**Sites of Death in Some Recent British Fiction**

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, an extended engagement with medical science and its institutions in eighteenth-century France, Michel Foucault argued that an epistemic shift took place at the end of the eighteenth century, a major component of which was the rediscovery of the idea that death provided ‘the absolute point of view over life and opening … on its truth’.[[1]](#endnote-1) For Foucault, the development of pathological anatomy in this period was the most vital expression of the new medicine. Through the dissection of the dead body came the discovery that ‘it is at death that disease and life speak their truth’ (BoC, p.145). From this perspective, disease breaks away from the metaphysic of evil and becomes, instead, ‘life undergoing modification in an inflected functioning’ (BoC, p. 153). More importantly, the anatomical gaze revealed ‘the forbidden imminent secret: the knowledge of the individual’ (BoC, p.170). Accordingly, Foucault concluded that ‘the experience of individuality in modern culture is bound up with that of death’ (BoC, p.197). Elisabeth Bronfen made productive use of this re-emergence of the idea that death is ‘that moment in a person’s life where individuality … could finally be attained’ and ‘an otherwise incommunicable secret could be made visible’ in her reading of nineteenth-century literature and art.[[2]](#endnote-2) She cites, as one example, Nell’s death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, where death ‘recreates the body into a perfect version of its former self’ (p.89).[[3]](#endnote-3) She notes also the nineteenth-century literary convention in which the deathbed scene involves not only the farewell greetings from friends and kin but also the dying person’s last minute vision of the after-life (p.77). While death remains an untransmissable experience, the deathbed spectators watch the dying person hovering on the threshold and through them hope to gain a glimpse into ‘the Beyond’.

This new conception of ‘death’s presence in life’ which Foucault delineates, Bronfen suggests, gave a new power to the dying person and led to ‘elaborate stagings’ of death.[[4]](#endnote-4) Death certainly seems to have been a regular part of everyday Victorian life, from high infant mortality rates to the death of women in childbirth, from public executions to familial death-beds, from elaborate rituals of mourning to commemorative photographs of the dead.[[5]](#endnote-5) Victorian fiction bears eloquent testimony to ‘death’s presence in life’ in a rich variety of forms. If we confine ourselves to the works of Dickens, in addition to Nell’s long journey to death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, there is Oliver Twist’s morally-improving final meeting with Fagin in the death-cell; the ‘Resurrection Men’ in *The Tale of Two Cities*; the unhealthy graveyards of *Bleak House*; the death-house of *Our Mutual Friend*; and Pip’s meditations over the tombstones of his parents and five little brothers at the start of *Great Expectations*. By contrast, we generally think that dying and death have retreated from contemporary everyday life, withdrawn to the non-places of nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, funeral parlours, crematoria. Thus Ruth Richardson, in her pioneering work on the history of attitudes towards death in the early Victorian period, observes that nowadays ‘preparation of the dead for disposal is regarded as a sanitary problem, dealt with professionally by hospitals and undertakers’.[[6]](#endnote-6) Roger Luckhurst makes a wider claim: ‘In advanced capitalist societies, encounters with extremity are suppressed: birth, death, insanity are all removed from the everyday and placed under technical and institutional command.’[[7]](#endnote-7) In Marc Augé’s words, this is ‘a world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital’.[[8]](#endnote-8)

In the essay that follows, I will argue that, while the process of dying has been removed to these non-places, death itself (in mediated and unmediated forms) has become ubiquitous in contemporary life. I will approach this through the engagement with death in a range of recent novels. I will argue that, if ‘death’s presence in life’ was linked with the attainment of individuality for the Victorians, death in recent fiction is rather associated with an alienation and a randomness that de-emphasise individual identity. In the first section, I will explore this through the analysis of three very different takes on death in two important literary novels (*Last Orders* by Graham Swift and *Remainder* by Tom McCarthy) and the counter-cultural fiction of J.G. Ballard. While Swift’s novel explores the non-places of death and dying in contemporary society through low-mimetic realism, the central figure of Ballard’s high-concept, techno-pornographic novel dreams of an erotic encounter with death. This dream might be read in relation to Foucault’s suggestion that ‘in that perception of death … the individual finds himself escaping from a monotonous average life’ (BoC, p.172). However, his death actually returns him to the regime of the simulacrum, the circulation of mediated and remediated images of violent deaths which prompted his dream. McCarthy’s novel also focusses on re-enactment and simulacra, but its peripheral vision registers the threat of arbitrary, violent death that is part of our contemporary reality not just in the form of traffic accidents and urban crime, but also through acts of terrorism. In the second section, I will consider the very different project of the counter-cultural, psychogeographic novels of Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd, which cultivate particular sites of death as part of a process of self-transformation. I will approach this through Gordon Burn’s novel, *fullalove*, with its tabloid journalist narrator, which presents both the mediation of death in popular journalism and the improvisation of rituals in the face of death. Where Foucault argued for an epistemic change in the medical discourses of death, Ruth Richardson’s account of the context for the Anatomy Act of 1832 foregrounds the length of popular memory and the survival in popular belief of a strong tie between the body and the personality that produced both ‘solicitude towards the corpse and fear of it’ (p.7). In the final section, accordingly, I will consider popular fiction in the form of the detective novel. In the contemporary context, however, ‘popular’ refers not to survivals of an earlier culture within folk memory and practice, but rather to an imposition of ideas from above through popular media. I will suggest that the ubiquity of death in mediated forms, particularly through the staging of the dead body in recent popular culture, is characterised, not by a focus on the self and the revelation of individuality, but rather by the performance of the ‘medical gaze’ that carefully separates the body from identity. In particular, in certain contemporary forms of popular culture, individual identity is subordinated to a technologized and militarised version of the collective aligned with the governmental agenda of state security and with the post-human.

**I. Alienation and inauthenticity**

Graham Swift’s prize-winning novel *Last Orders* (1996) occupies precisely the non-places of death to which Augé refers: through Jack’s medicalised hospital dying, his body disappearing behind the technology that keeps it alive, and through Vic’s work as an undertaker, the narrative repeatedly returns to the contemporary non-places of death.[[9]](#endnote-9) Swift’s novel, which takes off from Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, is the account of a journey from Bermondsey to Margate, undertaken by four men (Vic, Vince, Lenny and Ray) to scatter the ashes of their friend Jack. The novel consists of their thoughts and memories during the course of this drive. Vic, the undertaker, sums up the non-places of contemporary death in the alliterative phrase ‘Homes, Hospitals and Hospices, where people hexpire’ (LO, 211), and the novel initially focusses, through Jack, on the middle term here: it presents the medicalised treatment of dying, where dying and death take place in the non-place of the hospital removed from the course of daily life. Thus Jack is introduced into the text in his hospital bed: ‘His hands lying there on the bedclothes, the fingers half-curled, the tapes and stuff further up on his wrist where the tubes go in’ (LO, 33). As Jack’s condition deteriorates, his body disappears behind the technology that keeps him alive. At first he is remembered ‘sitting up there in that little white smock thing, with the extra tubes going in’, but then ‘it seemed like every day they rigged up another tube’ with the prospect that he will reach the condition of those ‘others in there that were all tubes, tubes and wires and bottles and apparatus, complete chemistry sets’ so that you had to look close to see ‘a human component still there somewhere’ (LO, 152). This is hardly death as the revelation of individuality, but rather the human ceases to be fully human and is reduced to a ‘component’ in a complicated machine for dying.

There is, of course, no death-bed scene with family and friends gathered around. Instead, through Vic, *Last Orders* also presents two other non-places of contemporary death: the funeral parlour and the crematorium. Vic’s place of work is mentioned early on with its ‘wax flowers and the marble slabs and the angel with its head bowed in the window’ (LO, 4). The narrative repeatedly returns to this place with its customers, its ‘lodgers’, and the relations visiting to view the body. Vic also recalls Jack’s cremation (and the numerous others in which he has been involved) and the modern embarrassment ‘in the face of death’: ‘When those curtains come across and the music plays nobody knows when to turn round and go’ (LO, 79). In addition to this lack of recognised ritual in the face of death, Ray registers another of the sources of this unease: he recalls the ‘velvet curtains, the flowers, the amens, the music’, but also his feeling that ‘none of it had to do with [Jack], none of it’ (LO, 201). Where the deathbed scenes of Victorian literature were both rituals of farewell and affirmations of continuity, the crematorium, like the funeral parlour, with the anonymity of the space and its furnishings, is markedly discontinuous with the life of the deceased. Where the hospital presents the medicalised process of dying, Jack’s profession produces two further sites of contemporary death, non-places which serve only to confirm the absence of the dead, the removal of the dead from the living.

Daniel Lea describes *Last Orders* as ‘Swift’s elegiac contemplation of mortality in a secularised community’.[[10]](#endnote-10) As he notes, Swift ‘mimics Faulkner’s progressive disentanglement of family secrets’ through his narrative exploration of ‘individual registers of debts incurred and paid’ (Lea, 162). One of those debts, what Lea calls the ‘ethical debt’ of the living to the dead, motivates the narrative and is expressed through the characters’ implicit search for ‘a suitable symbolic protocol to enact their leave-taking’ (Lea, 163, 167). In Lenny’s words, this is the concern to have ‘done our duty by Jack here’ (LO, 209). That contextually ambiguous word ‘here’ is a reminder that, although the characters’ sense of ‘duty’ is plain, Jack is unambiguously not ‘here’. Indeed, *Last Orders* repeatedly explores the place of death in relation to the absence of the most important person: the deceased. Ray, for example, looks at Jack’s body in the hospital bed and thinks ‘Everyone has their own space and no one else can step in it, then one day it’s unoccupied’ (LO, 183). The dead body is not a threshold ‘to the Beyond’, but rather a mirror in which the spectator sees themselves (Bronfen, 84). Instead, the novel confronts the passage from being to non-being from the perspective of the witnesses or survivors and their meditation on the difference between the embodied person and the lifeless body. Thus, when Vince views Jack’s corpse in the ‘Chapel of Rest’, he ponders the mystery of embodiment: how ‘nobody ain’t more than just a body, than just their own body, which ain’t nobody’ (LO, p.199). The body is, ultimately, not the person – just a place-holder for them. The narrative explores the gap left in other people’s lives by a death – and probes the mystery of life and death, not in relation to any hypothesised ‘after-life’, but as revealed in the difference between the living and the dead body.

Cremation adds a further twist since it produces the uncanny return of the dead body in another form. The fact that the four characters are carrying Jack’s ashes in an urn, which is passed between them during the drive, emphasises both the materiality of the body and the difference between the remains and the person. If Jack is a thought-provoking absence, the urn is insistently and awkwardly present. At the start of the novel, when the party gathers in the bar of the *Coach and Horses*, the urn is already causing problems: ‘Vic takes the jar and starts to ease it back in the box but it’s a tricky business and the box slides from his lap onto the floor’ (LO, p.10). The urn also begins the first of its many transformations: as Vic solves the problem of holding the urn, by placing it on the bar, he thinks ‘it’s about the same size as a pint glass’ (LO, p.10). Later, Vic is described as carrying the urn ‘’like it might be his lunch’ (LO, p.21), a motif that reappears, when the urn is slipped into a Rochester Food Fayre bag along with a jar of coffee (LO, p.109). Another kind of transformation is suggested, when Ray tries to move the urn onto the car seat next to Lenny, and Lenny quips ‘Jack in a box, eh’ (LO, p.49). The attention to the funeral urn and the ashes of the dead in numerous comic scenes from Edward Bond’s *The Sea* (1973) onwards testifies to the embarrassed fascination with this awkward relic, the urn and the ashes, resulting from the increased use of cremation in modern times. At the end of the novel, as the funeral party come to throw Jack’s ashes into the sea from Margate Pier, attention shifts from the urn to its contents. When Ray unscrews the cap and holds out the jar ‘like I’m holding out a tin of sweets’, Vic is concerned that the ashes will get ‘stuck to our hands’ (LO, p.293), while Ray is worried that he will have to bang the jar ‘like you do when you get to the bottom of a box of cornflakes’ (LO,p. 294). The abject physicality of the residue stands in contrast to the absence of Jack himself, as the soft sift ‘slipping through’ Lenny’s fingers gives way to the last of the ash ‘carried away by the wind … whirled away by the wind till the ash becomes wind and the wind becomes Jack what we’re made of’ (LO, p.295). This takes us back to Ray’s thoughts at the crematorium: ‘nothing ain’t got to do with Jack, not even his own ashes. Because Jack’s nothing’ (LO, p.201).

*Last Orders* thus presents a series of sites of contemporary death – hospitals, funeral parlours, graveyards and crematoria – and in this way echoes the common conception that contemporary dying and death are removed from everyday life.[[11]](#endnote-11) However, the journey that provides the frame to this narrative also points towards another perspective – one from which death is not so far removed from daily life after all; indeed, where death is literally ubiquitous in the sense that its sites are everywhere about us. Early in *Last Orders*, Vince offers a peon to the motor car: ‘A good motor is a comfort and companion and an asset to a man’ (LO, p.71). J.G. Ballard offers a much darker vision of our relationship with cars: in Ballard’s counter-cultural work, the companionable vehicle of Swift’s narrative brings death into everyone’s daily life. Ballard’s *Crash* (1973) thus provides a counter-example to Swift’s *Last Orders*. *Crash* takes place in the non-spaces of motorway slip-roads, airport access roads, police-pounds and reservoirs. At the same time, however, it registers how these spaces and non-spaces are over-written by various pre-existing scripts and fictions: ‘desires encoded by media circuits … compulsions instigated by television trauma’.[[12]](#endnote-12) Jean Baudrillard described *Crash* as ‘a work of death that is never a work of mourning; and called it ‘the first great novel of the universe of simulation’.[[13]](#endnote-13) As Ballard said in his Introduction to the 1995 re-issue: ‘The fiction is already there. The writer’s task is to invent the reality’.[[14]](#endnote-14)

*Crash* tells the story of a character called Ballard, his wife Catherine, and Vaughan, who is, in effect, their sex guru or life trainer. It begins with the announcement of Vaughan’s death in ‘his last car-crash’ and with the unfulfilled sexual fantasy that lay behind it – of death in a collision with the film star Elizabeth Taylor off the Heathrow airport flyover:

In his vision of a car-crash with the actress, Vaughan was obsessed by many wounds and impacts – by the dying chromium and collapsing bulkheads of their two cars meeting head-on in complex collisions endlessly repeated in slow-motion films, by the identical wounds inflicted on their bodies, by the image of windshield glass frosting around her face as she broke its tinted surface like a death-born Aphrodite … (C, p.8)

Instead of this desired consummation, however, Vaughan’s car ‘plunged through the roof of a bus filled with airline passengers’, and ‘his body lay under the police arc-lights at the foot of the flyover’ in a ‘broken posture’ of legs and arms that ‘seemed to parody the photographs of crash injuries that covered the walls of his apartment’ (C, p.9). Instead of being an orgasmic escape from the circuit of images, Vaughan’s death is marked as an anticlimactic return to the regime of the simulacrum.

The banality of the airport flyover is re-narrativised in his fantasy by an imagination full of ‘slow-motion films’ of accidents and ‘photographs of crash injuries’. As Luckhurst observes, the media ‘have released irresolvable traumatic material which can only induce repetition of the trauma, in a futile attempt at mastery’ (TAB, p.95). For Luckhurst, this is ‘the media as the embodiment of the death drive’ (TAB, p.95). In this media context, Vaughan’s imagination is, unsurprisingly, heavily invested in celebrity: in addition to his supreme fantasy of dying in a collision with Elizabeth Taylor, Vaughan ‘dreamed endlessly of the deaths of the famous’, inventing ‘imaginary crashes for them’. It is an imagination fed by the real deaths of high-profile figures: ‘Around the deaths of James Dean and Albert Camus, Jayne Mansfield and John Kennedy he had woven elaborate fantasies’ (C, p.15). Vaughan remediates this mediated reality through his photographs and films, his filmed reconstructions of accidents. Indeed, Jeannette Baxter has suggested that Vaughan can be seen as a performance artist ‘whose life is a theatrical exhibition of his own death’, staging and re-staging the human body in abject displays of pain.[[15]](#endnote-15) However, the engagement with death that provides the basis for this work is familiar to the reader, too, through news media: newspaper photographs and newsreel footage. The black-and-white photos of Dean’s smashed-up Porsche Spyder, Camus’s Facel Vega piled against a tree, and Jayne Mansfield’s Buick Electra after it ran under a trailer (not to mention Abraham Zapruder’s silent, colour movie footage of Kennedy’s assassination) are part of collective memory, which is also now readily accessible through the internet. Such images are also familiar as part of a photographic tradition that includes the 1930s US photographer Weegee and through Andy Warhol’s 1960s ‘Death in America’ series, which reworked images of electric chairs and car accidents. In this case, we might say, using Robert Smithson’s terms, that the site of death is the non-site of the newspaper photograph or television image.[[16]](#endnote-16)

As with the hospital death mentioned earlier, the car crash is a technologised death, but the conjunction of technology and death is seized upon in Ballard’s novel as the basis for a new (and problematic) sexuality.[[17]](#endnote-17) In the second chapter, the narrator describes his own first crash ‘below the entrance to the Western Avenue flyover’. His account initially foregrounds the aesthetics of the crash, ‘the stylization of violence and rescue’ (C, p.23). He soon links this experience to ‘all those scenes of pain and violence that illuminated the margins of our lives … that real world of violence calmed and tamed within our television programmes and the pages of news magazines’ (C, p.37). The technological shift in this sentence from illuminated letters in medieval manuscripts to contemporary news media marks also a shift from the marginal to the sublimated, but pervasive, violence of the world of the simulacrum. In this context, the narrator realises that the ‘crash was the only *real* experience I had been through for years’ (C, p.39), and he sets about a ‘remaking of the commonplace’ (C, p.52) through ‘the erotic delirium of the car-crash’ (C, p.16). As Luckhurst argues, this ‘logic of the accident, of the orgasmic transgression of death,’ can be seen as a strategy aimed at ‘breaching the endless circulation of traffic’, an attempt to break out of the order of simulation (TAB, p.127) through a moment of recognition produced by the conscious experience of transgression; however, if Baudrillard is right, death is pre-programmed and simply ‘reinscribes transgression as perfect confirmation of a system that can have no outside’ (TAB, p.127). This is the issue on which *Crash* hinges.

Tom McCarthy’s more recent literary novel, *Remainder* (2005), described by Zadie Smith as ‘one of the great English novels of the last ten years’, is also engaged with accident, trauma and re-enactment.[[18]](#endnote-18) The narrator has suffered brain damage in a traumatic accident (‘Something falling from the sky’, [R, p.5]), an event which he cannot recall. To recover lost motor functions, he has to engage in ‘rerouting’, laying new circuits in the brain through a process of visualising actions. As a result of this process, with its conscious attention to bodily movement, a visit to the cinema leads him to the paradoxical conclusion that the actors are more authentic, more natural, than he is: ‘if I’d been walking down the street like De Niro, … I’d still be thinking : *Here I am walking down the street* …. Second-hand’ (R, p.24). This, in turn, alerts him to the ‘second-hand’, inauthentic behaviour of those around him: ‘performing – to the on-lookers, each other, themselves’ (R, p.51). The media-types in the café remind him of an advert: ‘not a particular one, but just some ad with beautiful young people in it having fun …they acted out the roles of the ad’s characters’ (R, p.23). In this context, he recalls a moment when or, more accurately, a place, where his movements had been ‘fluent and unforced’: ‘They’d been *real*; I’d been real’ (R, p.62). This is when he makes the decision ‘to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again’ (R, p.62). In pursuit of this impossible dream, in the central part of the novel, he oversees the construction of this replica of the remembered place and moment. He consciously enters the world of the simulacrum, the hyper-real. In the second part of the novel, he undertakes further ‘re-enactments’ in search of ‘the real’. The re-enactment of a Brixton shooting eventually leads him to the re-enactment of a bank robbery in a real bank: ‘lifting the re-enactment out of its demarcated zone and slotting it back into the world’ (R, p.244). In this final re-enactment, life imitates the copy; the routines of everyday are exposed; and re-enactment and the everyday gradually merge. McCarthy’s focus is on re-enactment, but various sites of death are implied: the small-scale shooting; the bank robbery; and, finally, the blowing up of passenger planes. In the background to the novel are the events of 11 September 2001, and the way in which terrorism – and the mediated and remediated images of terrorist attacks – now brings the possibility of death into everybody’s everyday life.[[19]](#endnote-19)

**II. Rituals and self-transformation**

As this suggests, for Ballard and McCarthy, through traffic accidents and acts of terrorism, the place of death is everywhere. Jeannette Baxter describes accident sites as ‘public spectacles of private exposure’ and calls Vaughan ‘the cartographer of wound culture’ (p.130.)[[20]](#endnote-20) She describes his photographic project as an attempt ‘to reintroduce memory to the amnesic pathologic public sphere’ (p.131). McCarthy’s narrator’s engagement with memory and amnesia is on a more personal level, but his re-enactments, too, increasingly move towards the public spectacle of private exposure: from ‘the black man dying beside his bicycle outside the phonebox’ (R, p.171) on Coldharbour Lane, through another Brixton shooting of a man in a car (R, p.205) and a third shooting off Brixton Hill (R, p.206), to the real shootings in the ‘re-enacted’ bank robbery and the blowing up of passenger planes. In *Remainder*, violent death is an everyday occurrence: both in acts of urban violence at street level and through acts of terrorism. In *Crash*, not only is the site of death anywhere along the network of roads – with specific sites of death marked out with improvised shrines of flowers and soft toys – but it is everywhere present, in mediated form, through film, television news, and the pages of newspapers and magazines. This is the area that Gordon Burn explores in his literary novel f*ullalove* (1995).[[21]](#endnote-21) The protagonist of this novel, Norman Miller, introduces himself at the start as ‘a hack, a scribbler, a fully-benefited and BUPA-ed pen performer’ (p.1). To be more precise, he works for a tabloid newspaper at the ‘wall-shining, nose-poking, leg-in-the-door end of the trade’(p.1) with the role of the ‘victim’s … friend’ as his speciality.

The novel begins with a dying television personality, the victim of an assault, and the hospital as the site of death:

McGovern is dying of an acute haematoma and lacerations of the skull – an unstill package, ventilated, evacuated, fibrillated, palpated, catheterized in his polyurethane plastic tent … A modern death in a tiled hospital room. (p.23)

This, again, is the technologized death of *Last Orders*: the dying man is the passive object of various procedures that take care of breathing, excretion, urination and the beating of his heart. With all these functions technologized, he is dehumanised, reduced to ‘an unstill package’ in the non-place of a tiled room. Against this background image of ‘modern death’, Miller’s story lays bare ‘the daily reported spectacles of death and destruction’ of newspaper journalism (p.34) and the conversion of events into the formulae of journalism (‘Friends are still stunned ..Parents are deeply shocked …Park officials are still visibly affected …’ [p.63]). His story traces the removal of the event from experience to spectacle, from the real-world site to the non-site of the newspaper or television report.

In this context, Burn is particularly interested in modern, improvised rituals of death: ‘the impromptu pavement shrines marking the site of the latest nail-bomb or child-snatch or brutal sex-death’ (p.4). He draws particular attention to the contrast between their ‘peaceful, pastoral, consolatory’ air and the ‘raw modern city’ that provides their setting: ‘the railway-embankments, playing-field perimeters, tower-block entrances ‘(p.4). These are the marginal spaces, the in-betweens, the non-places of the modern city that Ballard’s fiction also occupies.[[22]](#endnote-22) However, as in the fiction of Ballard and McCarthy, death is really everywhere – both as random, real-life visitations and in mediated form as part of Burn’s depiction of a world where ‘experience’ is overwhelmed by ‘information’ (p.73). Thus, in Miller’s information-soaked, media-marinated consciousness, a drive through London becomes a glide past ‘rape sites and murder sites, scenes of hit-and-runs, child snatches, vendetta assassinations, car-jackings, care-in-the-community neck stabbings, and their commemorative shrines in varying conditions of completion’ (p.135). This is the super-modern city of dystopian landscapes over-written by popular newspaper culture and what Miller calls ‘post-literate paganism’ (p.178).

Burn’s narrative comes to focus on ‘maps of places where news has suddenly erupted’ (p.77), places that have become part of the newspaper repertoire. First, however, in an echo of ‘Heart of Darkness’, it addresses ‘a blank on the chart’ – in this case, a place that is not marked on the public plan of the hospital. This blank space is occupied by ‘the morgue and the post-mortem room, a sluice room, a furnace room’ – in short, ‘the place where death is’ (p.139). The places of death with which the narrative increasingly concerns itself, however, are the sites where policemen and policewomen have been killed – including, perhaps most famously, ‘the exact spot where WPC Yvonne Fletcher was mowed down’ in St James’s Square outside the Libyan Embassy (p.80). These memorials are presented as ‘sources of negative energy’, sites of ‘bad juju’ (p.78), as evidenced by further acts of violence attracted to them. In this context, the novel introduces the fictional Veorah Batcheller, first seen cleaning the memorial for Yvonne Fletcher, and follows her ‘voyage in the symbolic realms of death’ (p.175). On her living-room wall, Miller sees ‘a map of the pilgrimage route round the Buddhist temples on the Japanese island of Shikoku’ juxtaposed to ‘maps showing Irish holy places, medieval, Marian and twentieth-century shrines’:

…the Kop, Kent State, the Texas Schoolbook Depository, the Dakota Building, Graceland … the shapes traced and laid over one another in – I guessed – the search for correspondences … with the nine-sided, roughly kite-shaped figure you get … by linking the police memorial sites in a chain … (p.178)

Veorah Batcheller’s super-imposition of maps and her psychogeographic quest for occult correspondences recalls, respectively, parts of Allen Fisher’s 1970’s *Place* project and Iain Sinclair’s *Lud Heat*.[[23]](#endnote-23) In the closing chapters, after the novel’s thanatological journey, she sets out, in Sinclair mode, ‘to walk the route which connects all the London police memorials’ in ‘a ritual of cleansing and reclaiming, of undoing harm’ (p.205).[[24]](#endnote-24) She proposes to escape being situated as a victim through ‘acting in the world, stepping out into the blankness of motorways, loopways and roundabouts’ (p.206), undertaking her own pilgrimage, a ‘rite projected in space’ (p.215), through these non-places.

Sinclair’s long poem *Lud Heat* (1975) involves the creation of precisely such private rituals and takes off from just such a psychogeographical linking of Hawksmoor’s London churches. The accompanying map traces the triangles and pentacles they form, while the text explores their linkage to ‘sources of occult power’.[[25]](#endnote-25) The initial account of Nicholas Hawksmoor and his churches announces that the eight churches, built after the Great Fire of London, ‘give us the enclosure, the shape of fear … erected over a fen of undisclosed horrors’ (LH, p.4). As a result of their construction, Sinclair claims, ‘certain hungers were activated that have yet to be pacified’ (LH, p.4). The triangle formed between Christ Church, St George-in-the-East and St Anne, Limehouse, each of which has ‘a close connection with burial sites, Roman and pre-Roman’ (LH, p.16), is thus presented as a source of latent power: ‘the frustration mounts on a current of animal magnetism, & victims are still claimed’ (LH, p.5), while the pentacle formed by the remaining churches serves to ‘guard or mark’, ‘two major sources of occult power’, the British Museum and Greenwich Observatory, a power that is also evidenced in the closeness of these churches to the sites of the Ratcliffe Highway murders and the later Ripper murders through to the murder of Abraham Cohen in the summer of 1974. Sinclair links these modern sites of death to an occult ‘system of energies’ (LH, p.10), so that the Whitechapel Murders, for example, become part of a ‘karmic programme’ (LH, p.11). As Robert Sheppard notes, the sub-title, ‘a book of the dead hamlets’, ‘should not obscure the fact that death does not imply inertia, but potential’.[[26]](#endnote-26) Hawksmoor’s ‘rewriting of the city’ after the Fire of London through his building of a series of churches is seen as creating a series of sites of negative energy, ‘funnels of power for the gods’, emerging in acts of murder, which are linked to ideas of ritual killing and human sacrifice (Sheppard, p.30).

The third section of *Lud Heat*, ‘Rites of Autopsy’, engages with the films of Stan Brakhage, including ‘The Dead’, filmed in Père Lechaisse Cemetery, and, in particular, ‘Acts of Seeing’, filmed in the Alleghany Coroner’s Office in Pittsburgh, two institutional sites of death. ‘Acts of Seeing’ shows the ‘secret operation’ of the autopsy, which Sinclair describes in detail. He begins by describing how Brakhage is ‘granted access to the theatres of life and death’ (LH, p.40). However, it is theatres of death rather than life which particularly interest Sinclair. Thus he notes Brakhage’s fliming of open-heart hospital surgery (‘Deus Ex Machina’) and the coroner’s office (‘Acts of Seeing’), but he focusses on the autopsy: ‘this awful revelation of meat’ (LH, p.40). For him the filming of the autopsy, this probing and disassemblage of the human body, involves ‘a confrontation of the body’s most deeply held fears’, and the filming is presented as an act of initiation, being granted access to ‘secret rites’ and rituals (LH, p.43).[[27]](#endnote-27) In Sinclair’s narration, the scientific operations of surgeon and coroner are ghosted by ‘hieratic ritual’, ‘Egyptian autoptic rites’ (LH, p.43). As in his account of Brian Catling’s work later in *Lud Heat*, which acts as a subject rhyme with this account of Brakhage, the artist is presented as a priestly or shamanic figure, exploring dark forces, working ‘in fear & expectation of death’, but also working with ‘an understanding of the mutualities & relevances in Siberian, Egyptian, Meroean, Sumerian & Mayan cultures’ (L H, p.65). In Sinclair’s account of Catling’s exhibition at the Royal College of Art, Egyptian tombs are aligned with megalithic chambers and the crypts of Hawksmoor churches, as the account comes to foreground two particular pieces, a raft and a sledge: the raft is ‘made ready for the great voyage that is death’ while the sledge, an object ‘made for extreme margins’, contains ‘the idea of kneeling, prayer’, but also recalls ‘the urban hurdle of execution ceremonies’ (LH, p.66).[[28]](#endnote-28) Sites of death and the process of dying are the focus of Catling’s exhibition and Sinclair’s narrative. In Sinclair’s reading of the exhibition, through his engagement with death and dying, the sculptor (like Brakhage) places himself at risk and opens himself to ‘divine or demonic possession’ (LH, p.68). By implication, Sinclair’s own work exposes him, too, to the same risk. In the final section, Sinclair records an act of ‘total body exhaustion’ (L H, p.108), that involves him in running to ‘the oracle’ and back, not so much as a ritualistic act of healing, but as an attempt ‘to empty the body of all resistance’ in a quest for transformation (LH, p.109) . The ‘oracle’, a former machine-gun bunker, is described as the ‘epicentre of energies’ (LH, p.108), a ‘crossing place’ where the route of the Northern Sewage Outflow passes over the River Lea. It is identified subsequently, through casual browsing, as the place where a huge stone coffin of unknown origin was found in 1867. Sinclair seizes on this chance discovery as confirmation of his intuitive decision: ‘So again we service the dead, complete the stifled gesture, grasp at the arm raised in salute from the choked ground’ (LH, p.111). Sinclair’s exploration of the ‘archetypal expression of common needs’ (LH, p.20) concludes with this reaching back into the past, which also anticipates the conclusion of Brian de Palma’s 1976 film *Carrie*, with its graphic assertion of the continuing life of the dead.[[29]](#endnote-29)

In Sinclair’s first novel, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987), he returns to ‘the sites of the Jack the Ripper murders’, those urban sites of death made familiar by this narrative: ‘all the courtyards, doorways, factory gates’ of a specific area of east London.[[30]](#endnote-30) In this context of an obsessively retold story, Sinclair’s narrative explicitly picks up on Stephen Knight’s interpretation of the murders that attributes them to a triumvirate engaged in an Establishment cover-up: ‘Sickert the painter, Netley the coachman, Gull the doctor’ (WCST, p.54).[[31]](#endnote-31) In addition, while the title alludes to Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* and the discovery by a trio of book-dealers of ‘the first printing of the first appearance’ of Conan Doyle’s story (WCST,p. 25) forms part of a second contemporary narrative strand, Sinclair consciously sets out to ‘reverse the conventions of detective fiction, where a given crime is unravelled, piece by piece, until a murderer is denounced whose act is the starting point of the narration’ (WCST, p.61).[[32]](#endnote-32) Instead, Sinclair’s narrative ‘starts everywhere’ and assembles ‘all the incomplete movements’ until the point is reached ‘where the crime can commit itself’ (WCST, p.61). Beginning where *Lud Heat* ended, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*, as its third narrative strand, follows two characters, Sinclair and Joblard (based on Catling) in 1970s’ London.[[33]](#endnote-33) In this strand, Joblard describes how ‘you lay yourself open to a form of occult possession’: ‘You complete the other man’s work … The job doesn’t end with death’ (WCST, p.65). Thus, in the Victorian strand of the narrative, Gull completes Hinton’s ‘work’, but that act of completion reflects back upon the work of Sinclair and Joblard. Brian Baker has commented on how, picking up on the triumvirate of Sickert, Netley and Gull, ‘tripartite male relationships’ are used to structure the text.[[34]](#endnote-34) The novel also produces a proliferation of doubles and splits: Sherlock Holmes and Dr Moriarty, John Merrick (the Elephant Man) and Dr Frederick Treves, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The pairing of Sinclair and Joblard, which at times playfully echoes that of Holmes and Dr Watson, also explores the dangers of laying yourself open ‘to a form of occult possession’ in the pursuit of self-transformation. Thus, after the account of the contemporary murder of ‘Hymie Beaker’, reference is made to the ‘identikit portrait of a man seen lurking’ that accompanies the newspaper report: ‘horror hybrid, the features of myself and Joblard blended … Gone out of the human range’ (WCST, p.97). The novel has already suggested that ‘When two men meet a third is always present, stranger to both’ (WCST, p.36). Here, as Baker suggests, that third is ‘a malignant entity … seemingly let loose to rampage across the city, brought forth by occult forces’ (Baker, p.72). In his letter to Sinclair, which begins Book Three, the poet Doug Oliver comments approvingly on the novel’s ‘recognition that the self and its phantasmic forms and ghosts must be recognised before the self-as-self-healing or self-“disappearing” can enter the simultaneity of true knowing’ (WCST, p.163). However, what Sinclair also confronts is how this project might have less benign effects.

Peter Ackroyd had already made fictional use of the psychogeographic materials of *Lud Heat* in *Hawksmoor* (1985).[[35]](#endnote-35) In Ackroyd’s novel, the historical Hawksmoor becomes the fictional Nicholas Dyer in the eighteenth-century strand of the novel, while Hawksmoor’s name is given to a detective in contemporary London for the modern strand. Dyer’s churches, the churches built by the historic Hawksmoor, are sites of death in both narratives. In the first part of the novel, the ‘new church of Spittle-Fields’ is ‘built near a Pitte’ and ‘there are so vast a Number of Corses that the Pews will allwaies be Rotten and Damp’ (H, p.7). Similarly, the ‘Church at Limehouse’ is built upon ‘a burying-place of Saxon times, with Graves lined with chalk-stones and beneath them earlier Tombs’ (H, p.62). Dyer records that the site was ‘a massive Necropolis’, and it has ‘Power still withinne it’ (H, p.62). These are sites of death in so far as they are sites of burial, and they are associated in the novel with demonic powers. As Dyer’s narration subsequently reveals, however, this plague-pit has a particular significance for him, since his parents died from the plague and were buried in this very pit. He recalls their death and burial, and presents his building of the church as a compensation for the tears he was unable to weep at the time. The siting of this church is not a coincidence, but a deliberate plan: ‘in that place of Memory will I fashion a Labyrinth where the Dead can once more give Voice’ (H, p.16). In addition, these churches are sites of death in that they are associated with foundational acts of child sacrifice. Dyer is ‘no Puritan nor Caviller, nor Reformed, nor Catholick, nor Jew’, but ‘of that older Faith’ (H, p.20). In his creed, ‘He who made the world is also author of Death’ (H, p.20), and he looks back to the pre-Christian temples of Britain: ‘my own Churches will rise to join them, and Darknesse will call out for more Darknesse’ (H, p.22). As this suggests, as in *Lud Heat*, the churches are also sites of death in that they are associated with acts of violence and murder; indeed, they are seen to prompt and provoke such acts. Thus Dyer describes the building of his third church in Wapping and reports: ‘Here all corrupcion and infection has its Centre’ (H, p.92). Accordingly, he recalls the serial murder of children by Mary Crompton in Rope Walk, the murders committed by Abraham Thornton in Crab Walk, and the brutal murder of Mr Barwick in Angell Rents as associated with the location of the church (H, p.63). In Part Two, Hawksmoor is investigating a series of murders being committed at the sites of Dyer’s churches. At the start of Part Two, there have been three murders: at Spitalfields, Limehouse, and Wapping. He speculates that murderers ‘were drawn to those places where murders had occurred before’; he ponders various ritual murders in his east London patch; and, after thinking about murders besides St Georges-in-the-East and ‘in the streets and alleys around Christ Church, Spitalfields’, he even articulates a theory ‘that certain streets or patches of ground provoked a malevolence which generally seemed to be quite without motive’ (H, p.116). Hawksmoor’s theory is clearly the mirror to Dyer’s creed, and Hawksmoor seems to be set up to be the detective who will find the solution to the murders. However, Dyer is presented as an irrational alternative to the rationalism of his time, and Ackroyd is careful to advance the case of irrationality over rationality. Accordingly, Hawksmoor is increasingly positioned as a potential victim or perpetrator of the murders as the novel’s snake of time swallows its own tail.

Ackroyd’s work and Sinclair’s subsequent fictions bear witness to the continuing life of the dead as they revisit the sites of death of Sinclair’s first psychogeographic work, *Lud Heat*. However, where Burn’s novel primarily engages with the media landscape of crime reports and newspaper campaigns to commemorate murdered police-officers, Ackroyd and Sinclair go back to literary sources and earlier cultures to revive the metaphysic of evil.

**III. Technology, the individual and the collective**

The psychogeographical works of Sinclair and Ackroyd identify particular sites as sites of death and cultivate these sites as special sites of self-transformation. As we have seen, however, Burn’s novel, f*ullalove*, leads to a very different conclusion: that the site of death is potentially anywhere. Accidents and random acts of violence have an entirely arbitrary relation to place; at the same time, our consciousnesses are over-loaded with representations of death, and we carry those images with us wherever we go. The potential for the site of death to be anywhere is also the basis of another fictional genre, a genre that is dedicated to death, which has already been invoked – namely, the crime novel. For example, Patricia Cornwell’s detective, Dr Kay Scarpetta, is a forensic scientist, whose work involves two of the specialised, institutional sites of death – the morgue and the forensic laboratory – but also the arbitrary sites of the murder. *Body of Evidence* (1991) begins with Dr Scarpetta with ‘a packet of surgical gloves’ tucked into her ‘black medical bag’, as she takes the lift down to the morgue and the body of a murdered woman.[[36]](#endnote-36) The murder scene, by contrast with the morgue, is not a specialised site of death: indeed, it is described as ‘not the sort of neighbourhood where one would expect anything so hideous to happen’ (BE, p.8). It is an international-style detached house, ‘large and set back from the street’ on an ‘impeccably landscaped’ lot (BE, p.8). The victim had moved back there from Key West precisely because Key West had become a site of everyday death: she had written, in a letter to a friend, ‘AIDS is a holocaust consuming the offerings of this small island’ (BE, p.2). In attempting to escape one form of death, she relocates to what becomes the site of another. Similarly, in *Cruel and Unusual* (1993), the narrative begins with two institutional sites of death, the electric chair and the morgue, where the autopsy on the still-warm prisoner is described in some detail, but the first murder scene is behind a convenience store, where the victim had gone to buy a can of cream of mushroom soup. A banal everyday action and location become re-visioned through murder. In crime fiction on this side of the Atlantic, there is the same sense that the site of death can be anywhere. Thus, the scene of crime in Denise Mina’s Glasgow-based *The Dead Hour* (2006) is a Victorian villa ’in Bearsden, a wealthy suburb to the north of the city, all leafy roads and large houses with grass moats to keep the neighbours distant’.[[37]](#endnote-37) In Ian Rankin’s Edinburgh-based Rebus novels, the sites of death are located all over the city. In *Set in Darkness* (2000), the bodies are found where the new Scottish parliament building is being erected ‘on the cleared site, directly across the road from Holyrood House, the Queen’s Edinburgh residence’.[[38]](#endnote-38) By contrast, *Exit Music* (2007) begins with a body found at the foot of Raeburn Wynd in the Old Town, ‘a multistoreycar park on one side, Caste Rock and a cemetery on the other’.[[39]](#endnote-39) In detective fiction, the narrative moves between official, institutional sites of death (the hospital, the morgue, the forensic laboratory), the varied sites of murder and the various sites where bodies are found. These can be anywhere from closed rooms on the Rue Morgue to compartments on the Orient Express, from city side-streets to university departments.

As we have seen, recent British fiction (as represented here by the novels of Burn and McCarthy) is remarkable for its sense of the ubiquity of death – or, at least, the potential for death to take place anywhere. The places of death include the sites of traffic accidents and the sites of death from violent crime: terrorist attacks, murder, police action. These novels also pick up on those other places of death: the neo-pagan commemoration of sites of death in amateur shrines, alongside official memorials. They also engage with the non-sites of death which make it all-pervasive: the mediation of death through newspaper photographs, through newsreels, through other media. Over the last twenty years, popular culture has added to this rich, dense mix through the popularity of forensic-science series: *Silent Witness*, *Waking the Dead* and the *CSI* series present death in its multiple forms for peak-time viewing. In such series, the human body is staged as spectacle through incidents of violent death; the disposal of bodies; the processes of decomposition, dismemberment and autopsy. At a time when dying has largely been moved out of daily life to the specialist sites of the hospital ward and the hospice, both the dissolution of the body and the forensic penetration and disassemblage of the body become part of the ambient mediascape, the mediated environment we inhabit. In contrast to the representation of death in nineteenth-century fiction, however, this is not a staging of the corpse as an approach to the mystery of the afterlife, but the presentation of the corpse as the carrier of the legible signs of an event, as the bearer of traces that are readable genetically, medically, forensically by the trained observer. This is precisely the ‘medical gaze’ that separates the body from identity, and the viewer is educated into sharing this gaze. While death and dying are removed from immediate everyday experience, they return in the displaced, mediated form of the dead body, but they also return on specific terms: this is the dead body as the object of various technologies and scientific discourses rather than as the summation of an individual life. Thus death and dying are conceptually excluded, but return through the representational ubiquity of the dead body which is recuperated into the culturally symbolic order through the scientific gaze.

These series also foreground the institutional setting as the most important site of death. Thus, *Silent Witness* (1996 - ), from its title, announces its engagement with forensic pathology and foregrounds the dead body as the subject of post-mortem analysis: it is a body that will be made to speak through the forensic skills of specialists. Attention is shifted from the site where death took place to the forensic laboratory, although where the death took place may be read or reconstructed through the forensic skills of the laboratory. The series began with a private morgue in Cambridge as its primary location, but, by series three, it had shifted to the institutional context of a university in London (using framing shots of the portico and corridors of UCL). In both cases the institutional context was independent from police and government, and, indeed, both police and government agendas might be challenged by forensic findings. Originally, the focus was on Dr Sam Ryan (Amanda Burton), but when she was replaced by Dr Leo Dalton (William Gaminara), the focus became a team of forensic scientists: although Dr Harry Cunningham (Tom Ward) and Dr Nikki Alexander (Emilia Fox), for example, were technically subordinate to Professor Dalton, the drama depended on the dynamics between them. *Waking the Dead* (2000-2011), a police procedural series based on a fictional ‘cold case unit’ within the Metropolitan Police, similarly involves a combination of new evidence and contemporary technologies to make the dead speak (though with more attention to exhumation rather than immediate post-mortem analysis). It, too, focusses on team work (involving CID police officers, psychological profilers and forensic scientists) rather than the exceptional individual of classic detective fiction. Detective Superintendent Boyd (Trevor Eve) has some of the characteristics of this figure, but his maverick, transgressive tendencies are counter-balanced within the dynamics of the team by the ethical and professional concerns of the profiler, Dr Grace Foley (Sue Johnston), and the forensic scientist, Dr Frankie Wharton (Holly Aird).

In the United States, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-2015) was the source of a number of popular spin-off series.[[40]](#endnote-40) In the original *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, Gil Grissom (William Petersen), a forensic entomologist with various eccentricities, was positioned by these eccentricities (and a tendency to gnomic utterances) as the exceptional individual leading a team. In *CSI: Miami* (2002-2012) and *CSI: New York* (2004-2013), this role of the exceptional individual is gradually reduced and replaced by what Samantha Walton calls ‘an integrated network of technologies and human investigators’.[[41]](#endnote-41) The team leaders, Lieutenant Horatio Caine (David Caruso) and Detective Mac Taylor (Gary Sinise), establish the ethos of their team, but are dependent on the specific skills of other team members and a range of technologies: from dissection, sampling, chemical analysis through to databases and surveillance technologies. In the case of Caine, that ethos is one of care; in the case of Taylor, much is made of his past as a marine, and, as Walton shows, the gap between military and civilian elements of state security is erased and the team becomes a militarized collective. It is also significant that Taylor lost his wife in the events of 9/11. As Walton argues, *CSI: New York* is shaped by the changing relations of the individual and the state in the wake of 9/11 and the government response to perceived threat, the 2001 Patriot Act (p. 103). The series effectively promotes state surveillance and the ‘exploitation of comprehensive databases’, which it does, in part, by presenting the CSI team as motivated by ‘selfless commitment to protecting the security of the collective’ (p.103). Repeated references to the marines’ motto ‘Semper Fidelis’ cement this message.

Episodes in all three CSI series involve graphically detailed autopsies and the full gamut of violent death. Forensic attention to crime scenes, which the title promises, reconstructs a range of sites of death. However, one of the distinctive and controversial features of CSI was its close attention to the invasive procedures of the autopsy and its reconstruction of killings through depicting in slow motion the movement of bullets through the body. The reduction of human lives to materials for forensic analysis and this fetishistic pleasure in damage to the body – together with what Walton demonstrates as the series’s promotion of ‘anti-individualistic teamwork on a military model’ (p.105) - are part of the series’s diminishing of the individual and promotion of a militarized collective.

Where Swift’s *Last Orders* focussed on the removal of the process of dying from everyday life and presented the non-places of death, Ballard, McCarthy and Burn show the ubiquity of death – in the immediate form of accidents and street crime and in the mediated form of newspaper and television reportage. Where Ballard and McCarthy present the sites of death as arbitrary, the psychogeographic fiction of Ackroyd and Sinclair identify specific sites of death, sites which draw violence towards them, which they focus on as part of an individual’s process of self-transformation. The focus on special sites of death, self-transformation and the return to a metaphysics of evil places this fiction at odds with the other literary fiction discussed here. Detective fiction is the genre *par excellence* where the arbitrariness of the site of death is asserted. In the classic detective novel, however, rather than death signifying the deceased’s attainment of individuality, the dead body is used to present the individuality of the detective at the expense of the individuality of the deceased. In recent American police procedural television series, this diminishing of the individual takes what Walton identifies as a post-human turn: not only is the dead body reduced to matter to be processed, but the investigator is no longer an exceptional individual, just part of a team, and the team is presented as simply the operators of various technologies engaged in ‘self-abnegating mediation between the disorder of the crime scene and the ordering capacity of the computer’ (p.106).

1. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p.155. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic* (Manchester University Press, 1992), p.77. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. A late-nineteenth-century work, Conrad’s novella ‘Heart of Darkness’, plays with these tropes. As he describes the moment of Kurtz’s death, Marlow observes ‘It was as though a veil had been rent’, and he asks: ‘Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge?’. Subsequently, he reflects, after describing his own period of illness: ‘he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot’. Joseph Conrad, *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether* (London: J.M. Dent, 1923), p. 149, p.151 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bronfen, p.77. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See, for example, Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) for an account of how the high infant- and child-mortality rate and short life-expectancy in the Victorian period produced a deep pre-occupation with death; Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) for an account of grief and mourning among the Victorian and Edwardian working class; and Mary Elizabeth Hotz, *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (SUNY, 2009) for the centrality of death and burial for various Victorian discourses, including law, medicine and social planning. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), p.15. Richardson notes that it was during the eighteenth century that undertakers established themselves as a profession (p.4). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp.128-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), p.78. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Graham Swift, *Last Orders* (London: Picador, 1996); hereafter cited as LO. *Last Orders* was joint winner of the 1996 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction and the 1996 Booker Prize. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Daniel Lea, *Graham Swift* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.161. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Lea convincingly argues that the novel involves the ‘enforced recognition’ by the narrators of the provisionality of their own existence (164). From this, he concludes that death is ‘ordinary’ and, indeed, ubiquitous (p.187). However, this is using ‘ubiquitous’ in a more metaphysical sense, rather than with a focus on the sites of death. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Roger Luckhurst on T-cell, the precursor of Vaughan in Ballard’s *The Atrocity Exhibition*. Luckhurst, *‘The Angle Between Two Walls’: The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), p.95; hereafter cited as TAB. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (London: Vintage, 1995), p.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Jeannette Baxter, *J.G. Ballard’s Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship* (Ashgate, 2009), p.101. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. See Robert Smithson, ‘A Provisional theory of Non-Sites’. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. As Luckhurst notes, *Crash* is ‘obsessively phallic’ (TAB, 112), and what is desublimated, as in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, is not simply desire within a phallic economy, but violence towards the female body (TAB, 109). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (London: Alma Books: 2005); Zadie Smith, ‘Two Paths for the Novel’, *New York Review of Books* (20 November 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. McCarthy has had a long-term interest in death. In 1999, he co-founded the International Necronautical Society, aiming ‘to do for death what the surrealists had done for sex’; in 2006 he founded the fictitious Thanatological Corporation; and his most recent novel, *Satin Island* (2015), explores death and technology. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. For ‘wound culture’, see Mark Selter, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Gordon Burn, *fullalove* (London: Sacker & Warburg, 1995). Burn’s first novel, *Alma Cogan*, won the 1991 Whitbread Prize. He has also written two books on serial killers, *Somebody’s Husband, Somebody’s Son* (1984) on Peter Sutcliffe and *Happy Like Murderers: The Story of Fred and Rosemary West* (1986), and published a book of interviews with Damien Hirst, *On the Way to Work* (2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See Ballard’s other 1973 novel, *Concrete Island*, where the protagonist, Robert Maitland, goes off the Westway interchange after a tyre blows out at speed and finds himself stranded ‘in the waste ground between three converging motorway routes’. This in-between space becomes the island setting for Ballard’s modern, urban version of *Robinson Crusoe*. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Allen Fisher, *Place* (Hastings: Reality Street, 2005), written during the 1970s and published in parts during the 1970s and 1980s, and Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat: a book of the dead hamlets* (London: Albion Village Press, 1975). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Compare Iain Sinclair’s walk around the M25 which he recounts in *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Granta Books, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat* (London: Albion Village Press, 1975), p.5; hereafter cited in her text as LH. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Robert Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2007), p.25. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Sinclair might also have in mind Allen Ginsberg’s visits to cremations at the Nimtallah burning ghats in Kolkatta, which he recorded in his *Indian Journals* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1970), pp. 56-7, p.59, p.67. See Iain Sinclair, *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* (London: Albion Village Press, 1971), for Sinclair’s record of Ginsberg’s various visits to London between 1966 and 1971. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. The raft also suggests depictions of the Egyptian sun-god Ra on the solar boat. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. *Carrie* (1976) was based on Stephen King’s novel *Carrie* (1974). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (London: Paladin, 1987), p.35; hereafter cited in the text as WCST. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Stephen Knight, *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (London: Bounty Books, 1976). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. As the novel’s title suggests, and as Sinclair makes clear at various points in the narrative, Arthur Conan Doyle’s ‘A Study in Scarlet’ (1887), which introduced the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, is an important intertext. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* is, in fact, the third part of a trilogy: a second extended poetic work, *Suicide Bridge*, was published in 1979. For discussion of this work, see Sheppard, pp.33-41. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Brian Baker, *Iain Sinclair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.71. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* (London: Abacus, 1986); all references are to this edition. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Patricia Cornwell, *Body of Evidence* (London: Warner Books, 1992), p. 5; all references are to this edition. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Denise Mina, *The Dead Hour* (London: Bantam Books, 2006), p.11. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Ian Rankin, *Set in Darkness* (London: Orion, 2000), p.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Ian Rankin, *Exit Music* (London: Orion, 2007), p.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. The series was a CBS co-production with G.S. Capital Partners (an affiliate of Goldman Sachs); it was originally shot at Rye Canyon, a corporate campus owned by Lockheed Martin. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Samantha Walton, ‘Detection in a Complex Age: Collective Control in CSI: New York’, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 38.1 (March 2012), pp.103-23, p.103. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)