Resignation • Todgers's, somewhere adjacent to the Monument

Martin Chuzzlewit

Surely there never was, in any other borough, city, or hamlet in the world, such a singular sort of place as Todgers's. And surely London, to judge from that part of it which hemmed Todgers's round, and hustled it, and crushed it, and stuck its brick-and-mortar elbows into it, and kept the air from it, and stood perpetually between it and the light, was worthy of Todgers's, and qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance with hundreds and thousands of the odd family to which Todgers's belonged.

You couldn't walk about in Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood. You groped your way for an hour through lanes and bye-ways, and court-yards and passages; and never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street. A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and, giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about, and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless. Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers's, had travelled round and round it for a weary time, with its very chimney-pots in view; and finding it, at last, impossible of attainment, had gone home again with a gentle melancholy on their spirits, tranquil and uncomplaining. Nobody had ever found Todgers's on a verbal direction, though given within a single minute's walk of it. Cautious emigrants from Scotland or the North of England had been known to reach it safely by impressing a charity-boy, town-bred, and bringing him along with him; or by clinging tenaciously to the postman; but these were rare exceptions, and only went to prove the rule that Todgers's was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few.

Several fruit-brokers had their marts near Todgers's; and one of the first impressions wrought upon the stranger's senses was of oranges—of damaged oranges with blue and green bruises on them, festering in boxes, or mouldering away in cellars. All day long, a stream of porters from the wharves beside the river, each bearing on his back a bursting chest of oranges, poured slowly through the narrow passages; while underneath the archway by the public-house, the knots of those who rested and regaled within, were piled from morning until night. Strange solitary pumps were found near Todgers's,

hiding themselves for the most part in blind alleys, and keeping company with fire-ladders. There were churches also by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish. In some of these dingy resting-places, which bore much the same analogy to green churchyards, as the pots of earth for mignonette and wall-flower in the windows overlooking them, did to rustic gardens—there were trees; tall trees; still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a languishing remembrance of their kind (so one might fancy, looking on their sickly boughs) as birds in cages have in theirs. Here, paralysed old watchmen guarded the bodies of the dead at night, year after year, until at last they joined that solemn brotherhood; and, saving that they slept below the ground a sounder sleep than even they had ever known above it, and were shut up in another kind of box, their condition can hardly be said to have undergone any material change when they, in turn, were watched themselves.

Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand, there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came; but now these mansions, only used for storehouses, were dark and dull, and, being filled with wool, and cotton, and the like—such heavy merchandise as stifles sound and stops the throat of echo—had an air of palpable deadness about them which, added to their silence and desertion, made them very grim. In like manner, there were gloomy courtyards in these parts, into which few but belated wayfarers ever strayed, and where vast bags and packs of goods, upward or downward bound, were for ever dangling between heaven and earth from lofty cranes. There were more trucks near Todgers's than you would suppose a whole city could ever need; not active trucks, but a vagabond race, for ever lounging in the narrow lanes before their masters' doors and stopping up the pass; so that when a stray hackney-coach or lumbering waggon came that way, they were the cause of such an uproar as enlivened the whole neighbourhood, and made the very bells in the next church-tower vibrate again. In the throats and maws of dark no-thoroughfares near Todgers's, individual wine-merchants and wholesale dealers in grocery-ware had perfect little towns of their own; and, deep among the very foundations of these buildings, the ground was undermined and burrowed out into stables, where cart-horses, troubled by rats, might be heard on a quiet Sunday rattling their halters, as disturbed spirits in tales of haunted houses are said to clank their chains.

To tell of half the queer old taverns that had a drowsy and secret existence near Todgers's, would fill a goodly book; while a second volume no less capacious might be devoted to an account of the quaint old guests who frequented their dimly-lighted parlours. These were, in general, ancient inhabitants of that region; born, and bred there from boyhood; who had long since become wheezy and asthmatical, and short of breath, except in the article of story-telling: in which respect they were still marvellously long-winded. These gentry were much opposed to steam and all new-fangled ways, and held ballooning to be sinful, and deplored the degeneracy of the times; which that particular member of each little club who kept the keys of the nearest church, professionally, always attributed to the prevalence of dissent and irreligion; though the major part of the company inclined to the belief that virtue went

out with hair-powder, and that old England's greatness had decayed amain with barbers.

As to Todgers's itself—speaking of it only as a house in that neighbourhood, and making no reference to its merits as a commercial boarding establishment—it was worthy to stand where it did. There was one staircase-window in it; at the side of the house, on the ground-floor; which tradition said had not been opened for a hundred years at least, and which, abutting on an always-dirty lane, was so begrimed and coated with a century's mud, that no pane of glass could possibly fall out, though all were cracked and broken twenty times. But the grand mystery of Todgers's was the cellarage, approachable only by the little back door and a rusty grating: which cellarage within the memory of man had no connexion with the house, but had always been the freehold property of somebody else, and was reported to be full of wealth: though in what shape—whether in silver, brass, or gold, or butts of wine, or casks of gunpowder—was matter of profound uncertainty and supreme indifference to Todgers's, and all its inmates.

The top of the house was worthy of notice. There was a sort of terrace on the roof, with posts and fragments of rotten lines, once intended to dry clothes upon; and there were two or three tea-chests out there, full of earth, with forgotten plants in them, like old walking-sticks, Whoever climbed to this observatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out; and after that, was for the moment choaked from having looked, perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney; but these two stages over, there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers's, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path: the shadow of the Monument: and turning round, the tall original was close beside you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfreys, shining vanes, and masts of ships: a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.

After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings, seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the host of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold; and after gazing, round him, quite scared, he turned to Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers's afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would

> certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut: that is to say, head-foremost. (*MC* 132–4)

Resignation is an odd word, even when one recalls that it means, less frequently today, the act of giving oneself over, of surrendering or suffering passively the force of another. From the Latin, meaning cancellation or unsealing, it signifies the removal or subtraction of authority and control. In essence, you give yourself over to the other. The subject abandons the illusion of autonomy, mastery and anything amounting to control. This is not least the case with regard to perspective. Classical representation, aiming at mimetic fidelity and the fiction of an objective world separate from the self, places the viewing subject, the reading subject, at the centre of its worldview. The subject has the world he or she sees, over and against that seemingly controlling subjectivity. There is no view save for the one I see, no interpretation so valid as mine. Yet my perspective is merely a perception, a condition of my subjectivity and my being situated in the world at a given angle, or oriented in a particular direction. What takes place when that view becomes fragmented, when there are competing claims for my attention and when there is nothing on which my vision can fix, my interpretation can command, and to which it might give fixed or purposeful meaning? What occurs in the field of vision to perception, when the world resists, when it challenges? What takes place when there is more than one vision within any view? In the face of such challenges, classical, ordered representation no longer holds; falling apart, it reveals the differing facets, the heterogeneous perspectives, the irreconcilable positions, which do not reconcile themselves into a single image. As subject of that which is in fragments, which engages in an act of affirmative resistance by refusing to coalesce before me, for me, I must *resign* myself, I must resign the self that would separate the world from subjectivity, maintaining it in the fiction of objectivity. I must surrender myself, my *self*, to the other.

In what might be read today and retrospectively as an unconscious – how could it be otherwise? – anticipation of certain of the effects and devices of impressionism and post-impressionism, the opening pages of Chapter 8 of *Martin Chuzzlewit* posit such questions and problems for the subject. Or rather, they posit the possibilities of subjective resignation, and offer the reader the chance to rethink the question of narrative representation, which always puts into play the temporal and spatial phenomena of difference and deferral implicit in any image, if we read them carefully, and not think them merely a sustained passage of 'typical' Dickensian description. If such anticipation troubles the reader as retrospective anachrony on the part of the critic,[27] one might

approach 'what Dickens does' (that is to say, what is put to play, and what produces in a given reader certain responses, if the reader is open to the other, which, here, is the singular instance of the experience of the text) from the other 'end', historically speaking. Baudelaire observes that Romanticism, in painting at least, 'is precisely located neither in the choice of subject nor in exact truth [this being, if you will, the 'accidental' of particular modes of presentation], but in a mode of feeling'; and moreover, 'Who says romanticism, says *modern art* – that is intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration towards the infinite' (1987, 222). In its responses to, and experiences filtered through perception of, the city, Dickens's reading / writing of London aspires in its Romanticist vision towards the modern; always mediated by sensuous modalities, as befits an authentic unfolding of subjectivity's orientation, situation and determination, such reading bridges the Romantic and the modern. And while not all those qualifiers framing the idea of the modern necessarily leap from the page in the passage on Todgers's and its environs, not a few are already to be found at work.

A quite astounding passage, and perhaps one of the most sustained passages presenting London in any of the novels or essays, this study of place is as exhausting as it is exhaustive. It opens in abyssal fashion and hems one in, enclosing the reader on all sides with its idiosyncrasies of detail and observation. It is at once dizzying and claustrophobic, closely worked and yet proscriptive of positive or stable definition, save that in which affirmation of perception resists mimetic convention or adequation. In Dickens's generation of the city, his memory and apperception of London, these several paragraphs serve analogously as keystones and keys, in a re-presentation that is also a projection of remembered perception of the arche-textural and the founding of modern urban subjectivity attendant on this. Thus, the city drifts in and out of our vision – and with this motion, the viewer, the walker, the subject of the city, drifts also – as a series of 'phantasmagoria – now a landscape, now a room', as Benjamin puts it of Baudelaire's Paris (*SW*3 40). 'The modern is the accent' (*SW*3 40), that accent being a matter of reciprocity, inversion, iterability and recursion in presentation, and what one is given to read of the city is its ability to consume and overwhelm one, to lose the subject, but without trauma, even as the subject resigns himself to the experience, coming to reflect on what the urban location already reflects back – a series and sequence of seemingly endless locations of enclosedness or abyss. The opening of Chapter 8 thus forms itself as so many projections of 'the phantasmagoria of [a] "cultural history"' of urban modernity and its relation to the subject (*SW*3 41).

The presentation of Todgers's tends from its outset, with its hyperbole

and negations, its intimacy and its intimations of enigmatic obscurity, to inculcate, in the winds and folds of its labyrinthine, not to say abyssal detail, that sense of disorientation tending to vertigo for the subject, that perhaps not so hypothetical stranger, who, though unable to find the way to Todgers's from the street, finds himself on its roof, overshadowed, quite literally, by the only nominally given location, the Monument on Fish-Hill Street, to which the reader might go. That one reference to 'real' London only serves in the general sense of disorientation, to the extent that all else remains a projection of the imagination, a perception of the city-rhizome, its concatenated phenomena impressing the senses with an immediacy from all aspects, causing one to reside in a *kind of resigned distraction* as much in the reading as in the subjective experience, were such an experience possible. Thus it is that the narrator can introduce the reader into the passages around Todgers's and, at the same time, open to our view the passages that inaugurate the chapter, with the confident affirmation – against which nothing remains to be said – that surely there never was, in any other borough, city or hamlet in the world, such a singular sort of place as Todgers's. Everything comes down to the name, which signals nothing so much as a sense of self-possession, and with that, of being closed off from access or comprehension. Singularity of place is all; it is a measure of Todgers's singularity that London itself takes its tone, as it were, from Todgers's affirmed being. For, in a moment of reciprocity, which moves from the specific to the general, proving singularity through the immanence of urban iterability, we read:

> And surely London, to judge from that part of it which hemmed Todger's round, and hustled it, and crushed it, and stuck its brick-and-mortar elbows into it, and kept the air from it, and stood perpetually between it and the light, was worthy of Todgers's, and qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance with hundreds and thousands of the odd family to which Todgers's belonged.

Todgers's being singular, it remains nevertheless in close relationship with *hundreds and thousands* of buildings and dwelling places. Though singular, Todgers's belongs, kinship being signalled. In its belonging, Todgers's singularity is affirmed. Though there are, as yet, no human beings, that the house has a name, and this is given each time as a possessive noun; this implies, if not ownership, then a given relationship between the human and place. Place has meaning through the name. In this, the structure is analogous with those other houses that surround it and extend beyond it. More – and more uncannily, perhaps – than this, though, is that the house, in having a name, not only takes on a particular human aspect; but also it shares with those other houses, those

hundreds and thousands, with whom it is *on terms of close relationship* – and who are reciprocally *on terms of close relationship and alliance* with Todgers's – certain anthropomorphic phenomena, already foreshadowed in that allusion to London as a whole, which has *brick-and-mortar elbows*, and which hustles, crushes and intercedes between Todgers's and light and air. London defines Todgers's; but Todgers's, we might risk, in this perception of relation, offers to us what Gaston Bachelard terms a topoanalysis (1994, 8) of place by which meaning comes to light.

In short, Todgers's *is* London. *Surely*: that refracting pair of confident adverbs create the idea of place as if between two mirrors and their abyssal reflections. Not merely reciprocal reflections, the adverbial affirmations cause place to fragment into its myriad details, and so disperse across the capital in its entirety. Nowhere as such, utopian in one sense, and at least nowhere that can be found, Todgers's remains in its occlusion by virtue of a singularity that defies absolute generalisation but which, in turn, none the less makes available a kind of transcendental idea of the city to the subject's imagination, Todgers's can no more be 'seen' or 'represented' than can London as empirical entity. Instead, like London, Todgers's is available only as a series of sensory impressions, perceptions, which one has to arrive at in a spirit of passive openness, a *kind of resigned distraction*. Affirmation, singularity and inexplicable apperception open 'the space of an [otherwise] inextricably convoluted tangle of traits' (Weber 1996, 27), if we are prepared to accept these as the conditions of approaching Todgers's. Less a place than an idea, Todgers's comes to be apprehended, if at all, only through the work in re-presentation of the idea through its myriad traits, which in turn serve as 'countless intermediaries between reality and [those] symbols' (Bachelard 1994, 11) by which we grasp the sense of reality that shapes our impression.

Asserted through negative definition is the indisputable singularity of place, which, as we have argued, guarantees a generative iterability; further negation proving singularity is given – 'You couldn't walk about in Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood.' Such a combination of the singular and the negative arises as the mode of urban perception and re-presentation in the text of Dickens in response to the modernity of the capital, a response marked by the historicity of the moment in its formation of its subject in the act of reading / writing. The subject has made available to him a mode of perception – the subject / place relationship analogous with that which is put in play between the two adverbial affirmations, and by extension from this formal reciprocity the material relationship between 'town and

Todgers', as the title of Chapter 8 has it – that enables re-presentation in an act (as in all the other *enargia*) of 'exemplary originality' (Kant 2007, 146; see also 136–7, 146–7). Kant's phrase, 'exemplary originality', is employed to define artistic genius, which, for Kant, is the intuitive, that is to say pre-cognitive ability to present or re-present materiality so as to embody or produce the aesthetic expression of a concept. There is in this process a 'subjective purposiveness' (146) in response to the world; but purposiveness is what one is given to see, determined here in the text of Dickens in the response that is the subject's becoming-historical, inasmuch as the moment *as* re-presentation – the *now* in the process of becoming past – leaves 'images comparable to those registered by a light-sensitive plate' (*SW*4 405).

Thus, 'genius' does not then create *ab nihilo* but rather, in the relation between being and world, being and the event of experience of that world; genius *invents*, finding what is given by the other – hence the trace of historicity in the re-presentation of the material – and shapes it in an originary manner, as if seeing for the first time, and giving in the process to the trace of the past moment the 'now of recognizability' in a 'visionary gaze' (*SW*4 316). All 'aesthetic' re-presentation bears the trace of this historicity (it could not have taken place at any other time) but also the memory of the subject who invents. As observed elsewhere, London in all its modernity demands a response, an invention, on the part of someone whose perception presents and re-presents to readers to come the place, and the relation between subject and site, being and event (the event of the experience of modernity and the shaping force it imposes on subjective intuition). Apropos urban modernity and the reader, the city's subject that the proper name 'Dickens' engenders, on whom the name calls, and who in turn responds in reading / writing London *as if* for a first time, is thus the name of this 'exemplary originality'. It is in the name of Dickens that the subject comes into being, a subjectivity appropriate to its subject.

Who, and where, though, is the subject in this particular passage? There is – but again, where? – the 'narrator', that phantasmic projection, the screen as well as the projection, but the projector also. However, introduced into the second paragraph, initially as someone incapable of or barred from action, is another subject: you, the one who *couldn't walk*, as you would in any other neighbourhood. Instead, 'You groped your way for an hour through lanes and bye-ways, and court-yards and passages; and never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street.' *You* are recalled, even as the narrator imagines *you* remembering. Less or more than a subject? What we read is the impossibility of assigning a stable place to any 'one' subject; memory

of the subject re-presents the experience as a perception of 'groping', as if unable to see clearly, if at all. It could hardly be otherwise here, for Todgers's is so hemmed in, we will recollect, that neither light nor air can find its way to this location. Thus far, few if any details are given; there are the impressions of lanes, bye-ways, court-yards and passages, and, of course, impressions must be for someone; there are those brick-and-mortar elbows, but little resembling direct or straightforward mimetically or objectively faithful representation, merely an impression.

No sooner have *you*, the memory of you, or your memory been apostrophised, returned to the scene, recollected in the experience, than *you* disappear, giving way to a stranger, whose mental condition subsumes him:

> A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and, giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about, and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless.

That fragmentation of image initiated in the opening paragraph, finding its corollary in the displacements from within the instability of the second person singular, becomes the principal aspect of the stranger's passive, confused sense of self and place, distraction being a condition of being pulled apart or being pulled in different directions. The stranger surrenders to the experience of being lost, to suffering the event in something approaching a sublime reverie, as a condition that determines not only the phenomena of the city but the experience of those phenomena, and thus, indirectly, the apperception of London.

The (admittedly naïve) question might be asked, how does the narrator know the experience of the stranger, or the emotion and perception that are 'yours'? The most immediate response must be that the narrator, though a fictive projection of some subject, or otherwise the manifestation, the 'effect', if you will, of some narrating subjectivity irreducible to any one person, has experienced London in the manner being foregrounded, and responded in this way. Memory makes possible the re-presentation of the perceptual encounter with the urban phenomena. What returns here of the city is the result of 'putting the imagination into a play which is at once free and adapted to the understanding [of] . . . determinate ideas [received as] sensations', these being narrated, in the re-presentation of memory from the '*lasting* impression' (*SW*4 158) effected in subjective experience. A self – the condition of modernity – is performed as memory, as *you* and as stranger, estranged from selfhood in the encounter with urban phenomena. It is only in this manner of

provisional re-presentation and its play that a true or authentic experience of London's modernity – and thus to unveil indirectly the historicity of the encounter – has the chance to be communicated. In this way, the reader may, in turn, intuit the pleasure of an experience otherwise anticipated as traumatic or baffling.

As if to illustrate the truth of this, other people come into the picture, as it were, serving indirectly as witnesses, their own experience being evidence:

> Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers's, had travelled round and round it for a weary time, with its very chimney-pots in view; and finding it, at last, impossible of attainment, had gone home again with a gentle melancholy on their spirits, tranquil and uncomplaining. Nobody had ever found Todgers's on a verbal direction, though given within a single minute's walk of it. Cautious emigrants from Scotland or the North of England had been known to reach it safely by impressing a charity-boy, town-bred, and bringing him along with him; or by clinging tenaciously to the postman; but these were rare exceptions, and only went to prove the rule that Todgers's was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few.

The evidence amounts to a collective attestation regarding the difficulty, if not the impossibility of finding the location, but with that, equally, a shared sense of 'gentle melancholy', and 'tranquillity' in defeat. The lugubrious sense shared by those admitting of defeat is made all the more comically poignant by virtue of apparent proximity to the seemingly mythical location, given the greater frisson by virtue of the appearance of the chimney-pots. This single architectural feature does nothing to reassure, only serving in the general sense of frustration implicit here. Nothing else is to be seen, but the sense gained by those defeated is of a labyrinth, even though the idea of a labyrinth with chimneys is not a little odd. The very architectural incommensurability between what is seen and what is felt serves to construct an enigma in representation, as well as being expressive of that hieratic topographical conundrum. Those who do reach Todgers's allegedly are the stuff of urban legend, doxical knowledge affirming that they had 'been known to reach it'. Such a statement is mere word of mouth, with nothing to support it. In this way, the text comes to perform rather than describe the experience and the attendant memory of the subject's perception. For the narrative 'does not aim to convey an event per se, . . . [but to embed the event . . . in order that this be passed on] as experience to' the reader (*SW*4 316). Given that information is not being communicated, save for knowledge of the impossibility of 'knowledge transference' in the modish language of Higher Education documents today, there is a comic inutility to

representation. However, something else takes place; inasmuch as there is a performative aspect to be read, which is not simply concerned with representation of experience so much as the translation of the experience into the materiality of language, the text of Dickens may be read as conveying what George Eliot describes in *The Mill on the Floss* as 'the "transferred life" of human sympathy and identification' (Eliot 1997, 634; Stewart 2010, 179). There is thus construed an immersive transference of feeling, from navigating the passages around Todgers's, to navigating the (written) passages *about* Todgers's. The memory of resigned distraction, gentle melancholia and weariness becomes ours, during and following the process of reading, as if the experience of the city's phantasmagoric parade were ours. In reading, I become the subject, as Georges Poulet puts it, 'of thoughts other than my own' (1969, 56), though whose thoughts – and more significantly, whose perceptions, whose intuitions, whose feelings – these may be one is not quite sure, given the transference and transposition between 'narrator', the 'stranger' and 'you' (I?), singular or plural. If 'my consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another' (1969, 56), that other's consciousness is one engendered by London in the early part of the nineteenth century, felt as if for a first time, returning with the haunting force of its modernity.

Todgers's is there – as an enigma, or shibboleth perhaps. If you know how to navigate the area, no direction is necessary; you are a Londoner, of the city, one of its subjects or initiates. If, on the other hand, you do not know where Todgers's lies, no amount of information will make that plain to you. You do not belong, and cannot become part of this area of London, or, by extension, any other. Todgers's remains to be read, but is there affirming nevertheless its illegibility, its resistance to any mode of epistemological or, for that matter, topographical transcription. Knowing where the Monument is will not save you. All that you might receive, if you are 'the stranger' imagined as one of London's lost souls, is an impression:

> Several fruit-brokers had their marts near Todgers's; and one of the first impressions wrought upon the stranger's senses was of oranges—of damaged oranges with blue and green bruises on them, festering in boxes, or mouldering away in cellars. All day long, a stream of porters from the wharves beside the river, each bearing on his back a bursting chest of oranges, poured slowly through the narrow passages; while underneath the archway by the public-house, the knots of those who rested and regaled within, were piled from morning until night.

Strange impression this, at once – seemingly – olfactory and visual, or perhaps the phenomena belong to some synaesthetic or hallucinatory condition; though whether that is the stranger's or an effect produced in

the stranger by the city can hardly be decided, given that the impressions are wrought upon the stranger's senses. The perception of 'festering' and 'mouldering' is an apperception, properly speaking, because the alleged oranges, belonging to nothing other than sensory apprehension, are conceived of as being secreted away in cellars. The reality that accompanies the impression is no less surreal to the already disturbed senses of the stranger, for there passes before him an endless, slowly moving stream – figuratively, of course, a human tributary of pouring trade from the river, bearing on its current 'bursting chest[s]' of oranges. In counterpoint to this diurnal, iterable flow are those congestive gatherings, the human knots.

That we are implicated in sensory apperception with the intimacy implied by the sense of rotting scent associated by damaged, overripe fruit is clear enough – our consciousness desires to attribute particular determinations; but the immediacy of experience is itself a determination that is illusory because, as readers, we are no further forward than the stranger. Apprehending all there is, or all that there appears to be, yet there is nothing concrete, nothing that grounds. Even work and rest take place, and come to pass as zones of the text and zones of the location, forming the structure of perception.

The 'resigned distraction' of the subject, causing, in turn, the simultaneous condition *and* perception of 'giving' oneself 'up for lost', or 'never once emerg[ing into] anything that might be reasonably called a street', within a labyrinth – or, more accurately, the apprehension of the city appearing to one as a labyrinth – are symptoms, it has to be stressed, not of a distressing quality; this is not the representation of some existential crisis. In our readerly perception of the stranger's perceptions – or the narrator's hypothetical speculation of the stranger's apprehension perhaps being a result of the narrator's own haunting memories; let us not forget we are the folds of a labyrinth produced as a result of the singular modality of presentation, in which this passage encloses us – we find ourselves suspended, within, and subject to, subjects of, a stability of world that is also the experience of a suspended animation. We are *in* a world we cannot fully comprehend, and yet everything there is to apprehend is there, immediately. The various phenomena, those which reveal and those which occlude, those which enlighten as well as those which confuse, all are 'conjoined to my vision only by the nil value of appearing' (Badiou 2009, 128–9). In this world, which is all the world of the urban that there is, 'the being-there' of the impression of festering or mouldering oranges has '"nothing to do"', and thus gives nothing to be seen, as Badiou has it, 'with the being-there' of chimney pots, porters, court-yards, 'strange solitary pumps' or any of the other

observed details. There is, therefore, no trauma, no disjunction from the world, because the question is one 'of the nil value of a conjunction, and not of a dislocation of the world'. To put this another way, the determination of the passage to which one is led is not a crisis of or in representation but, simply, the transcription – the reading / writing – of one's being a subject of the modern. The meaning just is the conflation, the constellation of unrelated appearances, to which one's attention becomes 'situated', to appropriate Badiou's word, to, and by, phenomenon after phenomenon. Simply put, this is how one reads and writes London; there is nothing frightening, overwhelming, Gothic, traumatic and so forth in the experience of the city as such, if one's apprehension is of a piece with the modernity of the urban, and its phenomenological perception.

Importantly – and this might serve to explain why the passage is of such length – the text of Dickens constructs the modality of apprehension and experience as if it were a first time, as if one were coming to terms with London. Being lost, becoming lost is a mode of Being in itself, and resigning oneself to this one enters into a modernity that one barely understands, but which one senses, and which determines one's relation as the subject moves through the world. It is, therefore, necessary that the passage begin with negation, in a movement of presentation analogous with phenomenological reduction, in order to displace the false colouring of interpretive comparison, and thereby re-presenting the memory of the authentic event. From this, the reader, shadowing the narrator, and subsequently the second-person figure addressed and the 'stranger', moves without apparent purpose, without certainty of an end or any knowable goal, and without making connections, as the sustained scene, in which the furtherance of plot has no place, invents London. The city becomes a text to be read, 'a series of . . . images, of ideas, which in their turn begin to exist' (Poulet 1969, 54); and to do so, not 'in external space' but 'only', as Georges Poulet asserts of the experience of reading, in 'my innermost self . . . dependent on my consciousness' (1969, 54–5).

Though these are the perceptions, memories and the 'thoughts of another, . . . yet it is I who am their subject. The situation is even more astonishing' (Poulet 1969, 55) because I am perceiving, as the other perceives, memories which have never been mine arriving as if for a first time. Thus, we move on, moving spectrally, as it were, through 'a congeries of mental objects in close *rapport* with my own consciousness' (Poulet 1969, 55), a consciousness the *doppelgänger* of the narrator, the *you*, the stranger. Reading for a sign, reading the phenomena of the world, but not knowing how (yet) to navigate such a world in all its

strangeness, you, the stranger estranged in the act of reading, enclosed by the signs and yet distanced from comprehension, are conscious of having to take on a 'humble role, content to record passively all that is going [on] in me' (Poulet 1969, 59). Thus, it is little wonder that 'Strange solitary pumps were found near Todgers's, hiding themselves for the most part in blind alleys, and keeping company with fire-ladders.' While the notion of an alley's 'blindness' might be common enough, metaphorically, the anthropomorphised aspect of the pumps – having reclusive personalities and the ability to 'hide', apparently of their own volition – does not give itself to any normative or naturalising recuperation. The subject is conscious of what is seen, but the perception, its modality implicit in the 'translation' from world to word, maintains something approaching uncanniness, albeit of a non-threatening kind. The prose of Dickens's London thus performs that urban site in its re-presentation of an experience that has inscribed within it the memory of an initial encounter. This is not a matter of style, or of style alone; for, were that so, then, the 'strangeness' would be presupposed, the assumption resting in the *a priori* determination of 'some exterior model' (Merleau-Ponty 1981, 59). Such presupposition, or at least the modality of representation that employs presuppositions concerning a particular fashioning of the world, might be seen to be at work in *fin de siècle* representations of London, with their reworked, overheated Gothic tropes. But London in the text of Dickens is still modern, if not new exactly, and it is the encounter with, and experience of, urban modernity that the memory work of the Dickens text attempts to re-present and give to the reader to experience. The world thus emerges, phenomenon by phenomenon, as these are experienced, as if at what Merleau-Ponty describes, in talking of the act of painting, as the 'point of contact' between the subject and the world, 'in the hollow . . . of perception, and as an exigency which arises from that perception' (1981, 59). This is the genius of Dickens's textual fashioning of London – that the reader experiences in him- or herself a phantasmal encounter commensurate or analogous with the experiential moment, as if the prose were the material of the world, to stress this once more.

It is all too much, or almost too much, and we have not yet begun to reach the beginning of an ending to this passage from *Chuzzlewit*. From such closeness of observation, the presentation of place opens, perhaps unexpectedly, as the following one-and-a-half paragraphs show. What they also indicate is that if subjectivity is always tied to place, as I have argued, and if, moreover, place is not fixed as a series of objects but is protean according to the subjective response to the motions, rhythms and energies of place as these come to be apprehended, then it follows

that subjectivity is also unstable, 'neither thing nor substance but the extremity of both particular and universal' (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 153); and it is this polarity and mutability that comes to be reflected in, mediated by, the ever-changing perception of 'town and Todgers'– two terms, as we have suggested, that signify relation, iterability and flux in exchange, reciprocity and synecdoche or metonymic supplement:

> There were churches also by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish. In some of these dingy resting-places, which bore much the same analogy to green churchyards, as the pots of earth for mignonette and wall-flower in the windows overlooking them, did to rustic gardens—there were trees; tall trees; still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a languishing remembrance of their kind (so one might fancy, looking on their sickly boughs) as birds in cages have in theirs. Here, paralysed old watchmen guarded the bodies of the dead at night, year after year, until at last they joined that solemn brotherhood; and, saving that they slept below the ground a sounder sleep than even they had ever known above it, and were shut up in another kind of box, their condition can hardly be said to have undergone any material change when they, in turn, were watched themselves.
>
> Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand, there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came; but now these mansions, only used for storehouses, were dark and dull, and, being filled with wool, and cotton, and the like—such heavy merchandise as stifles sound and stops the throat of echo—had an air of palpable deadness about them which, added to their silence and desertion, made them very grim. In like manner, there were gloomy court-yards in these parts, into which few but belated wayfarers ever strayed, and where vast bags and packs of goods, upward or downward bound, were for ever dangling between heaven and earth from lofty cranes. There were more trucks near Todgers's than you would suppose a whole city could ever need; not active trucks, but a vagabond race, for ever lounging in the narrow lanes before their masters' doors and stopping up the pass; so that when a stray hackney-coach or lumbering waggon came that way, they were the cause of such an uproar as enlivened the whole neighbourhood, and made the very bells in the next church-tower vibrate again. In the throats and maws of dark no-thoroughfares near Todgers's, individual wine-merchants and wholesale dealers in grocery-ware had perfect little towns of their own; and, deep among the very foundations of these buildings, the ground was undermined and burrowed out into stables, where cart-horses, troubled by rats, might be heard on a quiet Sunday rattling their halters, as disturbed spirits in tales of haunted houses are said to clank their chains.

Following those solitary pumps, a difference is to be noted inasmuch as the narrator's perspective broadens, as if a camera sought to pull back, transforming the image into a more comprehensive urban landscape. If 'perception is always action', then it is at this point that

perception and the action it describes 'becomes praxis', so that the value of phenomena comes to reside in 'their capacity for composing all together, even in their intimate texture, a valid emblem of the world with which we are confronted' (Merleau-Ponty 1981, 64). The reader must refocus, as Dickens maintains the movement away from classical representation, knowing that spectacle has no place in introducing 'the allusive logic of world' (Merleau-Ponty 1981, 65), if, by 'world', we understand this to signify London, in all its modernity. The multiple churches, with their churchyards and the mouldering vegetable overgrowth; the anthropomorphised trees with their enfeebled memory; the figures of the watchmen, who 'guard the bodies of the dead at night' until 'they 'join that noble brotherhood', serve as so many examples of the temporality of place: perception also takes in the historicity of locus, as this is made manifest, albeit allusively, in decay and the intimation of the subject, placed in such a landscape, as both himself and as a *memento mori*; 'material change' is the perceived condition of everything, and so the sign of the authenticity of the image, history 'flattened out' in the perceived scene (Merleau-Ponty 1981, 65). The temporal and historical give to our reading a sense of 'sublimated existence', which is 'more true' than 'lived experience' (Merleau-Ponty 1981, 66), because of the access it gives to consciousness of one's Being. For the moment, there is no stranger at this point, no 'you' to whom the passage is explicitly apostrophised. The reader is left with the immediacy of the ghostly apperception, as if there were no mediation at work.

Death, time, decay and 'deadness' maintain the tenor of the image in the subsequent paragraph. Carved doors are synecdochic material fragments of the past, signifying the past of architectural forms while giving access to collective memory of past lives, haunted by sound, indirectly received by the silence of the present. Indeed, it is the presence of the past in the present which helps define the *topos* of Todgers's as an exemplary place of modernity; for the 'presence of the past in a present that supersedes it but still lays claim to it' is, in this 'reconciliation', the 'essence of the modernity' (Augé 1995, 75) as mapped by the polytemporal traces that mark the surface of narrative presentation. Dickens figures the cultural memory of place through memories of shadows, wood and stone, human lives and their material dwelling places intertwined and interanimated, much as the graveyards figure the living and the dead, the not so recently alive and those soon to be dead living on only through memory, perception and re-presentation. In the absence of knowing how to navigate this corner of the city, the subject has opened by place the possibility of reflection and attestation. Such present as there is appears in the form of merchandise. Juxtaposed to the revelry

and vivacity of those imagined pasts, which haunt the imagination, merchandise, singularised as cotton, has to be read as the none-too-subtle figure of the modern world.

It also stands as the material reminder, on the one hand, of slavery and colonial enterprises, and, on the other hand, the capital on which the modern is constructed, even as it serves a more murderous purpose, shifting in parenthesis to present tense, 'stif[ling] sound and stop[ping] the throat of echo'. The world of Todgers's has about it an air of 'palpable deadness', 'silence and desertion'; the court-yards are 'gloomy', the aspect 'grim', and the packs on their gibbets appear to figure nothing so much, 'dangling between heaven and earth', as material supplements for the damned. This 'Faustian image', coupled with the sense of historicity of place, the phenomena of gloom and death, the Ovidian echo – itself a classical allusion finding its own echo in the figures of labyrinth and maze, which serve as architectural forms of abyssal undecidability that 'define' the area around Todgers's – and the spectres of revelry, collapses worlds and times. If this is modern London, it is also a pre-modern place. Before the reader, one world emerges from within the other, the two in intimate relation and the intervening centuries erased in what might be called a temporal cathexis invested in the double image.

In the transposition between imagined revelry 'of old' and the quiet of the present, the transformation of lively mansions into dull warehouses and storage places, there is to be read something powerfully anachronistic at work, apropos historicity; possibly, this is the image of the modern out of time with itself; or, modernity is definable provisionally through the appearance of anachrony. Here, in surges, we read the re-presentation of past moments, allusively indebted to particular symbolic tropes, which fragment the present from within itself, and as the condition of its presentation. Anachrony works here in *Chuzzlewit* to render 'history-as-it-has-always-been-known' in ruins (Kates 2008, 203). As a result, every subjective experience and perception of the present, the presence of a present moment in relation to a particular site, 'becomes internally fragmented . . . even as each [site or event] ceases to be linked in any necessary or causal way to the other moments putatively surrounding it'. Thus, every 'present, every moment . . . is radically singular and unique', history, as a result, becoming 'located [albeit indirectly] in these otherwise dispersed moments' (Kates 2008, 203). The historicity of the passages and their traces becomes marked by, and offers a countersignature to, that double force of closure and opening, history being 'closed up in each present, even as this moment never closes upon itself' (Kates 2008, 203), due to that mediation on the part of an explicitly modern, urban

sensibility, and transmitted from the narrator in this openness of experience as if for a first time, to the reader. Furthermore, sound is cognate with the visionary and imagination here, serving in the consciousness of the reader to prompt the imagined aural signal, as the traces of the past are conjured through what can be heard or imagined as having been heard where now there is only silence. Horses troubled by rats in the cellarage are suggestive, sonically, of haunted houses, the purpose of aural stimulation being to offer counterpoint and spur to the imaginary juxtaposition of different imagined temporal moments. In this, there appears an 'understanding of forms', in which one might sense an injunction not to limit 'itself merely to the recording of their objective aspects . . . there is a "life of forms" perceptible not only in the historic development which they display from epoch to epoch, but within each single' figure (Poulet 1969, 67), and 'in the movement by which forms tend . . . sometimes to stabilize and become static, and sometimes to change one another' (Poulet 1969, 67). What Poulet defines as the simultaneous 'contradictory forces . . . the will to stability and the protean impulse' (1969, 67) is fully at play in Dickens's figures of the urban experience and the interaction between subject and place, through the mediation of the subject's perception of what haunts and resonates in place, to displace the present through the trace of the past, with what remains, what persists, and what comes to pass. In this, the rhetoric of the subjective reception and translation of urban modernity, the subject's reading / writing the city, we are enabled to perceive, in turn, 'by their interplay how much forms are dependent on . . . a shaping power which determines them, replaces them and transcends them' (Poulet 1969, 67).[28]

From that momentary double vision where the 'throat of echo' is countersigned by the 'the throats and maws of dark no-thoroughfares', a somewhat more benign, if still melancholic, world returns. So, yet another motion is discerned. The world of Todgers's contracts to confine, and yet expands so that the subject's place gives away to another situation. Across the lengthy introduction to the location and its reciprocal relation to the larger world of the city, so there is a process in re-presentation of experience, whereby, on the one hand, determination takes part in an infinite expansion, while, on the other, there is constantly what Coleridge calls a 'force' – and perhaps this might be the appropriate trope to supplement the notion of narrator-as-subject – striving to 'apprehend or *find* itself in this infinity' (Coleridge 1983, 297). The double principle replays itself spatially and temporally in a series of becomings across the text of Dickens. I say *becomings*-plural, for, if this is not yet apparent, there are multiple worlds ('individual wine-merchants and wholesale dealers in grocery-ware had perfect little

towns of their own'), temporally and spatially inhabiting the same place, the same realisation or cognisance; the urban space produced in the Dickensian imagination is, to borrow a singularly appropriate phrase of Coleridge's (in one of his more Kantian moments), 'inexhaustibly re-ebullient' (1983, 300).

From whence does this inexhaustibility, which nevertheless exhausts the subject, leaving him or her in a condition of ennui, arise? If 'to tell' is to describe, to enumerate and represent; and if such an action would 'fill a goodly book', while equally necessary would be a 'second volume no less capacious' concerning the guests of the 'queer old taverns'; then the matter is one of generation, attestation, reading and writing. It is not merely a matter of space, but of the interaction with space, and the relation of subjectivity to this. Apprehending this, we have to see how space is not just a neutral zone before us. The idea of space *is* an idea – that is to say, space is a conception, given concrete form in narrative as place. Space is a means to think the world architexturally, it is 'the means whereby the position of things becomes possible', invested with that power or force 'enabling them to be connected' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 243). Narrative reveals a mode of reflection on the part of the subject, which causes the world to appear in a number of modalities, translated through that process of anthropomorphisation and abstracted as moods: resignation, melancholy, and so forth.

> To tell of half the queer old taverns that had a drowsy and secret existence near Todgers's, would fill a goodly book; while a second volume no less capacious might be devoted to an account of the quaint old guests who frequented their dimly-lighted parlours. These were, in general, ancient inhabitants of that region; born, and bred there from boyhood; who had long since become wheezy and asthmatical, and short of breath, except in the article of story-telling: in which respect they were still marvellously long-winded. These gentry were much opposed to steam and all new-fangled ways, and held ballooning to be sinful, and deplored the degeneracy of the times; which that particular member of each little club who kept the keys of the nearest church, professionally, always attributed to the prevalence of dissent and irreligion; though the major part of the company inclined to the belief that virtue went out with hair-powder, and that old England's greatness had decayed amain with barbers.

Here, the narrator appears to pause. The world and its forms promise to overwhelm, and the only recourse is to admit, however indirectly, the impossibility of representation faithfully rendered and, instead, to imply, if not an endless reading / writing, one at least which, out of the imagination, gestures towards an abyssal unfolding. Book upon book, text within text: the dynamic of space considered as the interconnection between mutable forms, opens to consciousness the promise of a

potential infinity of narrative, remaining to be written but hinted at here by the sketched tales of 'opposition to steam', 'new-fangled ways', the sins of 'ballooning', the abandonment of 'hair-powder' as an essential cosmetic of civilised society, produced in response to the 'degeneracy of the times' by 'old guests', 'ancient inhabitants' and members of 'each little club'. Each narrative is a manifestation of memory, various pasts so many revenant instances belonging to others, the city's innumerable subjects. The multiplicity of worlds is conjured by, and in turn conjures and conjectures, equally, on the proliferation of story, and innumerable inhabitants. With this understanding, the narrating consciousness opens itself to the narration of countless others. The condition of the city is such that there can be no single, controlling subjectivity, no simple, sole position or perspective.

As the vision of the urban location unfolds, so too do its many traces call attention to themselves. The temporal opens from within the present, even as the space of narrative, and the place it strives to figure, expands all efforts towards offering greater detail and so the completion of representation inaugurating a gesture towards infinity and against stability. As the narrator admits to the reception of other narrations, other lives, other subjectivities – in this recognition, mimetic representation is defeated, objective vision of the world made impossible – so, here, we find two figures for the act of reading and writing London. On the one hand, the narrating machinery traces what it replicates, an ineluctable proem to urban modernity and the concomitant fluctuations of subjective reflection. The only authentic way that one can re-present the city is to generate a double act of reading and writing in which the subject is only ever a provisional figure, giving place to other subjectivities, other times and other narratives. On the other hand, as a corollary, any veridical apprehension or perception of, and response to, London perceives how the self is always situated by the world and appears in it and to him- or herself, as the world, as place appears. (On the situation of Being, see Badiou [2009, 113–18].) What the opening of 'town and Todgers' suggests is that Being does not have a world, as a stable object to which subjectivity bears witness. Instead, the being appears in a given place, or world, in its being situated by the given, singular locus. In short, subjectivity is always situated, and the situation being always more than one, so too is the urban subject.

Yet, what marks the subjectivity of the narrator in relation to place as singular, is that making exotic or strange the familiar, the otherwise unremarkable, and to excavate from within this material archive the historicity of place, without the programme to write a history of locale, as if from the outside. Here, the text of Dickens presents London, from

the inside, with the perception of the 'native', the London subject. Such a fiction, a construct – and, it must be remembered, there is no such thing, no such person as that which we call 'narrator', this being merely the phantasmal projection, a situation of subjectivity in the text – is motivated by what Walter Benjamin calls 'journeys into the past'; as a result of which, the 'account of a city given by a native will always have something in common with memoirs' (*SW*2 262), which in turn narrate rather than describe (to make a distinction of Benjamin's). Even more, such native narrative drive, for Benjamin, and this is certainly true in the doxical orientation of a Dickens narrative, the narrator-effect functions through what has been heard, the text becoming 'an echo of the stories the city has told him ever since he was a child' (*SW*2 262). This produces an 'epic book through and through,' generated from 'a process of memorizing while strolling around'; 'each street', Benjamin concludes, 'is a vertiginous experience', the city, 'a mnemonic for the . . . walker' (*SW*2 262). Nowhere is this felt to be more authentic than in those moments where the past erupts from the pavements of London, as in the narrative of Todgers's. What engages the narrative effect above all is the idea of London, and the condition of re-presenting that idea as an infinite task involving the labour of memory and figuration. Such an idea, which coincides with the Kantian notion of the Idea, is 'an idea *of* infinity' (Kates 2008, 147). As such – this will explain much about the modalities of the Dickensian architecture of re-presentation – 'London' can never be presented directly or as such, in totality; it is only ever available to that subjective experience indirectly, in every singular situation, for the idea 'can never be conceived as presenting its subject matter' directly (Kates 2008, 147). As 'an idea of infinity, the object at which this idea aims necessarily overflows the consciousness of this idea' (Kates 2008, 147), as a result of which one only grasps the subject's apprehension of London, if at all, in the frustration of representation, mapped here as the inability to locate location. London is only known in its 'nonappearance and nonpresentation' (Kates 2008, 147).

Admitting the past, with its promise to return the multiplicities of London, its memories, situations, subjects and tales, the narrator turns back to 'Todgers's itself', limiting for the moment presentation by engaging to speak 'of it only as a house in that neighbourhood'. Involved in this turn of focus is an attempted delimitation of the image through negation: 'As to Todgers's itself—speaking of it only as a house in that neighbourhood, and making no reference to its merits as a commercial boarding establishment—it was worthy to stand where it did.' To say that the sentence appears to say nothing would be to state the obvious. The evaluation of worthiness seems grounded in the doxa of tradition,

which empasises the the inoperability of a staircase window, whether regarding its being opened or being transparent:

> There was one staircase-window in it; at the side of the house, on the ground-floor; which tradition said had not been opened for a hundred years at least, and which, abutting on an always-dirty lane, was so begrimed and coated with a century's mud, that no pane of glass could possibly fall out, though all were cracked and broken twenty times.

The window no longer functions as a window. Its uselessness is paired with the 'mystery' of the cellarage, an enigma echoing that of the area itself ('the mystery was known but to a chosen few'), and of which no one knows or cares anything. While narrative in the form of rumour surrounds it, 'indifference' is the mood, the mode or affect directed towards it. Moreover, it has nothing to do with Todgers's, being the property of another, apparently. The cellar's most striking aspect is that no one knows anything about it, or has any memory about its purpose or precise ownership. The inutility, coupled with that pervasive defeat of any positive knowledge, reiterates the epistemological negativity, along with other denials or comparative dismissals (no sound, no activity, nothing worthy of the name of street, no-thoroughfare), with which the chapter had begun, and continued ('Surely there never was . . . You couldn't walk about in Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood . . . never once . . . Nobody had ever found Todgers on a verbal direction'). We have moved around and around the neighbourhood, without purpose or sense of direction, or being able to orient ourselves. We have witnessed strangers, our epistemological *doppelgängers*, equally lost, thwarted as to goal or destination. Yet, we, you, the stranger find ourselves *at* Todgers's, the sense and knowledge of which is equally purposeless. Indeed, given that we have arrived as if by accident, without knowing how we got there, without being able to observe how we made our way, Todgers's appears before us as if it were some mystical lodestone or keystone, centring and determining the occluded identity of place.

At the house, you are taken to the top, on to the roof. Clotheslines no longer work, having rotted, and plants have been forgotten, their withered condition transforming them. The promise of seeing anything is almost immediately negated on arriving on the roof, the prospective observer having been mildly concussed, then choked. If these trials are survived, however, *you* finally have both a perspective – on the condition of fine weather – and a point of orientation:

> there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers's, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon

> the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path: the shadow of the Monument: and turning round, the tall original was close beside you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfreys, shining vanes, and masts of ships: a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.

Below, in the streets nothing is to be seen clearly; clearly, nothing is what is to be seen, on the roof, all one can do is list in the face of the spectacle before the senses. The impression coalesces into the collective metaphor of a forest, which, in turn, transforms into 'wilderness upon wilderness', with smoke and noise, the assault on the senses virtually complete, being 'enough for all the world at once'. Before the iterable leading to a loss of focus – the world blurs into an endlessness of similar phenomena – optical, olfactory and aural senses are immersed, subsumed. More than representation, it is the subject's perception, his or her situation vis-à-vis the world, in the situation that is given the subject, and which grounds subjectivity's consciousness. Within the empirical are the symbols of the subject's being-there in the 'world' of nineteenth-century London. The novelty of the sensuous overload is such that it is only indirectly apprehensible through the natural analogy.

This is London as if for a first time. In this, Dickens's text mediates between classical and modern, in pictorial terms; for the passage suspends the subject between the world and the subject's senses. The view from the roof is not merely about seeing London. It is concerned with showing the reader how the subject sees London, if at all, at a given moment. And in order to make the reader see and sense in a manner appropriate to the modern urban subject's genesis, so that reading might have the chance to experience the memory of perception touched by the truth of its historicity, the narrator-effect circumscribes vision, constructing a 'representation in which each thing ceases to call the whole of vision to itself' (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 49), but works to recall the subject's situatedness. Everything in the phenomenological flow tends towards a reflection on subjectivity; concomitantly, perception of 'reality in itself and as it truly is' (Henry 2008, 26) for someone, whether you, I the narrator, the stranger, or whoever.

It should not be forgotten that whatever the reality revealed, however authentic the sense of that reality and the resonance of its material and sensory experience, this is nevertheless mediated through re-presentation, in a language of indirection tending towards the apprehension of impression and image. That this involved formulation *is* forgotten has tended to the assumption of the mimetic and objective, the merely aesthetic on the one hand, and the semi-transparency of the medium

supposedly in the service of the historical, of context or whatever, as the justification for a critical reading, on the other. But the literary has as much, if not more in common with painting and other visual arts than it does with 'history', in the functions of its representations. If we do not see the subject, neither do we see the city; hence the constant motion of analogy, the rhythms of negation, and all those other devices of indirection by which the passage in its detail and its entirety gives us to apprehend. What the passage from the rooftop gives us to understand is that we do not see the city, any more than we do a landscape; we see, instead, through that circumscription already acknowledged, all that which makes up a city; description forms a narrative surface, tending to the interminable and the infinite. The impression, the condition of apperception – the subject feels the 'whole' of the city's reality only through the intimacy and density of detail – demonstrates indirectly that which, in the text of Dickens concerning the modernity of the city and the subjectivity engendered, is always informed by the experience of the aporetic; hence negation, doubt, hesitation, the expression of limit, the passive suffering, the *resignation*. For re-presentation, we read, and learn from the reading / writing of London in Dickens, in its endlessly aporetic condition of 'no-thoroughfare', 'encompasses the infiniteness of singular difference, the infiniteness of reality'. There is, for the reader, as for the subject, what Louis Marin calls a 'loss in excess', a 'vertigo' (Marin 2001, 249). Of such images, I may have to say, following Marin's argument, this is London, or '"it is a city, a landscape"'; but we are at least able to conceptualise, from that which London gives to be read in the mediated impression and experience of the text of Dickens, 'the infinite difference of reality ['you observed upon the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path . . . steeples, towers, belfreys, shining vanes, and masts of ships: a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness'] without ever being able to express or represent it' directly or in full (Marin 2001, 248). As subject, entering into and resigning ourselves to a subjectivity not our own, neither ours nor of our time, our perception is as of a 'vertiginous experience: the eye loses itself in the surface where representations of things definitively' disappear in the 'words that designate and identify them' (Marin 2001, 249).

You arrive, therefore, at the conclusion of this extract, which begins, ironically, with the observation that

> After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings, seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their

> separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's.

Clearly, particular elements and objects determine what is to be noticed, and how one is to see, with no volition on the part of the resigned subject, whose gaze 'finds itself prescribed', the city's potential impression 'pre-written' (Marin 2001, 257) in the image of quasi-animate architectural details. This strangely vital architecture speaks or remains silent, it sees and communicates what it witnesses, or otherwise remains silent. Then, you happen to have your eye drawn towards someone:

> The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the host of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold; and after gazing, round him, quite scared, he turned to Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers's afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut: that is to say, head-foremost.

Who might the man in the window be? Why has he paused in the middle of writing? Is this no one in particular? Or might it be the artist in the mind's eye, placing himself in the field of vision, not in a self-portrait but, instead, in the manner of Velázquez, peering out from behind the canvas, as he paints the painting in which you see him, *Las Meninas*. This figure, appearing briefly, then retires. You are reminded that, if you see London, someone authorises that vision; becoming subjects of the text, subject to the text and the figures of the city from which it is composed, our perspective is positioned. You are invited to reflect on the perception of perspective, coming to consciousness reflectively of your having been situated. This moment is brief, however, the writer's retreat leaving a blank, as with a page remaining to be filled, or as a reminder that there is no image without a subject. And with that disappearance, the tumultuous phenomenal revenance visually and audibly of the mass of the city returns, to disorient and intimidate. Too much uncontrollable vision is awful, the figural vertiginousness threatening to become real, the stranger, or you, transformed into the looker-on, quickly withdrawing from the scene. This is not just a question of falling from the roof. It is also a question of resigning: *from* the perception itself, from its presentation, from living in memory through the experience of encountering London. Infinity is too much; the abyss cannot be comprehended. There

'can be sensation only on condition that it exists for a central and unique *I*' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 219). However, the event of modernity revealing that there is no pure subjectivity but that the self is always situated, the 'reflective *I* . . . [comes to find that it] is not [pure] consciousness or pure being' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 219); such an illusion is pre-modern. The reflective *I*, situated in resignation to the time and place of London in the early nineteenth century, is 'experience, in other words the communication of a finite subject with an opaque being from which it emerges' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 219). London gives us to read a radical subjectivity in Dickens' reading / writing the city and its experience or perception of the world, which is revealed 'as an open totality the synthesis of which is inexhaustible', and 'indivisibly demolished and remade by the course of time' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 219).

Were I tempted to give a name to the mode of phenomenal production and its situation of a subject signed by the historicity of its perception that is on display in the text of Dickens, it might be *apophatic hypotyposis*: the vivid representation of scene or event, brought before the mind's eye as if I were subject in close proximity to the experience, but produced through negation and indirection. Dickens gives us the possibility to see truthfully through a textual mnemotechnic that creates perception as if it were a new revelation. This is achieved through what might be thought initially to be paradoxical. Eschewing the pretence of mimetic transparency and yet offering the figuration of all that is there, the text of the city constructs and projects kaleidoscopic, fragmentary, iterable and protean impressions of itself. It achieves this through 'a reflexive or presentative opacity' (Marin 2001, 257) that is capable, if we resign ourselves to a patient, attentive, *resigned* and exhausted reading not driven by any purpose, goal, direction or teleologically desired meaning, by 'making the most of the representative transparency of descriptive discourse [that is a roof, this is a door] through its opaque boundaries' (Marin 2001, 257). We cannot find Todgers's because there is no map, no overview. Todgers's is not to be found, not because it does not exist but because it is everywhere; and everywhere *and* nowhere, once again, is where subjectivity finds itself when attempting to come to terms with London, foolishly seeking an authoritative perspective, a controlling and controllable point of view, rather than falling into the resignation of the passive perception, that involves one more intimately.