutionary avant-garde strand was primarily political in purpose, organised through ephemeral newsletters and focused on combating or creating novel forms of ceremonial magic as part of the 'class war'. Collier's (2015, 132) description of these groups as 'infraliterary' points to this underground status, while Home (1997) offers the neologism 'avant-bard' to capture their characteristic combination of mysticism and radicalism. However labelled, the influence of this strand within psychogeographical circles was significant enough to provoke a counter-movement, the Materialist Psychogeographic Affiliation, which was founded to challenge 'the indulgent and un-productive psychogeographies of occultism, or 'Magico-Marxism' (Calderdale Psychogeographical Affiliation, 2011). More recently, a more characteristic response has been to claim that magic was used by these groups for purely strategic ends. Thus they are held to have 'deliberately mystified and irrationalised their psychogeographical ideas in order to prevent them from being academized' (Richardson 2015, 24) or 'as a way of destabilising expectations'

(Bayfield 2015, 33). In part these explanations accurately reflect the contributions of Stewart Home, for whom constructing an ‘unacceptable’ theory (cited by Luckhurst 2002, 534) was a declared aim. However, other figures, notably the LPA’s principal organiser and writer, Fabian Tompsett, (cf. Coverley 2006), were heavily influenced by ‘earth mysteries’ literature and maintained an open-ended fascination with magic as a site of possibility and exploration (Tompsett 1998). The use of magic to produce radical uncertainty and a kind of fascinated hope connects the activities of the LPA back to Sinclair and kindred writers, artists and film-makers. It is an openness that, as Smith has recently noted, allows psychogeography to become an ‘immersed rather than a token practice’ (2015, 70), a point borne out in the three examples of London psychogeography I now turn to.

Stepping into magical London

In trying to account for the number of gothic and otherwise ‘extraordinary’ stories and accounts about London, Luckhurst (1992, 530) suggests that it is because it was ‘the first megapolis of the modern era’ that London has become ‘a sublime object that evokes awe and evades rational capture’. Similarly, for Wolfreys there is an ‘ineffability and lack which is always at the heart of London’ (1998, 25). Wilson (1991, 3; see also Pile 2005) hints at an explanation that avoids exceptionalism when she aligns the way ‘the city is in a constant process of change’ to it being experienced as ‘dreamlike and magical’.

The past two decades have witnessed a new prominence for magic-infused psychogeographical accounts of London (for example, Sinclair 2003; 2004; Ackroyd 2000; 2007; Morcock 1988; Furlong 2013; see also Ford 2011; Chivers and Kratz 2014).⁷ The three examples I focus on were all published in 2013 and are recent entries into this crowded field. They are of interest, in part, because they pursue distinct, individual agendas that build on the creative and subversive role assigned to magic by other cultural workers (including the psychogeographers described in the previous section). The three distinctive themes I will be drawing out from each (environmentalist magic in Papadimitriou, magic as humour/humour as magic in Rogers and ghostly activism in Rees), provide different pathways towards a shared end, namely an uncovering of the city's possibilities and a desire to listen to its occluded knowledge. This is particularly true of *Scarp* by Nick Papadimitriou (2013), which is based on 30 walks around north-west London, but also a lifetime of walks and memories in 'the North Middlesex/South Hertfordshire escarpment', a hidden eco-region '[s]creened from the consciousness of the city dweller' by an 'inward-looking and anthropocentric culture' (2013, 1).

Papadimitriou both reveals and summons this place into being through a posture of radical openness to 'voices' that 'come to me' the 'on long walks over the years' (2013, 2; cf. Edensor 2008). Through incantatory, immersive walking Papadimitriou positions himself as an environmentalist seer who is able to commune with the 'birds, mammals and insects' (2) and whose magic is focused on accessing the multiplicity and possibilities dormant within the anthropocentric, traffic dominated, streets he travels into and against:

Slip, Motorway, round my ankles if you must; drag me into your petroleum future. You will pass too, ending crocheted by red leaves of herb robert, stars of cow thistle. I see your car crashes. I see economies collapse. I sense the unspoken family secrets; I see the white cow-gate lit by sunshine. I am the centre. (49)

Rogers (2013, 64) describes Papadimitriou as 'a man steeped in both plant lore and roadside shamanism'. The splicing of the environmental and the magical in *Scarp* does not occur through any traditional ceremonies or spells but rather by representing walking as a way of conjuring 'hidden dimensions' (Papadimitriou 2013, 27). The trance-like state brought on by Papadimitriou's long forays manifests itself in frequent breaks with reality, notably on those occasions when Papadimitriou's starts to write from the perspective of one of the lost voices in the landscape. 'I was born John Osborne in 1700' (196) he suddenly announces, and

practiced arts and rituals ... When ready I dissolved my form and simply merged into the summer backdrop of horehound and hardheads, the ill-disciplined tracery of bryony and ivy and bindweed. (202)

For Papadimitriou such moments of enchantment are not an indulgence but a necessary act of imaginative possession in a landscape that does not, ostensibly, want him. '[H]ow did we end up with a city where walking is so hard, where the land is so hostile?' he asks, before recounting one of the many humiliations that befalls him. Papadimitriou is arrested, goaded in police cells and courtrooms and, unlike Sinclair's clubbable forays, appears friendless (the 'land is beginning to hate me; I

can sense it trying to stare me out', 187). His walks are littered with references to failed attempts, to 'the fear of this barren flinty earth' and to feelings of being 'bewildered' (70). It is in this context that he summons magic as a vital resource, not just for him but for the flora, fauna and land that he values.

A sense of lives real and imagined rises from the steel streams of cars passing endlessly along the motorway cuttings ... I think also of the lives of birds, mammals, and insects, those sentient beings whose undervalued and endangered domain of coppice and spinney, burnt-out car and fly-tipped mound interpenetrates the human world. (2)

Papadimitriou's attempt to conjure marginalised and diverse voices from the landscape is also of interest in the context of claims that psychogeography is intrinsically masculinist. He does not fit Ford's (2011, xiv) description of psychogeography as dominated by 'men acting like colonial explorers, showing us their discoveries and guarding their plot'. The assumption that psychogeography is typically male is increasingly questionable (see, for example, Qualmann and Hind 2015; Bridger 2013). It is striking, nevertheless, how all three of the lone male voyagers I am discussing in this section take their freedom to roam, at any time of day or night, for granted. Thus their vulnerability and openness to hidden voices runs alongside a quiet certainty that the city is theirs to explore. This mixture of fragility and confidence is equally apparent in Rogers and Rees's accounts, although their use of magic is different.

The humorous intent of Rogers's *This Other London: Adventures in the Overlooked City* (2013) means that, compared with Papadimitriou, it initially appears a more facile work. However, the relationship between magic and humour is a long and significant one. Both forms often have subversive and disorientating effects, a commonality exploited by magicians and humorists alike (Elliot 1960). Rogers's uses the disconcerting nature of magic to make humorous points and vice versa. His 10 walks of 10 miles each aimed 'to cover as much of the *terra incognita* on the map as possible' (Rogers 2013, xii), recounting myths and strange coincidences as he goes. Rogers's favoured device is the collision of magic with the prosaic. This typically commences with a description of enchanting knowledge followed by a sudden 'real time' framing by the ordinary.

In Celtic mythology hawthorn, also known as May Tree, is where the Little People hang out, waylaying unwary travellers. Maybe that explains my extended rest within the grove on Wyke Green. The workaday world of London life feels far away from here, faery magic temporarily transporting me to a different realm of time. A lad sprawled across the path supping a can of Tennant's Super and chatting loudly on his phone relocates me to the digital age and so I push on. (17)

This kind of collision also works as a form of self-mockery: it informs us that Rogers does not take himself, or magic, too seriously. Similarly:

I was attempting to access the woodland spirits and reawaken my pagan instincts when I found myself back on the A206 Woolwich to Erith Road

buzzing with afternoon traffic. This is not the place to perform the Rite of the Three rays. (77)

Like Papadimitriou, Rogers offers a vision of a hostile landscape that needs magic. Although Rogers often strives to make himself look ridiculous, he presents magic as intriguing and rewarding; a practice, and a set of knowledges, in which he is an inept but excited novice. The 'Rite of the Three rays' mentioned by Rogers refers to a spell devised by a contemporary Druid but it is telling that he never finds the right place to enact it. Like the 'magic without hope' celebrated by Monnerot (cited by Lepetit 2012, 251), the confluence between magic and psychogeography is neither literalist nor nihilist; it seeks out enchantment in the midst of disenchantment. This stance is knowing yet anti-cynical: it constantly urges a willingness to keep wandering and wondering.

At one point on Rogers's walks he enters a Bingo Hall which, in 1963, had been witness to 'chaotic gigs' by the Beatles, to 'see if I can access that hysterical moment in pop history' (50). It is one of the few moments he admits spectral presences into his psychogeography and they appear as uncanny but passive co-habitants, 'beyond the control of the haunted' (Matless 2008, 349). My final illustration of London psychogeography, Gareth Rees's (2013) *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London*, comes the closest of my three examples to offering a 'spectro-geography'. However, Rees's ghosts are distinctive for their agency and activism. Rees instils the image of 'London life as a kind of phantasmagoria' that Pile (2005, 8) identifies in Sinclair's work, with a wrathful purposefulness: Rees's London is being reclaimed by long buried and angry spirits. Against the background of the

redevelopment of land around an East London river tributary, Rees pits hidden and unearthly forces. Thus he populates the apparently empty and undefended 'battlefield of Leyton Marsh' (2013, 247) with ghostly resources, such as long-gone workers in an abandoned toy factory and gaunt refugees from World War Two bombing raids. 'London is dreaming again' (157) writes Rees and goes on to suggest that these extraordinary forces have been released not merely by the threat of development but, more fundamentally, because the modern city is socially and psychically disintegrating; it has become a site of 'entropy' where 'weirdness' is breaking through the surface of normal life. Rees's walks, like Papadimitriou's, often see him slipping between time frames. The marshland 'is a hole in London', he writes: 'strewn with ruins, rubble and wild flowers. It swallows up the city's time' (277).

Welcome to Entropy Junction, the frontier crossing of that borderland between the city and marshland, where the competing gravities of two worlds create unusual frissions. (17)

The ghostly figures that Rees's depicts are not isolated from their landscape but emerge from the magic of the marshland. Like Rogers and Papadimitriou, Rees draws out the magical and transformatory in the city's by-passed places. The disused Middlesex filter beds, zoned for demolition, are a particular site of fascination for him. 'Inside its stone gates was a network of stone ramparts, split and crumbling ... In the centre was a giant stone circle, like a sacrificial alter' (77-78). Such abandoned places accrete psychic and material debris which Rees deciphers as forms of restless energy. Surrounded by dimly lit and unclear graffiti - 'a warning

sign? An occult symbol?' – he knows that he is 'not alone' (116). To capture this landscape Rees occasionally adopts a spatialized incantatory poetic structure, in which the names of objects are spread on the page as they are spread on the ground, taking on the form of a chalked spell or thrown runes. For example, 'sheltered at the pylon's foot' (117) he records the following:

Coke bottles   polystyrene plates

plastic bags

The Mirror

a sock, soiled   fragments of cardboard box

a whittled stick

Rees's portrait of these discarded *objet trouvé* is transformative. Like Papadimitriou and Rogers, he wishes to conjure the extraordinary out of the prosaic. It is an act of reclamation that not only finds the magical in everyday life but is itself a magical act.

Conclusions

In 1976 Sack concluded his survey of the long relationship between geography and magic by explaining that the latter's unverifiable and mystical nature could not survive the onslaught of modernity. The 'few disjointed remains' (1976, 321) that Sack located, amongst earth mystery hobbyists, only reinforced his belief that this connection was now broken. Over the past two decades, this narrative has been challenged by geographers who have not only identified the growth of interest in the 'numinous' but have argued that it has an intimate and on-going affiliation with the modern world.

This paper has sought to contribute to this reclamation of magic. It has not offered an argument 'for magic' but, rather, for a more complex understanding of its varied and developing uses. This heterogeneous and mutable quality makes it difficult to endorse Laws's (2016, 13) recent 'magical manifesto' which calls for geographers to 'believe in magic and its possibilities'. This is not just a question of recognising, as Matless (2009, 186) notes, the 'submissive qualities' of enchantment (he is particular concerned with its deference to 'the connoisseur or the guru'). It is also to recognise that at the heart of modernist magic, including its deployments in psychogeographical walking, is not 'belief' but more characteristically modern sensibilities, such as a questioning, melancholic restlessness and a fascination with experimentation.

The view of magic in psychogeographical walking that has been proposed is one that situates it within the wider culture of modernism. This wider context allows us to appreciate that the inter-play of modernism and magic is neither new nor

epiphenomenal: indeed that it may be cast as a constituent and founding force within some of the major strands of the modernist imagination. Pels argues that modern magic offers an example of an “invention of tradition” that does not create continuity with the past as much as it distances itself from it’ (2003, 32). It is, in part, this free-floating character that makes magic such an alluring site of creation and subversion for artists and writers. The nature and function of magic’s role within modernism remains fluid. In British psychogeographical walking we encounter one of the most significant ways this ‘tradition’ is currently being re-claimed and re-constituted. Magic is being used to conjure an aura of yearning, delight and transformation, as well as to offer practices of critique and disorientation that challenge the predictability of the ordinary landscape. Following Benjamin’s (1979, 229) argument concerning the surrealists’ attraction to the ‘outmoded’, we might claim that, through their use of magic, psychogeographers ‘bring the immense forces of “atmosphere” concealed’ in the ordinary street ‘to the point of explosion’. But rather than the ‘revolutionary nihilism’ that Benjamin saw in this process this paper has identified a longing for enchantment. It is a desire that, across the varied terrain of psychogeographical walking, calls forth a sense of possibility.

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¹ See also, Exploring the Extraordinary research network, founded in 2007, (<http://etenetwork.weebly.com/>),

² This crossroads was also traversed by Perec (2010) who in works such as *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* may be said to have perfected the art of flat description. Perec’s advice - ‘Force yourself to see more flatly’ - provides the enticing epigram of Matless’s *The Regional Book* (2015).

³ The transgression of privatised space that often characterises the ‘arts of urban exploration’ overlaps with the wider ‘urban exploration’ phenomenon, a genre of popular geographical activity that typically has a more purposeful and instrumental approach than psychogeography (unlike psychogeographers, urban explorers usually set out to gain access to specific sites). However, the fact that the two currents intertwine and both express a yearning for ‘secret, mythical, magical

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landscapes' (Lorimer cited by Garrett 2010, 1455) is apparent from Garrett's (2010) overview of the urban exploration scene.

⁴ There are many recent examples of mysticism among walking artists; see for example, Furlong (<http://digitalitch.co.uk/LFwordpress/>), Jarvis

(<http://beatricejarvis.net/>), Speedwell

(<http://www.germanderspeedwell.org.uk/#/wayward-walks/4531154141>), Culhane

(<http://www.artsandcultureexeter.co.uk/field-sensing-with-anne-marie-culhane>);

Etheridge, Persighetti and Smith (<http://signsandwonderslancaster.tumblr.com/>).

⁵ First used in 1996 the term 'magico-Marxism' sought to capture the work of the LPA and associated groups who were 'engaged in the excavation of the imagination of the ruling class; in rooting around through its undisclosed myths and traditions' (Bin 1996, 121).

⁶ The LPA published 18 newsletters between 1993 and 1997 and organised numerous walks. A group with similar magico-Marxist ambitions was Manchester Area Psychogeographic.

⁷ More literal examples of magic in London psychogeography are offered by The Psychogeographical Commission (<http://www.psychetecture.com/>).

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