Invisible Architecture: Ideologies of Space in the Nineteenth-Century City

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Abstract

This thesis proposes and explores the concept of ‘invisible architecture’ as a means of interpreting the city in the nineteenth century. Invisible architecture is understood as the unseen structure which holds together the modern city, allowing it to exist as a concept despite the impossibility of gaining full knowledge of it. It has two sides, the first repressive and stabilising, the second fluctuating and utopian. In this way, the thesis is interested in the material and spatial basis of ideology, as well as the ways ideology can be disrupted or distorted. It is also interested in developing a link between invisible architecture and two forms of the unconscious: the psychoanalytic unconscious, which is read through Freud and Lacan, and Walter Benjamin’s ‘optical unconscious’. More broadly, the thesis explores the ongoing significance of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (1927-40) for nineteenth-century city literature.

Invisible architecture is explored by analysing how it operates as an object of interest and concern for a selection of writers whose work engages with the modern city between approximately 1830 and 1885. Chapter One focuses on Nikolai Gogol, whose essay ‘On Present-Day Architecture’ (1835) is read in relation to Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948). This text expresses the desire to bring into visibility the submerged history of architecture and to produce a modern urban architecture that is monolithic and controlling. At the same time, it imagines a city built from suspended structures made of iron, a form of architecture that is speculative and destabilising. Gogol’s use of the term ‘arabesque’ (as in his 1835 volume, *Arabesques*) is also investigated, with reference to ‘The Overcoat’ (1842), as a means of thinking about how the city both disrupts and evokes totality. Chapter Two looks at James Kay, Friedrich Engels and Elizabeth Gaskell’s writing on industrial Manchester, especially *Mary Barton* (1848). It argues that the trope of the underground, which is associated particularly with the working class, operates as a form of invisible architecture, and considers the ways Kay’s 1832 pamphlet on Manchester cotton-workers seeks to bring the city into greater visibility. Chapters Three and Four focus on Dickens’s London in *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) respectively. Chapter Three looks at the hidden, but unstable, connections between the domestic and financial ‘houses’ of Dombey, and reads the railway as a force which both breaks apart and connects the city of London. Chapter Four focuses on the river as indicating the presence of that which cannot be integrated into the city because it is fundamentally unknowable, drawing on Lacan’s work on vision and the unconscious. This chapter also suggests that city space in *Our Mutual Friend* is frequently uncanny, referring to Freud’s essay on the topic. Chapter 5 examines Zola’s Paris in *The Kill* (1872) and *The Ladies’ Paradise* (1883) in relation to Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), arguing that Haussmann’s boulevards and the new department stores of Second Empire Paris seem to open up the city with new vistas of space and glass, offering absolute visibility, but at the same time suppressing and destroying parts of the city. The conclusion looks at whiteness within city space, basing its discussion on texts covered in the preceding chapters. It proposes the contradictory combination of visibility and invisibility which whiteness signifies as a final example of invisible architecture, and argues for a dialectical connection between nineteenth-century whiteness and the whiteness of modernism.
Declaration

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Note on Abbreviations and Editions

Several abbreviations are used in this thesis when giving references in the main body of the text. These are as follows:

A: *Arabesques*

MB: *Mary Barton*

NS: *North and South*

GS: ‘George Silverman’s Explanation’

DS: *Dombey and Son*

OMF: *Our Mutual Friend*

K: *The Kill*

LP: *The Ladies’ Paradise*

I have used the Oxford editions of Zola’s novels throughout, as these are the most extensive modern English translations. I have also used the Oxford editions of Gaskell and Dickens throughout, except where these are not available, as with Dickens’s collected short fiction.

In the interests of consistency, I have followed the format of translated texts in my own discussions. This includes, notably, not using italics for French place names even when they are used in the original texts.
Invisible Architecture: Ideologies of Space in the Nineteenth-Century City

Introduction

[From the number of imaginable cities we must exclude those whose inner elements are assembled without a connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse.


What is invisible architecture? It is what holds the modern city together as a concept, but also what prevents it from existing as a unified and knowable entity, since it means there is always some part of the city which is hidden. It is structure which is not, and sometimes cannot, be seen, though its existence can be inferred or projected. It typically conceals or represses what is unpleasant, such as the connections between rich and poor, or wealth and waste, which exist under capitalism, but it also provides a space for the possible re-imagining or re-shaping of the city. It has two sides: the first reactionary, paranoid, ideological and molar; the second utopian, fluctuating and destabilising.¹ In particular, invisible architecture organises city space by limiting and directing visual perception.

Graham MacPhee has discussed ‘the invisible architecture of the visible’, defined as ‘the transcendental conditions of perceptual experience’: the hidden ways in which lived visual culture and technology are organised.² He examines how new visual technologies impacted on Western thought and culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, offering an archaeology of modern vision. My work is influenced by MacPhee’s claim that modern vision is architecturally structured, but my emphasis is more directly spatial and literary. I focus on how a selection of writers respond to what is hidden and invisible within city space between approximately 1830 and 1885, a period when

¹ I adopt ‘molar’ from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who characterise it as ‘rigid’ and always accompanied by the ‘molecular’, which is ‘supple’. A Thousand Plateaus, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 234-44.
cities seem no longer immediately graspable or comprehensible as a single whole, unless perhaps as a ‘mass’, a concept which unifies the city’s population only to render it more unknowable. William Cook Taylor, whom Asa Briggs calls ‘an apologist of the new industrial system’, described northern English industrial towns in the 1840s as ‘an aggregate of masses, our conception of which clothe themselves [sic] in terms which express something portentous and fearful’. Raymond Williams notes that, at this time, ‘the great city was […] so overwhelming, that its people were often seen in a single way: as a crowd, as “masses” or as a “workforce”’. For Charles Baudelaire, the modern city is ungraspable because it disallows totalisation, like modernity itself, which is ‘the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable’.

This is not to say that the city before this period was easily knowable. Williams argues that the nostalgic belief in a settled English countryside is an ever-receding myth, and something similar might be said of the unknowable or ‘overwhelming’ city, in which case modernity, like Williams’s figure of ‘Old England’, involves a symbolic rather than literal loss. Perhaps, if cities seem incomprehensible except through a radical reduction to ‘masses’, this sense of loss is inscribed primarily within the nineteenth-century itself, and is best understood as a desire for wholeness rather than as evidence of an actual, historically identifiable knowable city which has been lost. This is the view I take here, so that rather than attempting to establish some supposed site of original unity from which the modern city has fallen, I explore a selection of nineteenth-century texts that variously uncover, investigate, reinforce and undo the invisible architecture which signifies the city’s unknowability (and at times attempts to compensate for it).

This thesis, then, is primarily an account of the literary and cultural ‘imaginary’ of nineteenth-century city architecture rather than of its material reality, explored through the shifting place of

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6 *Country and City*, p. 12.
invisible structures in texts concerning cities – St Petersburg, Manchester, London and Paris – which are subject to the alienating and rationalising forces of capitalist modernity.

Although I use ‘invisible architecture’ to describe an architectural form of ideology and its contestations (see below), I have also chosen it because of its potential to open up connections between forms of architecture that seem otherwise separate. The cellar and the glass department store are two forms of invisible architecture which are both important in the nineteenth century, but operate in very different ways. The cellar provides invisibility through concealment, as a place for hiding, storing or discarding people and things, while the department store heightens visibility to the point of transparency, threatening to dematerialise architecture completely. These architectures of darkness and light both perform similar ideological work, however, organising and delimiting the boundaries of different regions of the city, while also harbouring that which cannot be encompassed by dominant modes of thought. This includes residual elements of the past, such as rural working class knowledge (in Mary Barton [1848] – see Chapter 2), and emergent elements of possible futures, such as dream-like and utopian structures (in ‘On Present-Day Architecture’ [1835] and Au Bonheur des Dames [1883] – see Chapters 1 and 5).

‘Invisible’ vs ‘Ideology’

Two key terms in my title – ‘invisible’ and ‘ideologies’ – require explanation here, especially since the ephemeral and fantastical phrase ‘invisible architecture’ seems to be contradicted by the solidity and materiality of ‘ideologies of space’. This juxtaposition is intentional, in order to indicate that what goes unseen can nonetheless have a real and significant effect on life within, and perceptions of, city space. Closer etymological and semantic examination of both words is needed, however, to establish more precisely the nature of this relationship.

The word ‘invisible’ has a long history in English, particularly in relation to religion, spirits and philosophical thought, descending originally from the Latin invisibilis. The OED gives an earliest citation of 1340, from Rolle’s Pricke of Conscience, which notes ‘How God invysible es, And
unchangeable, and endless’. In this sense the word describes something ‘That cannot be seen; that by its nature is not an object of sight’. To take an example from Our Mutual Friend (1865), at one point the metaphor of a ghost is used to describe the apparently dead John Harmon, who has become ‘invisible and voiceless’. This ghost will ‘look on for a little while longer at the state of existence out of which it had departed, and then should for ever cease to haunt the scenes in which it had no place’ (OMF2.14.379). In this metaphor, the ghost is not just invisible because it is hidden, but because it cannot be seen (though it looks at those it has left behind). Its invisibility is part of its nature. This sense of ‘invisible’ is complicated within the narrative, however, since not only is the ghost described by the narrator in the passage I have quoted, making it in some sense visible (as a kind of lost, gazing figure), but, as I discuss in the ‘Hidden Secrets and Hauntings’ section of Chapter 4, Harmon’s ghost is in fact seen, by Mrs Boffin. Moreover, the ghost metaphor follows a passage where Harmon is metaphorically ‘buried’ (OMF2.14.378), which implies being removed from view, but not becoming fundamentally unseeable.

Perhaps a better example of constitutional invisibility comes in Book I, Chapter 13, when Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood are waiting with a police inspector for the appearance of Rogue Riderhood, a suspected criminal. Eugene finds himself unable to stay still, taking ‘the fidgets’ (OMF1.13.165) in his legs, arms, chin, back, forehead and finally hair, telling Mortimer ‘Invisible insects of diabolical activity swarm in this place. I am tickled and twitched all over. Mentally, I have now committed a burglary under the meanest circumstances, and the myrmidons of justice are at my heel’ (OMF1.13.165). These ‘invisible insects’ are absolutely invisible, perceived but never seen. They are less material than ghosts because they are not remnants of physical people, hence not linked to a prior material presence. Most importantly, only their effects, not they themselves, can be described; what defines them is their ‘activity’ rather than any shape or form. This kind of invisibility is impossible to locate, seemingly both inside and outside the subject: Eugene’s torment is mental, yet

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7 OED, invisible.  
he is ‘tickled and twitched’ as if by an external force. It is this sense of the invisible in particular that calls for reference to the psychoanalytic unconscious, since the unconscious provides a way of accounting for symptoms like those Eugene experiences as signifiers of conflicting drives (the desire to sexually conquer Lizzie against the morality or guilt which resists this act, for instance), without either collapsing the invisible into some alternative form of presence or rendering it purely metaphorical.

There is another meaning of ‘invisible’ which is also important in this thesis, described by the OED as ‘Not in sight; not to be seen at a particular place or time, or by a particular person’. Again this can be illustrated with reference to Our Mutual Friend. In Book III, Chapter 5, following their wedding, John embraces Bella, pulling her into his body in what the narrator calls (somewhat ironically in light of John Harmon’s own disappearance) ‘one of those mysterious disappearances on Bella’s part’ (OMF4.4.670), upon which she remains ‘invisible and silent’ (OMF4.4.670) for some time. This invisibility is like the earlier ‘burial’ of Harmon in that Bella is out of sight because she is hidden, but she is also liable to return to view. Though unseen, she is not unseeable.

These two meanings of ‘invisible’ – unseen and unseeable – run throughout the thesis. The cellars of Manchester in Chapter 2, for instance, are unseen, as are the drapery shops of Zola’s Au Bonheur des Dames in Chapter 5, the first through being underground and the second through being swallowed up by darkness. The arabesque in Gogol, however (as discussed in Chapter 1), points towards an absolute that is fundamentally unseeable, as God is for Rolle. The underside of the river in Our Mutual Friend, in Chapter 4, is also unseeable and unrepresentable, though it signifies an absolute absence rather than an absolute presence. The unseeable, like the unconscious, cannot be read directly, but only through its effects. There are, however, sites of overlap between the unseen and the unseeable: the railway in Dombey and Son (1848), discussed in Chapter 3, opens up what is unseen, such as the areas where the poor live, but also signifies the presence of death, which is unseeable.
The word ‘ideology’ came into English more recently. It is first recorded in 1796, after the French idéologie, used by the philosopher Destutt de Tracy to refer to a scientific version of ‘philosophy of mind’, making it a modern, post-French Revolution concept. As Raymond Williams observes, one of the dominant meanings in the nineteenth century was that of ‘abstract, impractical or fanatical theory’, what the OED calls ‘Abstract speculation; impractical or visionary theorizing’, a sense apparently first used by Napoleon and still observable today. This understanding of ideology aligns it with supposedly radical political or religious points of view, against either ‘common sense’ or scientific and rational thought. In this sense, politicians can accuse one another of being driven by ‘ideology’, whether free-market or socialist, with inherently negative connotations. Since Marx and Engels’s The German Ideology (1845-47), however, the word has also been of major importance to Marxist cultural theory, and it is in this sense that I use the term.

As Williams points out, ideology in The German Ideology refers primarily to the process by which the material basis of social domination is naturalised and concealed, through the failure to recognise that ruling ideas are ‘nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas’. This meaning of ideology as concealment aligns it with what I have described as the second sense of the invisible: the unseen or hidden. When ideology is understood as another term for false consciousness, this implies that ideology is ‘mere illusion’, behind which lies a truth (the truth that material inequality produces social inequality) which can be uncovered.

Another, more subtle, meaning of ideology was developed by twentieth-century Marxists, including Louis Althusser, which aligns ideology more with my first sense of the invisible: the unseeable. In his essay on ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), Althusser recognises that institutions such as schools and churches ‘ensure subjection to the ruling ideology’ in order to

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9 OED, ideology. See also Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, 2nd edn (Oxford: OUP, 1983), p. 154.
10 Keywords, p. 154.
11 Keywords, p. 155, p. 156.
maintain the relative states of the exploiters and the exploited, a sense congruent with that found in 
_The German Ideology_. What Althusser adds, though, is an account of ‘ideology in general’ which 
argues that it is not just false consciousness, but the condition of all social consciousness, so that it 
becomes inescapable. Althusser finds that ideology for Marx is ‘an imaginary assemblage (bricolage), 
a pure dream, empty and vain’, paralleling the status of the dream in pre-Freudian thought, when it 
appeared as a mere residue of the real, concrete world. He argues, by contrast, that ideology does 
not represent ‘the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation 
of those individuals to the real relations in which they live’, adding an extra level of alienation to this 
system (that of the imaginary relation to real relations).

For Althusser ideology is like the Freudian unconscious in that it ‘has no history’, meaning it 
has no outside. What he means by this is that ‘there is no ideology except by the subject and for 
subjects’, but also that ‘the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all 
ideology has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as subjects’. 
Ideology, then, is not something which deludes us, but our apparently natural, common-sense, 
transparent state of being. Without it, we cannot exist as subjects – that is, as social beings. It is 
invisible (unseeable) insofar as we cannot gain a perspective on it, cannot see it from outside. This 
meaning of ideology reverses Napoleon’s, since the person who stands for rational common sense is, 
in Althusser’s terms, the most deeply enmeshed in ideology.

Althusser puts this another way in a famous formulation, saying ideology ‘hails or 
interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects’, which is also the function of architectural 
space as I conceive it. My argument is that this takes place not just through architecture which is 
seen and acknowledged, but, and perhaps more so, through architecture that is unseen and

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14 Althusser, p. 161.
15 Althusser, p. 170, p. 171.
16 Althusser, p. 173.
unseeable, since its invisibility promotes the production and maintenance of Althusserian ‘imaginary relations’. For instance, if the connections between domestic homes and places of business (a topic of *Dombey and Son*) are invisible, then it is easier to conceive of these realms as separate spheres, and to conceive of the business as an independent and self-evident principle. Or, if a department store (the setting for *Au Bonheur des Dames*) renders the city beyond it invisible, this makes it easier to imagine one’s relations to it as those of a pure consumer, separate from any arena of production. What is unseen or unseeable has a real effect, therefore, *precisely through* its invisibility.

More recently, Slavoj Žižek has developed an understanding of ideology which incorporates the Lacanian concepts of the Real and Symbolic. Even more strongly than Althusser’s intervention (which already referred to psychoanalysis), Žižek’s account of ideology not only disallows any understanding of it as false consciousness, but makes the concept of false consciousness the most pernicious form of ideology, along with all others which claim to unveil a hidden truth. In *Less than Nothing* (2012), he does this through reference to Lacan’s statement ‘*les non-dupes errrent*’ (‘the non-dupes err’), which he glosses as:

Those who err are precisely those cynics who dismiss the symbolic texture as a mere semblance and are blind to its efficacy, to the way the symbolic affects the Real, to the way we can intervene into the Real through the symbolic. Ideology does not reside primarily in taking seriously the network of symbolic semblances which encircle the hard core of *jouissance* [enjoyment, but opposed to *plaisir*, which is a more rational, limited form of pleasure, based on culture rather than sexual energy]; at a more fundamental level, ideology is the cynical dismissal of these semblances as ‘mere semblances’ with regard to the Real of *jouissance*.17

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The symbolic, such as dreams for Freud, is not just an arbitrary expression of the Real (material waking life, in this case), but something which acts upon the Real; indeed, the symbolic is inseparable from, and provides our only, always mediated, access to the Real. Ideology is thus not just being fooled by an illusion which justifies the dominant power, but, more fundamentally, the belief in a truth or reality beyond or behind all semblance.

Such an account rejects any association between ideology and invisibility in the sense of the unseen or hidden, since to be hidden implies a potential unveiling of truth (*alethia*, to use the Greek term), which for Žižek is the heart of ideology. Ideologies of space, in this sense, are any structures which direct the gaze away from themselves to imply some ‘deeper’ truth from which they are supposedly separate. Gogol’s Gothic towers, which fade from view to imply an unrepresentable God (see Chapter 1), are a prime example of this process.

While the invisible and the ideological do not coincide precisely, then, in its dual meanings of unseen and unseeable, ‘invisible’ nonetheless succeeds in indicating two of the most important meanings of ‘ideology’. Furthermore, in using these two terms I adopt a position, in line with the Žižek passage quoted above, that semblance and illusion, the ephemeral and invisible, are implicated in the material world, at once acting upon the social life of the city and providing a means of reading it, even if such reading requires the interpretation of gaps and absences.

**The Constellation and the Dialectical Image**

In asserting that there are valuable connections to be made between disparate architectural spaces, such as the cellar and the department store, I draw on Walter Benjamin’s concept of the ‘constellation’ (in German, *Konstellation*, rather than *Sternbild*, which connotes greater fixity through its use of the term *bild*, which describes stable, stationary images). This concept is closely related to what Peter Buse et al. describe as ‘Perhaps the [Arcades] Project’s most complex theoretical term’, the ‘dialectical image’, to which I return throughout the thesis.¹⁸

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The constellation appears in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), where Benjamin uses it to explain the relationship between ‘ideas’ and ‘phenomena’:

The idea [...] belongs to a fundamentally different world from that which it apprehends. The question of whether it comprehends that which it apprehends, in the way in which the concept genus includes the species, cannot be regarded as the criterion of its existence. That is not the task of the idea. Its significance can be illustrated with an analogy. Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. This means, in the first place, that they are neither their concepts nor their laws. They do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena, and in no way can the latter be criteria with which to judge the existence of ideas.\(^\text{19}\)

The constellation describes a method of reading the world which does not alter or encompass the objects upon which it relies, as a genus encompasses a species. A constellation does not change the position or nature of the stars, nor does it add to our knowledge of the stars as stars; instead it introduces a new framework or perspective for what already exists, bringing into relationship things that have no fundamental link to one another. For Benjamin an idea, like a constellation, multiplies meaning without imposing any final or determinant ‘law’ upon the objects it ‘apprehends’. An example of such a determinant meaning would be that ‘mammal’ is not just one possible way of describing a dog, but a dog *is* a mammal, so that ‘mammal’ is not an idea but a label which defines and limits what it describes. The distinction between ‘apprehending’ and ‘comprehending’ points to this difference, since it separates perception (especially visual perception, since we are talking about constellations) from knowledge-as-mastery (comprehension). The German original for ‘apprehends’ is *Erfaßte*, which connotes capturing, grasping or seizing. The idea ‘grasps’ phenomena and constellates them by constructing a line or network which connects them together. This is not so much a way of *knowing* these objects as of seeing them differently. It is also not the only way of seeing them: a star can be part of more than one constellation, and a constellation might have many

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stars to choose from in order to produce the desired image.\(^{20}\) This is the approach I have adopted towards the texts in this thesis, which are constellated in relation to the idea of invisible architecture.

The constellation is associated with the dialectical image in Convolute N of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (1927-40), its most methodological section, entitled ‘On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress’:

> It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.—Only dialectical images are general images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. [N2a, 3]\(^{21}\)

This concept of a dialectics which is not inside progress, but instead breaks it apart, is central to Benjamin’s approach to history and the city. The constellation is employed to describe the way past and present moments relate to one another in such a dialectic: they do not act upon one another directly (do not cast their light on one another, in Benjamin’s visual language) but come together to produce an image which is also a constellation, and therefore an idea. As Robert Gibbs puts it, ‘The two moments interrupt each other. This rhythm is structured so that the past and present are related without becoming identified. [...] At each now there is a new reading of a past image, but what is read is not identical or necessarily easily assimilated into the present’.\(^{22}\) The suggestion that new ideas can emerge in this coming together of historical moments indicates the political potential of


this attitude: moments which are in themselves ideological might generate utopian or revolutionary ideas when dislodged from their usual time and space.

Benjamin also makes the claim that dialectical images are encountered in language. This is an implicit justification of his technique in the *Arcades*, which arranges textual fragments in convolutes that act as constellations, bringing new ideas or images into being. It also justifies an approach which aims to identify and produce dialectical images in and between literary texts, such as I adopt here.

Is there, though, any way in which the dialectical image might be fundamental to, or even constitutive of language? One answer is to refer to Derrida’s concept of ‘iterability’. For Derrida, in order to be understandable, all speech acts have the structure of repetitions or quotations of previous (or subsequent) speech acts, and must be separable from their producer in order to be transmissible. Each instance of language is therefore dislocated in relation to its own context, so that language is never properly (in the sense that ‘literal meaning’ is ‘sens propre’) at home in its moment of utterance. As Derrida puts it, ‘a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription’. Though this is exemplified by writing, it is a function of all language, which is always ‘the nonpresent remainder [restance] of a differential mark cut off from its putative “production” or origin’. Language, then, has the character of atemporality, meaning that more than any other object it is susceptible to being ‘torn from its context’, which is Benjamin’s description of historical citation.

Supporting this connection with language, something of the dialectical image seems present when Benjamin describes the relationship between an original text and its translation in ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1923), an essay on which Derrida comments in ‘Des tours de Babel’ (1985). At one point Benjamin describes this relationship with a comparison:

\[\text{24 ‘Signature Event Context’, p. 10.}\]
\[\text{25 } \text{Arcades, p. 476.}\]
As the tangent touches the circle fleetingly and only at a single point, and as that contact (though not at that point) is prescribed for it by the law in accordance with which it continues its straight course into infinity, so the translation touches the original fleetingly and only at that vanishingly small point of sense before (obedient to the law of fidelity) pursuing its unique course in the freedom of linguistic usage.\textsuperscript{26}

Derrida notes: ‘On at least three occasions, this “fleeting” character is emphasized, and always in order to situate the contact with meaning, the infinitely small point of meaning that the languages barely brush’.\textsuperscript{27} The key difference between this and Benjamin’s formulations in the \textit{Arcades} is that here the fleeting contact between texts takes place in accordance with a ‘law of fidelity’. This is not primarily fidelity to the original, but to what Benjamin calls ‘the nucleus of pure language’, to which all languages relate.\textsuperscript{28} This suggests in turn a definition of the dialectical image that distinguishes it from translation: the dialectical image emerges in fleeting contacts between language-objects that are \textit{not} determined by any laws of fidelity. It is in this sense an ‘improper’ translation, one defined by fracture and disjunction rather than unity. It is to this fleeting contact, and this fracture, that I appeal when referring to the dialectical image.

\textbf{The Optical Unconscious}

I have already described invisible architecture as that part of structure in the city which is unseen or unseeable. Is it, then, the same as Benjamin’s ‘optical unconscious’, discussed in the essays ‘Little History of Photography’ (1929) and ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility’ (1935-39)? Benjamin describes the optical unconscious through the following observation:

\begin{quote}
While it is common that, for example, an individual is able to offer an account of the human gait (if only in general terms), that same individual has no knowledge at all of human posture
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{28} ‘The Task of the Translator’, p. 42.
\end{thebibliography}
during the fraction of a second when a person begins to take a step. Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals this posture to him.  

The optical unconscious is what goes unseen in the everyday world of the senses, like the murder David Hemmings’s character in the film *Blow-Up* (1966) may have unknowingly witnessed, something he only realises when looking back through enlarged copies of the photographs he has taken.

I return to the optical unconscious in Chapter Four, but it is important to note here that it is distinguished from invisible architecture in two main ways. The first is that invisible architecture draws on the psychoanalytic unconscious, which is not identical to Benjamin’s concept. Though it destabilises the authority of the subject, as Freud does, Benjamin’s optical unconscious is rooted in the visual field, suggesting its contents are ultimately available to be seen, even if they require the technological intermediary of the camera lens. In Detlef Martins’s words, Benjamin ‘consistently located the unconscious in the material world itself, not outside, behind, above or below it, but within’. Freud’s unconscious, by contrast, has ‘no access to consciousness except via the preconscious, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications’. The conscious mind cannot ‘see through’ the preconscious in order to access the unconscious; only products of the unconscious which have already undergone modification by the primary process (dreams, slips of the tongue and so on) are available to analysis. The question, then, is whether Benjamin’s camera is a transformative mediation analogous to Freud’s primary process or a means of somehow gaining access to the optical unconscious. Is it the unseeable or the unseen?

Benjamin’s language of ‘revealing’ suggests the latter, but his references to ‘distraction’, the condition of experiencing film, imply the former. Distraction, says Benjamin, defines film as it has

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always defined architecture: ‘the optical reception of architecture […] spontaneously takes the form of casual noticing, rather than attentive observation […] Film, by virtue of its shock effects, is predisposed to this form of perception’.\(^3\) Full appropriation of the perceived object is made impossible by the very technology (film) that allows it, implying that the optical unconscious, like Freud’s unconscious, cannot be mastered.

Partly this is true of the Freudian unconscious because, as Lacan shows, it is not inside the subject at all, but a relation or a dynamic which structures him/her, above all in language, and, moreover, it is \textit{nothing but this dynamic}. Lacan warns against ‘the impropriety of trying to turn [the unconscious] into an inside’, in this respect agreeing with Benjamin, whose optical unconscious is outside the self. He instead defines it as follows:

The subject, the Cartesian subject, is what is presupposed by the unconscious […]

The Other is the dimension required by the fact that speech affirms itself as truth [for instance, by naming the subject].

The unconscious is, between the two of them, their cut in action.\(^4\)

My concept of invisible architecture takes account of this, recognising that there are parts of city structures which are \textit{in principle} unknowable, functioning not as spaces but as cuts between spaces—the river in \textit{Our Mutual Friend} is perhaps the best example (see Chapter 4).

Invisible architecture’s second difference from Benjamin’s optical unconscious is simply that it emphasises the \textit{architectural}, which is to say, structures that have been created or utilised by people (and, conversely, what such structures cannot encompass). This moves my focus away from


technologies of seeing, the topic of MacPhee, and towards the way in which vision is articulated by
and through city space.35

The Architectural Unconscious

This thesis, and the concept of invisible architecture, are also indebted to another element of
Benjamin’s thought regarding the unconscious: his reading of the Swiss architectural historian
Sigfried Giedion’s claim that ‘In the nineteenth century [...] construction plays the role of the
subconscious’.36 Though Benjamin refers to Giedion’s Bauen in Frankreich, published in 1928, Giedion
develops this idea in his most significant book, Space, Time and Architecture, based on lectures given
at Harvard University in 1938-39.

Giedion identifies iron as the key building material of the nineteenth century, noting that
after the Darby family first developed bar iron in England around 1750, ‘Mass production of iron was
now possible, and this advance from manual production of the metal was to change the face of the
whole world’.37 Giedion raises the question of why ‘these tendencies [of using iron, glass and steel],
so important to the future, are to be discovered almost nowhere except in the utilitarian structures
of the nineteenth century? Why was their effect upon its official architecture so slight?’ He concludes
that this is related to the development of a ‘schism between the architect and the engineer’, in which
‘the engineer remained subordinate and detached from the architect’, so that ‘Construction was, as
it were, the subconsciousness of architecture; there lay dormant in it impulses that only later found
explicit theoretical statement’.38 Benjamin’s modification of this runs as follows:

35 Related to the optical unconscious is Juliet MacCannell’s concept of the ‘spatial unconscious’, based on
Deleuze’s work on cinema, particularly the ‘time-image’, which MacCannel calls an “anywhere” of a time
dense with space [which] appears to be no more or less than an unconscious, akin to Freud’s andere Schauplatz
(“other scene”) suddenly unburied from beneath its symbolic repression’. There is a link here to Benjamin’s
concept of a ‘space informed by the unconscious’. A full comparison of the two, however, lies beyond the
scope of this thesis. See Juliet MacCannel, ‘The City, Year Zero: Memory and the Spatial Unconscious’, Journal
36 Giedion, Bauen in Frankreich (Leipzig and Berlin, 1928) quoted in Arcades, p. 391.
37 Sigfried Giedion, Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition, 5th edn (Cambridge, MA:
38 Space, Time and Architecture, p. 182, p. 183.
Attempt to develop Giedion’s thesis. ‘In the nineteenth century’, he writes, ‘construction plays the role of the subconscious’. Wouldn’t it be better to say ‘the role of bodily processes’—around which ‘artistic’ architectures gather, like dreams around the framework of physiological processes? [K1a, 7]^{39}

The fundamental shifts Benjamin makes are, firstly, to make this structure explicitly bodily, and secondly, to reverse the relationship between immaterial and material implied by Giedion’s schema. Construction, which Giedion labels the ‘subconscious’ (immaterial), becomes ‘bodily processes’ (material), while artistic architecture, which Giedion sees as the conscious (which is material, at least in the sense that it is in direct contact with reality) becomes ‘dreams’ (immaterial). With this shift Benjamin does away with the conscious completely: for him, nineteenth-century architecture is not a model of the waking mind, but of the sleeping (but embodied) subject, or rather collective.

Commenting on the first part of this shift, Susan Buck-Morss observes that: ‘Benjamin resurrects an image of the body politic, out of fashion in political discourse since the baroque era, in which the nineteenth-century dream elements register the collective’s vital signs’.^{40} This allows him to emphasise his conception of the ‘sleeping collective’, as in the suggestion, two entries further on in the Arcades, that ‘The first tremors of awakening serve to deepen sleep [K1a, 9]’.^{41} As Buck-Morss notes, Benjamin ‘is referring to the kitsch at the end of the century that thickened the dream state. The proponents of Jugendstil [Art Nouveau] rejected kitsch and tried to break out into “free air”, but they understood this only as an ideational space [...] Jugendstil was thus only “the dream that one is awake”’.^{42}

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^{39} Arcades, p. 391.
^{41} Arcades, p. 391.
^{42} Buck-Morss, p. 272.
Jugendstil is also associated with the idea of construction playing the role of the subconscious (or, for Freud, the unconscious) by Irving Wohlfarth, who relates this to Nietzsche, Weber, and Ibsen’s The Master Builder (1893). Wohlfarth positions Jugendstil as a key example of the dialectic of disenchantment and re-enchantment which marked the nineteenth century:

What Weber calls the ‘disenchantment of the world’ [a process of rationalisation associated with the Enlightenment], Baudelaire, Marx, and Benjamin describe as ‘the loss of the halo’ or the ‘decline of aura’. All four claim that the failure to acknowledge this basic world-historical fact is likely to result in a surrogate re-enchantment of the world. Benjamin describes such re-enchantment in terms of the manifold ‘phantasmagorias’ of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, among them those of the ‘interior’.43

What makes Jugendstil so significant is that it materially embodies this process, providing a direct example of construction playing the role of the subconscious, or of bodily processes being surrounded by dreams. As Wohlfarth puts it:

Jugendstil architecture is the first to transfer glass and iron techniques from railway stations and exhibition halls to the construction of private dwellings. But it also re-envelops these technical forms in artistic ones, thereby promoting opaque, phantasmagorical confusions between the old and the new. Both opening up and closing off the interior, it ambiguously contains the material(ist) promise of a new ‘transparency’ held out by glass and iron. In short, it mirrors the basic contradictions of its time. 44

Jugendstil, then, contains both ideology and the utopian possibility of a future beyond ideology (or, at least, beyond current ideologies). For Benjamin, this is the condition of the nineteenth century more generally: utopia and ideology are not separate, but intimately bound together, and tied to

44 Wohlfarth, p. 158.
material forms. Jugendstil is, in this sense, a closer model for invisible architecture than was the optical unconscious.

Elizabeth Grosz’s conception of utopia is useful here, as it helps clarify both its ideological dimension and its relation to dreams. She argues that:

the utopian is not the projection of a future at all, although this is how it is usually understood; rather, it is the projection of a past or present as if it were the future [...], a future in which time will cease to be a relevant factor.

Utopia, like ideology (which presents the current state of the world as ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’) is a freezing of historical progression. Furthermore, utopia is not a description of the future but of immanent aspects of the past or present, which are projected forwards, reinforcing the status quo through the same act that seems to present an alternative to it. Grosz’s word ‘projection’ intimates the visual nature of this process, suggesting that it takes place within a regime of film-like images. Benjamin’s version of this simultaneous freezing (of history) and projection (of an imagined future) is the dream, which gathers around the structures of the nineteenth-century. For Althusser, ‘ideology has no history [...]’, since its history is outside it’, making it ‘a pure dream’, though for him, as for Benjamin, this does not make it meaningless: both ideology and dreams are symbolic structures that should be carefully read. For Freud, dreams, like psychosis, exhibit ‘a complete lack of sense of time’, and are built from material taken from both past and present (having an ‘emphasis upon recent and upon infantile material’). This makes them utopian in Grosz’s sense, in that time ‘cease[s]

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45 Fredric Jameson argues that ideology and utopia must be thought together, since ‘all class consciousness—or in other words, all ideology in its strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes—is in its very nature Utopian’. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 279.

46 Elizabeth Grosz, Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 143. Grosz also explores the concept of ‘embodied utopias’ (a parallel, perhaps, to Benjamin’s embodied ideological dream), arguing that to promote this idea architecture should recognise its provisionality, accepting that it deals with ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’; acknowledge gender difference by first acknowledging its own phallocentrism; and abandon the pursuit of fixed ideals in favour of multiplicity. Grosz, pp. 148-50.

47 Althusser, p. 160.
to be a relevant factor’, and because they are built not out of wholly new material, but from reworked elements of existing thoughts and images.48

Benjamin’s reformulation of Giedion’s claim can also be expressed in terms of ‘truth’, which would oppose both ideology and utopia. Martins argues that:

In reworking Giedion’s dualism into a dialectic between physiological processes and phantasmagoric dreams, Benjamin pointed to the immanence of truth within the expression of bodily labours and the physiognomy of historical events. This immanence, however, remained impeded by bourgeois controls, albeit less in the technical realm (unworthy of bourgeois attention) than in the artistic.49

There is a weakness in the Giedion-Benjamin model, which I have termed the ‘architectural unconscious’, that becomes evident here, though it is clearest in Giedion’s formulation. This is the implication that an architectural or historical ‘truth’ can be uncovered and separated from what mystifies it, after which the modern world will be able to enter onto a path of authentic progress. This is linked to what Hilde Heynen calls Giedion’s ‘programmatic’ (rather than ‘transitory’) concept of modernity, an approach which assumes that ‘a single vast evolutionary pattern underlies the history of architecture and that this evolution develops more or less in a linear fashion, culminating in twentieth-century modern architecture’.50 Derrida encounters this problem in Kant, and throughout Western philosophy, wherever architecture serves as a metaphor for a presumed original truth: ‘the architect of reason searches, probes, prepares the ground. In search of the bedrock, the ultimate Grund on which to raise the whole of metaphysics. [...] The desire of reason would be a fundamental desire, a desire for the fundamental’.51 In Martins’s commentary on Benjamin, similarly, ‘bourgeois controls’ seem to be imposed on top of ‘immanent’ truth, hiding but not fundamentally altering or interfering with it. This elevates what I have called the invisible as unseen (or hidden) into

48 The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 164, p. 312.
49 Martins, p. 205.
a position of authority, a process Žižek warns against as a belief that ideology can be overcome, in a self-sufficient Real that can be directly accessed or restored.

The concept of invisible architecture attempts to compensate for this, stressing that ideology and anti-ideology exist on the same plane, bound up with one another, so that no antecedence can be established. What is ‘deeper’ is not, I argue, necessarily more truthful. This is what a non-depth Freudianism adds to (or clarifies in) Benjamin’s modification of Giedion: if truth is in the place of the unconscious, there is no possibility of a ‘pure’ or uninhibited access to it. Truth is not separable from its modifications and concealments, whether ideological or utopian.

The City from Above and the City from Below

This idea of ‘depth’ in the city (which is especially important in Chapters 2 and 5) has often been discussed in relation to another problem: the perspective from which the city is viewed. This is a central area of concern in many accounts of the modern city, and crystallises several key issues: how perception operates in the modern city; what can be seen and what remains unseen; and how forms of viewing interact with architecture and literature.

Most critics and theorists divide views of the city into two main categories: views from above, and views from below, though they characterise these positions in different ways. Michel de Certeau distinguishes between the view from the summit of the old World Trade Center in New York and the view of the city crowds below, labelling these positions the ‘voyeur’ and the ‘walker’ respectively. The voyeur is described in relation to the Icarus myth:

An Icarus flying above these waters [of the city], he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts

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52 Eleanor Courtemanche associates the ‘worm’s-eye’ and ‘bird’s-eye’ views with Adam Smith’s concept of the ‘invisible hand’, which, she argues, operates in Victorian fiction through the interplay of these perspectives. The ‘Invisible Hand’ and British Fiction, 1818-60 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 3.
him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a
text that lies before one’s eyes.\textsuperscript{53}

The association of mastery (but also hubris) with the view from above is a common trope. For de
Certeau, this position is linked to a capacity to ‘read’ the city, whereas the walkers below, whose
paths trace out a series of marks invested with meaning, are the city’s ‘writers’.

Dickens, famously, walks and writes the city. After describing his experience as a young boy
at Warren’s blacking-warehouse, in the autobiographical fragment quoted by John Forster, he writes:

\begin{quote}
In my walks at night I have walked there often [i.e. in the Strand, where the warehouse was
located], since then, and by degrees I have come to write this. It does not seem a tithe of
what I might have written, or of what I meant to write.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Writing and walking run together here, though writing cannot, for Dickens, fully encompass the
experience of walking in the city (which is the title of de Certeau’s essay). Walking might even divert
writing into unintended paths, since Dickens has not written what he meant to write. For Benjamin,
writing and walking are connected through the figure of the \textit{flâneur}, among whom he counts
Baudelaire, Balzac and Dickens.\textsuperscript{55} Benjamin claims that ‘The social base of flânerie is journalism. As
flâneur, the literary man ventures into the marketplace to sell himself’, thus turning his leisure time
into labour-time\textsuperscript{56} The \textit{flâneur} is for Benjamin, though, also a \textit{reader}; of ‘faces’, for instance, which
reveal to him the owner’s ‘profession’, ‘ancestry’ and ‘character’.\textsuperscript{57}

David Pike, whose focus is the city’s underground spaces, also separates out the view from
above and from below, arguing that these were the most persistently described and imagined

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{53} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley and L.A.: University of
\footnote{55} See \textit{Arcades}, pp. 416-55. Gillian Piggott argues, however, that Dickens’s use of ‘moral prescription and
political satire’ distinguishes him from the disinterested Baudelairean \textit{flâneur}. \textit{Dickens and Benjamin: Moments
of Revelation, Fragments of Modernity} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 175.
\footnote{56} \textit{Arcades}, p. 446.
\footnote{57} \textit{Arcades}, p. 429.
\end{footnotes}
viewpoints in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Paris and London. The separation of these views produces a ‘vertical framework’, which ‘serves two distinct functions: it allows those it places underground to give expression to their own unfulfilled desires, and it allows persons placed aboveground by its framework to make some manner of sense out of those desires’.\(^5\) The view from above, says Pike, was ‘epitomized by the “Asmodeus flight”, derived from an eighteenth-century Spanish novel where the titular crippled devil flies above Madrid, unroofing the houses below’.\(^6\) Asmodeus is cited by Dickens in the ‘good spirit’ passage of *Dombey and Son*, discussed in Chapter 3, which imagines the social awareness that could be promoted by such a perspective.

The elevated, surveying viewpoint also recurs elsewhere in the thesis: in Chapter 1 it can be seen in Gothic architecture, which is associated with God and the Tsar; in Chapter 2, it is the perspective sought by James Kay in his survey of Manchester; in Chapter 5, it can be seen in Saccard’s view of Paris, and in Octave Mouret’s view of the Ladies’ Paradise from one of the mezzanine levels, a moment which dramatises Giedion’s observation that, in the department store, ‘the floors form a single space. They can be taken in, so to speak, “at a glance”’.\(^7\) This viewpoint is for Asa Briggs symbolised by the ‘balloon view’, which represents the hope of a ‘new and more ordered vision’ of the city.\(^8\) It seeks to overcome the city’s invisibility.

The view from below is also present in the thesis, though it can be harder to pin down or identify definitively. It would include the working-class families of Gaskell and Engels’s Manchester in Chapter 2, especially those who live in cellars, and large parts of *Our Mutual Friend*, discussed in Chapter 4, including John Harmon’s attempt to ‘bury’ his identity amid the anonymity of London’s streets. This perspective is more intimate, and frequently enters city spaces which are unseen by the view from above.

\(^6\) Pike, p. 8. Though the original source is Spanish, the 1707 novel, *le Diable boiteux*, is French, by Alain-René Lesage.
\(^7\) Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich*, quoted in Arcades, p. 40.
\(^8\) Briggs, p. 53.
Deborah Nord, in *Walking the Victorian Streets* (1995), points to ‘two dominant perceptual and literary modes of evoking the nineteenth-century city: the panoramic view and the sudden, instructive encounter with a solitary figure’, suggesting as examples Wordsworth’s view from Westminster Bridge and his ‘epiphanic encounter with the blind beggar in book 7 of The Prelude’. If Nord places emphasis on the unexpected encounter as a peculiarly urban experience, Sharon Marcus’s *Apartment Stories* (1999) argues that the viewpoint of the domestic interior must also be considered, focusing on apartment houses, which were ‘not enclosed cells, sealed off from urban streets, markets, and labor but fluid spaces perceived to be happily or dangerously communicating with more overtly public terrain’. Steve Dillon’s article ‘Victorian Interior’ also emphasises the interior, but draws attention to its enclosure and separation from the outside world, arguing that members’ clubs and domestic architecture act as enclosing, even imprisoning spaces. The topic of enclosure is significant to Benjamin too: for him, the nineteenth century ‘conceived the interior as a receptacle for the person’, the bourgeoisie seeking to protect itself from the traumatising external world, as described by Georg Simmel in ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ (1903).

Benjamin is also interested more directly in the view from above and the view from below, in relation to historiography. As Wohlfarth notes, for Benjamin the conventional historicist writes history ‘from some phantasmagorical vantage point above the fray, he “empathizes” with “the victor”’. The reference here is to the ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1940), especially Thesis VII, which posits that ‘empathy with the victors invariably benefits the rulers’. By contrast, says Wohlfarth:

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65 *Arcades*, p. 220.
66 Wohlfarth, p. 185.
To the bird’s-eye view of the soaring imperial eagle Benjamin implicitly opposes that of a subterranean ‘hunchback’, who is his theologico-political counterpart to Marx’s ‘old mole’. It is from below that history is to be made and written, unmade and unwritten.68

The hunchback is the figure imagined to operate the chess-playing ‘mechanical Turk’ that stands for historical materialism in Thesis I: ‘The puppet called “historical materialism” is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight’.69 What is interesting here is that Benjamin does not, as Wohlfarth implies, put himself in the position of the hunchback, but of the puppet (that is, the historical materialist). There is thus in Thesis VII an implicit critique of Benjamin’s own method, as relying on, but concealing, theology as its basis. Theology is presented as a kind of trump card against other methods, but one that succeeds only when it remains hidden. The view from below in Benjamin is complicated, then, and ambiguous. It is not a perspective that is in the service of the masters, but neither is it wholly controllable by those who seek to present an alternative history. It is not that historical materialism uses the hunchback, but rather that the hunchback (who is never seen) operates historical materialism from within, even though Benjamin describes this relationship as historical materialism ‘enlisting the services’ of theology.

This image of the ‘mechanical Turk’ is also an image of invisible architecture as I conceive it. Not only is the hunchback hidden, but ‘A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table [on which the chessboard was laid] was transparent from all sides’.70 It is thus a structure that combines two opposing forms of invisibility, transparency and concealment, and does so in the same location, making it an image of both enclosure and openness. This duality remains a central concern throughout the thesis.

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68 Wohlfarth, p. 185.
The most significant theorist of city space, and space in general, however, offering a different model from the above/below duality, is Henri Lefebvre, who proposes a spatial triad in *The Production of Space* (1974) in support of his basic claim that ‘*(Social) space is a (social) product*.71 This triad, an attempt to go beyond the ‘oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms’ in systems of two elements, consists of: 1) ‘spatial practice’ or ‘perceived’ space; 2) ‘representations of space’ or ‘conceived’ space; and 3) ‘representational spaces’ or ‘lived space’.72 I discuss Lefebvre further in Chapter 2, but, briefly, these three elements can be defined as: 1) directly experienced space, as felt through routines, movements and so on; 2) ‘the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers’, linked to mapping, and the view from above, this is ‘the dominant space in any society’; and 3) ‘space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols’, this is space as a field of contested ideas and symbolic resonances, which can coincide with the view from below, but is not co-extensive with it.73 The major importance of this schema is that it proposes a dynamic re-conceptualisation of space that allows us to theorise how the view from above and the view from below are produced in particular societies and at particular times, through particular spatial organisations and their associated class, power, gender, race and other relations.

**Reading Modernity, Reading Architecture**

This thesis is part of a recent tradition of reading nineteenth-century literature in relation to modernity and modernism. This takes place mainly through my use of the modernist theory of Benjamin and Freud, though the conclusion also refers to modernist architecture. Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) is a prime example of this type of work, described by Berman as ‘a study of the dialectics of modernization and modernism’.74 The nineteenth century is positioned by Berman as liminal in this process, since its public is increasingly modern but ‘can remember what it is like to live, materially and spiritually, in worlds that are not modern at all’.75 Lynda Nead, in *Victorian*...
Babylon (2000), investigates modernity in Victorian London, recognising that modernity must, as Benjamin emphasised, be understood in relation to the ancient world. For Nead, ‘The spaces of improvement were caught up in a ceaseless exchange with the spaces of the city’s historical past’, so that ‘Modernity is not understood as a rupture with the past, or as a fresh start, but as a set of processes and representations that were engaged in an urgent and inventive dialogue with their own historical conditions of existence’. Isobel Armstrong’s Victorian Glassworlds (2008) is concerned with what she calls Victorian modernism, explored through the multiple historical and literary resonances of glass in the period, and concludes by drawing a connection between nineteenth-century modernity and modernism. Sara Thornton, in Advertising, Subjectivity and the Nineteenth-Century Novel (2009), reads the instability and informational excess of modernity in relation to advertising in nineteenth-century London and Paris, where the all-comprehending gaze (the goal of the view from above) is rendered both necessary and impossible by the thickening and hundredfold expansion of objects and people in the city. David Spurr’s Architecture and Modern Literature (2012) considers the interrelated modernity of architecture and literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arguing that ‘the nineteenth century literary interest in Gothic architecture signals, in important writers, both a break with classical values and an estrangement from what these writers perceive as the objective and subjective conditions of modernity’. Fredric Jameson has consistently read nineteenth-century realism as one moment in an ongoing historical process, so that it cannot be adequately read apart from modernism, most recently in The Antinomies of Realism (2013).

76 See, for instance, Convolute C of the Arcades, ‘Ancient Paris, Catacombs, Demolitions, Decline of Paris’. Arcades, pp. 82-100.
Spurr’s connection of architecture and literature also points to another group of texts that have influenced this thesis. These deal with architecture along with literature and/or theory, often destabilising conventional conceptions of architecture as the basis for solidity and security. Among the most important for my work are Philippe Hamon’s *Expositions* (1989), Denis Hollier’s *Against Architecture* (1974), Mark Wigley’s *Architecture and Deconstruction* (1993) and Antony Vidler’s *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992). Works on visuality and modernity to which I also owe a particular debt include Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer* (1992), Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Jacques Rancière’s *The Future of the Image* (2003) and Jacqueline Rose’s *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (1986).

**Cities and Texts**

The thesis is arranged around four cities: Manchester, London, Paris, and to a lesser extent, St Petersburg. Three were capital cities in the nineteenth century, the odd one out being Manchester. Paris, however, is *the* city for Benjamin: the ‘Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, as his exposé of the *Arcades* has it. In recent years, though, critics have proposed giving this title to other cities. Evan Horowitz’s article ‘London: Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ suggests that London ‘was closer to fulfilled modernity than Paris or any other nineteenth-century metropolis’ and provided an important influence on Baudelaire, Benjamin’s quintessential modern poet. Janet Wolff’s ‘Manchester, capital of the nineteenth century’ identifies Manchester’s industrialisation, its 1857 Art-Treasures Exhibition and its influence on Marx and Engels as justifying Benjamin’s title. St Petersburg, then, the city I consider least, is the real odd one out: on the edge of Europe, it has little claim to be at the centre of modernity. Even so, Berman identifies the building of St Petersburg, at

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the start of the eighteenth rather than nineteenth century, as ‘probably the most dramatic instance in world history of modernization conceived and imposed draconically from above’. Petersburg, then, might be the first modern city, and an appropriate place to start.

If my selection of cities presents a range of possible capitals of the nineteenth century, the justification for selecting writers and texts is less clear-cut. Most texts I consider are by major literary figures, and have been chosen for their interest in architecture, modernity and the city. Other selections would be possible, just as other stars could be selected to produce the same, or similar, constellations. The ones I have chosen are intended to sketch out a range of ways in which invisible architecture was depicted, explored and analysed in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapter One focuses on Nikolai Gogol’s essay ‘On Present-Day Architecture’ (1835). This text imagines at least two forms of modern architecture: the Gothic tower, which is monolithic and controlling, associated with God or the Tsar; and the dream-city described in the final paragraphs, where stories are suspended in the air, forming an architecture that is speculative rather than monological. Gogol’s essay captures the central dialectical tensions of invisible architecture, containing both the transparent and the opaque, the ideological and the utopian, and the unseen and the unseeable. In doing so it sketches out a range of possibilities within which the other texts I discuss can all be located. For this reason I have chosen it to open the thesis. Gogol’s essay is especially significant because of the unresolved nature of its architectural investigation. It struggles to settle on one key figure for modern architecture, being torn between Gothic design and transparent ironwork. This is, I argue, symptomatic of a wider nineteenth-century tension, best understood not as a contest between the past and the future, but as an expression of the condition of modernity as described by Benjamin, which consists of the juxtaposition of disparate temporal and structural fragments.

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85 M. Berman, p. 176.
Gogol also offers a figure which describes the city’s uncanny and unconscious side: the arabesque, a recurring, non-referential, oriental pattern that was important in German Romanticism, and which seems to both disrupt and evoke totality. The arabesque can also be a form of language, as in ‘The Overcoat’ (1842), set in St Petersburg. I read it as a figure of the city’s complexity which, paradoxically, seems to indicate a greater unity beyond it – the absolute. It is one way, I argue, in which Gogol engages with what I have called the ‘unseeable’ dimension of invisible architecture.

Chapter Two looks at James Kay, Engels and Elizabeth Gaskell’s writing on industrial Manchester, paying particular attention to Mary Barton (1848). It takes as its focus the cellar-dwelling, a new concept in the 1830s and 40s. It argues that Manchester’s underground spaces, which are associated particularly with the working class, operate as a form of invisible architecture, in the sense of the unseen or hidden. It also considers how Kay’s 1832 pamphlet on Manchester cotton-workers seeks to bring the city into greater visibility for the middle-classes. In all three writers, I argue, there is a concern with what the middle-class gaze can and cannot access, and an interest in the hidden connections between classes. For this reason the movement from above to below (and vice versa) represents a crossing of social as well as topographical thresholds, forming part of an attempt to stitch together the city, to make it at once comprehensible and united. This takes place in different ways, however, in the different texts I examine, with different political implications.

Chapter Three looks at the suppressed but vital connections between Mr Dombey’s trading house and his family home in Dickens’s Dombey and Son (1848), considering the ways business and home are defined in relation to one another, and to visibility and invisibility. I argue that there is a basic instability in how both houses, but the family home in particular, moves in and out of visibility. The railway, meanwhile, is read as a structure which both breaks through and connects the city of London, undoing the conventional role of architecture to secure and stabilise city space. The instability of the city in this novel is, I argue, linked to the instability of capitalism itself, to which the houses and railways relate as semi-autonomous elements. Whereas Chapter 2 is concerned with a
relatively fixed regime of the seen and unseen, Chapter 3 looks at how this regime becomes destabilised when capitalist forces are less clearly tied to specific forms of production (such as factory work). While the chapter is still concerned mainly with the unseen rather than the unseeable, and with the opaque rather than the transparent, the latter categories can be seen at work at times, including in the railway’s relationship to death and its ability to open up houses to view.

Chapter Four considers *Our Mutual Friend*, where the river both connects and divides the city. Like the railway, it takes on the structuring role of architecture, but it is also the site of what architecture cannot contain, and what exceeds it: the unseeable, or the unconscious. Drawing on Lacan’s work on vision and the unconscious, this chapter reads the river as a play of surfaces that both resist comprehension and demand to be read. The unseeable becomes more significant in this chapter, though the unseen remains important in relation to the hidden secrets which are bound up with the buildings and structures of the novel. I also suggest that city space in *Our Mutual Friend* is highly uncanny, both familiar and unfamiliar, helping to explain its resistance to rational understanding.

Chapter 5 examines Zola’s Paris in *The Kill* (1872) and *The Ladies’ Paradise* (1883) in relation to Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which is used in order to think about how transparency and image relate to commodities within the structures depicted in the novels. I argue that Haussmann’s boulevards and the new department stores of Second Empire Paris, which seem to open up the city with new vistas of space and glass, offering absolute visibility, also suppress or destroy parts of the city. Even as it looks like the unseen has been completely abolished, it persists by becoming apparently unseeable against the brightness of the commodity and its associated architecture. I argue that architecture in Zola’s Paris becomes imbued with, and even replaced by, the character of the commodity. This chapter functions as a complement to Chapter 2, this time considering spaces of consumption rather than of production.

In the conclusion, I propose whiteness as a final way to think about invisible architecture in the nineteenth century. The general trajectory of the thesis, from the unseen to the unseeable, and
the opaque to the transparent, is here taken to its furthest point. As I read it, nineteenth-century whiteness is both associated with and opposed to the white walls of modernist buildings. It seems to be invisible, yet also promotes visibility. It is a cleansing and a blankness that both reveals and represses, and which stands for death as well as ideological control. Like all forms of invisible architecture, it represses its own presence. This chapter functions both to review the thesis’s key concerns, and to indicate how those concerns extend forward to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond.
Chapter 1—Gogol’s Dream-City

Nikolai Gogol’s status as one of the most influential nineteenth-century Russian writers is famously expressed in Dostoevsky’s apocryphal remark, ‘we all came out from Gogol’s Overcoat’, a reference to one of the writer’s best-known stories (‘The Overcoat’, 1842).\(^\text{86}\) Despite this quotation’s shaky provenance, it has a powerful hold over the popular academic imagination, suggesting that Gogol instigated a form of writing which Dostoevsky, Turgenev and others developed. Like Dostoevsky, Gogol was interested in city life, and St Petersburg in particular, the setting for his ‘Petersburg tales’. These include ‘Nevsky Prospect’, ‘The Portrait’ and ‘Diary of a Madman’, all published in Arabesques (1835). My focus is not these tales, however, but a lesser-known essay from Arabesques, ‘On Present-Day Architecture’.\(^\text{87}\) More than any other of Gogol’s texts, it highlights the relationship between architecture and the city, placing it in three temporal frames: as it has been, as it appears to Gogol in the 1830s, and as it might be in the future. Walter Benjamin, focusing on the third of these perspectives, read the essay as a dream-vision, finding in it ‘A divinatory representation of architectural aspects of the later world exhibitions’.\(^\text{88}\)

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\(^{88}\) Arcades, p. 198. Benjamin appears not to have read the whole essay but to have become aware of it through Wladimir Weidlé’s book Les Abeilles d’Aristée (1936).
The details of Gogol’s life and character can be hard to interpret, as Donald Fanger points out.\(^{89}\) According to Nabokov’s biography, he was adept at ‘weaving [legends] round his own past’, such as his claim that on arriving in St Petersburg as a young man his first act was to visit Pushkin, who he found in bed having played cards all night.\(^{90}\) For Nabokov, Gogol was ‘the oddest Russian in Russia’, making him appropriate amidst the oddness of St Petersburg, a city unlike any other in the country.\(^{91}\) Gogol’s first stories, however, were not urban but rural, based on his Ukrainian youth, and collected as *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1831-32). This Ukrainian background mingles with his Russianness in ‘A Glance at the Composition of Little Russia’, an essay in *Arabesques* that positions Ukraine as the site from which modern Russia developed.\(^{92}\) Gogol left Ukraine for St Petersburg in 1828, his father having died in 1825, eventually securing an appointment as adjunct-professor of History at St Petersburg University in 1834, a position for which, Carl Proffer observes, he was notably under-qualified.\(^{93}\) It is in this context that *Arabesques* was published.

The book contains an eclectic selection of stories and essays, written mostly just before and just after Gogol’s assumption of the university post, though earlier dates were given by Gogol for some of them, in an apparent attempt to forestall criticism by passing off the work as juvenilia. Despite these claims, the architecture essay was probably written in 1833-34.\(^{94}\) By way of context, the early 1830s had seen iron and glass raise new possibilities for architecture in Europe, with structures like Fontaine’s Galerie d’Orléans in Paris (1829-31) anticipating the more elaborate galleries, train stations and World Exhibition buildings which would be built in the second half of the century.

\(^{91}\) Nabokov, p. 12.
\(^{92}\) Gippius, p. 17.
\(^{94}\) According to V.V. Gippius, Gogol dated the essay as 1831 but it was written in 1833. Tulloch gives the date of completion as February 1834 (*Arabesques*, p. 261). Gogol’s probably intentionally inaccurate dating makes sense if he wanted to distance himself from *Arabesques*, as suggested by an 1835 letter to M.A. Maximovich which describes *Arabesques* as a ‘mishmash’ or ‘mixture of everything’. See Gippius, p. 193, p. 41; *Creation of Gogol*, p. 58.
Written before the full impact of these new technologies had been felt, Gogol’s essay forms part of what Walter Benjamin calls the ‘fore-history’ of their development. For Benjamin, history should not be interpreted as if it has a simple cause and effect structure (in which a new technology arises, causing social change) but with the awareness that past and future moments are liable to come together in unexpected or fragmentary ways. The job of the historical materialist is to bring about and bear witness to this non-continuous collision of diverse historical moments within each present. It is in this spirit that I aim to read Gogol’s essay.

Intellectually, Gogol was influenced in the early 1830s by Zhukovsky, a translator of European Romantic writers including Schiller, and Pushkin, to whom an essay in Arabesques is devoted. This period heralded the start of Gogol’s greatest creative outpouring, culminating with the 1842 publication of Dead Souls, the second part of which Gogol destroyed in 1852, shortly before his death. 1830-36 was also, Donald Fanger observes, the time of Gogol’s ‘maximal engagement in the life of St Petersburg’. According to V.V. Gippius, one figure Gogol encountered during this period whose influence is felt in ‘On Present-Day Architecture’ is Vladimir Pavlovich Titov, who published ‘A Few Thoughts about Architecture’ in 1827. Titov was a prominent member of the initially Moscow-based Lyubomudry (‘Lovers of Wisdom’) circle, alongside Dmitry Venevitinov, who also wrote on art and architecture, before dying at twenty-one. This group consisted of young, wealthy intellectuals who took their cues from German Romanticism, especially the writings of Schelling. They sought to locate a divine truth, or ‘absolute’, in the face of the chaotic world of appearances. While appearance does not, for this group, provide access to truth, it nonetheless carries traces of the absolute which might be explored philosophically or aesthetically. This is how Titov reads architecture in his 1827 essay, though he finds seeking the infinite in the finite ultimately inadequate.

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95 Giedion, p. 179. The most significant European exhibitions were held in London in 1851 and Paris in 1855, 1867, 1889 and 1900.
98 Gippius, p. 44. For an overview of the group, see Victoria Frede, Doubt, Atheism and the Nineteenth-century Russian Intelligentsia (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), pp. 21-53.
99 Gippius, p. 42.
which Gogol named his 1835 book, was discussed in relation to these ideas by Friedrich Schlegel, Goethe, Moritz, Heinse and others.\textsuperscript{100} Gogol’s choice of title suggests he may have encountered these debates through the Lyubomudry group, though he could also have been influenced by the writings of Walter Scott and E.T.A. Hoffmann, discussed below.\textsuperscript{101}

The arabesque in its most basic form is a recurring, non-referential pattern or decoration, but it can, I propose, be utilised as a means of reading the nineteenth-century city. As filtered through Gogol, it opens up a way of thinking which registers the city’s labyrinthine complexity, while also (perhaps, because this is the heart of the German debate) indicating the presence of an organising principle, or invisible architecture, behind external appearance. The arabesque can also be a form of writing, as in Poe’ \textit{Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque} (1840).\textsuperscript{102} In some texts, like ‘The Overcoat’, considered below, arabesque language relates to the city mimetically, in Adorno’s sense, which means being truthful but not simply representational: ‘art reaches toward reality, only to recoil at the actual touch of it. The characters of its script are monuments to this movement. Their constellation in the artwork is a cryptogram of the historical essence of reality, not its copy’.\textsuperscript{103} This concept of the arabesque as expressive, but not directly imitative, of society relates to Sergei Eisenstein’s accounts of montage and ‘ecstasy’ in cinema, qualities he also finds in Gogol.

Before developing this connection, though, I will first examine the details of the essay itself. It is important, fundamentally, because it presents the role of architecture in the city in two apparently opposed forms: one repressive and unifying, the other utopian and fantastical. In this way it expresses the co-existence of, and tension between, the two sides of invisible architecture.

\textsuperscript{101} According to John Kopper, Gogol was influenced by a simplified form of German philosophy. See ‘The “Thing-in-Itself” in Gogol’s Aesthetics: A Reading of the \textit{Dikanka} Stories’, in \textit{Essays on Gogol}, pp. 40-62 (p. 54).
Unity and Multiplicity

Like the other essays in *Arabesques*, Gogol’s style in ‘On Present-Day Architecture’ is broad, generalising and idiosyncratic, described by Fanger as ‘all aspiration [...] hyperbolic, universalistic, global’. The main thrust of Gogol’s argument is that current European architecture is lacklustre compared to the styles of other times and places, an idea he expresses from the start:

> It makes me sad to look at the new buildings which we are constantly erecting, and on which millions have been squandered and of which few can arrest the startled eye with the majesty of their design or the wilful impertinence of their imagination, or even the luxury and dazzlingly colorful nature of their adornments.\(^{105}\)

There are two things to note here. Firstly, Gogol’s conception of good architecture is fundamentally visual: he wants buildings that will ‘arrest the startled eye’; and secondly, this arresting of the eye is to be achieved through majestic design, wilful imagination and varied ornamentation. The visual dimension is important throughout Gogol’s work, as several critics have recognised, including Fanger, who suggests that the architecture essay has a ‘panoramic’ quality which should be compared to ‘Life’, another piece in *Arabesques*.\(^{106}\)

> ‘Life’ is a short essay (less than three pages in the Ardis edition), opening with the line ‘The poor son of the desert dreamed’. It describes how the heterogeneous nations of the Mediterranean, including ‘Ancient Egypt’, ‘Joyous Greece’ and ‘Iron Rome’, were unified by the birth of Jesus (A143), demonstrating Gogol’s interest in the relationship between part (individual nations) and whole (Christendom), a topic which Carsten Strathausen associates with German Romantic debates about

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\(^{104}\) *Creation of Gogol*, p. 63.

\(^{105}\) Nikolai Gogol, *Arabesques*, p. 115. Further references in main text.

aesthetics and the arabesque. 

Melissa Frazier has commented on this interest, suggesting that, influenced by Schlegel, Gogol ‘always had a leaning towards wholes, wholes in the form of political and also religious autocracies’, though still balanced in 1835 by a ‘very strong interest in parts’. This balance became less evident as Gogol grew older, especially in Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends (1847), a book attacked by Belinsky for its conservatism and advocacy of autocracy.

As the essay continues, Gogol weighs up the qualities of different forms of architecture, beginning with Medieval European Gothic, a form he, like A.W. Pugin in Contrasts (1836), sees as the highpoint of Christian design, but one which has now been lost:

Those centuries have passed when faith, fiery passionate faith, directed all thought, all minds and all activity towards one goal, when an artist strived to raise his creation higher and higher up to heaven, striving for it alone and, almost in sight of it, beneficently raising his imploring hand to it. His edifice soared up to heaven; the narrow windows, columns and arches stretched endlessly upwards; the transparent spire, almost lace-like, hovered transparently above it, like smoke, and the magnificent temple would seem so immense by comparison with the ordinary dwellings of the people; so great are the demands of the soul compared to those of the body. (A115)

There is a desire for unity here, but also a recognition of the ultimate unattainability, through construction at least, of the goal Gothic architecture strives for. The Gothic tower, as it fades from view, leads towards an invisible divinity whose presence it can only imply. It is the ‘transparent’

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108 Frazier, p. 277.
110 This is representative from Pugin: ‘Yes, it was, indeed, the faith, the zeal, and, above all, the unity, of our ancestors, that enabled them to conceive and raise those wonderful fabrics that still remain to excite our wonder and admiration’. Augustus Welby Pugin, Contrasts: or, A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste (London, 1836), p. 3.
nature of the Gothic cathedral that allows this: only by rendering itself invisible can it reveal its true purpose, which is to point towards a whole or absolute that cannot be directly signified. This is also, for Schlegel in *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800), the role of the arabesque, which is ‘a means to express those “Zauberworte der Poesie” (“magical words of poetry” [334]) which function as indirect signifiers of “the higher, the infinite, hieroglyph of the one, true love and the holy multitude of life in creative nature”’. Schlegel comments on Gothic architecture himself, writing of one church in Cambrai, France: ‘Wonderful style of architecture! springing from the highest story of the tower, it seems to pierce the clouds like a transparent obelisk, or pyramid of open tracery!’. Like Gogol, he associates Gothic with transparency, but Gogol’s emphasis on verticality (‘higher... striving... raising... soared’) is more pronounced.

Gogol later emphasises this verticality further:

Gothic architecture should be reserved for use only in very tall, towering churches and buildings. [...] Build it as it should be built; build its walls higher and higher, until they are as high as possible [...] And remember the most important thing, there must be no comparison between height and width. The word “width” should disappear. The one dominant idea must be—height. (A124)

For Gogol, the great example that fulfils these conditions is Cologne Cathedral, which is nothing ‘but perfection and majesty’ (A124). Though the tallest structure on earth when Gogol was writing, Cologne Cathedral remained unfinished. Having lain incomplete for centuries, proposals for its completion began to circulate during the Napoleonic wars, supported notably by Schlegel, who observed in 1804 that ‘A third part only of the body of the church, and half of one tower, are yet completed’, but still ‘one glance at the immense height of the choir fills every beholder with astonishment’. Construction of the cathedral, first begun in 1248, was eventually restarted in

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1842, and it was finally completed in 1880, before being superseded as the world’s tallest building by the Eiffel tower in 1889.\footnote{Robin Lenman, \textit{Artists and Society in Germany: 1850-1914} (Manchester: MUP, 1997), pp. 16-29.} Cologne Cathedral provides a suggestive instance of the eruption of Gothic into the nineteenth century in a hybrid form, neither solely medieval nor solely modern, but both at once. Its supplanting by the Eiffel tower calls to mind Zola’s description in \textit{Le Ventre de Paris} (1873) of the late-medieval Gothic church of Saint-Eustache, now enveloped by the new iron and glass development of Les Halles: ‘It’s an odd mixture’ says Claude Lantier, ‘that section of the church framed by an avenue of cast iron. The one will destroy the other. The iron will kill the stone’.\footnote{Émile Zola, \textit{The Belly of Paris}, trans. by Brian Nelson (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 186. For a discussion of Zola’s depiction of Les Halles and a map that includes Saint-Eustache Church, see Geoff Woollen, ‘Zola’s Halles, A Grande Surface before their time’, \textit{Romance Studies}, 18.1 (2000), 21-30.} Despite prophesying the death of stone, this comment, a recasting of Victor Hugo’s ‘this will kill that’, unconsciously registers that modernity is not just a feature of the iron, but of the iron’s ‘odd mixture’ with the stone; modernity is only fully realised in the jarring confusion of different architectures and different temporal moments.\footnote{See Victor Hugo, \textit{Notre Dame de Paris}, trans. by Alban Krailshelmer (Oxford: OUP, 1993), pp. 192-206.} This is an idea treated by Baudelaire in the poem ‘Le Cygne’, where ‘Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood/Nothing has budged!’ The new spaces of Haussmann’s city are most modern when they contain, or at least register, the past—like the poet’s memories, which remain, ‘heavier than stone’, as Saint-Eustache remains, though surrounded by new market buildings.\footnote{Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Swan’ in \textit{The Flowers of Evil}, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: OUP, 1993), p. 175.} In the same way, not only is Cologne cathedral a mixture of old and new, but it is only by replacing it as the world’s tallest building that the Eiffel tower becomes truly modern, a comparison which introduces a peculiar modernity to the cathedral itself, drawing it into the modern age (as those who sought to make it a nineteenth-century monument to nationalism had already done), even if only to show it as outdated. This collision of iron and stone produces a dialectical image in which medieval and modern come together not through smooth historical progression, but by means of fracture and discontinuity.\footnote{Compare to the opening of \textit{Our Mutual Friend}, where Hexam’s boat floats ‘between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone’ (OMF1.1.1), suggesting both temporal regression and a confrontation between modernity and pre-history.}
This collision of old and new, a mark of modernity, runs through Gogol’s essay, including in his treatment of verticality. Though symbolic of unity, verticality produces a shock effect that is multiple, at once modern, medieval and prehistoric. The Gothic cathedral has the power to regress the observer to a primal state: its grandeur ‘plunges the common man into a kind of numbness which is the only spring moving a wild man’ (A125). Moreover, Gogol argues that ‘a building should tower to an incalculable height above the head of the on-looker; it should stop him in his tracks, struck by sudden amazement and scarcely able to see the top’ (A121). This paralysing shock effect is associated with both the prehistoric (the ‘wild man’) and the medieval religious attitude symbolised by Gothic.\textsuperscript{119} Shock is also, though, evocative of the experience of modern city living, as in Asa Briggs’s description of Manchester as a ‘shock city’.\textsuperscript{120} As Eisenstein observes, Gogol’s descriptions of untouchable height seem to anticipate the skyscrapers of New York and Chicago, another of Briggs’s shock cities, built in the 1880s and 1890s.\textsuperscript{121}

The combination of religious feeling and shock associated with the experience of viewing the skyscraper is captured in a 1916 painting by Glyn Philpot (known mainly for his portraits, his interest in religious subjects and his homosexuality) held by the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath (image 1).\textsuperscript{122} In this painting, a young man gazes off towards something that cannot be seen, located behind, above and to the left of the viewer. His face, which indicates shock, reverence or awe, is lit up from the direction in which he gazes. His hat is held before his chest in a prayer-like gesture of respect or solemnity. He stands against a plain dark background. Only the title, \textit{The Skyscraper}, indicates what the man looks at. For the viewer of the painting, this is a literal instance of invisible architecture. It suggests what Rem Koolhaas claims of Manhattan, that it ‘inspired in its beholders ecstasy about


\textsuperscript{120} Briggs, p. 51.


architecture’, illustrating the effect Gogol wishes Gothic architecture to produce. The skyscraper activates a mode of perception associated with Biblical revelation, which does not involve seeing God directly, but what indicates His presence, such as a burning bush or an angel (as in Fra Angelico’s Annunciation paintings of the 1430s-50s). Here, that which is most modern (the skyscraper) is simultaneously ancient (i.e. Biblical). In Gogol this temporal relationship is inverted: the Gothic tower is the sign of a ‘lost’ past, but also evokes a half-imagined future (the skyscraper). In both Gogol and Philpot, shock is accompanied by non-representability: Philpot’s skyscraper is not pictured, while Gogol’s tower fades into invisibility. In both cases, fore- and after-history collide to form an

Image 1. The Skyscraper (1916), Glyn Philpot.

architecture which is simultaneously ancient and modern, sacred and secular. This is, though, an ultimately repressive form of architecture, before which the subject has no choice but to submit.

Against the glorious height of the Gothic, Gogol sets present-day architecture, which he criticises for its tendency towards commodification, what Benjamin calls loss of aura:

Our century is so petty, our desires are so diverse in everything, our knowledge is so encyclopedic that we just cannot concentrate on any one object of our thoughts and thus we have willy-nilly reduced our products to trifles and charming toys. We possess the wonderful gift of making everything insignificant. We distort Egyptian architecture (the effectiveness of which lies in colossal size) into little bridges and gates, the tops of which any passing coachman can touch with his hand. From the Gothic we make earrings and watch-cases; we use Greek architecture in gazebos. And in huge public buildings we display architecture of a kind that can scarcely be categorized. (A125-26)

English Gothic revival buildings of the 1820s and 1830s, like those designed by Pugin, do not escape this criticism: ‘They are very charming and very pleasing to the eye, but alas! they contain none of the genuine majesty which permeates the great buildings of the country’ (A125). For Gogol, the problem is that contemporary architecture has been made to submit to people, rather than people to architecture. The image of the ‘passing coachman’ touching the top of an Egyptian-style gate provides a striking visual metaphor of this. Benjamin quotes a similar observation about the Eiffel Tower: ‘It is characteristic of this most famous construction of the epoch that, for all its gigantic stature, ... it nonetheless feels like a knickknack’. Gogol’s concerns chime, too, with Benjamin’s identification in ‘The Work of Art’ essay of ‘the desire of the present-day masses to “get closer” to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing’s uniqueness [...] by assimilating it as a reproduction’. For Benjamin, this ‘getting closer’ is not necessarily negative, since it holds out the promise of democratisation. Gogol’s distaste, though, implies a class prejudice.

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124 Arcades, p. 163.
Architecture is especially devalued, Gogol suggests, if even a coachman can approach it on equal terms, or worse still master it. This attack on coachmen recurs in *Dead Souls*, where a sergeant-at-arms in the tale of Captain Kopeikin is ‘a giant of a man [...] specially equipped by nature for admonishing coachmen’.\textsuperscript{126} There is an implicit desire for authoritarian control here, driving Gogol’s preference for the colossal. Writing in relation to 1847’s *Selected Passages*, Gippius draws attention to this:

> The love with which Gogol hopes to fill his idyllic hierarchy “should be communicated upward, from one superior to the next ... so that in this way it may reach its lawful source and so that in the sight of all the beloved Tsar may triumphantly communicate it to God Himself”.\textsuperscript{127}

The Tsar plays the role of the Gothic tower, dominating the people and directing them towards a higher religious unity. This differs from Ruskin’s conception of Gothic, which stands for individual expression and genuine collectivity, unlike modern factory production.\textsuperscript{128} Yet like Ruskin (and unlike Benjamin), Gogol condemns processes of commodification, not because they consign workers to subjection, but because they work against his dream of unification.

In the middle section of the essay, before addressing the architecture of towns, Gogol discusses ‘the architecture of the East’ (A126), specifically Arabian, Indian and Egyptian buildings. There is an orientalism in Gogol’s attitude towards the East, and an admiration for the supreme power it embodies, as when he describes how ‘the majestic Mohamedan, in his loose-fitting garb, studded with gold and jewels, reclines amid the houri of slender, dazzlingly white-skinned, naked girls’ (A127). Gogol is aware to some extent that this otherness is a Western construction; in the essay ‘On the Middle Ages’, talking of the early Medieval Arabs who built an Islamic empire, he asks:

\textsuperscript{127} Gippius, p. 148. For the full text in English see *Selected Passages*, pp. 174-94. Karlinsky makes a similar point about Gogol’s conservatism. Karlinsky, p. 108.
‘did they really live and exist, or were they merely the most beautiful creation of our imagination?’ (A35). He is also sensitive to the position of Russia as a hybrid nation, poised between East and West. In ‘A Glance at the Composition of Little Russia’ he describes Kiev, which he calls ‘the ancient mother city of Russia’ (A101), as:

belonging to Europe by faith and habitat, but completely Asiatic in lifestyle, customs and dress; a nation in which two opposing parts of the world, two vastly different elements, collided with strange results: European caution and Asiatic carelessness, simplicity and cunning, strong vitality and lethargic comfort, attempts at development and perfection—and at the same time the desire to appear contemptuous of every perfection. (A108)

Kiev functions as a metaphor for the hybrid state of Russia, albeit one that still positions the European element as superior. When Gogol speaks of Asian architecture, then, he is not talking of something alien to Russia, but something incorporated within it. When he describes ‘A huge Eastern cupola, either completely spherical in shape or bulbous like an upturned sensuous vase, or ball-shaped, weighed down and festooned with carvings and embellishments like a priceless miter’ it is not just Arabia we are seeing, but the towers of St Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow.

If Moscow represents the Eastern pole of Russia, St Petersburg stands for the Western. In ‘Petersburg Notes for 1836’, Gogol defines Moscow as the more typically Russian city, while Petersburg is a German ‘dandy’ surrounded by seas which are mirrors to its vanity; a ‘European-American colony’ introduced into Russia.129 This helps explain Dostoevsky’s comment, in Notes from Underground, that Petersburg is ‘the most abstract and intentional city in the whole round world’.130 To be abstract and intentional is to be organised by Western rationality, determined by a system in which the underground man, driven by non-rational ressentiment, does not fit. In the same way (as

considered in Chapter 2) the ‘underground’ domestic life of the working classes does not fit within the abstract intentionality of bourgeois Manchester.

For Gogol, ‘Eastern’ architecture is marked out above all by ornamentation. Of the Arabs, he writes:

They borrowed from nature all that was extremely beautiful. Their architecture bears no trace of the slumbering forests; it consists only of flowers. It is adorned with flowers, it is swamped with a whole sea of beautiful, luxuriant flowers such as those which adorn the delicate vale of Kashmir. (A128)

The patterns described here are arabesques. They enchant the eye, like the Eastern columns which are not plain, like European ones, but ‘brightly colored with embellishments from the pedestal to the capital’ (A128). Eastern, arabesque architecture is positioned here as the counterpart to the Western, Gothic architecture described at the start of the essay. But it is the mixture of styles which Gogol praises most highly: ‘A creative architect must possess a profound comprehension of all kinds of architecture. Least of all should he scorn the styles of those nations to whom we usually show scorn because of their art’ (A131). Such an architect must ‘study everything in abstract terms and not be guided by such trivial considerations as outward appearance and individual parts. But to study in abstract terms he must be a genius and a poet’ (A131). The ideal architect is forced to work with parts, but in them sees the whole, which exceeds representation. He must be both an architect and an artistic visionary, as Piranesi is for Eisenstein. Though there is still an appeal to abstract unity here, there is also a move away from the controlling Gothic tower, and towards multiplicity and juxtaposition. This is also evident in Gogol’s approach to history, as when he describes the Middle Ages as a ‘huge building’, with walls

composed of different materials, both ancient and modern, so that Gothic fleeces can be seen on one brick, while on others the Roman gilt-work gleams; Arabian carvings, a Green cornice, a Gothic window—all have stuck together to form a mottled tower. (A32)

This is close to Gogol’s description of the ideal town, which Benjamin quotes:

A city should consist of many different styles of building, if we wish it to be pleasing to the eye. Let as many contrasting styles combine there as possible! Let the solemn Gothic and the richly embellished Byzantine arise in the same street, alongside colossal Egyptian halls and elegantly proportioned Greek structures!^{132}

Here is the dream of an architecture which would truly arrest the eye, Gogol imploring ‘Let the houses fuse into a single, even, monotonous wall as seldom as possible, but let some lean upwards and some downwards. Let multifarious towers give a varied aspect to the streets as often as possible’ (A130-31). In the Convolute where he quotes this passage, Benjamin also cites an 1830 proposal for urban planning in Paris, which, like Gogol, embodies the ‘architecture of future exhibitions’:

It would be advisable to vary the forms of the houses and, as for the districts, to employ different architectural orders, even those in no way classical—such as the Gothic, Turkish, Chinese, Egyptian, Burmese, and so forth.^{133}

Here, the town comes to resemble the exhibition, or department store, where all the products of the world are laid out side by side (though intermingled ‘in the same street’ for Gogol and placed in separate ‘districts’ for the Paris planners). This points to a contradiction within Gogol’s essay: he condemns the commodification of architecture, but advocates designing a town which seems to express the same principles as the commercially-driven exhibitions. What is most interesting in this is Gogol’s attempt to separate the utopian elements of capitalist architecture from its reifying drive. This is expressive of a more general split in his thinking, which isolates the repressive dimensions of

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^{132} Arcades, p. 198.
^{133} Arcades, p. 201.
architecture from its liberating possibilities while nonetheless seeking to demonstrate the value of both.

Gogol’s town, despite replacing the unity of the Gothic with multiplicity, retains Gothic’s traumatic effect:

A town should be built in such a way that each part, each group of houses, taken separately, should present a striking landscape. A group of houses must be given scope, if one may use such an expression, to toy with sharp features so that it will scratch its way into the memory and torment the imagination. There are those views which one remembers for a lifetime, but there are also those which, however one tries, one cannot retain in one’s memory. (A131)

Gogol might be talking of the picturesque (he has already referred to the ‘unexpected views’ in ‘an English garden’ [A123]) when he describes a ‘striking landscape’ emerging amidst the city. Yet the effect he outlines is not pleasurable contemplation but trauma. The city scratches its way into the mind of the viewer, becoming impossible to forget, or impossible to recall. For Freud, trauma has the latter effect, overwhelming the subject’s ability to register and remember the experience, though such events are always liable to return in the form of repetition. Baudelaire’s attitude towards Paris is similarly marked by sharpness, describing the process of writing poetry as ‘fantasque escrime’ (fantastical fencing). If for Baudelaire fencing is a way of thinking about poetic imagination, though, for Gogol imagination is what is tormented by the city.

In Gogol’s essay, then, the unifying effect of the Gothic exists alongside its traumatic power over those who witness it. It is also accompanied by a preference for multiple different forms of building within the city. As Gogol goes on to consider more speculative forms of architecture, he

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134 Susanne Fusso makes this link, suggesting that the text of Arabesques functions like a picturesque garden, aiming to ‘avoid monotony at all costs’. Fusso, p. 121.
continues to explore ways of combining unity and variety within the visual sphere, moving increasingly into the realm of the imagination, as I will now discuss.

**Imagination and Dreams**

Imagination, poetic or architectural, is important throughout Gogol’s essay. He describes the imagination of the Gothic architect as the style’s greatest value (A124) and talks of Eastern architecture being ‘created by imagination alone’ (A126). ‘The Portrait’, a story in *Arabesques*, functions as a meditation on the limits of artistic imagination. In it Chertkov asks:

> Does there exist a line to which higher knowledge leads a man but, once he has crossed it, he grasps something not created by human effort and tears something live out of the life which animated his model? Why is it so terrible to cross over this line, which is the borderline of the imagination? (A60)

Imagination leads to the very edge of the human, and gestures towards the absolute, which is terrible because incomprehensible. It takes us out of ourselves, into a state Eisenstein calls ‘pathos’ or ‘ex stasis’, which for him is not terrible but euphoric. 137 William Keyes suggests that the role of artistic imagination in Gogol’s essay is to make architecture a means of interpretation between earth and heaven, a connection only the poet of genius can see. 138 This makes him a conduit to enlighten others, since he can perceive the connections—the invisible architecture—which others cannot. I return to this idea in Chapter 3, in relation to the ‘good spirit’ passage of *Dombey and Son*, which imagines the author opening up the houses of the poor.

Imagination, though, is limited if the city is dominated by uniformity. For Gogol, ‘Uniformity of style and simplicity of houses here are a great sin. Architecture here should be as capricious as possible’ (A132). More than this, architecture should act as a ‘chronicle of the world’ (A132). This leads to a footnote where Gogol describes a ‘strange thought’ (A132), which has what Derrida calls a

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137 See *Nonindifferent Nature*.
138 See Keyes.
'parergonal' status, at once marginal and central, moving away from the essay only to reflect back on it. I quote it here in full:

A very strange thought occurred to me: I thought that it wouldn’t do any harm to have in a city one such street which would act as a chronicle of architecture. It should begin at one end with heavy, somber gates, passing through which an observer would see on both sides the towering majestic buildings of the original, uncultivated style which is common to all proto-nations. Then he would see the gradual change into various styles: the lofty transformation into the colossal Egyptian style so imbued with simplicity, then into the beautiful Greek style, then the lascivious Alexandrian and Byzantine style with smooth cupolas, then the Roman style with rows of arches, further on descending again to uncultured times and suddenly ascending again with the unique luxury of the Arabs, then the uncultured Gothic, then the Gothic-Arabian, then the purely Gothic, the crown of art, emanating from Cologne cathedral, then the ancient Greek in a new guise and finally, so that the whole street should end with gates, redolent with the elements of the new style. This street would then become, in certain respects, the history of the development of style, and anyone too lazy to leaf through thick tomes would only have to walk along it to find out everything. (A132-33)

The temporality of this passage moves in two opposite directions. The first is into the past, as the history of world architecture is made accessible to the strolling flâneur. As the visitor moves horizontally along the street, s/he can also be imagined to move vertically, through the accreted layers of architectural history. This represents the dream of a continuous tradition in which nothing is lost, of a city without ruins.

In Civilization and its Discontents (1930) Freud imagines just such a city as a metaphor for the preservation of memory in the unconscious:

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139 The Truth in Painting, pp. 37-82.
Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past—an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. This would mean that in Rome the palaces of the Caesars and the Septizonium of Septimius Severus would still be rising to their old height on the Palatine and the castle of S. Angelo would still be carrying on its battlements the beautiful statues which graced it until the siege of the Goths, and so on.\footnote{140}

Freud, like Gogol, imagines a state of absolute visibility where the buried past is fully exposed, so that to walk through the city is to ‘find out everything’. The difference is that Gogol imagines examples of earlier architecture, whereas Freud imagines \textit{the original buildings themselves}, which have been lost, making this an impossible metaphor. Moreover, Freud positions his city as a psychical structure within the unconscious, whereas Gogol makes it separate from the subject, like a ‘tome’.

Again unlike Freud, Gogol wants to draw together the architecture of the \textit{entire world}, so that his vision erases space as well as time, bringing together the styles of all countries. In this sense, as well as looking back, his ‘strange thought’ looks forward to the world exhibitions, which achieve precisely this effect for Giedion, as quoted by Benjamin:

\begin{quote}
Exhibitions: ‘All regions and indeed, retrospectively, all times. From farming and mining, from industry and from the machines that were displayed in operation, to raw materials and processed materials, to art and the applied arts. In all these ways we see a peculiar demand or premature synthesis, of a kind that is characteristic of the nineteenth century in other areas as well: think of the total work of art’.\footnote{141}
\end{quote}

The total work of art is the \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk}, an idea developed by Wagner, described by James Garratt as ‘the collective artwork at the heart of both the Greek polis and the community of the


\footnote{141} \textit{Arcades}, p. 175.
future’, and in a recent collection on the topic as ‘an aesthetic ambition to borderlessness’. This is the theme of Zola’s novel *L’Œuvre* (1886), where Claude Lantier (based on Paul Cézanne) dreams of painting a masterpiece that would encompass ‘Paris in all its glory’. Gogol explores the same idea in ‘The Last Day of Pompeii’, an essay which discusses Karl Bryullov’s painting of this name (1830-33) (image 2). Gogol writes: ‘Bryullov’s painting may be said to be a complete creation of worldwide significance. It includes everything. Within its limits it captures diversity to an extent which nobody previously had managed to capture’ (A205). For Gogol this is symptomatic of the nineteenth century, which is ‘aware of its own terrible process of disintegration and is striving to unite all genres into general groups’ (A205). Gogol’s street aims to do just this: to bring about unity through multiplicity, to suggest a whole by means of parts.

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The street is also intended as a replacement for the book, a ‘chronicle of architecture’ for those too lazy to ‘leaf through thick tomes’. This reverses the direction of Victor Hugo’s suggestion in *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) that ‘this will kill that, the book will kill the building’. For Hugo, the narrative and symbolic possibilities of architecture dominated the period ‘from the most immemorial pagoda of Hindustan down to Cologne Cathedral’, making it ‘the great script of the human race’. With the advent of printing, though, writing became more resilient than stone. Printing has created a structure which is more multiform and baroque than the ‘visible majesty’ of the colossal architecture it replaces. This new, invisible, architecture has ‘a thousand storeys’, and ‘on its surface art brings forth a visible luxuriance of arabesques, rose-windows and tracery’. It is a structure in which the ‘harmony’ of the whole emerges from the chaos of many parts, as ‘countless towers jostle in disorder on this metropolis of universal thought’.  

In Gogol, although buildings replace books, they do so not as a unitary form of architecture, but as a kind of kaleidoscope, so that the street evokes the visual technologies of Gogol’s own time; not just the kaleidoscope (a word coined in 1817), but also the panorama, a popular entertainment since the end of the eighteenth century. Rosalind Williams describes a panorama which functions like Gogol’s street. Named the ‘World Tour’, it was displayed at the 1900 Paris Exhibition:

> The tourist walked along the length of an enormous circular canvas representing “without solution of continuity, Spain, Athens, Constantinople, Suez, India, China, and Japan,” as natives danced or charmed serpents or served tea before the painted picture of their homeland.

For Benjamin, the panorama is part of the fore-history of cinema: ‘the panoramas prepare the way not only for photography but for <silent> film and sound film’. This indicates the second temporal

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145 The kaleidoscope was invented by Sir David Brewster in 1817. OED, kaleidoscope, n.
147 ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ [1935] in *Arcades*, pp. 3-13 (p. 5). Punctuation unaltered.
direction taken by the footnote: towards the future. Gogol’s street is comparable to Benjamin’s imagined cinematic compression of Paris, where the city’s history is contained not in a street, but in half an hour:

Couldn’t an exciting film be made from the map of Paris? From the unfolding of its various aspects in temporal succession? From the compression of a centuries-long movement of streets, boulevards, arcades, and squares into the space of half an hour? And does the flâneur do anything different? [C1,9]

It is notable in this respect that Sergei Eisenstein was interested in Gogol’s work, including the essay on architecture, and in Andrei Belyi’s book on Gogol (Gogol’s Artistry), which he read in 1933. Eisenstein compares Gogol’s writing to montage in cinema, arguing that the rhythm of his descriptions in a passage from Taras Bulba (1835) function in the same way as shots in a sequence from Dovzhenko’s Ivan (1932). He identifies a certain ‘ecstasy’—understood as ex-stasis, or ‘being beside oneself’—in Gogol’s description of Gothic which is precisely the effect he sought to produce in his films. Eisenstein describes the basic formula of this effect as ‘a leap “beside oneself”, which unavoidably becomes a leap into a new quality and most often encompasses a diapason [octave] leap into the opposite’. Opposing qualities or images proceed from one another in a montage-like sequence, while also contributing towards a greater whole. There is a Marxist ideal behind this theory, as the individual comes to know the ecstasy of existing as part of a social unity, understood in organic terms:

a transition by leaps from quality to quality is not only a formula of growth but also a formula of development—development involving us by its regularity no longer only as single ‘vegetative’ units, subordinate to the evolutionary laws of nature, but as units that are both

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148 Arcades, p. 83.
collective and social, consciously participating in its development, for we know that this leap, which we are now discussing, also exists in [...] those revolutions by whose path social development and social movements proceed.\textsuperscript{151}

Gogol’s footnote is an illustration of this montage effect, being described by Eisenstein as ‘the constant transition of architectural forms into each other’.\textsuperscript{152}

For Benjamin, the succession of frames in cinema should be understood not as ecstasy but as shock, which forms the main distinction between cinema and painting. Cinema is based upon constant movement, preventing any possibility of contemplation:

The chain of associations of the person viewing those images is indeed instantly interrupted by their changing. That is what film’s shock effect is based on, which like every shock effect seeks to be offset by heightened presence of mind.\textsuperscript{153}

Cinema can never be a total work of art for Benjamin, since shock works against unity, distinguishing it from Eisenstein’s conception of ecstasy. This difference points to the tension that marks Gogol’s street: his unified history of architecture is produced by cinema-like disjunction, which calls unity into question. This tension runs throughout the essay, which attempts to reconcile the two opposing dimensions of invisible architecture: its sense of untapped, uncontrollable possibility and its ability to function as ideology, unifying the city.

Gogol makes a move towards the former option—untapped possibility—late on, by speculating on how ornamentation might transform construction. He imagines a building consisting exclusively of embellishment, where the parergonal becomes central and ornament replaces structure:

\textsuperscript{151} Nonindifferent Nature, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{152} Nonindifferent Nature, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{153} ‘The Work of Art’, p. 32. There is a distinction, of which Eisenstein was aware, between architecture, where the subject moves, and cinema, where images move before the subject. Both forms, however, exist on a spectrum in which movement is the primary feature. Warped Space, p. 118.
There are many [...] inventions and new elements, belonging exclusively to our century, which could provide a mine of previously unbuilt edifices. Let us consider, for example, those hanging adornments which have recently begun to appear. At the present time pendent architecture is only seen in theatre boxes, balconies and small bridges. But if whole stories could be suspended, or if daring arches could be constructed, if whole columns, bunched together, could appear on transparent, cast-iron supports, if a house could have columns, girded from top to bottom with patterned iron railings and if hanging iron embellishments, in thousands of different designs, could surround it with delicate filigree through which the house would look as though through a transparent veil, then these transparent iron embellishments, entwining a beautiful circular tower, would soar with it up towards heaven and what a delicate, esthetically [sic] ethereal quality our houses would then acquire! But so many suggestions abound everywhere which could generate unique and lively ideas in an architect’s mind, if only the architect were both a creator and a poet. (A133-34)

The verticality of the Gothic with which the essay began is transformed into a vision of suspended stories and soaring buildings. These dreamlike forms, associated by Eisenstein with Piranesi’s prison engravings, are driven by what Giedion calls the ‘new potentialities’ of the industrial revolution. Eisenstein comments on the anticipatory quality of this passage:

Somehow even Belyi overlooked Gogol’s anticipation of Le Corbusier’s ideas about a house on tree trunks; and if his idea of “the transparency” of architecture was solved, not by his castiron “transparent veils,” but by ... glass, then—it was the glass of the American (Frank Lloyd Wright), “father of transparent houses,” and the conception of his “beautiful tower”—is Tatlin’s tower.154

Frank Lloyd Wright is the architect most responsible for the transformation of Chicago at the end of the nineteenth-century, while Tatlin’s tower (image 3) was a modernist iron structure intended as a

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monument to the Third International, incorporating a gigantic metal spiral and spaces for political activities. It would have dwarfed the Eiffel tower, but was never built (though several models have been made).  


Gogol’s final dream-vision gives full rein to the utopian and multiform side of invisible architecture. This architecture is invisible both because it is not yet built, and because it is built out of transparency—made from iron that has taken on the quality of glass. It is architecture which expresses the untapped potential of the city. By contrast, Gothic architecture expresses the side of

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On Frank Lloyd Wright and Chicago, see Giedion, pp. 396-428. A wooden model of Tatlin’s tower was put on show in Moscow and Petrograd in 1920. More recently models have been displayed at The Royal Academy of the Arts, London (2011-12), the Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm and Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
invisible architecture which is repressive, monadic, unifying and ideological. It represents a controlling authority which organises both architecture and the subject who lives among architecture, enforcing a sense of unified meaning upon a disparate and complex reality. Gogol’s essay is significant because it not only contains both these elements of invisible architecture, but praises both, attempting to maintain an allegiance to both sides. In doing so, it indicates that what appear to be two completely different forces are in fact two sides of the same dialectical phenomenon: invisible architecture, structure that cannot be seen, which pulls simultaneously in two opposing directions, giving the city a split identity.

In order to expand on this description of invisible architecture, and extend my reading of Gogol, I now turn to two other instances where unified meaning and dreamlike multiplicity co-exist, both of which are relevant to Gogol’s essay, as will become clear.

**Arabesque, Ecstasy, Montage**

These two expressions of the conflictual state of invisible architecture, which have points of connection with each other and with Gogol, are the German Romantic debate over how to interpret the arabesque and Eisenstein’s reading of Piranesi. The German debate centres on whether the arabesque is expressive of a transcendent absolute or an example of mere appearance, unable to move beyond its own surface. By relating this debate to Eisenstein, I hope to suggest that the arabesque, which is important to writers including E.T.A. Hoffman, Walter Scott and Edgar Allen Poe, can function as a way of reading the city. Rather than attempting to reconcile the competing interpretations of the arabesque, I suggest that its very tensions allow the arabesque to capture the dichotomies of invisible architecture. Most significantly, of course, *Arabesques* is the title of the volume from which Gogol’s architecture essay is taken.

Arabesque is a term often used when describing Islamic art, referring to its geometrical decorations and borders. Wolfgang Kayser, though, stresses that the form was not originally Islamic,
being used by both the Greeks and the Romans. The OED gives the following among its meanings: ‘Arabian, Arabic’; ‘Strangely mixed, fantastic’; ‘The vulgar Arabic language’; ‘A species of mural or surface decoration in colour or low relief, composed in flowing lines of branches, leaves, and scrollwork fancifully intertwined’. The term, then, brings together language, architectural decoration and the fantastic. It also has the meaning in ballet of ‘A pose in which the dancer stands on one foot with one arm extended in front and the other arm and leg extended behind’. The OED gives an example from 1911: ‘One of her [sc. Marie Taglioni’s] most wonderful attitudes was an arabesque which gave her the appearance of actually flying’. The arabesque here is a static image that connotes movement, like the Tristram Shandy-esque diagrams drawn by Belyi to illustrate Gogol’s writing, which transform his words into abstract movement-images. Gogol’s imagined buildings, which seem to soar up to heaven, are arabesques in this sense perhaps more than any other. In ballet, each arabesque exists as part of a series of poses, determined by the pose that precedes it and the pose that follows, putting it in the same position as a single frame in a film strip, or a single building on Gogol’s street. Arabesques (in the plural) can therefore describe the film reel, or cinema as a whole, or the movement between the different buildings in Gogol’s street, or between stories and essays in his book.

For Jacob Berman, arabesque is a form of displacement or translation which replaces the material world with an imagined world, and real relations with imagined relations. Berman notes that William Carlos Williams links ‘the abstraction of Arabic art’ with Dürer’s Melancholy, as part of a genealogy of modernism. This tendency towards abstraction connects the arabesque with the modern city, where complexity is accompanied by increasing reification (I return to this in Chapter 2).

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157 OED, arabesque, n. Interpolation in source.
159 Anne Nesbet also makes the link between this street and the film strip. Nesbet, p. 511.
Gabrielle Rippl has pointed out that Poe’s understanding of the arabesque was influenced by Walter Scott’s 1827 essay on Hoffman (‘On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition’), which contends that Hoffman was ‘so nearly on the verge of actual insanity, as to be afraid of the beings his own fancy created’, and that:

the grotesque in his compositions partly resembles the arabesque in painting, in which is introduced the most strange and complicated monsters, resembling centaurs, griffins, sphinxes, chimeras, rocs, and all other creatures of romantic imagination, dazzling the beholder as it were by the unbounded fertility of the author’s imagination.\textsuperscript{161}

The arabesque, associated with painting, runs together with the grotesque, associated with writing, as signs of a madly excessive poetic imagination. Scott is mentioned directly in ‘On Present-Day Architecture’, Gogol stating he ‘was the first to shake the dust from Gothic architecture and display its merits to the world’ (A125). In his 1842 essay, ‘The Philosophy of Furniture’, Scott defines the arabesque as ornament without specific meaning. It is this semantic emptiness which allows it to be particularly stimulating to the imagination, as in Poe’s ‘Ligeia’, where arabesque figures on the curtains of the bridal chamber become ‘changeable in aspect’, creating a ‘phantasmagoric effect’ in which a series of different nightmarish visions appear before the visitor.\textsuperscript{162} A similar effect is at work in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1890), where the paper’s ‘debased Romanesque’ pattern appears to shift endlessly, and to trap the narrator within it; at one point she exclaims ‘The front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!’\textsuperscript{163} Whether this woman is the narrator cannot, however, be determined. In Gilman’s story, as in Poe and Hoffmann, madness and imagination are both at stake, and in all three cases the arabesque seems to

\textsuperscript{163} Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ in \textit{The Yellow Wallpaper and Selected Writings} (London: Virago, 2009), pp. 1-23 (p. 19).
mimetically display the troubled mind of the viewer, though never in a straightforwardly representational manner.

The German Romantic debate around the arabesque aimed to explore its wider aesthetic and philosophical significance. It began in the 1780s as a subset of other aesthetic discussions and continued into the early nineteenth-century. Goethe’s essay ‘von Arabesken’ (1788) saw the arabesque as an inferior form of art, its movement and multiplicity taken as signs of non-rationality. Schlegel, writing in *Gespräch über die Poesie*, applies the concept to writers including Diderot, and above all Lawrence Sterne, whose works exhibit a fantastical imagination. Schlegel states of such writing: ‘Freylich ist es keine hohe Dichtung, sondern nur eine—Arabeske. Aber eben darum hat es in meinen Augen keine geringen Ansprüche; denn ich halte die Arabeske für eine ganz bestimmte und wesentliche Form oder Außerungsart der Poesie’ [Certainly there is no high poetry but one—Arabesque. But for that reason it has in my eyes no small claim; because I take the arabesque for a very specific and essential form or expression of poetry]. As Melissa Frazier points out, Schlegel seeks to identify the part that is also the whole, and for him this can be found in both the novel and the arabesque, which share a capacity to bring together the finite and the infinite, the beautiful and the sublime. For Schlegel, the arabesque refers to the absolute ideal, not despite but because of its mutability and multiplicity, which gesture towards what cannot be signified or made manifest; any conventionally representational artwork must fail in this regard. Susanne Fusso has noted that the fragment, which is at the basis of arabesque art and defines the form of much of Schlegel’s writing, is important throughout *Arabesques*, itself a collection of fragments, as signified by the often-repeated word *drob*’ (fragment). At the same time, as I have observed, Gogol repeatedly searches for unity in his essays. The essay ‘Thoughts on Geography (for children)’ serves as a commentary on this duality. Gogol suggests:

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164 See Strathausen, p. 375.
166 Frazier, p. 278.
167 Strathausen, p. 375.
168 Fusso, pp. 112-13.
One must never teach the size of the world by calculations in square miles. The only way to appreciate its size is to look at a map. It is a good idea to cut out each separate state individually so that it can be seen as a separate entity, and, being linked to the others, can be seen as being part of the world. (A199)

A broad philosophical project is expressed here: the world is sliced up into separate parts, but only as a precursor to piecing it back together again as a unified whole.

Kant is also important in the German Romantic debate, Winfried Menninghaus suggesting that ‘Without directly using the concept, Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (1790) formulates and elaborate a philosophy of the arabesque that then serves as a major touchstone for the reevaluation of the arabesque in early Romanticism’. Kant does this through the idea of ‘free beauty’, which is marked out by self-sufficiency and non-referentiality:

There are two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*), or beauty which is merely dependent (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object should be [...] Those of the first kind are said to be (self-subsisting) beauties of this thing or that thing; the other kind of beauty, being attached to a concept (conditioned beauty), is ascribed to objects which come under the concept of a particular end.

It becomes clear that Kant includes the arabesque in this category when he writes ‘designs à la *grecque*, foliage for framework or on wallpapers, etc., have no intrinsic meaning; they represent nothing—no object under a determinate concept—and are free beauties’. Free beauty, which might formally imitate nature (a flower is a free beauty for Kant), but does not reproduce it, finds a twentieth-century parallel in Eisenstein’s concept of ‘organic unity’, meaning artworks that correspond to ‘the laws of the structure of organic phenomena of nature’. In

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both cases nature is a model for artistic structure, though Eisenstein’s organic unity lacks the
goallessness of free beauty. Montage is central to Eisenstein’s concept, one of the key elements of
which is its metaphorical, non-representational nature.\textsuperscript{171} The connection can be seen in his essay
“‘Eh!’ On the Purity of Film Language’, where Eisenstein conceives of montage as a new form of
language, consisting solely of metaphor and abstraction. An illustration is provided by Eisenstein’s
commentary, in \textit{Nonindifferent Nature}, on a sequence in his film \textit{The Old and the New} (1929), where
the milk emerging from a milk separator becomes fountains, then fireworks, then abstract images
accompanied by increasing numbers (representing those who join the dairy cooperative).\textsuperscript{172} This
combination of repetition and difference produces \textit{pathos}, or ecstasy.

The same process can be detected in some architecture, when forms transition into one
another in an ongoing, arabesque sequence. Eisenstein writes of such harmonic architectural
assemblages:

The dynamics of these construction elements overflowing into each other promote that
feeling of emotional seizure, that ‘abstract’, ‘nonrepresentational’ whole that the harmonic
building truly represents for us.\textsuperscript{173}

There is a distinction between this and Kant’s free beauty, since Eisenstein’s images necessarily exist
as part of a defined sequence. Eisenstein is perhaps closer to Schlegel, who writes of the Gothic: ‘All
component parts ought to minister to the combined effect of the structure’.\textsuperscript{174} Despite the difference
between Eisenstein’s Marxist political project (which underlies his theory) and the approaches of
Kant or Schlegel, there is a line here which connects the Romantic and Modernist periods, and which
runs through Gogol.

Staying with \textit{Nonindifferent Nature}, after examining montage effects in various places,
including in Zola (on which see Chapter 5), Eisenstein turns to consider how ecstasy operates in

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Nonindifferent Nature}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Nonindifferent Nature}, pp. 38-59.
\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Nonindifferent Nature}, p. 138.
Piranesi’s prison engravings. Basing his analysis on a comparison of two images, *Carcere oscura* [*Dark Dungeon*] and *Carceri* [*Dungeon*] (from *Carceri*, Plate XIV) (images 4 and 5), both published in 1743, he suggests that the ordered architecture of the first etching, with its framing arch and limited perspective, has been ‘ecstatically exploded’ in the second, where we see ‘a whirlwind, aiming like a tornado at all sides: Ropes, scattering staircases, exploding arches, stone blocks torn apart from each other….’. The second image has lost its sense of referentiality, opening up the constrained possibilities held static within the first. Eisenstein imagines a further stage, which moves into absolute abstraction: ‘Stone no longer stone, but a system of intercrossing angles and planes, in whose play the geometrical basis of its forms explode’; he finds here the looming potential of Picasso within Piranesi’s work.\(^{175}\)

What Eisenstein implies, but does not directly state, is that Gogol’s movement from Gothic architecture to ‘suspended stories’ of iron follows the same trajectory. The potential of Gothic—its transparency, its height, its shock effect—explodes outwards in the final vision of a future city. In both Piranesi and Gogol, this shift is towards the arabesque, which is determined by movement, abstraction, repetition and the free movement of imagination. To return to Kant on free beauty:

[The] English taste in gardens, and baroque taste in furniture, push the freedom of imagination to the verge of what is grotesque—the idea being that in this divorce from all constraint of rules the precise instance is being afforded where taste can exhibit its perfection in projects of the imagination to the fullest extent.\(^{176}\)

This free imagination is the utopian possibility which invisible architecture offers at its most abstract. It is the possibility expressed in Piranesi’s second engraving, and in Gogol’s final passage on the city. Against this stands the ordered form of the first engraving, and the vertical Gothic tower, which both offer spatial and conceptual unity. Here, again, are the two sides of invisible architecture, arrived at via Eisenstein’s reading of Piranesi.

\(^{175}\) *Nonindifferent Nature*, p. 130, p. 136.

\(^{176}\) *Critique of Judgement*, p. 73 [p. 242].
Image 4. *Carcere oscura [Dark Dungeon]* (1743), Piranesi.
This leaves two outstanding questions. The first is whether arabesque, exploded architecture implies a greater whole, as Eisenstein argues, or operates as a surface which endlessly defers meaning. This is, I suggest, the central question which the modern city poses to perception. It returns us to the distinction between seeing the city from above and from below (see Introduction). The tension between these two modes is the tension which marks invisible architecture. The methodological mistake is to believe one can be separated from the other, since the two are produced simultaneously, in the same space.

The second point is to clarify how the arabesque can function as a form of language. To do this, I turn to ‘The Overcoat’, Gogol’s short story which is concerned with the experience of a lower
order clerk in the St Petersburg civil service, and his need for a new coat. I focus on the speech of the narrator and Akaky Akakievich, the protagonist.

**The Overcoat**

As Charles Berheimer notes, this tale, published in 1842, opens with a digression: ‘In the department of ... but it would be better not to say in which department. There is nothing more irascible than all these departments, regiments, offices—in short, all this officialdom’. As this opening signals, the narrator’s language is marked throughout by digressions, absences, hesitations and repetitions. Victor Brombert reads this as both playfulness and subversion of auctorial authority, since it shows ‘the arbitrariness of any fictional structure’. Gogol, says Brombert, seems caught ‘between the conviction that writing is the only salvation, and that it is powerless to say the unsayable’.178

Petersburg, I suggest, contributes to this ‘unsayability’, confusing the possibility of coherent narrative:

> Precisely where the clerk who had invited [Akikievich] lived, we unfortunately cannot say: our memory is beginning to fail us badly, and whatever there is in Petersburg, all those houses and streets, has so mixed together in our head that it is very hard to get anything out of it in a decent fashion.179

The effect of the city ‘going into’ the narrator’s head works against anything, such as language, getting ‘out of it in a decent fashion’. Fragmentation defines both the story’s language and the experience of living in Petersburg. Janet Tucker suggests this fragmentation extends to the generic make-up of ‘The Overcoat’, which is composed (like *Arabesques*) of a patchwork of different forms of

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179 ‘The Overcoat’, p. 410.
writing, including ‘hagiography, the physiological sketch, the gothic tale, bureaucratic prose plus the oral tale, and the society tale’.\textsuperscript{180}

Fragmentation and digression are hallmarks of arabesque writing, especially if, as for Schlegel, Lawrence Sterne is taken as the archetypal arabesque writer. \textit{Tristram Shandy}, famously, is almost nothing \textit{but} digression. Such writing has an affinity with Baroque, a form, like Gothic and arabesque, that is both architectural and literary. For Gavriel Shapiro, Baroque forms the basis of Gogol’s writing, characterised by ‘figures of language based on repetition, cumulation, and wordplay’.\textsuperscript{181} The writing of Cervantes is a typical example of this style. Belyi explicitly combines the architectural and literary sides of Baroque when he compares Gogol’s writing to ‘an asymmetrical Baroque structure surrounded with a colonnade of repetitions’.\textsuperscript{182} Similarly, Carsten Strathausen suggests that a genuine translation of the arabesque into writing should be expected to use ‘ellipses, redundancies, [...] alliterations [...] repetitive phrases, and so forth’.\textsuperscript{183}

All these features, especially repetition, characterise Akikievich. Like Melville’s Bartleby the Scrivener, Akikievich’s sole job is to copy documents, an activity which dominates his life. Unlike Bartleby, though, he derives a peculiar pleasure from copying:

There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own. Delight showed in his face; certain letters were his favorites, and when he came to one of them, he was beside himself: he chuckled and winked and helped out with his lips, so that it seemed one could read on his face every letter his pen traced.\textsuperscript{184}

Bernheimer identifies in this pleasure a Kierkegaardian freedom, which recalls Kant’s description of free beauty: ““Repetition,” writes Kierkegaard, “signifies freedom itself, ... a transcendency, a...

\textsuperscript{182} Shapiro, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{183} Strathausen, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{184} ‘The Overcoat’, p. 397.
religious movement by virtue of the absurd, which comes to pass when it has reached the borders of the marvellous’. This is characteristic of the arabesque, where absurdity frequently tends towards madness, as in Scott’s reading of Hoffmann, and Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’. Repetition, indeed, is embedded in Akiky’s name, since he was christened after his father. In Russian, notes Brombert, this is emphasised, as the name suggests the syllable kak, meaning ‘like’ (as well as sounding like a child’s term for excrement). The story is also, says Brombert, written using ‘seemingly endless variations’ on the same Russian words, heightening the repetitive effect. Akiky’s speech, meanwhile, is marked by ellipses, redundancies and digressions, making it highly non-referential:

It should be known that Akaky Akikievich expressed himself mostly with prepositions, adverbs, and finally such particles as have decidedly no meaning. If the matter was very difficult, he even had the habit of not finishing the phrase at all, so that very often he would begin his speech with the words “That, really, is altogether sort of…” after which would come nothing, and he himself would forget it, thinking everything had been said.

This Shandian language is typical of the arabesque, which in Gogol’s hands becomes an urban and abstracted form, mimetically signifying the abstract and intentional city of St Petersburg. The unfinished, interrupted sentences of Akikievich prevent continuity, as does film for Benjamin, permitting only repetition.

Akikievich offers a linguistic patterning of the new form of perambulating movement which the modern city generates, and which can be seen in Raskolnikov’s erratic journeys around Petersburg in Crime and Punishment (1866). The affinity between Akaky’s language and such movement can be observed in a passage that comes after he learns his old coat cannot be fixed:

185 Bernheimer, p. 57.
187 Brombert, p. 571.
188 ‘The Overcoat’, p. 402.
When he went outside, Akaky Akikievich was as if in a dream. ‘So that’s it, that’s what it is’, he said to himself. ‘I really didn’t think it would come out sort of...’ and then, after some silence, he added, ‘So that’s how it is! that’s what finally comes out! and I really never would have supposed it would be so’. Following that, a long silence again ensued, after which he said, ‘So that’s it! such an, indeed, altogether unexpected, sort of ... it’s altogether ... such a circumstance!’ Having said this, instead of going home, he went in the entirely opposite direction, without suspecting it himself.189

Akaky’s erratic language becomes erratic movement. Both are arabesques, generated in reaction to the modern city. This influence the city exerts is attuned with the bureaucracy which continually passes Akikievich new documents to copy. It is part of the city’s invisible architecture, which cannot be detected directly, but only in its effects. It works to repress Akaky’s desires and his expression of his desires (which only emerge in the story’s conclusion, when Akaky’s ghost appears to take on the form of his superior), but also generates the peculiar freedom Akaky exhibits in his copying.

This combination of repression and freedom, organisation and randomness repeats the themes of Gogol’s essay on architecture. Space, like language, is charged with contradictory energies. On the one hand, the desire to view the architectural history of the world as a combination of educational tool and proto-cinematic entertainment, to have it clearly laid out and ordered; and on the other a desire to combine all possible architectural styles, or, alternatively, to explode the potential of existing architecture into new forms. The gaps and digressions in Akiky’s language, meanwhile, signify both a repression and an opening up of unexpected and unknown areas of thought and action.

The next chapter is concerned with the anxiety hinted at by Gogol’s ‘strange thought’: how to ensure that the city can be brought fully into view, how to overcome its resistance to being seen as a whole. It is again concerned with the relationship between unity and multiplicity, but this time in

189 ‘The Overcoat’, p. 404.
industrial Manchester, a city that seems divided in a starkly binary manner, between workers and masters. Where Gogol seeks to find a form of architecture appropriate to the modern age, which would provide both visual pleasure and overcome the problem of the city’s unknowability, the writers I turn to now seek to overcome problems rooted in class division. Their texts attempt to bring the spaces of the workers into visibility, in order to comprehend, and hence either ameliorate or overturn, their relationship with factory owners and the middle classes more generally.
Chapter 2—The Underground City: Kay, Engels and Gaskell

I have shown in the previous chapter how Gogol sought new ways to visualise the modern city, imagining on the one hand previously unknown forms of height, transparency and suspension, and on the other a street through which citizens could wander in order to see the architectural history of the world. In shifting focus to industrial Manchester, the ‘shock-city’ of the 1830s and 40s, this chapter focuses less on urban architecture in the abstract and more on theoretical and literary engagements with a particular city, albeit one for which abstraction itself sometimes seems to offer a means of overcoming social problems, as in James Kay’s 1832 report on the city’s working classes.  

This chapter explores the structural role played by invisible architecture in Manchester in the writing of James Kay, Friedrich Engels and Elizabeth Gaskell. In particular, I argue that underground and unconscious spaces are positioned, along with the working classes who inhabit them, as both structurally necessary and potentially disruptive or threatening by the industrial capitalist system which generates such spaces. This arrangement, the result of a spatial and social repression that seeks to preserve the existing form of capitalist relations of production, throws up spaces whose invisibility to dominant forms of power at times provides an opportunity for emergent or residual forms of thought and praxis to develop or persist, though usually in tenuous and marginal ways, as with Alice Wilson in Mary Barton (1848). On the other hand, such invisibility may lead to social erasure, as with the Davenport family in the same novel.

My argument derives largely from Henri Lefebvre’s analysis of space as a social product, as laid out in The Production of Space:

Many people will find it hard to endorse the notion that space has taken on, within the present mode of production, within society as it actually is, a sort of reality of its own [...].

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190 Briggs, p. 51.  
191 My use of the unconscious is influenced by both psychoanalysis and Benjamin’s ‘optical unconscious’. For more detail, see Introduction.  
192 On emergent, dominant and residual forms see Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: OUP, 1977), especially pp. 121-27.
The more so in view of the further claim that the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it. The social and political (state) forces which engendered this space now seek, but fail, to master it completely; the very agency that has forced spatial reality towards a sort of uncontrollable autonomy now strives to run it into the ground, then shackle and enslave it. Is this space an abstract one? Yes, but it is also ‘real’ in the sense in which concrete abstractions such as commodities and money are real.\textsuperscript{193}

For Lefebvre, space is both a social product (hence subject to historical forces and limitations) and a form of ideology. It is also an arena of social contestation, and a tool which can be used by different social classes to produce or resist domination. In line with this, I argue both that Gaskell’s Manchester novels (\textit{Mary Barton} and \textit{North and South}) identify the city’s spatial organisation as a product and driver of class division, and that the ideological force of these spatial divisions enters into, and limits, the solutions Gaskell can offer to this problem.\textsuperscript{194} The only tangible solution to class conflict at the end of \textit{Mary Barton} is to transfer the workers from one form of invisibility—life in the slums of Manchester—to another, more morally acceptable one: life in the colonies.\textsuperscript{195}

In \textit{North and South} (1855) Gaskell implicitly recognises that such a solution serves ultimately to reinforce the class distinctions generated by the modern city, yet cannot provide a satisfactory alternative. The latter novel eschews emigration as a non-resolution, replacing it with a social union between Thornton and Higgins (one of his workmen), modelled on the romantic union between Margaret and Mr Thornton. This romance covers over and compensates for the insufficiency of the proposed union between classes, which takes only the vague and fragile form of an assertion that

\textsuperscript{193} Lefebvre, pp. 26-27.
\textsuperscript{194} While \textit{North and South} is set in the fictional town of Milton, the novel draws on Gaskell’s experience of Manchester, though Alan Shelston finds it more generic in its description of the city than \textit{Mary Barton}. Alan Shelston, ‘Elizabeth Gaskell’s Manchester’, \textit{Gaskell Society Journal}, 3 (1989), 46-67.
\textsuperscript{195} Emigration from Britain to the colonies, particularly Australia and Canada, took place on a large scale in the 19th century, often promoted as a solution to perceived overpopulation, and as a ‘vital safety valve against disorder’. See Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, \textit{Migration and Empire} (Oxford: OUP, 2010), pp. 11-40, pp. 41-74 (p. 16). See also Dennis Wepman, \textit{Immigration} (New York: Infobase, 2002), pp. 94-133.
master and man will ‘look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy, and bear with each other more patiently and kindly’, a stance described by Terry Eagleton, somewhat derogatorily, as ‘Gaskellian liberalism’. Gaskell’s decision, after North and South, not to write any more city novels might therefore be seen as the recognition of an inability to take any further her critique of urban industrial life. Engels, by contrast, begins to develop a vision of how urban life and class relations might be defined through rather than against modernity, with new forms of space giving rise to wholly new social forms rather than facilitating the development of those which already exist. For Gaskell, a solution which goes beyond worker/master relations remains unthinkable: the invisible architecture of capitalism which has structured Manchester also limits her vision of the city’s future (though this is not to say that Engels is somehow outside ideological limitation). In order to escape this binary, Gaskell instead turns, particularly in Mary Barton, to spaces and times outside the scope of the city.

While the main goal of this chapter is to explore Manchester’s invisible and underground spaces, it should be noted that Manchester in the 1830s and 40s was shocking not only for its invisibility, but also for its excessive visibility. According to Deborah Nord, the central problem posed by Manchester was the threat of female ‘exposure’, the risk of ‘being looked at on the street and assessed as an object of interest’—a danger always associated with prostitution, which the crowded streets of industrial Manchester seemed to promote. This apparent contradiction, in which visibility and invisibility both become excessive, is found across all the texts in this thesis, although the balance between them shifts: excessive visibility is more obvious in The Ladies’ Paradise than Mary Barton, for instance. This apparent paradox can be understood by adopting a dialectical perspective where visibility and invisibility are understood as emerging from the same set of

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197 Sylvia’s Lovers and Wives and Daughters, the two novels of the 1860s, are mainly provincial. It is also worth noting that when Gaskell spoke in sympathy with working-class or female rights, as in Mary Barton and Ruth, she attracted criticism, making these difficult texts for her to write and defend. See Nord, pp. 157–59.

processes (industrial concentration, reification and abstraction), which capitalism puts to work in the modern city. This means that increased visibility can actually promote invisibility, as in the anonymity of the crowded street, for which Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd’ (1840) is a foundational text, or that invisibility might become a means to promote visibility, as in the fog of *Bleak House* (1853), which serves as a background against which specific objects emerge.\(^{199}\) Whiteness, considered in the conclusion, also has this effect.

This dialectical relationship can be rearticulated in Lefebvre’s terms, as a form of the ‘double illusion’ by which space conceals its socially produced nature. This consists of ‘the illusion of transparency on the one hand and the illusion of opacity, or “realistic” illusion, on the other’.\(^{200}\) In the illusion of transparency, visibility is foremost, and space appears to be an open realm of free activity, just as free-market capitalism appears to allow individual freedom. In the realistic illusion, invisibility takes precedence, with objects encountered in space appearing to have a ‘natural’ reality. This illusion is a reifying and ideological one, where contingent structures employ a cloak of permanence, obviousness and self-sufficiency. Lefebvre observes that ‘each illusion embodies and nourishes the other. The shifting back and forth between the two, and the flickering or oscillatory effect that it produces, are thus just as important as either of the illusions considered in isolation’.\(^{201}\)

Such a system can be characterised as in/visible architecture, since it puts visibility and invisibility to work together, in the form of naturalness and freedom, as components of a self-regenerating and self-concealing process. This in/visible architecture operates like the Ideological State Apparatuses described by Althusser, taken at their most dynamic, since in it not only production but also the *conditions of production*—the way in which space is socially organised and interpreted—are continually reproduced in society.\(^{202}\) In this sense, the current chapter explores one moment in a

\(^{199}\) Poe, ‘The Man of the Crowd’, in *Selected Tales*, pp. 84-91.

\(^{200}\) Lefebvre, p. 27.

\(^{201}\) Lefebvre, p. 30.

\(^{202}\) See Althusser.
larger dialectical process of ideological production and reproduction, which is constitutive of social space.

**James Kay and Friedrich Engels’s Manchester**

Before turning to Gaskell’s Manchester novels, I want to situate the spatial organisation of the city in relation to class division in the intellectual discourse of the 1830s and 40s. This question can be approached by comparing two important texts: James Kay’s 1832 pamphlet, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, and Friedrich Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). As Mary Poovey notes, the research presented by James Kay (1804-1877; Kay-Shuttleworth from 1842) in 1832 was very influential, inspiring the foundation in 1833 of the Manchester Statistical Society, the first of its type. This society in turn prompted the formation of the Statistical Society of London in 1834. The Manchester Statistical Society played a key role in reshaping the direction of social reform in Britain in the years that followed, promoting the use of statistics and other social-scientific tools for the analysis of poverty and other social problems.203

From the start, the language of Kay’s pamphlet indicates that its main purpose is to open up the lives of the working classes to view. In the ‘Advertisement’ that opens the first edition of the pamphlet, Kay emphasises ‘the importance of minutely investigating the state of the working classes’, referring to ‘the evils here unreservedly exposed’.204 This drive towards ‘unreserved exposure’ suggests a need to work against a constitutional closure or resistance at work in the city, a mode of investigation, according to Poovey, indebted to the anatomical investigations of eighteenth century medicine, which opened up the human (as opposed to social) body to scientific view for the first time.205 It is comparable to the desire that motivates the narrator in the ‘good spirit’ passage of *Dombey and Son*, which calls for ‘a good spirit who would take the house-tops off [...] and show a

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203 See Poovey, p. 57.
205 Poovey, pp. 73-97
Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes’ (see Chapter 3), though Dickens writes in a literary and ethico-religious rather than social-scientific register.206

In Kay’s pamphlet, the role of the ‘good spirit’ is to be fulfilled by a new organisation, based on the Provident Society of Liverpool, whose members ‘include a great many of the most influential inhabitants’.207 Kay describes how this bourgeois society operates:

The town is divided into numerous districts, the inspection and care of which is committed to one or two members of the association. They visit the people in their houses—sympathise with their distresses, and minister to the wants of the necessitous; but above all, they acquire, by their charity, the right of enquiring into their arrangements—of instructing them in domestic economy—of recommending sobriety, cleanliness, forethought and method.208

The desire for exposure is explicitly formulated here as a means of social control, with working-class people first investigated and then imbued with the bourgeois virtues of ‘sobriety, cleanliness, forethought and method’. Implicitly, this desire is driven by an anxiety that arises from the invisibility, unknowability and unrepresentability of the city and its working classes, problems which Kay’s division of the city into discrete areas (or ‘numerous districts’) and abstraction into statistical tables of data (presented elsewhere in the pamphlet) are supposed to address.

The process Kay pioneers has been described by Mary Poovey, drawing on Lefebvre (and, to a lesser extent, on Foucault), as the ‘production of abstract space’.209 Abstract space can be understood as a form of representation that is socially productive rather than merely passive, where rationalisation and quantification become means to comprehend and master what is unseen in modern society, including the urban poor. Abstraction is employed to bring what is socially and spatially concealed into visibility, though at the cost of reducing and homogenising it. Poovey

207 Kay, p. 63.
208 Kay, p. 63. Compare to the work of Bible Societies, described in Poovey, pp. 42-54.
describes this process with reference to an 1838 study by Kay into the workhouse poor: ‘In Kay’s plan, the problem of the poor’s invisibility was solved by the application of accounting: written records made virtue visible as they rendered labor quantifiable and diligence a matter for certification’. The development of this framework of visibility, bureaucracy and quantification reached its apex, Poovey argues, in Edwin Chadwick’s major Sanitary Report of 1842.

Kay’s concern with visibility, and the underlying class anxieties that attend it, comes to the fore when he describes the thoughts of a typical visitor to Manchester. This implicitly middle-class, and explicitly male, visitor is cast as a spectator, adopting an all-encompassing gaze. This gaze is, however, disrupted in the second part of the passage by the presence of the working classes:

Visiting Manchester, the metropolis of the commercial system, a stranger regards with wonder the ingenuity and comprehensive capacity, which, in the short space of half a century, have here established the staple manufacture of this kingdom. He beholds with astonishment the establishments of its merchants—monuments of fertile genius and successful design:—the masses of capital which have been accumulated by those who crowd upon its mart, and the restless but sagacious spirit which has made every part of the known world the scene of their enterprize. The sudden creation of the mighty system of commercial organization which covers this country, and stretches its arms to the most distant seas, attests to the power and the dignity of man. Commerce, it appears to such a spectator, here gathers in her storehouse the productions of every clime, that she may minister to the happiness of a favoured race.

When he turns from the great capitalists, he contemplates the fearful strength only of that multitude of the labouring population, which lies like a slumbering giant at their feet. He has heard of the turbulent riots of the people—of machine breaking—of the secret and sullen organization which has suddenly lit the torch of incendiariam, or well nigh uplifted the

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210 Poovey, p. 36.
211 Discussion of the Report lies beyond the scope of this project, but see Poovey, pp. 98-114, pp. 115-131. On Chadwick in relation to the problem of waste, see Gallagher, pp. 86-117.
arm of rebellion in the land. He remembers that political desperadoes have ever loved to
tempt this population to the hazards of the swindling game of revolution, and have scarcely
failed. In the midst of so much opulence, however, he has disbelieved the cry of need.\footnote{Kay, pp. 46-47.}

This is the picture of a city divided. The overwhelming excess of the first half of the passage
(‘monuments of fertile genius and successful design’) draws on a predominantly visual register
(‘regards’, ‘beholds’, ‘spectator’) while the second half employs an ambiguous mix of sensory and
non-sensory perception (‘contemplates’, ‘heard’, ‘remembers’) as it considers the ‘fearful strength’
of the working classes. The shift is from visibility to invisibility, or at least visibility’s unsettlement and
confusion. This transformation culminates in the final sentence, where the ‘opulence’ of commerce
(the visible) is revealed to carry an ideological force sufficient to overwhelm the ‘cry of need’ of the
poor. The poor, neither seen nor believed, are rendered invisible, concealed behind the wealth their
labour has produced. This is the same process by which, in Marx, the fetish form of the commodity
conceals the real conditions of its production behind its phantasmagoric appeal.\footnote{Karl Marx, \textit{Capital}, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: OUP, 1995), pp. 42-50.}

It is the specific form taken by capitalist production in Manchester—one produced and
reflected by the divided form of the city itself, and evident in the passage quoted—which makes the
poor literally and metaphorically invisible. This invisibility, which Kay wants to overcome through
‘unreserved exposure’, is only the other side of the bourgeois system of commerce which stimulates
wonder in the visitor. The ‘sudden creation’ of this system seems magical, but only because its basis
in mass labour has been systematically repressed. The totalising ideology of this system, which
‘stretches its arms to the most distant seas’, is also that of Dickens’s Mr Dombey, for whom: ‘The
earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them
light’ (DS1.2). Space and time are colonised by the House of Dombey and Son, which acts as the
‘favoured race’ of Kay’s description, reduced absurdly, but appropriately, to a single bourgeois family
(for more on Dombey, see Chapter 3); appropriate because Kay’s defence of capital is also a defence
of the ideals of the middle-class Victorian family (‘sobriety, cleanliness, forethought and method’), which Kay wants to promote in the working classes.

This passage reveals that in order to maintain part of the invisible architecture of the industrial city (the part associated with commerce) while reforming the part which is problematic (the part associated with the working classes), Kay has to ignore or conceal the structural interdependency of these two terms. The result is the repeated claim that ‘the evils affecting [the lower orders] result from foreign and accidental causes’, rather than any kind of systemic crisis.\textsuperscript{214} Having diagnosed the situation in this way, Kay can respond by setting up an alternative form of invisible architecture, re-classifying the city into districts numbered from 1 to 14, each of which is an expression of the aggregated population which it contains, information about whom is displayed in a series of numerical charts.\textsuperscript{215} Even within the terms of this system, however, full visibility is impossible: ‘It is [...] to be lamented, that even these numerical results fail to exhibit a perfect picture of the ills which are suffered by the poor’.\textsuperscript{216} Kay also expresses concern about the invisibility of the poor’s sexual behaviour, described in miasmic terms as ‘a licentiousness capable of corrupting the whole body of society, like an insidious disease, which eludes observation’.\textsuperscript{217} For Thomas Carlyle, fierce opponent of political economy, these are fundamental problems of statistical abstraction: ‘Tables are like cobwebs, like the sieve of the Danaides; beautifully reticulated, orderly to look upon, but which will hold no conclusion. Tables are abstractions, and the object a most concrete one, so difficult to read the essence of’.\textsuperscript{218} Even with perfect data sets, Kay’s method could never bring about absolute visibility, because its object (the city) resists systematisation. More than this, Kay’s revelations are predicated on the continued invisibility of the structural connection between the successes of commerce and the miseries of the poor. One sign of this absent link is the displacement

\textsuperscript{214} Kay, p. 47. See also p. 1.
\textsuperscript{215} Kay, p. 16 onwards.
\textsuperscript{216} Kay, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{217} Kay, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{218} Thomas Carlyle, \textit{Chartism} (London: James Fraser, 1840), p. 9.
of the unresolvable causes of Manchester’s social problems onto the most foreign and abject of its citizens: the Irish.\textsuperscript{219}

If Kay’s construction of abstract space offers a middle-class response to the invisibility of Manchester’s poor, Friedrich Engels (who responds to Kay’s text), provides a reading of Manchester which seeks to deconstruct rather than ameliorate the status quo.\textsuperscript{220} For Engels, the architecture of the city consigns the poor to the place of death, waste and abjection, not accidentally as in Kay, but through the logic of capitalism itself. Engels’s description of Manchester’s spatial layout goes to the heart of this logic:

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working people’s quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working people’s quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class; or, if this does not succeed, they are concealed with the cloak of charity.\textsuperscript{221}

Concealment of the working classes is, Engels argues, fundamental to the city’s constitution. Charity, which implicitly assigns poverty to ‘foreign and accidental causes’, plays its part in this concealment. Particularly important is Engels’s recognition of the partly ‘unconscious’ manner in which Manchester is spatially constituted. Following up on this hint, a psychoanalytic reading can recognise the exclusion of the working classes as analogous to the psychical process of repression, where sources of anxiety are concealed in order to facilitate the smooth functioning of the conscious mind, here


\textsuperscript{220} See for instance, Friedrich Engels, \textit{The Condition of the Working Class in England} (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 100-02. The deconstructive nature of Engels’s argument is evident when he states: ‘I always preferred to present proof from \textit{Liberal} sources in order to defeat the liberal bourgeoisie by casting their own words in their teeth’. Engels, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{221} Engels, p .85.
represented by the smooth operations of commerce. For Freud, ‘the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious’, an operation which, however, ‘demands a persistent expenditure of force’.\(^{222}\) The workers are not absent, nor are they unnecessary, but they are made invisible by the persistently reproduced appearance of a background of homogeneous, abstract space. Abstract space, Lefebvre argues, is identical to the abstract Cartesian thought of Western philosophy. Such thought separates consciousness from the material conditions of the body, then re-positions this artificial split as normative.\(^ {223}\) In this sense, abstraction and repression are co-extensive processes, in which both body and unconscious material are excluded from representation. The repression in Engels’s topography of Manchester can be further explicated using Lefebvre’s triad, or trialectics, of ‘spatial practice’, ‘representational spaces’ and ‘spaces of representation’. The spatial practice of Manchester (daily material reality, perceived space) excludes workers from the city’s primary representational spaces (‘space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols’), while the city’s representations of space (‘conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers’) either exclude the working classes or, as in Kay’s pamphlet, include them in an abstracted and reified form.\(^ {224}\)

For Engels, the link between the architecture of Manchester and the exclusion of the working class is important. Whereas in Kay the evils affecting the working classes are ‘foreign’ and ‘accidental’, for Engels these evils are fundamental to the spatial constitution of the city. They may appear accidental, but they in fact serve the interests of the bourgeoisie:

> the thoroughfares leading from the Exchange in all directions out of the city are lined, on both sides, with an almost unbroken series of shops, and are so kept in the hands of the middle and lower bourgeoisie [...] True, these shops bear some relation to the districts which

\(^ {223}\) Lefebvre, pp. 1-7.
\(^ {224}\) Lefebvre, pp. 38-39.
lie behind them [...] but they suffice to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement to their wealth.225

The dialectical connection between wealth and misery is here rendered invisible by the facade of commerce, which functions, as in Kay, like a commodity, concealing the conditions of its own production. Engels later expands on this:

anyone who knows Manchester can infer the adjoining districts, from the appearance of the thoroughfare, but one is seldom in a position to catch from the street a glimpse of the real labouring districts. I know very well that this hypocritical plan is more or less common to all great cities; I know, too, that the retail dealers are forced by the nature of their business to take possession of the great highways; I know that there are more good buildings than bad ones upon such streets everywhere, and that the value of land is greater near them than in remoter districts; but at the same time I have never seen so systematic a shutting out of the working classes from the thoroughfares, so tender a concealment of everything that might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie, as in Manchester. And yet, in other respects, Manchester is less built according to a plan, after official regulations, is more an outgrowth of accident, than any other city; and when I consider in this connection the eager assurances of the middle class, that the working class is doing famously, I cannot help feeling that the liberal manufacturers, the bigwigs of Manchester, are not so innocent after all, in the matter of this sensitive method of construction.226

Both passages make Manchester a spatialised form of the Freudian unconscious. For Freud: ‘an unconscious conception is one of which we are not aware, but the existence of which we are nevertheless ready to admit on account of other proofs or signs’.227 It is suggestive, too, that Engels

225 Engels, p. 86.
226 Engels, p. 87.
points to the ‘eye’ and the ‘nerves’ of the bourgeoisie as the senses affronted by the working classes. The reference to eyes suggests a form of Benjamin’s ‘optical unconscious’, the elements of the visual field which cannot be seen, a form of invisibility film explodes.\textsuperscript{228} The reference to nerves anticipates Freud’s claim, concerning the pleasure principle, that the psychic apparatus of the mind seeks to suppress and avoid sources of nervous stimulation, especially pain.\textsuperscript{229} In Engels, Freud’s psychical system has been realised spatially, with Manchester’s architecture protecting the system of consciousness (the bourgeoisie) from potentially disruptive sources of stimulation (the workers). Engels also returns to the puzzling fact that while Manchester is organised in a way which perfectly suits the bourgeoisie, it is predominantly ‘an outgrowth of accident’. Whereas Kay is willing to accept this, Engels suspects there is an underlying intentionality in the behaviour of the ‘bigwigs of Manchester’, who are largely responsible for the city’s construction. Engels’s slight dissatisfaction with the details of his diagnosis (‘I cannot help feeling...’ suggests an absent causal link) implies that he does not have the theoretical tools to formulate a model which would reconcile accident and intentionality. The concept of repression, and later theories of ideology such as Althusser’s, provide this, allowing us to see that the bourgeoisie have not only concealed the working class, but also concealed from themselves their culpability for this act. Freud’s theory of repression, in recognising that unconscious drives underlie conscious thought, allows for the city to be organised ‘unintentionally’ without this being either random or accidental.

Another way to read Engels’s description of Manchester is through Dostoevsky’s \textit{Notes from Underground} (1864), whose protagonist, characterised by ressentiment and self-division, speaks of ‘having the misfortune to live in St Petersburg, the most abstract [отвлеченном] and intentional [умышленные] city in the whole round world’.\textsuperscript{230} The underground man follows this up with the

\textsuperscript{228} ‘The Work of Art’, p. 37.
remark: ‘Towns can be either intentional or unintentional [неумышленные]’. The ‘abstract’ for
the underground man, as for Lefebvre, is associated with thought, and opposed to action, so that ‘to
think too much is a disease, a real, actual disease’. An abstract and intentional city is, then, not
only organised by Western rationality, as I argued in Chapter One, but also crippled by thought. The
underground man reiterates this view when he states that, for the purposes of ‘ordinary human life’,
‘It would be quite enough [...] to have the consciousness of all our so-called men of action and public
figures’. Such a consciousness, which privileges action over thought, becomes untenable in the
intentional city. An intentional city privileges thought, and renders it excessive; it is also planned and
bureaucratic, like St Petersburg, designed by Peter the Great as an ideal European capital. An
unintentional city, by contrast, would be unplanned, and dominated by principles of laissez-faire, like
Manchester. It would not be coherently thought out or conceptualised, but would privilege action.
Mr Thornton, we might observe, Gaskell’s archetypal Manchester employer, is a ‘man of action’
(NS276). Manchester is unintentional, then, because its structure, which excludes the working
classes, is rendered unavailable to the thought of those within it, though it is actively lived every day.
This is perhaps why it takes Engels, an outsider, to diagnose its condition. Kay’s project, which is one
of abstraction, aims to retroactively make the city intentional, dividing it into a series of discrete and
comprehensible areas. Engels, by contrast, finds in Manchester signs of the unconscious
intentionality which drives capitalism. My next section turns to an important spatial correlative of
this unconscious intentionality: the cellar.

Cellar-dwelling

Cellar-dwellings are, I contend in this section, a form of habitation that was particularly significant in
northern English industrial towns in early- to mid-century, including Manchester, forming the spatial

\[\text{231 Dostoevsky, p. 17.}\]
\[\text{232 Dostoevsky, p. 18.}\]
\[\text{233 Dostoevsky, p. 17, p. 18.}\]
\[\text{234 On the city’s history, see Bruce Lincoln, Sunlight at Midnight: St Petersburg and the Rise of Modern Russia (New York: Basic Books, 2000).}\]
dimension of a social repression. These spaces served to render the working classes unseen to the middle-class gaze, associating them with what is hidden and unknown, and hence making them disturbing and threatening to a liberal writer such as James Kay.

*Mary Barton* will be discussed specifically in the next section, but I want to note here that the very fact Gaskell depicts working-class spaces and their inhabitants in such detail is unusual, and has often been the most highly-praised aspect of the novel. Kathleen Tillotson, employing a phrase from Disraeli’s *Sybil* (1845), comments that ‘The denizens of the ‘other nation’ [the poor] are neither harrowing victims nor heroic martyrs; they are shown in their natural human dignity’. Similarly for Raymond Williams, ‘The really impressive thing about the book is the intensity of the effort to record, in its own terms, the feel of everyday life in the working-class homes’. Paradigmatic among the working-class living spaces in *Mary Barton* is the cellar-dwelling, an invention of the nineteenth-century. Though the word ‘cellar’ is medieval, the terms ‘cellar-dwelling’ and ‘cellar-dweller’ are first recorded in 1837 and 1844 respectively, so that Engels was dealing with a new concept when he wrote of Manchester in 1844: ‘Cellar dwellings are general here; wherever it is in any way possible, these subterranean dens are constructed, and a very considerable portion of the population dwells in them’.

Gaskell associates cellars, along with garrets, with the lowest form of poverty, as in a passage from Chapter 8 of *Mary Barton* which addresses the reader directly:

> It is so impossible to describe, or even faintly to picture, the state of distress which prevailed in the town at that time [1839-41], that I will not attempt it. [...] And when I hear, as I have heard, of the sufferings and privations of the poor [...] of parents sitting in their clothes by the fireside during the whole night for seven weeks together, in order that their only bed and bedding might be reserved for the use of their large family [...]—of others being compelled

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238 OED, cellar, n.1. Engels, p. 83.
to fast for days together, uncheered by any hope of better fortune, living, moreover, or rather starving, in a crowded garret, or damp cellar [...]—can I wonder that many of them, in such times of misery and destitution, spoke and acted with ferocious precipitation?239

Gaskell refers here to the Chartist agitation of the period (the acts of ‘ferocious precipitation’), suggesting that the cellar forms a major part of the marginal and excluded position which generated this unrest, though this is the case indirectly rather than directly in her own narrative, since John Barton, the main figure of working-class violence, is partly motivated by seeing cellar conditions but does not live in them himself. To live in a cellar, she suggests, is to risk entering a condition which is impossible ‘even faintly to picture’, an unrepresentability exacerbated by the location of cellars and garrets at the extreme edges of the house. Poised at the top or bottom of a building, often concealed from other inhabitants, these are barely rooms at all, neither inside nor out. Such a position is appropriate for a repressed space; the unconscious, too, is impossible to describe, and can only be talked about through places where it erupts into consciousness, such as jokes and dreams.240 The unconscious is, though, more inaccessible than cellars and garrets: for Gaskell’s narrator, here as throughout the novel, the failure is one of language and communication, while those who physically visit such spaces (as she has done) can viscerally comprehend them. The psychoanalytic unconscious is unrepresentable in principle; it cannot be entered like a conventional space.

Nonetheless, in the context of Gaskell’s Manchester, riots and Chartism can be added to the list of eruptions which signify some form of repressed unconscious. Thomas Carlyle’s Chartism (1840) seems to recognise the state of repression under which the Chartists acted:

The distracted incoherent embodiment of Chartism, whereby in late months it took shape and became visible, this has been put down; or rather has fallen down and gone asunder by gravitation and law of nature: but the living essence of Chartism has not been put down.241

240 As in Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) and The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901).
241 Chartism, p. 2.
The ‘living essence’ of Chartism remains after the failure of 1839, though it is now unseen. This is, Carlyle contends, because it is hidden – the descriptions ‘put down’, ‘fallen down’ and ‘gone asunder by gravitation’ imply going underground – and not because it has been abolished. In the context of Engels’s earlier quoted passages, I want to reinterpret Carlyle to suggest that Chartism has fallen back into a social and spatial unconscious which is strongly associated with cellar-dwelling. Even the form of Chartism that emerged into social consciousness, though, cannot be considered entirely authentic, since it is a ‘distracted incoherent embodiment’ of a more powerful unseen force.

Gaston Bachelard, exploring the poetics of space, engages with this link between repression and underground space, opposing ‘the rationality of the roof’ to ‘the irrationality of the cellar’. While the roof and attic have a ‘solid geometry’ that is logical and comprehensible, the cellar is different:

As for the cellar, we shall no doubt find uses for it. It will be rationalized and its conveniences enumerated. But it is first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths.242

For Bachelard, the cellar reverberates within the human subject as an unconscious dream-space; in it, ‘The impassioned inhabitant digs and re-digs, making its very depth active’.243 Although for Bachelard, unlike Gaskell, this unconscious is often intimate and personal rather than disturbing, the cellar remains its locus, a spatial correlative of the primal and oneiric.

It is no coincidence that one of Dickens’s characters most subject to repression, George Silverman, is first encountered in a cellar. Silverman features in Dickens’s late short story, ‘George Silverman’s Explanation’ (1868), which begins, after two abortive first chapters reflecting on the difficulty of beginning ‘to explain my explanation’, with Silverman describing his early life:

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243 Bachelard, p. 18.
My parents were in a miserable condition of life, and my infant home was a cellar in Preston. I recollect the sound of father’s Lancashire clogs on the street pavement above, as being different in my young hearing from the sound of all other clogs; and I recollect, that, when mother came down the cellar-steps, I used tremblingly to speculate on her feet having a good or an ill-tempered look, - on her knees,—on her waist,—until finally her face came into view, and settled the question. From this it will be seen that I was timid, and that the cellar-steps were steep, and that the doorway was very low.244

The range of Silverman’s world is bounded by the four walls of this cellar, where he would often be locked up ‘for a day or two at a time’ while his parents looked for work. Driven by hunger, thirst and lack of knowledge to appear uncaring after his parents die, Silverman is described as a ‘worldly little devil’ (GS380), a term first used by his mother which haunts him throughout the text. It is the business of his life and his ‘explanation’ to prove or disprove his right to this name. As well as being called ‘worldly’, Silverman is haunted by a fear of his infectiousness: ‘you are going’, he is told upon removal from the cellar, ‘to a healthy farm-house to be purified’ (GS383). He is also told: ‘You had better not say much—in fact, you had better be very careful not to say anything’ (GS383). These injunctions—seeing oneself as devilish, being infectious, not saying anything—form Silverman’s character, to the extent that he later unites the girl he loves, and who loves him, with another man, out of a belief in his own inferiority.

The tragedy of the story is that Silverman never really leaves his cellar. Once physically removed from it, he rebuilds it internally, as a form of repression. He now stands inside and outside the cellar at once, both the little boy and the parents who lock him in. The story realises Bachelard’s observation that fear becomes exaggerated in the cellar, so that eventually ‘The cellar […] becomes buried madness, walled-in tragedy’.245 Unrepresentability is also important in this text, as in Gaskell, Engels and Kay’s readings of Manchester, in the difficulty Silverman faces in beginning his

245 Bachelard, p. 20.
explanation: he hopes to show his true self in writing, as he could not do in life, but writing too fails him. Repression and the cellar come together here, as components of an invisible architecture which is at once spatial and psychological.

In order for cellars to operate effectively as sites of psychical and social repression, they must be conceptually available for dwelling. The cultural change which allows this is the development of a form of capitalism that relies on reserve-labour, traced by Marx in *Capital*, in Chapter 25, Section 3 of Volume 1: ‘Progressive Production of a Relative Surplus-Population or Industrial Reserve Army’. Marx argues that an increasing accumulation of capital leads to a relative fall in the proportion of capital directed to labour-power (the workers). This accumulation is due to the increased concentration of capital (meaning the process is reflexive) and improvements in the technological basis of production, both of which lead to increased productivity. For Marx:

> it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces in direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant population of labourers, i.e. a population of greater extent that suffices for the average needs of the self-expansion of capital, and therefore a surplus-population.\(^{246}\)

The accumulation of capital is correlated with the accumulation of workers, as a pool of labour upon which capitalism can draw as required. This surplus population must be stored, just as capital or commodities are stored, and this takes place in the hidden and marginal spaces of the city, above all attics and cellars, spaces formerly reserved for goods. In a reifying process, people take the place of commodities. This relationship between capitalist accumulation and the surplus population is also a dialectical one:

> if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus-population becomes, conversely,

\(^{246}\) *Capital*, p. 351.
the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production.  

The accumulation of capital generates an accumulation of population, but also relies upon it. The opposition of these terms is cancelled and sublimated by the more general system of the capitalist mode of production as a whole.

This dialectical connection between the wealthiest and most excluded sections of the population helps explain Gaskell’s use of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, in Mary Barton, as a metaphor to describe the urban working classes:

The actions of the uneducated seem to me typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil.

The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. Then, in the sorrowful moment of our triumphant power, their eyes gaze on us with mute reproach. Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness? (MB165)

Kay, who sees population growth as an ‘accidental’ cause of misery rather than an inevitable outcome of capitalism, also gestures towards Frankenstein’s monster when he describes the labourers as a ‘slumbering giant’ at the feet of the capitalists. An entry in the Arcades from 1839 instead associates the monster with the machines, and the workers with Victor: ‘the machines have behaved like Frankenstein’s monster [...], who, after acquiring life, employed it only in persecuting the man who had given it to him’. Gaskell’s passage is revealing in its confusion of the creator, Victor Frankenstein, with his creation. This mistake should remind us that in Mary Shelley’s novel

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247 Capital, p. 352.
249 Kay, p. 47.
250 Arcades, pp. 705-06.
Victor and the monster are bound together as doubles and opposites of each other, just as, for Marx, the working class and the bourgeoisie (or capital and surplus-population) are dialectically bound together by capitalism. Speaking to Walton, Victor describes this existential connection: ‘I must pursue and destroy the being to whom I gave existence; then my lot on earth will be fulfilled and I may die’. In the same way, if the bourgeoisie were to destroy the proletariat it would destroy itself, since neither class can be sustained (in its current form) without the other. What is truly monstrous in the working class, then, is that it gives rise to a dialectical image—a moment in which two opposing and separate images turn into one another and the world is seen allegorically—where the bourgeoisie, its creator, is also revealed as a ‘powerful monster’. Just as the creature (for Gaskell) has no knowledge of ‘the difference between good and evil’, the dialectical image has no knowledge of the difference between workers and bourgeoisie. This indicates the real reason why the workers must be concealed in cellars: because they present to the bourgeoisie a reflection of themselves.

I turn now to a detailed consideration of the cellars in *Mary Barton*, including how they relate to the issues of repression discussed here and how their hidden status impacts upon the social life of the city as it is represented in the novel’s narrative.

**Mary Barton’s Cellars**

*Mary Barton* includes two notable cellar-dwellings, which have different symbolic roles. Taken together, they map out a particular orientation towards the spatial and class structure of Manchester, one which finds hope in community cohesion and the preservation of the past whilst fearing alienation and the loss of identity. The first is inhabited by Alice Wilson, who is Mr Wilson’s

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253 On the dialectical image, see Introduction.
sister and Jem’s aunt, and the second by the Davenport family, after Ben Davenport is put out of work by the factory-owning Carsons.

Alice Wilson, a poor washerwoman, is part of an older generation of characters, also represented by Job Legh, who provide a link to the pre-industrial past through their association with the countryside and rural traditions, depicted as under threat from the growth of the industrial city. This becomes most clear in Alice’s final illness, when she imagines herself as a child, singing songs ‘such as are sung in country churches half draperied over with ivy, and where the running brook, or the murmuring wind among the trees makes fit accompaniment to the chorus of human voices uttering praise and thanksgiving to their God’ (MB260-61).

The novel’s first reference to Alice is by Mr Wilson, giving her place of residence: ‘our Alice lives in the cellar under No. 14, in Barber Street’ (MB12). Shirley Foster notes that Barber Street had been replaced by London Road train station when Gaskell was writing in the late 1840s. In fact, the first station built on this site was Store Street Station in 1842, not long after the novel closes in approximately 1840. By this point Alice has died, following her mental regression (MB327), and the mode of life she represents, defined by a close engagement in one’s local community and opposition to the alienating city, is due to be replaced by the modern, industrial values of the railway, associated with the bewildering experience of Mary’s journey to Liverpool (MB273). According to John Parkinson-Bailey, Store Street Station was initially built for the Manchester and Birmingham Railway, a company taken over in 1846 by the newly formed London and North-Western Railway, which also took control of the Liverpool and Manchester, London and Birmingham, and Great Junction Railways. Store Street, renamed London Road Station, became part of the new company, later becoming Manchester Piccadilly Station, as it is today. From 1846 the London and North-Western Railway also controlled the London and Birmingham Railway, building work for which creates the upheaval of

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254 Shirley Foster in Mary Barton, p. 417n.
Staggs’s Gardens (see Chapter 3). This means that, when Gaskell was writing, not only had Alice Wilson’s cellar been replaced by a railway station, but that station was a terminus on a line whose other end lay in Camden Town, its construction depicted in *Dombey and Son*, a novel whose serial publication concluded in 1848, the year *Mary Barton* was published. Whereas *Mary Barton* implicitly positions Alice’s death and the construction of the railways as the end of a way of life, in *Dombey and Son*, as discussed in the next chapter, the construction of the railway is part of an ongoing instability within the city.

Alice’s cellar-home is a space where, in the first half of the novel at least, she maintains rural knowledge, as an early passage makes clear:

Alice Wilson had but just come in. She had been out all day in the fields, gathering wild herbs for drinks and medicine, for in addition to her invaluable qualities as a sick nurse and her worldly occupations as a washerwoman, she added a considerable knowledge of hedge and field simples; and on fine days, when no more profitable occupation offered itself, she used to ramble off into the lanes and meadows as far as her legs could carry her. This evening she had returned loaded with nettles, and her first object was to light a candle and see to hang them up in bunches in every available place in her cellar room. It was the perfection of cleanliness; in one corner stood the modest-looking bed, with a check curtain at the head, the whitewashed wall filling up the place where the corresponding one should have been. The floor was bricked, and scrupulously clean, although so damp that it seemed as if the last washing would never dry up. (MB16)

Alice’s traditional knowledge of herbs is an ‘addition’ to her ‘worldly occupations’. More specifically, it is a knowledge located below the ‘worldly’ (the same word used to describe George Silverman), in the cellar. It is a form of ‘underground knowledge’, located outside the visual field of the conscious city and preserved by certain members of the working classes. This preservation is symbolised by the

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bunches of herbs which hang ‘in every available place’ in the room, redefining the cellar’s traditional role as a store for commodities, making it a location where the poor can store and protect rural knowledge and culture. This is what Lefebvre calls ‘appropriated space’, described by Isobel Armstrong as ‘the space of limited freedom within the capitalist project’. The passage continues:

As the cellar window looked into an area in the street, down which boys might throw stones, it was protected by an outside shutter, and was oddly festooned with all manner of hedge-row, ditch and field plants, which we are accustomed to call valueless, but which have a powerful effect either for good or for evil, and are consequently much used among the poor.

(MB16)

Just as the shutter is a protection from the stones of the boys, the plants which festoon the window are a protection from the filth and degradation of the city. Symbolically, Alice’s knowledge and traditions act as a barrier which protects rural and communitarian values against the corrupting influence of Manchester. As Elaine Freegood notes, there is a certain ‘coziness’ in Alice’s cellar which works to mitigate the ‘homogenization and degradation of the new laboring class’. Yet the narrator also observes that Alice’s underground knowledge is socially as well as topographically hidden: it is a knowledge which ‘we’—the educated middle-classes—‘are accustomed to call valueless’, rendering it invisible and even threatening, carrying what Freegood calls a ‘potential volatility’.

This view seems in line with Engels’s claim that ‘The workers speak other dialects, have other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics than those of the bourgeoisie’. It also recalls Egremont in Sybil (1845):

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259 Freegood, p. 60.
260 Freegood, p. 60.
261 Engels, p. 150.
I was told [...] that an impassable gulf divided the Rich from the Poor; I was told that the Privileged and the People formed Two Nations, governed by different laws, influenced by different manners, with no thoughts or sympathies in common; with an innate inability of mutual comprehension.262

Despite her subordinate position, Alice has access to a form of knowledge beyond either reader or narrator. Such underground knowledge, though, like repression in Freud, demands a persistent expenditure of force to maintain it. In Alice’s case this consists of regular trips to the country to replenish the cellar’s stock of plants and herbs.

This conception of Alice aligns her with what Diane Purkiss, following Mary Daly, calls ‘the myth of the Burning Times’.263 In this feminist myth of the witch, she lived alone, in her own house surrounded by her garden, in which she grew all manner of herbs and other healing plants.[...] The woman was a healer and a midwife; she had practical knowledge taught her by her mother, and mystical knowledge derived from her closeness to nature, or from a half-submerged pagan religion. She helped women give birth, and she had healing hands; she used her knowledge of herbs and her common sense to help the sick.264

Purkiss criticises this myth as ahistorical and as portraying women as ‘nothing but the helpless victims of patriarchy’, though she acknowledges its role in forging an alternative form of history.265 It ‘offer[s] nostalgic pleasure to anxious urban residents’, but ‘[p]recisely because the fantasy depends on an opposition between the modern urban world and the countryside of the past, it cannot serve as a blueprint for action’.266 This is evident in Alice’s relationship with the modern world, which she resists but cannot change.

264 Purkiss, p. 7.
265 Purkiss, p. 17
266 Purkiss, p. 21.
Alice’s cellar is linked to the old farm-house in Green Heys Fields described in the opening chapter, with a ‘little garden surrounding it [...] crowded with a medley of old-fashioned herbs and flowers, planted long ago, when the garden was the only druggists’s shop within reach’ (MB6). The implication here is that ‘long ago’ (or far away, in the case of Mary’s removal to the colonies) might be the only place where rural working class knowledge can be effectively preserved from the effects of the city. Certainly, Alice’s use of the cellar as a site of preservation is no permanent solution, since by the end of the novel she is dead and her house due to be replaced by the railway. Commenting on Alice’s delirium, the narrator tells us: ‘God had sent her a veiled blessing: she was once more in the scenes of her childhood’ (MB210), among ‘the golden hills of heaven’ (MB33). This regression acts as a religious elevation, moving Alice away from the underground towards another, more divine, form of invisibility. The knowledge and life Alice represents are preserved by this process, but only at the cost of placing them behind a barrier more powerful than her cellar window: that between life and death. This preservation through separation parallels the emigration of Mary, Jem and Mrs Wilson to Canada, where they live in ‘a long low wooden house, with room enough and to spare’ (MB378). This is a retreat from the city, as is made clear by the house’s surroundings, with a ‘garden around the dwelling’ and an ‘orchard’ stretching beyond (MB378). For Raymond Williams, the conclusion represents ‘a cancelling of the actual difficulties and the removal of the persons pitied to the uncompromised New World.’

It should be added that the reason Alice Wilson’s cellar fails as a site of preservation is that it operates by resisting and denying the city rather than by acknowledging and accommodating it. As a space outside the gaze and consciousness of the wider city, the cellar adopts an oppositional stance which renders it marginal, precarious and (unlike the contents of the Freudian unconscious) subject to destruction by the historical forces which have created it.

In contrast to Alice’s cellar is the cellar where Joseph Barton and Mr Wilson find the Davenport family in Chapter 6, after Ben Davenport has been put out of work following the fire at the

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267 Williams, p. 91.
268 For Freud, even traumatic events are retained in the unconscious. See Jill Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 21-22.
Carsons’ factory (MB37-55). The Carsons have delayed the rebuilding of their mill—despite being ‘well insured’ for the damage—for reasons of political economy: ‘The weekly drain of wages given for labour, useless in the present state of the market, was stopped’ (MB56). This decision, which fails to count the human cost of delay, recalls Engels’s comment that the English bourgeois ‘cannot comprehend that he holds any other relation to the operatives than that of purchase and sale; he sees in them not human beings, but hands, as he constantly calls them to their faces’.269 As a result, the Davenport family have ‘sunk lower and lower, and pawned off thing after thing, and [...] they now lived in a cellar in Berry Street, off Store Street’ (MB57). This is the street that gave its name to Store Street Station, so the Davenports are very close to Alice’s cellar in Barber Street. Isaac Slater’s 1848 map shows Berry Street was still in existence when the novel was published, now located close to the new train station.270

The filth Alice resists by keeping her cellar spotlessly clean is inescapable in this second cellar, where ‘household slops of every description’ are thrown into the street’s overflowing gutters and a ‘foul area’ forms the entranceway (MB58). This recalls Engels’s description of the lowest and worst parts of Manchester, including an area on the south bank of the river Irk:

> In one of these courts there stands directly at the entrance, at the end of the covered passage, a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement.271

Urine and excrement form a threshold to the court, marking those who pass through it as waste, rejected by the social body. Similarly, the entrance to the Davenports’ cellar is reached by crossing a series of thresholds, first a set of steps, which take visitors so low that ‘a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street’, and then ‘you went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived’ (MB58). The gradual descent

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269 Engels, p. 276.
270 Isaac Slater, *A Plan of Manchester and Salford with Vicinities* (1848), Manchester City Council archive.
271 Engels, pp. 88-89.
from street to court to cellar parallels the moral and spiritual descent of the Davenport family. It takes the visitors into a lower and more primal world than the main streets, from which the cellar is hidden. Like the family, the visitors enter the extreme darkness of the cellar, where window-panes are ‘broken and stuffed with rags’ (MB58). As well as emphasising the room’s darkness, this draws attention to the family’s social invisibility (no-one can see in or out) and their vulnerability (the window offers no material protection). Unlike Alice Wilson’s home, where the herbs in the window signify rural knowledge and traditions, here the smashed and blocked-up window signifies an absolute absence of culture. There is no way this cellar can hold an alternative form of culture or praxis; it can only render its inhabitants pre- or sub-human.

The Davenports’ cellar is an inversion of the Parisian arcades described by Walter Benjamin, a dialectical other of those commoditised dream-worlds from which matter and weather are so thoroughly expelled. In the cellar room, children roll on the floor like animals, and the ‘stagnant, filthy moisture of the street’ oozes through the bricks, while Ben Davenport lies on straw ‘so damp and mouldy, no dog would have chosen it in preference to flags’ (MB60). Such hellish primality is also though, associated with the arcades which reject its existence:

One knew of places in ancient Greece where the way led down into the underworld. Our waking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld—a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise. All day long, suspecting nothing, we pass them by, but no sooner has sleep come than we are eagerly groping our way back to lose ourselves in the dark corridors. By day, the labyrinth of urban dwellings resembles consciousness; the arcades (which are galleries leading into the city’s past) issue unremarked onto the streets. At night, however, under the tenebrous mass of the houses, their denser darkness protrudes like a threat, and the nocturnal pedestrian hurries past—unless, that is, we have emboldened him to turn into the narrow lane. [C1a,2]273

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272 See, for example, Arcades, pp. 101-19.
273 Arcades, p. 84
The arcades of Paris are, like the cellars of Manchester, corridors into the unconscious, though the former seem ambiguously to attract while the latter only repel. Yet for Dickens at least, these two drives are not separate but intimately connected, Forster famously recording his ‘profound attraction of repulsion to St. Giles’s’, a poor area of London which stimulated his imagination: “Good Heaven!” he would exclaim, “what wild visions of prodigies of wickedness, want, and beggary arose in my mind out of that place!”.

In Benjamin’s Paris, as in Engels’s Manchester, the city is the site of an interplay of conscious and unconscious which constructs a new urban topography. For Benjamin, the main threshold between conscious and unconscious is the transition between day and night, when the dwellings which ‘resemble consciousness’ seem to become a ‘threat’. What is threatened is the return of the repressed, as what has been concealed in the daytime—unsettled here from being the time of greatest visibility—rises into view.

For Bachelard, the darkness of night is associated with the cellar: ‘In the attic, the day’s experiences can always efface the fears of night. In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls’. It is significant that the murder of Harry Carson takes place in the evening, with the Carson family subsequently staying up all night (MB206). This murder is the moment in Mary Barton when the repressed (the working class) destructively emerges. It pulls the Carson family into the night, which throughout the novel is the time of the workers. A temporal corollary to the cellar, the night offers another kind of margin where working class subjects can act outside the purview of the bourgeoisie.

Many of the novel’s major events take place at night, particularly those associated with death and illness. Alice Wilson sits up throughout the night with ill children (MB12), and when Mary’s mother dies, the ‘cries of agony [...] resounded in the little court in the stillness of the night’ (MB19). Mr Wilson and John Barton stay overnight to look after the Davenports (MB61), while Mary helps Alice throughout the ‘long night’ that follows the death of the Wilson twins (MB77). At times, night has a spatial element, becoming accentuated in the city; when the Wilsons and the Bartons return from

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274 Forster, p. 12.
275 Bachelard, p. 19.
Green Heys Fields, ‘although the evening seemed yet early when they were in the open fields—among the pent-up houses, night with its mists and its darkness, had already begun to fall’ (MB13).

If Alice’s herbs are an attempt to ward off the shocks of the city, the bourgeois home of the Carson family fulfils a similar role: its ‘comfortable, elegant, well-lighted drawing-room’ (MB196) insulates the family from the underground, night-time world of the workers. For Benjamin, this is characteristic of domestic furnishings:

Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment [...] Indefatigably, he takes the impression of host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devises coverlets and cases. He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which preserve the imprint of all contact.276

Furnishings preserve traces, as the city does not. They resist the death of self that the anonymity of the city, especially in its night-time character, threatens. It seems natural, then, that the preserving powers of the furnished interior are a recourse for the family when what is repressed, which is the very fact of working-class subjugation, forcibly enters the Carsons’ home. On hearing of Harry Carson’s murder:

One sister sat down on an ottoman, and covered her face, to try and realise it. That was Sophy. Helen threw herself on the sofa, and burying her head in the pillows, tried to stifle the screams and moans which shook her frame. (MB199)

Harry’s sisters submerge themselves in the furniture, impressing their own traces upon the interior from which death was supposed to be banished. By contrast, Mary Barton, on hearing the news that Jem may be tried and hanged:

threw herself on the ground, yes, on the hard flags she threw her soft limbs down; and the comb fell out of her hair, and those bright tresses swept the dusty floor, while she pillowed and hid her face on her arms. (MB223)

Mary has no soft furnishings in which to hide; her grief can only direct itself back onto her own body, as she hides her face in her arms. There is no capacity for this interior to absorb grief. The only dream-world Mary can escape into is one of literal dreams: ‘Heaven blessed her unaware, and she sank from remembering, to wandering, unconnected thought, and thence to sleep’ (MB225). If Mary’s escape into sleep and ‘the happy times of long ago’ (MB225) is her equivalent to the bourgeois domestic interior, then Alice’s holy delirium also parallels the preserving effect of the Carson family’s furnishings; all are forms of protection that are both a symptom and a rejection of modernity.

The dream represented by the bourgeois interior, though alienating, is at least comforting. The alienation of the Davenports’ cellar is different. Instead of taking the family away from death, it drives them towards it, installing it as a constant presence in their lives, most evidently in the Davenports’ ‘back apartment’. Mr Wilson opens the door to this apartment ‘for an instant’, revealing that it led into a back cellar, with a grating instead of a window, down which dropped the moisture from pigsties, and worse abominations. It was not paved; the floor was one mass of bad smelling mud. It had never been used, for there was not an article of furniture in it; nor could a human being, much less a pig, have lived there many days. Yet the ‘back apartment’ made a difference in the rent. The Davenports paid threepence more for having two rooms. (MB62)

This primal space below the underground, where life is absolutely unsustainable, is like the lowest row of buildings on the banks of the river Irk described by Engels, which ‘stands so low that the
lowest floor is uninhabitable, and therefore without windows and doors’. The apartment represents both excrement (‘the moisture from pigsties’) and death (‘nor could a human being […] have lived there many days’). One way of reading this deathly room is as a representation of what architecture relies on but seeks to conceal. For Hegel, this is symbolised by the tomb, which both preserves (by marking) and denies (by replacing) death, and is the origin of art and architecture.\textsuperscript{278}

The back cellar stands for the death and filth which tombs conceal; it is a primal regression to the beginnings of architecture and humanity.

Benjamin, quoting Marx, associates such regression, alongside alienation, with the working-class cellar:

\begin{quote}
We have already said ... that humanity is regressing to the state of cave dweller, and so on—but it is regressing in an estranged, malignant form. The savage in his cave ... feels ... at home there ... But the basement apartment of the poor man is a hostile dwelling, “an alien, restraining power, which gives itself up to him only insofar as he gives up to it his blood and sweat.” Such a dwelling can never feel like home, a place where he might at last exclaim, “Here I am at home!” Instead, the poor man finds himself in someone else’s home ... someone who daily lies in wait for him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent. He is also aware of the contrast in quality between his dwelling and a human dwelling—a residence in that other world, the heaven of wealth.\textsuperscript{279}
\end{quote}

This passage opposes Bachelard’s understanding of the primal home as the locus of an originary comfort and intimacy. The archetypal primal home for Bachelard is the hermit’s hut, which is a ‘center of concentrated solitude’.\textsuperscript{280} For Marx and Benjamin, the problem is that the working-class home is not a place of solitude; unlike the cave of the savage, it is turned against its inhabitants, as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[277] Engels, p. 89.
\item[280] Bachelard, p. 32.
\end{footnotes}
the embodiment of the owner, ‘who daily lies in wait for him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent’, representing the entire capital-owning class. The Davenports’ cellar takes this alienation to its conclusion by dissolving human identity itself. Through it, Gaskell attacks the view that workers are an unwanted but necessary excess, a position associated with political economy. In a subtle shift, workers are instead recognised as the excluded—because degraded and death-like—presence on which the structure of industrial society is based. Gaskell does not want to replace this structure, however, but to reform it.

In this chapter, the unconscious has been understood primarily from a Freudian perspective, and associated with the architectural repression by which the underground and the night render the working classes socially and culturally invisible in industrial Manchester. Such invisibility has mainly been in the form of the unseen, though the sense of a ‘cellar below the cellar’ in the Davenports’ dwelling hints at the presence of the unseeable within architecture, which is associated with death. The link between the unconscious and invisibility explored here returns in Chapter 4, where the river and dust-heaps of Our Mutual Friend are read as structures of repression. Freudian models of repression are not sufficient to interpret the river, however, so I also draw on Lacan, and on Benjamin’s optical unconscious.

The next chapter, though, looks at Dombey and Son, which presents a different relationship between architecture and visibility in the city; one in which the architectural dialectics explored in this chapter enter into a greater dynamism, and the hidden connections between disparate parts of the city come to signify a far greater instability than in Gaskell, as the boundaries between regions start to break down. While parts of city structure are wholly or partially exposed in this novel, others, such as the details of the firm’s business, remain hidden.
Chapter 3—The Unstable City: *Dombey and Son*

The contention of this chapter is that Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1848) is structured by an invisible architecture, articulated in particular through two sites which have attracted considerable critical attention: the House, or rather Houses, of Dombey, and the railway. The sea is also important in this respect, but primarily as a metaphor for the city’s hidden structure (connoting concealment, suspension and death) rather than a direct presence. Julian Wolfreys has noted the significance of these elements of *Dombey and Son*—house, railway and sea—finding that ‘Two motifs that are now familiar to critics of Dickens, and much discussed, recur throughout the novel, outside the house and the home: the sea and the railways’. As Wolfreys implies, the house of Dombey falls into two halves, the house of business and the domestic home. This, I suggest, makes it simultaneously single and multiple, and hence symptomatic of a basic instability in Dickens’s London.

Through Dombey’s two houses, I argue, the novel explores hidden connections between work and home which the structure of the city works to conceal. These connections emerge above all when the instability of modern financial and mercantile capitalism finds expression in the bourgeois home. Meanwhile, the railway, itself a product of modern capital, raises the possibility of a new form of architecture appropriate to the modern city which differs fundamentally from earlier architecture in being built on movement rather than stability, allowing it to connect and divide space more thoroughly, but also more transiently, than before. Through its new disposition of space the railway offers the hope that the invisible architecture of the city might be opened up and rendered visible, but also raises the prospect that a new kind of mastery over the city might be established, one which, like the statistical science considered in the last chapter, seeks to abolish heterogeneous spaces.

281 Though the sea appears literally too, as the place Captain Cuttle has spent much of his life (as a ‘pilot, or a skipper, or a privateersman, or all three perhaps’ [DS1.45]), the location Paul visits with ‘old Glubb’ at Brighton (DS12.160), the medium by which Dombey’s trade activities operate, and the place where Walter Gay is thought to have lost his life (DS23.343-44, DS32.481).


I also explore how the figure of the ruin, in both the railway and Dombey’s houses, functions as part of the city’s modernity. In these structures, I argue, the ruin co-exists with the whole, forming a dialectic in which each holds the capacity to turn into the other at any moment (like that which characterised the arabesque in Chapter One, suggesting Dickens’s novel might be structurally arabesque). This makes the London of Dombey and Son a profoundly unstable city, giving it the form of Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image—that moment in which two opposites are held together in a relationship of tense simultaneity (see Introduction). Such an image, built out of contradiction, can fall either way, making it a frozen moment of pure chance, like the turn of the cards or a roll of the dice in gambling.

These moments fascinate Benjamin, who includes in the Arcades a Convolute entitled ‘Prostitution, Gambling’ (Convolute O), with the suggestion that ‘The basic principle ... of gambling ... consists in this: ... that each round is independent of the one preceding ... Gambling strenuously denies all acquired conditions, all antecedents ... pointing to previous actions’. Each event is wholly isolated, and can never be predicted on the basis of what has come before or analysed in terms of what comes after. In this complete denial of systematisation, gambling, like the dialectical image, represents the dream of an escape from an increasingly prevalent capitalist system with which it is nonetheless intimately bound up. This is especially true in the nineteenth century, the period, says Benjamin, in which ‘the bourgeois gambles’. Gambling, as Benjamin conceives it, was previously the privilege of those who did not participate in productive processes. Benjamin makes the link between gambling and nineteenth-century capitalism more explicit by quoting Paul Lafargue:

‘Modern economic development as a whole tends more and more to transform capitalist society into a giant international gambling house, where the bourgeois wins and loses capital in consequence of events which remain unknown to him’. Important here is the idea that such events are unknown,

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285 Arcades, p. 512.
286 Arcades, p. 512.
287 Arcades, p. 497.
putting the bourgeoisie in a position of ideological mystification which is both unsettling and intoxicating, replicating the conditions of gambling. Yet capitalism for Benjamin is not entirely random, it just appears so: it has an invisible architecture which determines the conditions under which the bourgeoisie, and all other classes, operate. Gambling makes this structure appear as fate, beyond our control; Benjamin asks: ‘Isn’t there a certain structure of money that can be recognized only in fate, and a certain structure of fate that can be recognized only in money?’

Although the instability of the city often seems random or arbitrary in *Dombey and Son*, as when Staggs’s Gardens is turned upside down (DS6.68), or when Florence returns home to find her house transformed (DS28.426-27), such events are largely an expression of capitalist forces. As Lefebvre argues (and as discussed in Chapter Two), the appearance of neutrality or randomness within space is a form of ideology, which Lefebvre calls the ‘realistic illusion’, since space is always a ‘social product’ determined largely by hegemonic forces within society. As will be argued, Dickens’s novel indicates the formative influence of hegemonic capitalist forces on the city, and thereby challenges the realistic illusion, *even though* the details of such forces remain a mystery within the text. The precise nature of Mr Dombey’s business, for instance, is never made clear; we know Walter is sent to Barbados, but little about the House’s operations there, since when Dombey informs Walter of the transfer he ‘scorn[s] to embellish the bare truth’ (DS13.187). This is not just Dombey’s attitude, but the attitude of the whole novel in relation to Dombey’s business. The novel’s failure to ‘embellish’ the firm’s operations serves not to reveal the ‘bare truth’ of its activities, but to hide it. As Jeremy Tambling has argued, the firm’s operations are suggested only by hints or traces, such as Walter and Florence’s honeymoon trip to China, which implies involvement in the opium trade. Another such hint, considered below, is Dombey’s attitude towards nature.

If an invisible architecture of capitalism is at work in the text, connecting up disparate parts of the city, then this makes the London of *Dombey and Son* a form of totality in Lefebvre’s sense, in

288 *Arcades*, p. 496.
289 Lefebvre, p. 27.
which space is always integrated into a social and economic system.\textsuperscript{291} Yet, as noted above, this is a totality that escapes full elucidation. Althusser offers a concept that helps theorise this dichotomy: the idea that society has ‘semi-autonomous’ or ‘relatively autonomous’ elements. Though in the last analysis these exist within a social totality, they are not merely reducible or subservient to economic forces. Althusser states that:

\begin{quote}
the Ideological State Apparatuses [religion, family, culture and so on] are multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous’ and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms.\textsuperscript{292}
\end{quote}

For Althusser, areas which have ‘relative autonomy’, such as the domestic house and railway in this novel, nonetheless ‘express’ (in ways that are not simply imitative) class struggle. Within the ISAs, general social dynamics are played out in an altered form. Fredric Jameson’s suggestion that narrative is the ‘imaginary resolution of a real social contradiction’ is another form of this idea, taking literature as an ISA and positioning it as a mediated expression of the ‘political unconscious’ (history).\textsuperscript{293} Jameson introduces this concept to architecture, arguing that if ‘the outer limit of the individual building is the material city, then the outer limit of some expanded conception of the architectural vocation...is the economic itself, or capitalism in the most overt and naked expression of its implacable power’.\textsuperscript{294} Architecture (as a profession) exists within capitalism as a building exists within a city, as an inextricable part of it, but one that enjoys a measure of semi-autonomy. For Benjamin, as I showed in the introduction, semi-autonomous artistic architecture is a form of social dreaming. In Dickens, as in Althusser and Jameson, such semi-autonomy can become a means of

\textsuperscript{292} Althusser, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{293} The Political Unconscious, p. 62.
ideological mystification, since the ultimate determinants of conflict are not immediately apparent. Florence, for instance, whose existence is largely bounded by the domestic house, does not see or comprehend the business world of her father, though she feels its effects; the railway, similarly, does not immediately appear as a product of capitalism, instead becoming monstrous.

At least one distinction between Dickens and Althusser (and Jameson) arises from this comparison. If the economy seems to act as the final social determinant, then for Dickens this can only be aberrational, a fault of modern life, rather than a historical necessity as for Althusser. This is part of the message of the novel’s conclusion, which shifts the basis of morality from the business to the home. As I suggest below, however, this is only the switching of one form of ideology for another within the same capitalist process.

The Two Houses of Dombey

Most critical investigation of Dombey’s two houses can be summed up by Raymond Williams’s observation that ‘House has two meanings: the family home and the firm’.295 While the details of this relationship have been debated, the novel’s criticism of the firm’s dominance has generally been agreed upon, as a brief survey of critical opinion demonstrates.

John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson suggest that despite a reduction of the space dedicated to the firm of Dombey as the monthly numbers progressed, ‘The moral shape of the novel [...] is not really affected; the pervasive suggestion remains that a family cannot be run on business lines’.296 Andrew Elfenbein argues that an analogy is established between home and business through the role of the professional manager, a new figure in mid-nineteenth century London, associated with the growing prominence of office clerks (the Liverpool Clerks’ Association, for instance, was formed in 1861).297 The manager is represented by Mr Carker, who crosses the border between Mr Dombey’s

work life and home life when he is employed as an intermediary between Dombey and Edith, his wife. For Elfenbein, ‘Dickens’s narrative tends to deflect tensions in the office to the home’, allowing the novel to be critical of Dombey by showing that he fails to observe the proper separation of his two houses, but avoiding ‘the more radical position necessary to describe the inherent conflicts in running a home like a home or an office like an office’. Dickens stops short, Elfenbein suggests, of criticising in themselves these two fundamental elements of Victorian society.

Julian Wolfreys discusses the houses, rooms and tombs of *Dombey and Son*, arguing that the novel presents ‘a haunted and haunting, domestic melodrama, and one in which the home plays a particular role’. As well as finding that the sea and the railway ‘give to the reader the perception of selfhood under threat’, Wolfreys suggests that Dickens dramatises a debate about the nature of house and home, with the novel registering a disruption of Heideggerian ‘dwelling’, but also gesturing towards its continued possibility. For Heidegger, ‘Dwelling’ signifies ‘the manner in which we humans are upon the earth’, and is tied to ‘building’, which emerges from it; it also has the character of ‘sparing’, understood as a positive act of ‘leav[ing] something beforehand in its own essence’ and ‘return[ing] it specifically to its essential being’. Dickens is like Bachelard, Wolfreys argues, in taking the house as a privileged location of interiority, though he also makes houses prison-like and tomb-like. Wolfreys follows Butt and Tillotson in suggesting that ‘The home is subordinate to the House *de facto* and *de jure*, the one merely a domestic factory for producing the product [i.e. a male child] that will continue the other’. His argument that the novel puts house and home into crisis is close to my position, though I am less interested in how Dickens interrogates the concept of home than in the connections between the two houses, and what this structure implies about the modern city.

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298 Elfenbein, p. 365.
299 Wolfreys, p. 22. The haunted house is considered in my next chapter, in relation to *Our Mutual Friend*.
302 Wolfreys, p. 28.
Holly Furneaux, by contrast, considers the ‘queer potential’ of certain houses and buildings in Dickens, including Sol Gills’s instrument shop, the Wooden-midshipman, which like its owner sits ‘outside of both productive and reproductive economies’, presenting an implicit challenge to Dombey’s firm, since it is premised, as the name ‘Dombey and Son’ indicates, on heterosexual reproduction. Ann Gaylin considers the architecture of the novel in relation to eavesdropping, suggesting that the double use of the term ‘house’ ‘denies the separation that the ideology of separate spheres [public and private] would imply’. Like Elfenbein, she refers to Carker’s ‘infiltrations into domestic space’, interpreting them as ‘transgressions that jeopardize all the “houses” of Dombey’. Some transgressions, though, like that of the ‘good spirit’ (see below), are more benignant, so that ‘All eavesdroppers are not created equal’. Once again, the novel ‘demonstrates the dangers of not distinguishing between house and home, of confusing or conflating the public and the private’. For Lisa Surridge, the early chapters ‘invoke the key Victorian assumption [...] that the House of Dombey and the house of the Dombey’s are inseparable enterprises, and will succeed or fail together’.

None of these readings, however, captures the paradox at the centre of the house of business: that it passes through a cycle of rises and falls while upholding an ideology of permanence that is never wholly shattered. In order to consider this question, I put the domestic home to one side temporarily to focus on Dombey’s business.

303 Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 52. For David Ellison, the ‘paralyzed’ goods of the Wooden Midshipman are nonetheless at risk of being mobilised by falling into the possession of Brogley. ‘Mobile Homes, Fallen Furniture, and the Dickens Cure’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 108.1 (2009), 87-114 (pp. 93-96).
305 Gaylin, p. 100.
306 Gaylin, p. 100.
307 Gaylin, p. 102.
The Trading House

The trading house is the first house encountered in the text, preceding the brick and mortar house in West London. It is introduced in the novel’s full title, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation*, and Mr Dombey’s words on the birth of his son Paul, who shares his name: ‘The house will once again, Mrs. Dombey [...] be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son; Dom-bey and Son!’ (DS1.1). The novel thus opens with the literal and metaphorical rebirth of the house, which was at risk of decay. This house of trade will also prove to be a house of cards when it later collapses, an event foreshadowed by Hablot Browne’s cover illustration for the novel’s weekly parts (image 6).

The illustration shows a precarious tower of cash boxes and ledgers on the left side, and an equally precarious tower of playing cards on the right. The cyclical rise and fall of the company seems indicated by this illustration, if the account books represent accumulation, culminating in the cash box at the top, surmounted by a seated and apparently confident Dombey, and the playing cards represent collapse, ending with the jester who sprawls across the bottom, smoking a long pipe. That such a pattern was part of the novel’s earliest design is supported by a letter to John Forster where Dickens describes the narrative as involving the growth of Dombey’s pride, then the ‘decay and downfall of the house’.

The playing cards also hint at a connection with gambling or gaming, an activity whose master is Carker, at least until he is beaten by Edith. Dombey comments that ‘Carker plays at all games, I believe [...] and plays them well’ (DS26.401); he has the face of a man who studied his play warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew

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310 The illustration faces the title page in the Oxford edition (DSii).
Image 6. Cover design for monthly parts of *Dombey and Son*, Hablot Browne.
exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand. (DS22.316)

Carker is a devilish player who knows the outcome of the cards and has insight into the ‘games’ of money-making and personal advancement.

Another devilish figure in the novel is Mr Punch, whom the jester-like figure in Browne’s illustration may represent. Punch is mentioned twice, once in Chapter 3, where the sombre enclosure of Dombey’s mansion is contrasted with the ‘bands of music and straggling Punch’s shows’ (DS3.24) outside, and once in Chapter 31, after Dombey’s wedding to Edith, when the street celebrations include ‘Mr Punch, that model of connubial bliss, salut[ing] his wife’ (DS31.473). The illustration for this monthly part shows a Punch and Judy show in the background, with Punch wielding his characteristic stick (image 7). In both cases Punch opposes Dombey’s sobriety with disorder, and the world of the home with the world of the street; a distinction, Sambudha Sen argues, that Dickens inherits from Hogarth, evident in his series *Industry and Idleness* (1747).312 If disorder later overtakes Dombey’s life, as Edith and Carker leave him and his firm collapses, then Punch, who overturns social and legal restrictions, represents its immanent possibility from the start. His presence on the cover (or the jester’s) implies that the structure it depicts could be inverted at any moment in a carnivalesque gesture. The only fixed point is Florence, whose ‘constant nature’ (DS47.704) turns towards Dombey in his distress. This feminine characteristic is shared by Polly, who exhibits a nature ‘more constant [...] than the nature of men’ (DS3.29). Femininity must compensate, then, as constancy, for the dual failures of architecture and masculinity.

Though the firm eventually collapses, following Dombey’s refusal to reduce its enterprises (DS58.856-57), the novel ends with Susan Nipper’s prophecy that it will be rebuilt, reported by Mr Toots: ‘under the very eye of Mr. Dombey, there is a foundation going on, upon which a— an Edifice

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[...] is gradually rising, perhaps to equal, perhaps excel, that of which he was once the head’ (DS62.924). The architectural terms ‘foundation’ and ‘Edifice’ suggest not a temporary structure but a permanent, or at least persistent one; the capitalisation of ‘Edifice’ reinforces this, making the firm appear as a fixed principle. Just as the firm’s rise and fall mirror the greater speculations and crashes of the financial system, then, it also partakes of the illusion of permanence granted to this system. The contingent—the trading house—seems permanent, even when events have proved this to be false. The novel does not, therefore, depart as far as it seems from Dombey’s world view in Chapter 1:

The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them: A.D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei—and Son. (DS1.2)
This makes the failure of Dombey and Son literally unthinkable, by positioning it as the basis of the natural order. Such is the appearance granted to space by Lefebvre’s realistic illusion, where the contingent and secondary appears natural. Here, everything testifies to the divine authority (A.D. meaning Dombei and Son) of the firm, in what Foucault defines as a pre-Enlightenment picture of the world: one where ‘The names of things were lodged in the things they designated’, functioning as God’s language or ‘signatures’, proof of an underlying unity.\(^{313}\)

Michal Ginsburg has observed that ‘Dombey presents the continuity of the firm as occurring almost by itself’.\(^{314}\) For Ginsburg, it is the immateriality of the House that enables this to occur, since ‘the firm is seen as a name and since Dombey (and Son) are seen as just the temporary bearers of this name’.\(^{315}\) By contrast, the house where Dombey lives is vulnerable to time, which can only be countered by a preserving female guardian, which it lacks. Thus, Ginsburg argues, the novel’s conclusion does away with the physical house altogether, in order to preserve the illusion of permanence: ‘The house as a physical space [...] cannot be subjected to the fantasy of indestructible love, independent of circumstance and acts, reproduced without labor’.\(^{316}\) As the above reference to Foucault indicates though, the firm is not so much immaterial as the basis of the material. In this case, the House of Dombey is the name for a metaphysical belief system. Mark Wigley, drawing on Heidegger and Derrida, has argued that Western metaphysics relies on architectural thought to provide its foundation: ‘The question of metaphysics has always been that of the ground in which things stand, even though it has only been explicitly formulated in these terms in the modern period inaugurated by Descartes’.\(^{317}\) Architecture operates within philosophy as a ‘systematic blinding of discourse’, making its contingencies and assumptions appear solid, so that ‘The philosopher is first

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\(^{314}\) Michal Ginsburg, ‘House and Home in *Dombey and Son*’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 36 (2005), 57-73 (p. 60)

\(^{315}\) Ginsburg, p. 60.

\(^{316}\) Ginsburg, p. 71. David Ellison makes the related argument that ‘the absence of architecture and the attendant host of vexing, ironic, and mobile objects finally allow Dombey to rightfully recognize Florence as an angel’. Ellison, pp. 108-09.

and foremost an architect, endlessly attempting to produce a grounded structure’. For Dombey, the firm plays this role. Yet he is not its architect, since it was passed onto him by his father: he merely hopes it will ‘once again’ be Dombey and Son. This makes it impossible for Dombey to recognise the ideological nature of the structure he surveys, since it precedes him, constituting the philosophical basis for his existence.

Dombey’s identity, therefore, is secured by the firm of ‘Dombey and Son’, and threatened by its collapse. The word ‘firm’ is the clue to this relationship. The OED gives its earliest meaning in this context as ‘signature’, from the sixteenth century onwards, then ‘The style or name under which the business of a commercial house is transacted’. It was only during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the word came to refer to the commercial house itself. The firm, then, is the signature and name of Dombey, and of the father from whom he inherited it, and of his son. As the narrator tells us: ‘He had risen, as his father had before him, in the course of life and death, from Son to Dombey’ (DS1.2). Dombey remarks of his son’s name that ‘it doesn’t enter into the correspondence of the House. Its signature remains the same’. The signature, which provides legal proof of identity, precedes the identity (both Dombey’s and Paul’s) which it secures.

The pre-existence of the person by the signature, and its persistence after his or her death—that is to say, its insertion into the world as a ‘firm’—provides a preserving function. For Dombey, the usual weaknesses of a signature—that it is contingent rather than necessary, that it can change, be copied by others, even be forgotten—are overcome by the metaphysical institution of the firm. The firm is ‘preserved inviolate’ by the stars and planets, making it a form of protection against death. If the signature lasts forever, the assumption goes, then Dombey will also be preserved forever, similarly inviolate. For Derrida, though, the constitutional ‘iterability’ of language means that no

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318 Architecture of Deconstruction, p. 21, p. 10.
319 ‘firm’, n. 1, OED.
320 These lines were not included in the 1848 one-volume edition, but are in the manuscript. See Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 2, n. 1.
signature or speech act can ever be originary, though each is a singular event. There is always a negation of authority at work in the signature:

by not letting the signature fall outside the text any more, as an undersigned inscription, and by inserting it into the body of the text [read ‘firm’], you monumentalize, institute, and erect it into a thing or stony object. But in doing so you also lose the identity, the title of ownership over the text: you let it become a moment or part of the text, as a thing or common noun.

The erection-tomb falls \([L\text{‘}ération\text{-}tome]\). This shift, where the signature becomes part of the text, parallels the shift by which a ‘firm’ ceases to be the mark of a person doing business and comes to describe the business itself, operating as if it were a person, a process of embodiment implied by the word ‘corporation’, which Dickens uses in *American Notes* (1842): ‘There are several factories in Lowell, each of which belongs to what we should term a Company of Proprietors, but what they call in America a Corporation’. Derrida’s analysis suggests there is a sense in which ownership of the company is lost as soon as it is identified as ‘Dombey and Son’; that is, as soon as it is founded. In this moment, the name/identity is interred within the text/company.

There is something tomblike, then, in Dombey’s means of preserving identity, as in Derrida’s references to ‘stony objects’, ‘monuments’ and the punning ‘\(L\text{‘}ération\text{-}tome\)’. Such preservation makes identity absolutely unchangeable. Dombey can rely on the firm of Dombey and Son to secure his sense of self only if he adheres to what is imposed upon him by his own signature. This necessitates his statue-like inflexibility, as expressed in the narrator’s exclamation ‘rigid man!’ (DS21.315), which suggests rigor mortis. This connection with death can be drawn out further through Dombey’s faith in money, as in his response to Paul’s question ‘what’s money after all?’ (DS8.99). He answers ‘Money, Paul, can do anything’, before qualifying this as ‘Anything—almost’

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321 See ‘Signature Event Context’.
323 *American Notes; and, Pictures from Italy* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), pp. 65-66. Since 1819, the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed legal personhood to corporations with regard to contracts.
Money could not, as Paul observes, ‘save me my Mama’ (DS8.99), a failure that leaves Dombey ‘uncomfortable’ (DS8.100). There are several ways to interpret this: one is that money, in the form of the company, has no room for the feminine, which remains always outside its purview (which is why the feminine can escape money’s instability, becoming a point of reified constancy). As Tambling notes, for Dombey and Son a daughter is ‘merely a piece of base coin that couldn’t be invested’ (DS1.3). Another is that death falls outside the economic laws of circulation and exchange, so that it cannot be grasped by money (the connection between death and money is important in Our Mutual Friend (see Chapter 4) and Gogol’s ‘The Overcoat’ (see Chapter 1), where Akikievich’s purchase of a coat leads to his death; this theme is developed further in Dead Souls [1842]). Dombey, who thinks in the terms money provides, cannot comprehend death; or at least, not the death of Dombey and Son. This does not mean he has escaped death, merely that he inhabits a system which cannot tolerate it. For him, the terms ‘Dombey’ and ‘Son’ function like commodities, abstract sites of exchange-value which are absolutely substitutable for one another. This is indicated when Carker observes that a junior employee has died ‘in the agency at Barbados’ (DS13.185) and a new one must be sent in ‘the Son and Heir’ (DS13.185), a ship whose name reflects ‘Dombey and Son’ and repeats a phrase (‘son and heir’) that describes Paul (DS5.60, DS11.147). ‘You don’t care who goes, I suppose?’ Carker asks Dombey, who shakes his head ‘with supreme indifference’ (DS13.185). Anyone can fill this post, just as anyone can fill the position of ‘son and heir’, provided he is born into the right family. In the end, Walter fills both roles, being sent to Barbados in the ‘Son and Heir’, and becoming the son and heir when he marries Florence and helps resuscitate the company. The important thing is that the post is filled, and that economic circulation continues.

At the same time, in a Benjaminian dialectical inversion, death lies at the heart of the House. Death’s major representative is Mr Carker the Manager, whose name suggests ‘canker’, and hence rottenness within the firm. The word ‘carking’ itself is an obsolete term for ‘Burdening, distressing, grieving, wearing, fretting’, used in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841) to refer to ‘Some carking care that

would not be driven away’. For Florence, Carker is ‘like a scaly monster of the deep, [who] swam down below, and kept his shining eye upon her’ (DS28.421-22). He is the threat of shipwreck and ruin from within that haunts the firm. Indeed, the House is presented like a sunken ship throughout: its clerks sit ‘as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea’, while one of the rooms ‘might have represented the cavern of some ocean-monster, looking on with a red eye at these mysteries of the deep’ (DS13.182). This monster can only be Carker, whose ‘shining eye’ threatens Florence. In these passages the house is not part of the outside world, but something which lies under the surface, in a primordial time of its own. This is the state Dombey’s other house enters after Paul’s death, becoming like a ‘magic dwelling-place in magic story’ (DS23.337). In effect, death is suspended inside the firm, like the ‘shrivelled-up bluebottle’ that hangs in a cobweb over Walter’s head as he works, which ‘looks as if it had hung there ever so long’ (DS4.40).

This sense of shipwreck or ruin which pervades the firm means its collapse, while unexpected, is also the realisation of an immanent potential. For Georg Simmel, in a 1911 essay, all architecture carries this possibility of future ruin, so that calling the firm a ‘house’ may doom it from the beginning. For Simmel, nature always has a latent claim on a building, which does not come from outside but from within:

For this reason, the ruin strikes us so often as tragic—but not as sad—because destruction here is not something senselessly coming from the outside but rather the realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of existence of the destroyed.326

This characterisation of the ruin as the realisation of an inherent tendency agrees with Benjamin’s definition of the tragic hero, whose life is the unfolding of a death inscribed within him or her from the start:

Just as in the ordinary creature the activity of life is all-embracing, so, in the tragic hero, is the process of dying, and tragic irony always arises whenever the hero—with profound but

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Death and ruin share this characteristic, which is central to tragedy: they are not external but immanent to life and architecture. They are brought together in the novel through the death of Alice, a poor woman who refuses to enter the work house; when she dies, there is nothing left ‘but the ruin of the mortal house on which the rain had beaten’ (DS58.871). Unlike for Simmel, though, who describes the ruin as an accommodation between the opposing forces of nature and architecture, in \textit{Dombey and Son} the immanence of ruin is not comforting but threatening. It is what must be concealed by the forces of ideology and architecture, operating in concert.

This inherent possibility of ruin is realised through Carker, who has ‘led the House on, to prodigious ventures, often resulting in enormous losses’, and made of it ‘a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue’ (DS53.790). (The ‘clue’ is important in \textit{Our Mutual Friend}; see Chapter 4.) Unlike Dombey, Carker was not born into the firm and is not deceived by its apparent solidity. Where Dombey views nature as a source of resources for the company — a ‘standing-reserve’, to use Heidegger’s term — Carker views the company itself as standing-reserve, available to draw upon and manipulate.\footnote{See Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, in \textit{Basic Writings}, pp. 307-43.} Both men, though, are wedded to what, following Heidegger, can be termed a ‘technologised’ outlook; an approach to the world that is fundamentally exploitative. Steven Marcus identifies this tendency when he suggests that Dombey sees the world ‘as a kind of neutral material to be acted upon and fashioned to one’s design’.\footnote{Steven Marcus, \textit{Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey} (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 321.} This attitude perhaps indicates the character of the firm’s ‘dealings’ with the rest of the world, as a trace of what the text has otherwise repressed. In this case, the firm functions as a machine which relentlessly staves off its own collapse by stripping resources from elsewhere. Carker, then, does not rebel against the firm, but follows this logic to its
conclusion. In a similar vein, Tambling argues that ‘The text embodies several [...] buried histories of colonial intervention’, including mining speculation in South America and the aftermath of slavery in the West Indies. Marcus touches on this when he suggests that Carker stands for what Dombey has repressed: he is soft where Dombey is hard, sexual where Dombey is reserved, effeminate where Dombey is rigidly masculine, and secretive where Dombey is (or thinks he is) open. None of this cannot be openly recognised, since by the end of the novel the firm of Dombey and Son has been recalled to life as an embodiment of hope for the future. Carker, though, signifies these absences, particularly in his ‘false mouth’ (DS17.251), which he presents to Captain Cuttle ‘stretched but not laughing’ (DS17.251), showing as many teeth as ‘A cat, or a monkey, or a hyena, or a death’s-head’ (DS17.249).

What Carker desires is not so much to destroy Dombey as to replace him. This is evident in Carker’s first appearance, where he ‘affected a stiff white cravat, after the example of his principle’ (DS13.183, also DS27.402-03). This desire reaches its height in his attempt to claim Edith, her rejection finally putting him in the same position as Dombey. Carker indicates his attempted assumption of Dombey’s place when he jokingly asks Edith ‘Do you mistake me for your husband?’ (DS54.801). In trying to take Dombey’s place, though, even as his inverse image, Carker is ruined. His alignment with Dombey is what allows Edith’s revenge on him; she tells him: ‘In every vaunt you make [...] I have my triumph. [...] Boast, and revenge me on him! [...] Boast then, and revenge me on yourself’ (DS54.806-07). In seeking to adopt Dombey’s position, Carker wishes away his knowledge of the unreality of the firm, and of Dombey’s relationship with Edith, which is based on nothing but money (as she is fully aware, telling her mother ‘You know he has bought me’ [DS27.417]). Carker’s paradoxical desire, therefore, is to stand at the centre of the capitalist ideological structure which he knows to be illusory.

331 Steven Marcus, p. 349.
Despite this, Carker’s stripping of the firm remains a stripping of the illusion of changelessness, revealing it as a facade. This facade operates like Mrs. Skewton’s make-up, which interst and conceals the presence of death. Mrs Skewton, Edith’s mother, is repeatedly compared to Cleopatra—a famous beauty, but dead for hundreds of years. She must be prepared for bed every night by her maid, whose touch is ‘as the touch of Death’, so that ‘The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off’ (DS27.416). This makes her like Edgar Allen Poe’s ‘man that was used up’, in his 1839 short story, who is so disfigured and maimed by the ‘Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indians’ that when the narrator sees him without his accessories he mistakes him for a ‘large and exceedingly odd-looking bundle of something’. 332 In both cases, death not only lurks beneath the appearance of life, but death and life disturbingly imply, and become, one another.

Just as Poe’s General puts himself together with the help of his servants, only gradually becoming recognisable, Mrs Skewton not only dies each night, but is revived every morning: ‘giving one arm to her mistress [the maid] collected the ashes of Cleopatra, and carried them away in the other, ready for to-morrow’s revivification.’ (DS27.419). There is a gender difference here, since the General’s reconstruction is associated with war and Cleopatra’s with fashion (these come together in Zola’s department store however (see Chapter 5)).

What Cleopatra undergoes is also what Dombey’s House experiences: a resurrection, but one that cannot escape death, which remains entombed within it as its past and its future. This is what John Harmon senior tries to protect himself against in Our Mutual Friend, when he takes measures against returning to life (see Chapter 4). The concept of repeated death and resurrection is not confined to the trading house however, but extends to its counterpart, the domestic home, as I will now explore.

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The Domestic House

The house in the City is paralleled by the house where Dombey, Paul and Florence live, which is similarly marked by death, instability and cyclical transformation. In this house, life and death turn into one other as it moves repeatedly in and out of ruin. For David Ellison, the house ‘teems with mobilities’, being ‘variously reconfigured, renovated, and emptied following Fanny’s death, Paul’s death, Edith’s marriage and Dombey’s subsequent collapse —pointing to an alarming instability within the domestic’. I take these changes as my focus in this section, but argue that the house’s instability is tied, indirectly and covertly, to the shifts in the fortunes of the firm, and more broadly to the upheavals of modern capitalism.

Shortly after the novel opens with Paul’s birth and Fanny’s death, the first transformation takes place. In a much-discussed passage, life seems to be withdrawn from the bourgeois home:

mysterious shapes were made of tables and chairs, heaped together in the middle of rooms and covered over with great winding sheets. Bell-handles, window-blinds, and looking-glasses, being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders. Every chandelier or lustre, muffled in Holland, looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling’s eye. Odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys. The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages. (DS3.24)

The house is wrapped up as if it, like Fanny, is a corpse. Everything is obscured and incomplete, from the ‘mysterious shapes’ of the furniture to the ‘fragmentary accounts’ of death on the newspaper. Ellison notes the ‘futility of Dombey’s efforts to secure domestic space by wrapping it up’, suggesting that the ‘architectural apertures’ which remain visible in Hablot Browne’s illustration undermine the house’s isolation. If the security of the domestic interior is at stake here, then Dombey anticipates

Ellison, p. 92. Compare to Dillon’s claim, regarding Phiz’s illustration of the dining-room at Chesney Wold in Bleak House, that ‘The objects are restless’. Dillon also refers to the ‘turmoils of the Victorian interior’ in Dombey. Steve Dillon, p. 107.

This illustration can be found on p. 33 of the Oxford edition.
Mr Thornton and his mother in *North and South*, who cover their furniture in dust-sheets to protect it from the dust of Milton (see Conclusion). Other critics have commented on the presence of death and violence in this passage, including Linda Lewis and Lisa Surridge, Surridge suggesting that ‘The real fear […] is that the dreadful crimes of the daily and weekly newspapers will, through Dombey’s failure to understand the value of women’s ideological work in the Victorian gender system, come to rest in the middle-class home’. For Wolfreys, the passage positions the house as unhomely, uncanny and dominated by the traces of death, which cannot be expunged.

What should be noted, though, is that at this point the house is not fully but only partially dead. The frame of Fanny’s picture is obscured in ‘ghastly bandages’, giving the sense that she is somehow still alive, in a wounded state, perhaps persisting in the odours emerging from the chimney. The ‘eye’ in the ceiling seems to cry a single tear, suggesting the house still lives, though in mourning. Elfenbein contrasts this ‘frozen’ state of mourning with the ‘full-scale mourning’ that follows Paul’s death. Moreover, the house is not entirely shut up, since Dombey reserves certain apartments for his own use, including a sitting-room, library and conservatory (DS3.24). These rooms, especially the library and sitting-room, maintain a form of life, but also suggest repose and inactivity, which also characterises the firm. In both cases this is ideological, concealing the firm’s exploitative trade activities. Another way to describe this state is that the house has become monstrous, like the muffled chandeliers, or the train, which is ‘a type of the triumphant monster, Death’ (DS20.298), though the train is a more active force (see ‘The Railway’, below).

The status of death, then, is in question here. It seems to exist on the borders, making it, to use Derrida’s term, ‘parergonal’:

The *parergon* inscribes something which comes as an extra, *exterior* to the proper field [of reason, philosophy etc.] […] but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto,

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336 Wolfreys, p. 32.
337 Elfenbein, p. 62.
brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking in something and it is lacking from itself.\textsuperscript{338}

What seems exterior (such as death) is also interior, and points to a lack that was inside from the beginning. A certain confusion of interior and exterior is indeed evident in Dombey’s house, which is ‘as blank a house inside as outside’ (DS3.24). This confusion is also at work in Fanny’s picture, where only the frame is wrapped in ‘ghastly bandages’, indicating a change in the status of the picture’s subject, even though the picture has remained the same. The horror which attaches to this picture is hard to pin down: is it the sitter’s death or the ‘bandages’ which makes it ‘awful’? Is horror in the centre or on the margins? Death also marks the newspapers used as wrappings for objects which themselves remain unchanged. Does this wrapping signify the external addition of death, or that death is somehow inside these objects? There is no clear answer here, except that the interplay of the homely with the parergonal creates a space in which death is present, but not stable or locatable.

The passage also subtly aligns the material house with the firm, through a shared sense of underwater submersion. The odours of the chimney evoke ‘damp places’, while the ‘eye’ of the ceiling parallels the ‘red eye’ of the ocean monster that is supposed to inhabit the firm. If, as I have suggested, this eye is the eye of Carker, then he is present from the start at the heart of Dombey’s family home. Later this becomes explicit, when Dombey invites Carker to dinner and entrusts him with messages for Edith, as his ‘confidential agent’ (DS40.598). The eye is also aligned with Carker by metaphorically gazing at the picture of the first Mrs Dombey; later, in his own home, Carker ‘looks with a musing smile at a picture on the opposite wall’ (DS33.500) which resembles Edith, the second Mrs Dombey. The concept of woman as picture is also used of Lizzie Hexam in \textit{Our Mutual Friend}, perceived by Eugene as a ‘deep rich piece of colour’ (OMF1.13.164) (see Chapter 4), making him like Carker, whose house is full of ‘Rich colours’ and whose pictures are ‘mere shows of form and colour — and no more’ (DS33.499); both see women in aesthetic terms, as forms of decoration and ornament. Mary Barton, too, finds herself put on display as an image, being described by a supposed

\textsuperscript{338} \textit{The Truth in Painting}, p. 56.
eye-witness at her trial as ‘more like the well-known engraving from Guido’s picture of “Beatrice Cenci” than anything else he could give me an idea of’ (MB312-13). Elsewhere in Dombey and Son, vision is emphasised in relation to other women, including, Michelle Mancini notes, ‘Good Mrs Brown’ and Alice, Edith’s aunt and cousin. Elsewhere in Dombey and Son, vision is emphasised in relation to other women, including, Michelle Mancini notes, ‘Good Mrs Brown’ and Alice, Edith’s aunt and cousin.339 Here, women are the subject of the gaze rather than its object. Alice, who was used and discarded by Carker, has a gaze to rival his: when contemplating her revenge she exhibits a ‘dark gaze’, and a ‘glance [that] was brighter than her mother’s, and the fire that shone in it was fiercer’ (DS52.780).

Early in the novel, then, the house is in a similar state to the firm: both are crippled by having a ‘Dombey’ but only a young and economically inactive ‘Son’. The next major transformation follows the death of Paul, which destroys even this fragile future potential. The house falls almost completely into ruin, with only Florence and a few servants remaining inside. It withdraws from the public world into its own time and space, like a ‘magic dwelling-place in magic story’ (DS23.337), guarded by a monster that is, like Carker, marked out by its gaze: a ‘glowering visage, with its lips parted wickedly, that surveyed all comers from above the archway of the door’ (DS23.337). To enter the house is to be separated from the world of the city: ‘Noise ceased to be, within the shadow of the roof’ (DS23.337). The ‘blankness’ which typified the mansion now deepens into absence, as it has ‘slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street’ (DS23.339). The house becomes invisible architecture, an abyss in the street, like the gaps that open up in Mrs Skewton’s language following her stroke. She begins to leave certain syllables unsaid, so that their presence is only implied, as a haunting possibility, in phrases such as ‘Sterious wretch, who’s he’?, ‘it’s most trodinary thing’, and ‘little repose — and all that sort of thing — is what I quire’ (DS40.603). This ghostly interplay of presence and absence is apposite to Dombey’s mansion, which gains a reputation as a ‘haunted house’ (DS23.341), with Florence the ghost who haunts it. Later, following Dombey’s collapse,

language has gone altogether, as the house stands ‘frowning like a dark mute on the street’ (DS60.892).

The connection between these two kinds of ‘gap’ is indirectly suggested by Major Bagstock, who remarks to Dombey of Mrs Skewton that ‘a fair friend of ours has removed to Queer Street’ (DS40.605). This flippant comment, if taken seriously, as Freud takes jokes seriously, makes language a kind of street, with Queer Street being broken or fractured language. In this case language is spatially located, and can be outside the self, a place to which one might remove Florence, unlike Mrs Skewton, but like the Major’s description of her, really is ‘fair’; she has ‘bloomed there [in Dombey’s house], like the king’s fair daughter in the story’ (DS23.339).

Conversely, the house itself, like Satis House in Great Expectations, is both frozen and decaying, corresponding to Mrs. Skewton’s failing attempts to remain young: ‘The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired’ (DS23.337). In this unusual form of stasis, clocks ‘never told the time’ (DS23.338), but time somehow still passes, since fungus creeps in and ‘Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence or how’ (DS23.338). The house is outside circulation, like the goods in Brogley’s second-hand furniture shop, where ‘motionless clocks […] never stirred a finger’ (DS9.122). It is still tied to economic movement, however, if only as the sign of its absence, again echoing Brogley’s shop, where mirrors reflect ‘an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin’ (DS9.123). If such ruin signifies a lack of economic activity, it also implies its future resurgence: these objects are intended to circulate again; to ‘return to the open market in a disgraced state’ to use Ellison’s phrase.340

These dual gaps in language and architecture correspond to the gap left in the name and structure of ‘Dombey and Son’ by Paul’s death. In this sense, the house registers the shifts in the firm’s fortunes as dreams register the unconscious thoughts of the sleeper for Freud: in a condensed and displaced form.341 Benjamin re-articulates this idea in Marxist terms: ‘The superstructure is the

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340 Ellison, p. 96.
341 Interpretation of Dreams, pp. 381-419
expression of the infrastructure. The economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure — precisely as, with the sleeper, an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the content of dreams’.\footnote{Arcades, p. 392.} The house, in its ‘sleeping’ or ‘enchanted’ state, ‘expresses’ the vicissitudes of the firm, but without directly reflecting them. Among these vicissitudes is the gradual hollowing out (or decaying) of the firm, which Carker has begun, but which is not yet visible. The company, like the house, only appears to be in stasis: it is in fact being eaten from within. Both houses, in this case, are equally enchanted, so that it would be wrong to think of the company as providing ‘true’ or ‘direct’ access to the driving forces of capitalism. These are diffused across society and cannot be isolated to one particular part of the system, instead arising from the interactions between its various constituents. This is capitalism’s invisible architecture, which gives it the appearance of fate, or gambling.

Just as the potential for ruin always exists in architecture, the potential for reanimation always exists within the ruin. Dombey’s ‘wilderness of a home’ (DS23.339) is suddenly brought back to life when Florence and Susan Nipper return from visiting the ‘Skettleses’, before Dombey’s second marriage. This scene, which recalls the upheaval of Staggs’s Gardens at the coming of the railway in Chapters 6 and 15, sees the house enveloped by a ‘labyrinth of scaffolding raised all around the house, from the basement to the roof’ (DS28.426). As Florence puts it, ‘There are great alterations going on’ (DS28.427). These aim to make the house a fashionable modern dwelling, decorated with ‘great rolls of ornamental paper’ (DS28.426). The use of ‘labyrinth’ here links the home to the company, which Carker has made a ‘great labyrinth’. It also associates it with Florence’s experience of being lost in the city, when she is tricked by Good Mrs Brown and conducted ‘through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys’ (DS6.79). Again, there seems no distinction between the interior and exterior of the house, as work goes on ‘Inside and outside alike’ (DS28.427). The house is opened up to public view, with ‘no furniture [...] to be seen through the gaping and broken windows
in any of the rooms’, full instead of workmen, ‘swarming from the kitchens to the garrets’ (DS28.427).

Once this work is completed:

The dark blot on the street is gone. Mr. Dombey’s mansion, if it be a gap among the other houses any longer, is only so because it is not to be vied with in its brightness, and haughtily casts them off. (DS35.525)

The house reverses from ruin and darkness to magnificent ‘brightness’. The ‘haughtiness’ of the house is the haughtiness of Dombey, who has made, in Mrs Skewton’s words, a ‘perfect palace’ (DS35.529) of the building. He tells her: ‘It is handsome [...]. I directed that no expense should be spared; and all that money could do has been done, I believe’ (DS35.529). For Ginsburg, ‘the house now represents not so much Dombey’s status as money’s purchasing power’, making it an expression of the economic power of the firm.\(^{343}\) The word ‘handsome’ has been repeatedly used to describe Edith (DS21.305, DS21.315, DS26.394 for instance), whom Dombey has also acquired through money.

Elsewhere this link between money and ‘handsomeness’ is made explicit: a young man at the Major’s club is willing to ‘give a handsome sum to be able to rise and go away, but cannot do it’ (DS31.478). Meanwhile, Mrs Skewton’s response to Dombey, ‘And what can it [money] not do, dear Dombey?’ (DS35.529), recalls Paul’s question ‘What is money?’, and hence the fact that money cannot overcome death, including Paul’s own death. Mrs Skewton inadvertently reveals that money cannot expunge death’s death within the mansion, though it can buy ornamentation, another name for the parergon. The ‘ornamental paper’ used to decorate the house is, then, not—or not only—the opposite of the ‘ghastly bandages’ that wrap the frame of Fanny’s picture, but their return in another form. Although the gap has been covered up, it is not gone.

Edith herself also signifies the continued, or recurring, presence of death within the house. According to Major Bagstock, she has lost both a previous husband and a son, who drowned ‘When a

\(^{343}\) Ginsburg, p. 66.
child of four or five years old’ — a similar age to Paul — after ‘the upsetting of a boat in which his nurse had no business to have put him’ (DS21.309). This incident, which recalls Walter’s apparent death in the ‘Son and Heir’, means Edith is marked by death in a way both marginal (it receives only one passing mention) and central (since it presumably constitutes the most significant event of her life). The upset boat is thus another instance of the parergon. Indeed, boats are a metaphor Derrida uses to explain the parergon, since a boat forms a limit between inside and outside. Foucault also points to the liminality of the ship, calling it ‘a floating part of space, a placeless place, that lives by itself, closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean’. The novel later inverts the relationship between boating and death as part of its apparatus of resolution, when Florence’s first child is ‘born at sea’ (DS54.889). Nonetheless, in bringing Edith into his house, Dombey reintroduces death with the same gesture by which he hopes to expel its traces (since the changes he makes for his marriage include the removal of Fanny’s portrait and the refurbishment of Paul’s room [DS28.427]). In this respect the ‘handsome’ decoration of the house is like Edith’s ‘handsome’ face: both are fashionable facades concealing death.

Edith’s face is at one point called a ‘handsome mask’ (DS35.536), concealing her emotion as she talks to Florence, but at the same time indicates this concealment. Edith’s face, like Carker’s, is a signifying blank, a white wall that is also an ornament. Both facade and mask operate as fashion does for Benjamin, covering over death while signifying it: ‘fashion has opened the business of dialectical exchange between woman and ware — between carnal vision and corpse’. The mask is positioned on this dialectical border between death and sexuality, which extends to the domestic sphere, the realm of the feminine, where the house’s decay and the sexually charged ‘blooming’ of Florence cannot be separated.

The domestic house, then, has descended from bourgeois respectability to semi-ruin, before returning to glorious ‘brightness’. It will now reverse once more into complete ruin. This time, the fall

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344 *The Truth in Painting*, p. 54.
345 ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 355.
346 *Arcades*, p. 62.
of one house follows the fall of the other, Dombey’s home being stripped by builders and auctioneers as the financial House was stripped by Carker: it is ‘a great house still [...] but it is a ruin none the less, and the rats fly from it’ (DS59.871). Although the house previously elided inside and outside, in its final state of ruin the interior fully becomes the exterior. Ornaments and furniture are sold from within it in a public auction (DS59.876-77), ensuring that there is ‘not a secret place in the entire house’ (DS59.874). The opening up which began with the house’s refurbishment is completed when ‘Two brokers invade the very fire-escape, and take a panoramic survey of the neighbourhood from the top of the house’ (DS59.876). Again, this is not an event from outside, but the realisation of the ruin which has always haunted both houses. The movement from completeness to ruin (whole to part) suggests the swings of a stock market in crisis, reminding us that, for Marx: ‘The contradictions inherent in the movement of capitalist society impress themselves upon the practical bourgeois most strikingly in the changes of the periodic cycle, [...] whose crowning point in the universal crisis’. Reversal and crisis emerge from capitalism itself, not disruptions to it, making them inseparable from wealth creation. This makes capitalism tragic in Benjamin’s sense, doomed to carry its own ruin within it as the basis of its existence. The house’s instability, then, is not isolated or aberrational, but a semi-autonomous expression of capitalist society.

It is only Dombey’s final recognition of the unstable architecture of both his houses (if not its ultimate cause in capitalism itself) that drives him towards reconciliation with Florence. His dream of permanence can only survive by switching its object to her, since ‘of all around him, she alone had never changed’ (DS54.883). Dickens is correct, then, when he claims that ‘Mr. Dombey undergoes no violent internal change’ (DS Appendix A, 927). This comes in an 1858 preface addressing criticism of Dombey’s apparently uncharacteristic sentimentality towards the end of the novel. Such criticism can be reversed by recognising that lack of change is precisely Dombey’s problem. Dombey still seeks the same security of identity as he always has, but now locates it in the family rather than the firm. Ginsburg comments that ‘the love Florence represents is just a new version of the name [Dombey

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347 *Capital*, p. 12.
and Son] which Paul was supposed to represent’. This modifies, without entirely discounting, Steven Marcus’s argument that the novel’s central concern is ‘change, alteration and time’. Dombey changes in switching allegiance from the company to Florence, but maintains the ideology of permanence indicated by his initial world-view. The hope remains that ‘another Dombey and Son will ascend [...] triumphant’ (DS62.924). Dombey stays within the system which has ruined him, though he entrusts its continuation to the next generation.

What is partially concealed in the conclusion is that neither material nor financial house ever forms a secure architectural structure, though both attempt to overcome death, either through the stasis of the firm-as-tomb, or through the fetishised domestic interior. Both are unstable where they should be stable, undermined by an invisible architecture which introduces ruin at their heart. The next form of architecture I consider is in many ways the opposite: instead of resisting instability it adopts it, and in the place of labyrinthine obfuscation it promises to open up the invisible architecture of the city.

The Railway

Much criticism concerning Dombey and Son has explored the function and symbolic value of the railway. It initially appears in two passages (in Chapters 6 and 15) describing the changes in ‘Staggs’s Gardens’, where the London and Birmingham Railway (L&BR) is being constructed. The L&BR existed from 1833-46, before being taken over by the London and North Western Railway (L&NWR). The line it established, which operated out of Euston Station in Camden Town from 1837, now forms part of the West Coast Main Line. After coming under the control of the L&NWR in 1846

348 Ginsburg, p. 71.
349 Steven Marcus, p. 296. Dennis Walder takes a similar view to Marcus, referring to the novel’s ‘central preoccupation with the nature of change’ and its obstructions. ‘Introduction’ to Dombey and Son (Oxford: OUP, 2001) p. xx. For Jeremy Tambling, by contrast, the novel mixes styles and genres with a ‘contradictoriness which disallows change’. Tambling sees this as the text’s repression of its own modernity. Dickens, Violence and the Modern State, p. 53.
(the year serial publication of Dombey and Son began) Euston station became part of the same line as Store Street (afterwards London Road) Station in Manchester, the area where many key events in Mary Barton supposedly take place, before the station was built. The railway also features at two other significant points: in Chapter 20, when Dombey travels from London to Leamington, and in Chapter 55, when Carker is destroyed by a train. It is also relevant to the ‘good spirit’ passage in Chapter 47, which develops questions of visibility and architectural penetration that the railway has already raised.

I argue that the railway must be understood in relation to city architecture, which it destabilises and breaks apart, yet also re-frames in a new way. Although the railway is accompanied by fragmentation and ruin, its primary role is to reveal the ruin which already exists within the city. As part of this reading, I consider the railway in relation to the proposition, adapted from Sigfried Giedion, that engineering is the architectural unconscious of the nineteenth century (see Introduction).

One critic who discusses the railway is Kathleen Tillotson, for whom it is a ‘ruthless’ force associated with ‘the fascination of the new as well as the horror of the strange’, being portrayed as ‘destructive, ruthless, an “impetuous monster”, a “fiery devil”’, and providing ‘no suggestion of hope, of social progress’. For Marcus, by contrast, the railway is part of the novel’s concern with change, as ‘the great symbol of social transformation’, which ‘destroyed traditional notions of space and time’. Movement and change are also central to Raymond Williams’s reading, which sees it as ‘the exciting and the threatening consequence of a new mobility’, and hence symptomatic of the modern city. Tambling also notes the railway’s association with modernity, arguing that it helps shape a Foucauldian society which ‘is becoming Panoptical, regulated, even by accurate clock-time’. For Tambling this does not imply negativity; rather, the railway’s characteristic power is ‘monstration’, or

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351 Tillotson, p. 200.
353 Country and City, p. 164.
For Stephen Kern, such transformation of space and time is symptomatic of the years 1880–1918, when ‘The thrust of the age was to affirm the reality of private time against that of a single public time and to define its nature as heterogeneous, fluid, and reversible’. If the railway represents this transformation, then it constitutes part of what Benjamin calls the ‘fore-history’ of this later period (and, conversely, the period 1880–1918 is its after-history), making it incomprehensible at the moment of its emergence. As Benjamin puts it, within the historical object all the forces and interests of history enter on a reduced scale. It is owing to this monadological structure that the historical object finds represented in its interior its own fore-history and after-history. (Thus, for example, the fore-history of Baudelaire, as deduced by current scholarship, resides in allegory; his after-history, in Jugendstil.)

In Benjamin’s historical materialism, the interior and exterior of the historical object cannot be separated: its past and future unfurl from within its own interior structure. This is what Benjamin calls the monad. Such a dialectic between inside and outside suggests that the railway contains its own past and future. This does not make it part of a historical continuum however. Instead, it has to be read as an image which belongs to a particular time, but also ‘attain[s] to legibility only at a particular time’, just as Baudelaire can only be understood if he is held in a non-continuous constellation with allegory and Jugendstil.

While most critics have found the railway to be an important part of the novel, Ian Carter has observed that ‘Dombey contains only four brief railway passages’ which, despite their ‘complex structure of feeling’ are not sufficient to make it ‘a railway novel’. This should remind us that, as

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356 Arcades, p. 475.
357 Arcades, p. 462.
with any aspect of this novel, the railway should not be given sole analytical precedence, but related to its other spaces and structures. One way to do this is to view it as architecture.

If, as Denis Hollier suggests, ‘Society entrusts its desire to endure to architecture’, then the railway is a form of architecture that undoes any such permanence, as the ruinous transformation of Staggs’s Gardens indicates:

Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcasses of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. (DS6.68)359

This scene of confusion shows that the construction of the railway is also its deconstruction, in the sense that for Derrida, referring to the tower of Babel, deconstruction is ‘an unfinished edifice whose half-completed structures are visible, letting one guess at the scaffolding behind them’.360 This captures one of the characteristics of the ruin: that it is an inverse image of construction. For Philippe Hamon, the ruin of a building has a prophetic quality, so that ‘The Romantic ruin somehow anticipated modern architecture’, since both expose internal structure.361 More generally, the ruin always refers to the future as well as the past, since every building is a potential ruin. This duality is captured by Gustave Doré’s 1872 engraving of Thomas Macaulay’s New Zealander, an imagined

359 Hollier, p. 49.
future visitor to the ruins of London, first described in a review of 1840 (image 8). Blanchard Jerrold, co-author with Doré of *London. A Pilgrimage*, describes this image with a quotation from Poe’s 1845 poem ‘To Helen’, suggesting the New Zealander contemplates something matching ‘The glory that was Greece —/ The grandeur that was Rome’. This connects London’s future with the ruined classical past, in a modification of classical ruin landscapes by painters such as Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691-1765). For Benjamin, similarly, Paris evokes the spectre of ancient Greece: ‘One knew of places in ancient Greece where the way led down into the underworld. Our waking existence [in the city] likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld’; he also suggests that the arcades can be read as the ‘temple of Aesculapius’, the Greek god of medicine and healing.


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364 *Arcades*, p. 84, p. 410.
The Staggs’s Gardens passage makes a connection with ancient ruins in the reference to ‘Babel towers’, which suggests progress is simultaneously a return to the primeval or Biblical past. Later, Dombey’s train journey demonstrates this capacity for temporal confusion when it goes into a tunnel, ‘plunging down into the earth’ (DS20.298) as if entering the underworld, at which point, ‘amidst the darkness and whirlwind the motion seems reversed, and to tend furiously backward’ (DS20.298). As Gillian Piggott notes, spatio-temporal disorientation is also evident in ‘A Flight’, an 1851 *Household Words* article where Dickens asks, ‘why it is that when I shut my eyes in a tunnel I begin to feel as if I were going at an Express pace the other way?’ For Piggott, this is part of ‘Dickens’s urban sublime’, an aesthetic mode which, like Benjamin, registers the *Erlebnis* (experience that is momentary or ephemeral), as opposed to *Erfahrung* (experience as continuous and unified) of modern life.

In being ‘unintelligible as any dream’, Staggs’s Gardens is associated with the dream-like stasis of the ‘haunted’ house where Florence dwells as a fairy-tale princess. Despite the activity in Staggs’s Gardens, it too is in a (literally) suspended state, where bridges lead nowhere. The ‘giant forms of cranes’ here recall the region of Todgers’s guest house in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), where ‘vast bags and packs of goods, upward or downward bound, were for ever dangling between heaven and earth from lofty cranes’. These cranes combine mobility and immobility, as goods are ‘bound’ towards ground or sky, yet appear ‘for ever’ suspended. This scene cannot be easily read, since it signifies two things at once. For Freud, this a characteristic of dreams, which undergo ‘condensation’, meaning a ‘very great number of associations’ can be produced for ‘each individual element of the content of a dream’; a metaphorical image of this is Freud’s vision of Rome, where multiple buildings occupy the same spot (see Chapter 1). Such associations can be contradictory, since dreams ‘show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the

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366 Piggott, p. 105.
368 *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 384.
same thing’. This helps explain why the railway work is unintelligible: it is both a state of suspension and a state of movement, a contradiction that resists interpretation because it is entirely new. The local neighbourhood is ‘shy to own the Railroad’ (DS6.68), unable to read the signs of the future in the chaos of its construction.

Benjamin associates dreams with industrial construction in ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, when, after discussing the use of iron, he introduces a line from Michelet: ‘each epoch dreams the one to follow’. The confusion of Staggs’s Gardens is such a dream, out of which a new epoch emerges in Chapter 15, the area having become a ‘Railway world’ (DS15.233), complete with ‘railway hotels, coffee-houses, lodging-houses, boarding-houses; railway plans, maps, views, wrappers, bottles, sandwich-boxes, and time tables’ (DS15.233). Benjamin is drawing on Sigfried Giedion’s argument that all genuinely new developments in nineteenth-century architecture took place not in official architecture (such as the Royal Exchange and East India House, both located near Dombey’s offices [DS6.36]), but in ‘humbler structures’ driven by practical purposes, where ‘Industry unconsciously creates new powers of expression and new possibilities of experience’. This split is implied in the new division between architects (who focus on artistic facades) and engineers (who focus on interior structure) following the establishment of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1834. Industrial construction is therefore ‘the subconscious of architecture’, or, as I suggested in the introduction, the ‘architectural unconscious’.

In Dombey and Son, the railway is a sign of this architectural unconscious. It brings death and ruin, which are elsewhere repressed (if not always successfully) to the surface. In doing so, it shares something with the river in Our Mutual Friend (see Chapter 4). Michael Klotz connects the railway with the domestic interior, suggesting it produces a ‘tension between the way property functions

369 The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 429.
370 ‘Paris, the Capital’ [1935], p. 4.
371 Giedion, p. 167.
372 RIBA was first established as the Institute of British Architects in London, before gaining a Royal Charter in 1837.
373 Giedion, p. 183.
outside and within the home’. Its movement of goods works against the ‘perception of the Victorian home as a safe and private space’, even though this perception is based on the same goods which the railways move. More than just bringing out the mobility inherent within domestic goods, though, the train brings out the death and ruin which the domestic interior seeks to cover over. This is evident in Dombey’s train journey in Chapter 20, where the train comes to appear as ‘the triumphant monster, Death’ (DS20.298) amid Dombey’s growing resentment and thoughts of mortality following the death of his son. This phrase, repeated several times with minor variations, is associated with train’s unstoppable movement, as it cuts through and opens up the landscape:

Away, and still away, onward and onward ever: glimpses of cottage-homes, of houses, mansions, rich estates, of husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and paths that look deserted, small, and insignificant as they are left behind. (DS20.298)

The train gives only fragmentary, broken ‘glimpses’ of its surroundings, yet these glimpses connect disparate parts of society, bringing together ‘cottage-homes’ and ‘mansions’. The train’s movement stitches together town and countryside, overcoming what Raymond Williams calls the ideological separation between the processes of rural exploitation, which have been, in effect, dissolved into landscape, and the register of that exploitation, in the law courts, the money markets, the political power and the conspicuous expenditure of the city.

Yet the train carries its passengers through the countryside, so allowing the suppression of this link once again. As with the Carsons’ house in Mary Barton, the repression of class connections is aided by soft furnishings: Klotz notes that railway carriages in the Victorian period, particularly in first class, came to replicate bourgeois homes, giving the example of Augustus Egg’s painting The Travelling

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375 Klotz, p. 65.
376 Country and City, p. 46.
Companions (1862), where one woman reads a novel and the other is asleep. Neither looks out at the landscape, from which they are isolated and protected.377

In Chapter 20, Dombey does look out of the window, but misinterprets what he sees. The train enters an area of industrial poverty, which must be in the Midlands, since the train is for Leamington Spa:

There are dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far below. There are jagged walls and falling houses close at hand, and through the battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, while smoke, and crowded gables, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance.

(DS20.299)

The train breaks through architecture, revealing the death and lack within. This revelation is met by the refusal or inability of Dombey, a representative of the dominant classes, to confront the ‘want’ on which his own edifice is built:

As Mr. Dombey looks out of his carriage window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in upon these things: not made or caused them. (DS20.299)

All Dombey sees is a ‘ruinous and dreary’ (DS20.299), even apocalyptic scene, rendering the view little more than an externalisation of his own state of mind. He has no conception of space as a social product, since for him it functions purely to serve the firm, and hence becomes an index of the firm’s (that is, his own) troubles. He does recognise a connection between him and the ruin he observes, but only as a monstrous excess that confronts him, rather than part of a system in which he is invested; an attitude which recalls James Kay’s middle-class visitor to Manchester (see Chapter 2). The narrator, meanwhile, repeats Dombey’s error by distinguishing the railway from the social

377 Klotz, p. 68
system which has ‘made or caused’ this poverty, not allowing that, as a product of capitalist speculation, the train is, like Dombey, implicated in the ruin it reveals.

This scene relates to ‘Over London by Rail’, another engraving by Gustave Doré (image 9), as Klotz observes.\(^\text{378}\) Here, a train passes over a viaduct in the background, while a long row of terraced houses and yards fills the rest of the scene. The perspective from the train provides a panoptical view over them, yet this remains limited, since the passengers have only an instant to take in the scene as the train speeds past, and are unable to see inside the buildings. The train here points the way towards total visibility, but does not bring it about. As critics have noted, however, Dombey’s train journey foreshadows Chapter 47, where total visibility does become possible, at least within the pages of the novel. The relevant section begins with the question ‘what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural’ (DS47.683). This leads to the narrator’s desire to reveal the ‘moral pestilence’ (DS47.684) of the city:

Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame demon in the tale [Asmodeus], and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel as he moves forth among them! For only one night’s view of the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect; and from the thick and sullen air where Vice and Fever propagate together, raining the tremendous social retributions which are ever pouring down, and ever coming thicker! Bright and blest the morning that should rise on such a night: for men, delayed no more by stumbling-blocks of their own making, which are but specks of dust upon the path between them and eternity, would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place! (DS47.685)

\(^{378}\) Klotz, p. 75. London. A Pilgrimage, p. 120.
As Raymond Williams observes, the ‘potent and benignant hand’ is ‘the hand of the novelist; it is Dickens seeing himself’. In this case, Dickens wishes not only to reveal the suffering of the poor, but to emphasise its connection with his implicitly middle-class readership. As Klotz, Mancini and Tambling point out, this is also the perspective of the train. As Tambling puts it:

> The novel and the train act analogously to each other in letting the light of day in: battered roofs and windows are exposed, brought into visibility by the train, which is thus like the good spirit which takes off the housetops, and which is monstruous in that it questions the distinction between the natural and unnatural.\(^ {380}\)

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379 Country and City, p. 156.
380 Going Astray, p. 116. See also Klotz, p. 75 and Mancini, p. 116. Mancini notes that Murray Baumgarten has also made this argument.
If the good spirit is both novelist and train, the passage evokes two spatial modes simultaneously: the ‘mental space’ where the novelist constructs his world and the ‘physical space’ of a train moving through the landscape, which both work to make the invisible visible. This is an act which breaks through the semi-autonomy of separate social spheres, destabilising society, but with the ultimate aim of greater social unity.

The final appearance of the train follows Carker’s flight from Dijon, when he experiences ‘a fevered vision of things past and present all confounded together; of his life and journey blended into one’ (DS55.817). Again the train is linked to temporal confusion, this time even before it has appeared. Carker first travels by carriage, but, just as Dombey carries ‘monotony with him, through the rushing landscape’ (DS20.297), so Carker has ‘A vision of change upon change, and still the same monotony of bells and wheels, and horses’ feet, and no rest’. (DS55.817). As Isobel Armstrong notes, space on this journey is divided up, but ‘the more the spatial division, the more monotonous and undifferentiated the journey seems to Carker’. For Armstrong, this is ‘peculiarly modern space, empty meaningless space’, paralleling Benjamin’s empty homogeneous time. This combination of monotony and change recalls Staggs’s Gardens, which was simultaneously frozen and in motion in Chapter 6. For Carker, the confusion of time and space is accompanied by the ‘flight of Death’ (DS55.811), leading Tambling to suggest that ‘Repetition precedes the event [of Carker’s death], which it brings on’. Moreover, the railway turns Carker’s own planned revenge against him: the ‘red eyes’ (DS55.823) of the monstrous train that bears him down as he flees from Dombey recall the ‘red eye’ of the monster at the heart of the firm — the eye of Carker himself. Whereas Carker’s eye was hidden and mysterious, however, these eyes openly announce the coming of ruin. In this sense, the train has turned the house inside out, bringing the death which was hidden at its centre (and on its margins) to the fore.

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381 ‘Theories of Space’, p. 13.
382 ‘Theories of Space’, p. 13.
If Carker represents death, lack and ruin within the house and firm, then his obliteration by the train makes this visible. When he is smashed into ‘mutilated fragments’ (DS55.823), Carker is ‘opened up’ in a violent parallel to the train’s opening up of architecture during Dombey’s journey. Carker’s death takes place in front of Dombey, who is confronted with the disturbing image of ‘something covered, that lay heavy and still, upon a board’ (DS55.823). This covering recalls the journals used as wrappings after the death of Fanny, with their ‘fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders’. It is a parergonal structure that represents how architecture operates in this text: seeking to contain and conceal death, but also bringing it to the surface. Though Dombey may not realise it, the covered corpse of Carker is an image of the structure of his two houses, which the train, with the force of the architectural unconscious, has thrust into the open.

The status of death in the city will be explored further in Chapter 4, which investigates the relationship between architecture, the city and the unconscious; it turns from instability to uncanniness, and from the railway of Dombey and Son to the river of Our Mutual Friend. In this next chapter, the connections between spaces, which were relatively stable in Chapter 2, and had come to threaten both sides (in the case of Dombey’s two houses) or be associated with violence and confusion (in the case of the railway) in this chapter, become sites of blankness and absence. The circulation of ruin and rebirth which is associated with Dombey’s two houses, and with Staggs’s Gardens, also marks Our Mutual Friend, but now increasingly requires the psychoanalytic unconscious to interpret it, as it brings into plat an invisibility that cannot be seen or understood, but which still acts upon city space and its inhabitants.
Chapter 4 — The Uncanny City: Our Mutual Friend

In Our Mutual Friend (1865), Charles Dickens’s last completed novel, life and death circulate insistently. As critics have noted, this applies both to the narrative, which centres on John Harmon’s apparent death by drowning, and to Dickens’s depiction of London, especially the river Thames. While taking on board previous critical work, I read the Thames somewhat differently, as an element of the invisible architecture of the city. I approach the river and the city as participants in a dynamic interplay of death and rebirth, but one which raises the disturbing uncanniness of a depth that can never be revealed, which is unseeable rather than only unseen, though it is fully imbricated within the structure of the city.

As a form of invisible architecture, the river sits alongside a number of other sites and structures: the dust mounds which haunt the cityscape of the novel; the houses of the Boffins, the Veneerings and the Lammles; Jenny Wren’s rooftop garden. While the river may not immediately seem to fit among these more straightforwardly architectural spaces, it is in fact inextricably bound up with the city’s buildings, the line separating the two often proving impossible to draw. This is evident in Limehouse Hole, where Gaffer Hexam and Rogue Riderhood live and the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters (a pub frequented by watermen) is located. In this East End region, centred on Limehouse Dock and dominated by shipping and related activities, ‘vessels [...] seemed to have got ashore, and houses [...] seemed to have got afloat’ (OMF1.3.21). The river blends with the city here, even as it threatens those who work on it with drowning.

The Thames also has an uneasy relationship with the residences of the rich, as Dombey and Son ironically indicates:

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Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, very good people, resided in a pretty villa at Fulham, on the banks of the Thames; which was one of the most desirable residences in the world when a rowing-match happened to be going past, but had its little inconveniences at other times, among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the contemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery (DS24.361).

The river here is a place for leisure, but also has the potential to flood unexpectedly, intruding into the aristocratic or bourgeois household. It is defined and organised by human activity, but cannot be wholly tamed, making it at once architectural and beyond architecture.

This river is a very different structure from the two houses of Dombey in Chapter 3, whose connection is hidden but ultimately comprehensible within the context of capitalist space, as are the cellars of Gaskell’s Manchester. It is more akin to the destructive force of the railway in *Dombey and Son*, which is produced by capitalism, but seems to exceed it. Like the railway, the Thames simultaneously breaks apart and connects the city, making it appropriate to the modern world, which for Dickens is both interconnected and fractured. According to John Forster, Dickens maintained the world ‘was so much smaller than we thought it; we were all so connected by fate without knowing it; people supposed to be far apart were so constantly elbowing each other’; yet, as Moretti notes, Dickens’s middle-class characters often have ‘two lives: a public one in the workplace—and a private one at home’. 386 The river connects and divides in at least two ways, geographically (dividing the city in two, yet connecting London to its overseas Empire and the surrounding countryside), and symbolically (bringing people and classes together, but also threatening obliteration, of memory and life). It also allows Dickens to engage with what is unrecoverable in the city—not just hidden, but absolutely inaccessible. Throughout the novel, what lies under the river’s surface is not directly seen

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or experienced, only inferred from what rises to the surface. In this respect, the river operates like the psychoanalytic unconscious.\textsuperscript{387}

Like Freud’s model of the mind, at least in its initial form of conscious and unconscious, Dickens’s river is composed of two sides, which can be described as surface and depth, or visible and invisible, and which exist in a dynamic relationship.\textsuperscript{388} Only the first of these, however, is accessible to analysis. This structure makes the Thames simultaneously architecture and anti-architecture; or to use Dostoevsky’s terms, both intentional and unintentional.\textsuperscript{389} The city relies upon it, using it for trade, movement and sanitation, yet cannot master it. The Thames activates an anxiety which has haunted architecture since at least Hegel: that it is founded on the concealment and memorialisation of death, which remains beyond its control and knowledge. According to Hegel, in its most ancient forms architecture is fundamentally \textit{double}. The pyramids consist of a ‘double architecture, one above ground, the other subterranean’; they put before our eyes the simple prototype of symbolical art itself; they are prodigious crystals which conceal in themselves an inner meaning and, as external shapes produced by art, they so envelop that meaning that it is obvious that they are there for this inner meaning separated from pure nature and only in relation to this meaning. But this realm of death and the invisible, which here constitutes the meaning, possesses only one side, and that a formal one, of the true content of art, namely that of being removed from immediate existence; and so this realm is primarily only Hades, not yet a life which, even if liberated from the sensuous

\textsuperscript{387} Holbrook also reads the river in terms of the unconscious: ‘The river, as I have said, is the river of the unconscious and primal passion’. He focuses on its role as a source of libidinous energy in relation to death, rather than on the spatial and visual implications I pursue. Holbrook, p. 156.


\textsuperscript{389} ‘Anti-architecture’ is associated with deconstruction, as in Nikos Salingaros’s book \textit{Anti-Architecture and Deconstruction} (Solingen, Germany: Umbau-Verlag, 2004), which is extremely critical of deconstructivist architecture. Denis Hollier’s description of Bataille’s writing also positions it as a form of anti-architecture, and it is in light of Hollier’s analysis that I use the term. See Hollier.
as such, is still nevertheless at the same time self-existent and therefore in itself free and living spirit.\textsuperscript{390}

This earliest architecture does not exist for itself but for ‘death’, its ‘inner meaning’, to which it is connected and which it symbolises. Moreover, the spatial arrangement of the pyramids (their connection of the above-ground with the below-ground) makes them a metaphor for symbolism, a representational mode which insists on a unity of form and content (or ‘meaning’). Hegel asserts that ‘the architectural work of art is not just an end in itself; it is something external for something else to which it serves as an adornment, dwelling-place, etc’.\textsuperscript{391} This means it does not qualify as true ‘spirit’, since it cannot bring about ‘the connection of spiritual meaning with sensuous material’ to which true art, such as poetry and music, aspires, instead remaining split. The visible side of architecture always refers to something else, which is ‘invisible’, ‘removed from immediate existence’, lacking a positive independent presence.\textsuperscript{392} Behind this is Hegel’s conceptualisation of the symbolic, in which the Absolute is united with what represents it. Symbolic art hints at something beyond itself, to which it is nonetheless fundamentally connected. The temple, Hegel’s prototypical architecture, is an example of this: it symbolises the god it houses, distinguishing it from classical or romantic art.\textsuperscript{393}

Gogol’s Gothic cathedrals, discussed in Chapter 1, are symbolic in this way. For Benjamin, the symbolic is opposed by allegory, which undoes all connections, laying death open.\textsuperscript{394} London in Our Mutual Friend is also symbolic in Hegel’s sense, as ‘a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being invisible and invisible, and so being wholly neither’ (OMF3.1.420), though it seems poised at a moment of indeterminacy here, rather than on its way towards unity as in Hegel.

Moreover, as Denis Hollier observes, art is already dead for Hegel, returning it to its origins in architecture:

\textsuperscript{391} Aesthetics, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{392} Aesthetics, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{393} See Aesthetics, pp. 323-61 (especially p. 352), pp. 82-90.
\textsuperscript{394} German Tragic Drama, pp. 163-67.
Art is dead. With his *Aesthetics*, Hegel constructs its tomb. Art, which began with the construction of tombs, also ends with a tomb. [...] Architecture is something appearing in the place of death, to point out its presence and to cover it up: the victory of death and the victory over death.\(^{395}\)

Similarly, for Adorno, ‘One of the models of art may be the corpse in its transfixed and imperishable form’, which is feared and fetishised, and out of which other artforms gradually develop.\(^{396}\) This idea that death is entombed within architecture can be extended to identity, which Foucault shows to be itself architectural in panoptical societies, where the subject ‘assumes responsibility for the constraints of power’, becoming ‘the principle of his own subjection’ and hence imitating the architecture that encompasses him.\(^{397}\) Such ‘entombing’ is relevant to John Harmon’s death and ‘resurrection’, discussed below.

By considering the river, and the architecture of the novel more generally, I seek to demonstrate that the London of *Our Mutual Friend* is organised by an uncanny dynamic, drawing on Freud’s essay on the topic. This helps explain the novel’s weird mixture of the human and inhuman, its ability to confuse perception and memory, and the recurrent sense it generates of something lost which needs to be found. It is, I argue, the inaccessibility of the unconscious, which is spatialised as invisible architecture, that produces the impression of something hidden or secret that can never be fully uncovered.

**In Search of a Clue**

I begin by reviewing critical approaches to the river, and offering a new reading that draws on Lacan to interpret it as a structure composed of two sides, one of which is unseeable and unrepresentable, and the other of which is a site of signification which requires interpretation. It is also an uncanny

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\(^{395}\) Hollier, p. 6.

\(^{396}\) Aesthetic Theory, p. 361.

site, I suggest, which provokes conflicting reactions among those who use it. I go on to consider some of the implications of this reading.


More recently, Catherine Gallagher has expanded on this relationship between money, dead bodies and the river, discussing the novel’s ‘bioeconomics’ in relation to Ruskin, Malthus and Adam Smith. Catherine Gallagher, pp. 86-117. Michelle Allen, meanwhile, has traced the role of the Thames as ‘a site of drowning and death’ in Dickens’s earlier writings, noting that ‘Down with the Tide’ (1853) and ‘On Duty with Inspector Field’ (1851), both from *Household Words*, focus on the criminality, morbidity and mystery of the river. Michelle Allen, Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London (Athens: Ohio State UP, 2008), p. 96. For a survey of the Thames in Dickens’s novels, see Luc Bouvard, ‘The Thames Persistently Revisited: Dickens on the Edge of Water’, Etudes Anglaises: Revue du Monde Anglphone, 65.1 (2012), 80-95.


For J. Hillis Miller, the river, as the context for an array of drownings and near-drownings, confounds ‘the rationalities of cognitive mapping’, serving as a ‘realm of otherness’ or ‘underwater locus of metamorphosis’ that is resolutely non-topographical. J. Hillis Miller, ‘The Topography of Jealousy in *Our Mutual Friend*’ in Dickens Refigured: Bodies, Desires and Other Histories, ed. by John Schad (Manchester: MUP, 1996), pp. 218-36 (p. 222). For Jeremy Tambling, the Thames evokes the Derridean concept of ‘life death’, a ‘reminder that every concept contains its other’; this makes it a profoundly dialectical object, and a form of the Freudian
unconscious, which like dreams cannot express ‘The alternative “either-or” [...] in any way whatever’. 405

What has not been considered in sufficient detail is how Dickens deploys visuality as an index to reading the river, and how this interacts with vision elsewhere in the novel. In the opening scene, for example, Gaffer Hexam is looking for something in the Thames (image 10), focusing narrative attention on his gaze and the river: ‘there was no clue what he looked for, but he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze’ (OMF1.1.1). Hexam’s gaze, directed towards the Thames, has no defined object, though it soon becomes clear he is looking for human bodies. Initially, however, the gaze gives ‘no clue’ about its purpose. At the same time, it is in search of a clue, in the form of disturbances in the water: ‘Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, [Hexam’s] gaze paused for an instant’ [OMF1.1.2]). This gaze that searches for clues while itself remaining inscrutable replicates the gaze of the detective, like the inspector who appears in Chapter 3, and spends the night looking for Hexam in Chapter 13, or of the criminal—which Hexam is accused of being by Rogue Riderhood (OMF1.12.150). It also suggests the gaze of the physiognomist, seeking to draw out a human logic from the blankness of the river, even if only in the form of death; or the architect, seeking to impose a structural order onto the dark and indeterminate river. This gaze hopes to uncover what is concealed, to bring to light what should have been left submerged.

This opening episode echoes throughout the novel, the first instance where the visual field is defined by obscurity and concealment rather than clarity, and where a non-human structure serves as an index for the human (another example is Mr Venus’s shop, where ‘nothing is resolvable into anything distinct, save the candle itself [...] and two preserved frogs’ [OMF1.7.77], and where Silas Wegg seeks to buy back his missing leg bone). The scene suggests that something secret, and deathly, is hidden in the city. As it continues, something is drawn out of the river: money, apparently taken from the pockets of a dead man, making Lizzie, Hexam’s daughter, shiver and turn ‘deadly

faint’ (OMF1.1.3). For Lizzie at least, this money should not have returned to the surface. It recalls the money used to pay Charon, the ferryman of Hades in Greek mythology, from whom Gaffer symbolically steals, and whose character he partly takes on.

For Freud, the feeling of untimely re-emergence is symptomatic of the Unheimlich, or uncanny. The Unheimlich (literally ‘unhomely’) is the opposite of the Heimlich (familiar or ‘homely’), but also one of the latter word’s meanings. Consulting Grimm’s 1877 dictionary, Freud finds that Heimlich can mean ‘that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge’, coinciding with its opposite. For Freud, the re-emergence of the hidden or concealed element in the Heimlich is the primary source of the uncanny. More precisely, ‘an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive

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beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed’. An archetypal example is the feeling that emerges in relation to ‘death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts’. To the extent that Our Mutual Friend is concerned with the return or persistence of the dead, then, it is also an exploration of the place of the uncanny in modern life.

We can return to Hexam’s gaze in light of Freud’s essay, bearing in mind that the uncanny is an instance of the return of the repressed. In this view the river plays the role of the unconscious, the site of repression, most clearly in a passage from which I have already quoted:

Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant. At every mooring-chain and rope, at every stationary boat or barge that split the current into a broad-arrowhead, at the offsets from the piers of Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steamboats as the beat the filthy water, at the floating logs of timber lashed together lying off certain wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. (OMF1.1.2)

Hexam searches the river not for a body, but for the trace of a body, in the form of an ‘impediment’, which functions as a fracture or gap in the surface of the river, Hexam looking for places where boats ‘split the current into a broad-arrowhead’ [my emphasis] as evidence of what lies beneath. Lacan’s Seminar XI is helpful here. Lacan insists on the distinction between the Romantic unconscious—‘the locus of the divinities of night’—and the Freudian, which is ‘at all points homologous with what occurs at the level of the subject’. He focuses on what allows Freud to identify the unconscious as unconscious:

In the dream, in parapraxis, in the flash of wit—what is it that strikes one first? It is the sense of impediment [empêchement] to be found in all of them.

408 ‘The Uncanny’, p. 248.
409 ‘The Uncanny’, p. 240.
Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence, something stumbles.

Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious.411

The empêchement or impediment is the sign which reveals the unconscious—though ‘reveals’ is perhaps the wrong word here, since the impediment can operate only as a clue, not as something which would lift the lid on the contents of the unconscious. It points towards, but does not undo, repression. Similarly, for Hexam, the impediment or split in the river indicates the presence of the body, which takes on the role of repressed material, its return generating an uncanny effect.

The dead body is what should remain concealed (the uncanny), but also what the gazing subject desires, since it is from the bodies that Hexam gets his livelihood. Lizzie, however, views the river differently:

‘It’s my belief you hate the sight of the very river.’

‘I—I do not like it, father.’

‘As if it wasn’t your living! As if it wasn’t meat and drink to you!’412 (OMF1.1.3)

While Lizzie hates the sight of the river, to her father it is the site (and sight) of desire. It conceals, but also bears witness to, the object for which Hexam’s ‘shining eyes darted a hungry look’: the dead body, which can no longer feel or return desire. The closest Hexam can come to consummation is to plunge his arms into the water of the river—presumably into the pockets of a drowned body—and the subsequent actions he performs on the money he retrieves: ‘He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once [...] before he put it in his pocket’ (OMF1.1.3).

This play of vision goes further. It is not only between Gaffer Hexam and the river, and Lizzie and the river, but between Lizzie and Hexam. As Gaffer watches the river, Lizzie Hexam watches him: ‘She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look there was

411 Seminar XI, p. 25.  
412 On this conversation, and its relation to the dead body as a nexus of economic exchange, see Gallagher, especially p. 93.
a touch of dread or horror’ (OMF1.1.1). Just as Gaffer visually assesses the river, Lizzie assesses him, reacting to the slightest alteration in his features, such as when he suddenly steers towards the Surrey shore, and: ‘Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling’ (OMF1.1.2). Lizzie’s comprehension of the river is mediated through her father, and it is through this mediation that her response is determined. It is not the river she hates so much as her father’s attitude towards it. Gaffer, meanwhile, also reads the river through Lizzie: when she shivers upon seeing a stain in the boat, he asks ‘what ails you?’, becoming ‘immediately aware of it, though so intent on the advancing waters’ (OMF1.1.2). These different attitudes represent the two sides of the uncanny, and the subject’s relationship to repressed material: for Hexam, the river is Heimlich, homely and desirable, but for Lizzie it is Unheimlich, repulsive and disturbing (though only through her father’s reaction, through the Heimlich). Like fear of the uncanny, Lizzie’s dislike is not rational: ‘What hurt can it do you?’ Hexam asks, Lizzie replying, ‘None, none. But I cannot bear it’ (OMF1.1.3). The river is harmless, and Lizzie knows it is harmless (though there is irony here, as it will kill Rogue Riderhood and Bradley Headstone) but it is nonetheless intolerable, the repetition of ‘none’ effectively carrying a double meaning, like Heimlich itself.

This sense of the river as intolerable is extended to the masses who dwell along its banks. As with Gaskell’s Frankenstein metaphor (see Chapter 2), the poor threaten the ‘respectable’ city, seeming both living and dead, human and inhuman, and thus potentially diseased and contagious. This becomes clear during Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn’s journey across London to see John Harmon’s body:

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher ground, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat—among bowsprits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships—the wheels rolled on, until
they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all, where the boy alighted and opened the door. (OMF1.3.20-21)

The people in Limehouse Hole are ‘moral sewage’, a term which cuts two ways: they are both a source of moral contagion, and a product of the social morality of the affluent middle classes. Moral sewage comes from the (social) body, but might also return to infect it. This passage harks back to the ‘good spirit’ passage of *Dombey and Son*, where the term ‘moral pestilence’ (DS47.684) is used, the metaphor there being one of gases and vapours rather than water. The sentiment, though, remains similar: the middle-classes have cut themselves off from the poor, but remain tied to them by the invisible architecture of the city.

This journey cuts across London from West to East, starting at the Veneerings’ house in ‘Stucconia’ (OMF1.10.117), usually taken to be Tyburnia in Bayswater.413 Franco Moretti suggests that this journey reveals Dickens’s ‘stroke of genius’, which is to ‘see the city as a whole, a single system’.414 In Hegel’s terms, Dickens sees the city symbolically, in terms of totality rather than isolation; though there are elements of the novel which trouble this idea, not least the river itself, as I will show. Like Balzac, says Moretti, in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens finds a third way between the silver-fork and Newgate novels of the 1820s and 30s, which dealt solely with the upper and lower classes respectively. Dickens uncovers the hidden connections between these two social orders which the earlier genres had obscured. Similar arguments have been made about the distinction between Dickens and Thackeray, including by Sambudha Sen, who suggests that Thackeray, unlike Dickens, wrote from the position of a political and aristocratic insider, confining his fictions to one social group.415

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413 *Going Astray*, p. 240. Tambling also comments here on Lightwood and Wrayburn’s journey.
414 *Atlas*, p. 116. A map showing the start and end points of this journey, and other locations in the novel, is on p. 115.
415 Sen, pp. 36-38.
The River and the Gaze

So far I have ignored something important: the gaze of the river itself. Lacan argues that vision must be understood not only ‘geometrically’—consisting of straight lines which connect the object viewed to the viewer—but also in terms of the ‘point of light’.\textsuperscript{416} Thinking geometrically, a logocentric approach associated with the realist perspective developed during the Renaissance in Western art, puts the viewer in a position of primacy. To understand vision as vision, rather than just a form of space, we must instead consider the object we perceive as ‘the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth’.\textsuperscript{417}

A story Lacan tells to illustrate his point suggests the relevance of this concept to Our Mutual Friend:

One day, I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen in a small port. At that time, […] there were no trawlers. The fisherman went out in his frail craft at his own risk. [Risk is the condition of river scavengers such as Hexam and Rogue Riderhood, as becomes clear when Riderhood’s boat is run down by a foreign steamer (OMF3.2.440)]. [A]n individual known as Petit-Jean […] pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. […] It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me—You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn’t see you!

[…] [I]f what Petit-Jean said to me […] had any meaning, it was because in a sense it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated.\textsuperscript{418}

The light emanating from the can, or any other object, ‘grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than landscape, something other than what I have called

\textsuperscript{416} Seminar XI, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{417} Seminar XI, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{418} Seminar XI, p. 95.
the picture’. Rather than just presenting a flat image, the point of light adds depth to the visual field, and de-centres the subject, who is constituted by this point of light, which Lacan calls the gaze, before s/he sees: ‘What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside’. This idea is illustrated by Holbein’s painting The Ambassadors (1533), whose famous anamorphic skull is a ‘singular object floating in the foreground, which is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, to catch in its trap, the observer’.

Similarly, when Lizzie attentively ‘eyes’ Gaffer’s face,

it happened now, that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl’s eye, and she shivered. (OMF1.1.2)

This ‘slant of light’, like Holbein’s slanting skull, undoes geometrical perspective. The ‘stain’ it highlights catches Lizzie’s eye, functioning as Lacan’s gaze by putting the source of vision outside the self, as the verb ‘glanced’ also subtly does. The stain implies the presence of something which cannot be directly seen, perhaps bodies in the river, since it recalls a ‘human form’; though this remains uncertain as it is ‘muffled’, only ‘resembling’ an ‘outline’. For Lacan, the ‘stain’ is identified with the gaze, eluding the Cartesian subject who believes herself in control of vision:

the function of the stain and of the gaze is both that which governs the gaze most secretly and that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision what is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness.

Lacan’s use of the term ‘floating’ (flottant), to describe both skull and sardine can, also indicates that vision escapes fixity and control, as does the Thames.

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419 Seminar XI, p. 96.
420 Seminar XI, p. 106.
421 Seminar XI, p. 92.
422 Seminar XI, p. 74.
The stain has aspects of Benjamin’s ‘optical unconscious’, which inheres undetected in the visual field, only revealed by photography and cinema:

Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what takes place during the split second when a person actually takes a step. [...] This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing a subject.423

The slant of light, like a focusing camera, brings the stain into view for Lizzie in a new way, revealing something unknown within the visual field, which was nonetheless there the whole time. This combination of unseen and seen, familiar and unfamiliar, suggests there is an uncanniness to the optical unconscious. As the authors of Benjamin’s Arcades: An UnGuided Tour (2005) argue, though, this unconscious differs from Freud’s:

For Benjamin, the unconscious is simply a place which ‘exists’ and can be revealed or can reveal hitherto unknown things, a far cry from Freud’s unconscious which is accessible only through its traces. Benjamin operates within a visual model in which there is an order of the seen or not-seen, an order simply brought to light by virtue of photography.424

For Freud, as for Lacan, the visual can only indicate the presence of the unconscious, not reveal it. The optical unconscious, by contrast, is revealed by the gaze of the camera, though it also, as I argued in the introduction, promotes distraction, where conscious knowledge is replaced by ‘habits’, which ‘Even the distracted person can form’.425 Photography does not simply bring the unseen to light, it actively reshapes perception, with slow motion, in disclosing aspects of movement that ‘do not appear as the retarding of natural movements but have a curious gliding, floating character of

424 Buse et al, p. 162.
their own’, multiplying rather than reducing the unknown.\textsuperscript{426} Lacan’s re-orientation of the gaze onto the landscape, as a form of stain remains, though, of most relevance to Dickens’s novel, in its emphasis on the insistence of the unconscious within vision.

Indeed, Lacan’s concept of the stain is more complex than indicated so far. It is also the place of the subject: ‘if I am anything in the picture [produced by the point of light], it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot’.\textsuperscript{427} The subject attempts to coincide with the gaze, and find a place in the ‘picture’ (both of which are outside her), by means of ‘mimcry’: ‘It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled’.\textsuperscript{428} The ‘muffled human form’ whose presence Lizzie infers, then, is also her perception of herself: this is the self as stain, determined by something which exceeds us, and which we cannot comprehend; the unconscious, or the river. As Lacan puts it: ‘To imitate [...] is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps us’.\textsuperscript{429} This claim is less speculative than it seems, since Lizzie’s position coincides with the bodies pulled out of the river, Hexam telling her: ‘The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore’ (OMF1.1.3). Before she was conscious of herself, the river determined Lizzie’s identity, providing the means to warm and comfort her, effectively surrounding and ‘grasping’ her.

Gaffer’s statement that Lizzie hates ‘the very sight of the river’ can thus be turned around: it is the river’s sight of her she hates. It has formed the role she wishes to escape, revealing that her fate is not in her own hands but externally determined. Lizzie’s relationship with Eugene Wrayburn, whom she loves uncontrollably, against her will, bears this out. Yet her openness to the gaze of the river is what ultimately allows her to identify his drowning body: ‘An untrained sight would never have seen by the moonlight what she saw at the length of a few strokes astern. She saw the

\textsuperscript{427} Seminar XI, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{428} Seminar XI, p. 97, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{429} Seminar XI, p. 100.
drowning figure rise to the surface, slightly struggle, and as if by instinct turn over on its back to float’ (OMF4.6.700). Like the camera in Benjamin’s optical unconscious, Lizzie sees the minute signs normal eyes would miss. As Benjamin suggests of cinema, her personal vision becomes collective here: ‘Thanks to the camera, [...] the individual perceptions of the psychotic or dreamer can be appropriated by collective perception’. 430

The gaze from outside is also, Lacan argues, the object of desire: ‘The objet a in the field of the visible is the gaze’. 431 This becomes clearer if we recognise that the gaze emanates not just from the stain, but also the money which Gaffer retrieves, and the bodies it represents. The concept of money as gaze is evoked by Dickens, in more beneficent terms, in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), where a workman gives Nell ‘two old, battered, smoke-encrusted penny pieces’, the narrator commenting: ‘Who knows but they shone as brightly in the eyes of angels, as golden gifts that have been chronicled on tombs?’. 432 Adorno interprets this incident, in an essay Benjamin quotes, as signifying that ‘the possibility of transition and dialectical rescue [is] inherent in this world of things, this lost, rejected world’. 433 While Benjamin and Adorno focus on the transformative power of the commodity, this moment also hints that money itself gazes at the (be)holder, like the eyes of angels, or perhaps death (it suggests ‘tombs’). Money though, always refers to something else; the commodities it might purchase, as Marx shows. This makes it like Hegel’s tomb: a symbolic structure which refers to something beyond it, and which symbolises symbolism. Money, though, breaks the fixity of this relationship, since it expresses infinite possibilities, possessing ‘the property of being able to buy everything and appropriate all objects’. 434 It is not money which is the objet a, but this something else, which could be anything else, to which it refers.

431 Seminar XI, p. 105.
432 The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 337.
433 Adorno, quoted in Arcades, p. 208.
Writing of the gaze of the painter, which seems to impose itself in every painting, Lacan states: ‘There was always a gaze behind’. Money acts in this way, as does the stain Lizzie sees, behind which lurks a sense of death. This is also true of Hegel’s concept of architecture: the pyramid symbolises the gaze of the pharaoh, which exceeds death, but this gaze is always pre-existed by another, which enables it. This is the condition of the pyramid’s possibility. Though the gaze grasps us, it is also what is always missed, which is why it coincides with desire, as one of Lacan’s formulations recognises: ‘In our relation to things [...] by the way of vision [...] something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—this is what we call the gaze’. The gaze, then, always escapes us, like a secret within vision which the viewing subject cannot master.

In the next two sections I move to consider other instances where the uncanny operates within the spaces of the novel, this time within more conventionally architectural structures, which, nonetheless, turn out to be based on both hidden secrets and death. This invisible architecture expresses an anxiety, I suggest, that the modern city always escapes comprehension, always retaining some element of the unfamiliar, no matter how well known it might seem.

Uncanny Houses

As a structure that seems to conceal an uncanny secret, alternately compelling and repelling the subject with the force of the gaze, the river is not alone in the text, then. Nor is it the only form of architecture to be built on death and absence. I briefly survey several other examples in this section.

One is the house of the Veneerings, which is entirely facade-like: ‘Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new’ (OMF1.2.6). The name ‘Veneering’ points openly towards this hollowness and

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435 Seminar XI, p. 113.
436 Seminar XI, p. 73.
437 David Spurr identifies Dickens among modern writers who ‘make a space for the demonic in the constructed world’. Spurr, p. 74.
predominance of surface. The void at the heart of the Veneering architecture is symbolised by the consternation of Twemlow, a minor character: ‘The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering’s oldest friend, or newest friend’ (OMF1.2.7). Such confusion of newest and oldest is for Benjamin characteristic of the city, where ‘primal history’ (Urgeschichte) emerges within modern capitalism, understood as a dream: ‘The dream—it is the earth in which the find is made that testifies to the primal history of the nineteenth century’.438 Twemlow perceives that this contradiction defines the Veneerings, but is still held in its grasp, unable to recognise that the city disallows any solution to the problem.

The Veneerings also take on aspects of the uncanny. They metaphorically perform the task of restoring bodies to life from the water, which Lizzie later achieves literally in relation to Eugene. At one social event, Mrs Veneering ‘dived into the same waters [as her husband] for a wealthy Ship-Broker, and [...] brought him up, safe and sound, by the hair’ (OMF3.11.134). Indeed, Mr Veneering’s whole social success is built on the apparent death of Harmon by drowning, first reported at their dinner-party, so that ‘such another lucky hit would almost have set him up in that way to his satisfaction’ (OMF3.11.13).

In contrast to Mr Veneering, for whom he works in the drug-house of ‘Chicksey, Veneering and Stobbles’ (OMF1.4.33), ‘Rumty’ Wilfer is emphatically not ‘bran-new’. A poor clerk, his ambition is ‘to wear a complete suit of clothes, hat and boots included, at one time’ (OMF1.4.32), aligning him with Akikievich in ‘The Overcoat’, another clerk who needs new clothes (see Chapter 1). The impossibility of his task renders him a perpetual patchwork of different times and styles:

His black hat was brown before he could afford a coat, his pantaloons were white at the seams and knees before he could buy a pair of boots, his boots had worn out before he could

438 Arcades, p. 88.
treat himself to new pantaloons, and, by the time he worked round to the hat again, that shining modern article roofed-in an ancient ruin of various periods. (OMF1.4.32)

Wilfer symbolises the chaotic, unintentional city, composed of different periods arranged in fluctuating relationships. Against this stands the highly intentional Veneering, who ‘signalized his accession to supreme power by bringing into the business a quantity of plate-glass window and French-polished mahogany partition, and a gleaming and enormous door-plate’ (OMF1.4.33). In this juxtaposition there is a confrontation between two visions of the city, which can be associated with London (like Wilfer, never entirely reshaped), and Paris (Veneering uses a French partition, suggesting the imposed order of Haussmannisation [1853-70]). Indeed, Veneering’s love of glass, also evident in the ‘great looking-glass’ (OMF1.2.10) in his dining room, would make him at home in Zola’s La Curée and Au Bonheur des Dames (see Chapter 5). Put another way, this contrast is like the one Zola identifies in Le Ventre de Paris between the medieval church and the new glass markets of les Halles (see Chapter 1). Neither vision of the city, however, is definitive. Dickens presents us with a choice—new or old, Veneering or Rumty—that cannot be settled. Both coexist within the same firm, constituting two sides of modern capitalism, though Rumty, like Zola’s church, represents the residual elements that inhere within this system.439

Other buildings associated with death or ruin include Eugene and Mortimer’s offices. Eugene works in a ‘black hole called a set of chambers’, and Mortimer ‘high up an awful staircase commanding a burial-ground’ (OMF1.3.20). This sense of death within architecture is more explicit with the Lammles, two con-artists who trick each other into marriage before realising they are both poor. Their secret is a ‘skeleton up-stairs’, above which ‘The handsome fittings and furnishings of the [rented] house in Sackville Street were piled thick and high’ (OMF2.4.256). The Lammles propagate the myth of their imminently buying a grander house: ‘they were always looking at palatial residences in the best situations, and always very nearly taking or buying one, but never quite

439 I take the term ‘residual’ from Raymond Williams, who contrasts it to the ‘emergent’ and ‘dominant’. See Marxism and Literature, pp. 121-127.
concluding the bargain’ (OMF2.4.256). Their acquaintances even become ‘envious of the non-existent Lammle structure’ (OMF2.4.256). Mr Venus’s shop, meanwhile, stores literal skeletons, or rather pieces of skeletons, along with an array of dead objects: ‘what’s in those hampers over them again, I don’t quite remember […]. Say, human various. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, various. Mummied bird. Dried cuticle, various’ (OMF1.7.81).

Another structure based on death is Jenny Wren’s rooftop garden, from where Jenny, the ‘dolls’ dressmaker’ (OMF2.2.232), calls to Riah to ‘come up and be dead!’ (OMF2.5.282). Death here becomes liberating, Jenny describing how Riah ‘toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright […] and his life down in the dark was over!’ (OMF2.5.281). By contrast, death threatens to overcome Charley Hexam’s school (located ‘where Kent and Surrey meet’ [OMF2.1.218]), brought by the railways that ‘still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them’ (OMF2.1.218). At times, the whole of London has a deathly appearance: ‘A grey dusty withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect. The closed warehouses and offices have an air of death about them, and the national dread of colour has an air of mourning’ (OMF2.15.393). This description comes in the chapter detailing Bradley Headstone’s doomed proposal to Lizzie in a churchyard (St Peter’s in Cornhill), where the dead do not remain underground, their presence insisting from a ‘raised bank of earth’, ‘conveniently and healthfully elevated above the level of the living’ (OMF2.15.394). In these three instances—Jenny’s garden, Charley’s school and the churchyard—death is elevated above the living, but also enters into the structures it overhangs. Only Jenny is able to turn this situation to any kind of account.

Hidden Secrets and Hauntings

The site which most fully develops the uncanny aspects of architecture is Boffin’s Bower, also known as Harmony Jail—one of many dualities and renamings in the text. This is where John Harmon grew

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440 Adrian Poole notes this is probably Deptford, New Cross or South Bermondsey. See Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 219, n.8. Tambling comments on the school’s location in Going Astray, pp. 241-42.

441 See Poole, OMF, p. 386, n.1.
up and where his father, another John Harmon, died, setting in motion the novel’s inheritance plot. In this part I look at this location in some detail, analysing the traces it bears of the Harmon family and the uncanny effect generated by John Harmon’s return.

As the novel opens the Bower has been taken over by Mr and Mrs Boffin, retainers to John Harmon senior and presumptive inheritors of his property. The house is later passed on to Silas Wegg, who acts as caretaker for the estate which includes the novel’s famous dust-mounds, foundation of the elder John Harmon’s wealth. These mounds are the site of a search which comes to obsess Wegg, for something presumed to have been hidden by Harmon, an ‘inquisitive’ and ‘secret’ man (OMF2.7.300). As Mr Venus puts it: ‘He was the species of old gentleman [...] that I should judge likely to take such opportunities as this place offered, of stowing away money, valuables, maybe papers’ (OMF2.7.301). As the two men search the mounds they become convinced that a secret will is hidden there. To Wegg in particular, the mounds become a combination of tomb and wealth, a site where absence sustains and produces desire: ‘What have we found? [...] Nothing. But [...] what may we find? [...] Anything’ (OMF3.6.478). For Wegg the mounds are architecturally double, a ruin with the potential of a palace. They evoke a fantastical invisible architecture, like the interior of ‘Our House’ (OMF1.5.45), a grand residence whose interior Wegg used to imagine, becoming melancholic when he discovers the reality bears no relation to his fantasy (OMF2.7.296).

The novel implicitly comments on this duality of wealth and death through the stories of misers Wegg reads to Mr Boffin, especially the chapter ‘The Treasures [...] of a Dunghill’ (OMF3.6.481), where a ‘heap of ruins’ in which one miser dies turns out to have ‘secret hoards’ hidden in the wall, the teapot and even the chimney (OMF3.6.482). Such possibilities seem realised when Wegg finds a cash-box in the grounds containing a will giving almost all Harmon’s property to the Crown (OMF3.7.493), which he intends to use to blackmail Mr Boffin. Here, the rule of the Lacanian gaze— that there is ‘always a gaze behind’—is reversed (but also sustained), as the will which matters most is the last one. The problem is that it is never possible to determine which this is. It is not Wegg’s will, since Boffin eventually reveals he has uncovered a later one, hidden in a ‘Dutch
bottle’ (OMF4.14.787), leaving all the property to him. This message in a bottle hints at a connection between the mounds and the sea or the river, sites one would expect a bottle to be found. Each new will functions as a partial return of the dead man, who speaks from beyond the grave, uncannily giving orders which retain power over the living. Boffin’s document is said by the younger John Harmon to be ‘the latest will of the many wills made by my unhappy self-tormenting father’ (OMF4.14.787). There is no guarantee, though, that this is the case. The novel has opened up the fluidity of the past, creating the possibility, even if never realised, of a later will, another secret with the power to supersede its precursors.

Like the mounds, the house is an uncanny structure with death at its core. It is ‘Bare of paint, bare of paper on the walls, bare of furniture, bare of experience of human life’, with ‘an air of being denuded to the bone’ (OMF1.15.183). It recalls the bones in Mr Venus’s shop, which display the architecture of the human. While the skeleton in the Lammles’ house is covered over, here the house’s ‘bare bones’ are exposed to view. Comparing these two houses explicates Benjamin’s claim that the nineteenth century bourgeoisie is obsessed with gathering furnishings and coverings, as the Lammles do (an idea already discussed in relation to Mary Barton [see Chapter 2]). Harmony Jail shows the alternative: to confront the spectre of death within architecture, and face the ruin which all buildings threaten to become in the modern city. For Benjamin, to see buildings as ruins is to see the dream-like basis on which modern capitalism is constructed, as in the conclusion to his 1935 Exposé of the Arcades: ‘With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled’. This is an inversion of Wegg’s view of Harmony Jail, as a ruin that will elevate him to the bourgeoisie.

Like the river, and the mounds surrounding it, Boffin’s Bower activates a sense of something hidden on the verge of re-emerging. Anthony Vidler points out that this aspect of the uncanny is often associated with haunted houses, including in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Freud’s favourite author, making the uncanny, as homely made unhomely, a fundamentally architectural concept.

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Vidler identifies moments in Hoffmann where the familiar and unfamiliar are uncannily juxtaposed, or turn into one another, and argues that this anxiety is often visual. In Der Sandmann (1816), for instance (to which Freud refers in ‘The Uncanny’), vision becomes suspect and pliable as mechanical eyes (spyglasses, telescopes) both add to the power of the natural eye and confound it.443

The homely made unhomely, the hidden or repressed secret and visual anxiety are all features of Harmony Jail, which undergoes several forms of haunting. The most obvious is experienced by Mrs Boffin after John Rokesmith (John Harmon) visits the house. She tells her husband: ‘Noddy, the faces of the old man and the two children [Harmon and his sister] are all over the house to-night’ (OMF1.15.189). Just as the ‘floating face’ of Eugene later rises up from the river before Lizzie (OMF4.6.700), the faces of those who have lived and died in the house rise up before Mrs Boffin. What seems a visual image, however, is not ‘seen’ but ‘felt’, Mrs Boffin telling Mr Boffin: ‘I don’t know that I think I saw them anywhere. I felt them’ (OMF1.15.190). In Lacan’s terms, this is the gaze; the faces see Mrs Boffin rather than her seeing them. She goes on:

I felt there was a face growing out of the dark. [...] For a moment it was the old man’s, and then it got younger. For a moment it was both the children’s, and then it got older. For a moment it was a strange face, and then it was all the faces’ (OMF1.15.190).

This recalls Hexam’s search, where impediments in the water indicate where a body lies but do not reveal its identity. Mrs Boffin senses an outline of a face rather than the face itself, like the stain which catches Lizzie’s eye. Yet there is a difference here. Mrs Boffin does not see the face because she has already seen it, in the person of John Rokesmith, whose visit is a haunting, the return of someone presumed to be dead. More precisely, she experiences not a haunting but the repetition of a haunting, which she has already missed. The blending of the children’s and old man’s faces indicate that Mrs Boffin is seeking to re-constitute the face of the living John Harmon, without knowing that she has just seen it. Her experience is uncanny, and also seems to replicate the conditions of trauma,

443 Architectural Uncanny, p. 28.
which for Freud is a moment that cannot be remembered, only repeated.\textsuperscript{444} For Lacan, this is the 
\textit{tuché}: ‘the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially 
the missed encounter’.\textsuperscript{445} Harmony Jail becomes an arena in which this missed encounter is played 
out.

The Bower is also haunted by the persistent traces of its former residents, including the two 
children who once lived there, as Mrs Boffin observes:

And here’s the sunny place on the white wall where they one day measured one another. 
Their own little hands wrote up their names here, only with a pencil; but the names are here 
still, and the poor dears gone for ever. (OMF1.15.184)

These names inscribe and preserve, within architecture, a trace of the human. The children’s heights 
remain as outlines, like shadows on the sunny wall, the only piece of life left on the bare bones of the 
house. Similarly, the elder John Harmon’s bedroom has been ‘left as he had left it’ (OMF1.13.183), 
imprinted by his miserly character: ‘There was the tight-clenched old bureau, receding atop like a 
bad and secret forehead; there was the cumbersome old table with twisted legs, at the bed-side. [...] 
A hard family likeness was on all these things’ (OMF1.15.183-84). These items of furniture are like 
the bones collected by Mr Venus: hard, fixed and dead. The twisted legs of the table recall Silas 
Wegg’s twisted leg-bone, sold to Venus but unusable by him, just as John Harmon’s wealth was 
ever never used, only collected and stored as vast dust-heaps.

While old Harmon’s bedroom preserves his ghost, or skeleton, he has also taken measures to 
make sure he is not ‘recalled to life’, a formulation used in \textit{A Tale of Two Cities} (1859), and by Jenny 
Wren.\textsuperscript{446} According to Mortimer, Harmon ‘directs himself to be buried with certain eccentric 
ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life, with which I need not bore you’ (OMF1.2.15).

\textsuperscript{444} See for instance ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, pp. 3-23, where trauma is linked to the compulsion to 
repeat. 
\textsuperscript{445} \textit{Seminar XI}, p. 55. 
\textsuperscript{446} ‘Recalled to Life’ is the first chapter of the novel, and refers primarily to Doctor Manette. See Charles 
Dickens, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities} (Oxford: OUP, 2008). Riah is ‘called back to life’ (OMF2.5.281) by Jenny.
As if aware of the possibility of resurrection that haunts the novel, Harmon senior attempts to ensure he will remain dead. What he fears most, it seems, is not death but life after death, the uncanny re-crossing of an apparently fixed threshold. A weird inversion of ancient Egyptian practices, such as pyramid-building, which sought to guarantee the prolongation of life after death, Harmon’s act is anti-Christian, resisting the Book of Revelation’s claim that the Last Judgement will see the dead rise again.\(^\text{447}\)

These ‘precautions’ draw attention to a connection between father and son, and reveal an affinity between architecture and identity, as both structured around the immanent, but invisible, presence of death. Like his father, the younger John Harmon seeks to bury his identity and prevent it rising up to life once again.\(^\text{448}\) After weighing up whether he should remain ‘dead’, he concludes that ‘John Harmon shall come back no more’ (OMF2.13.373), a decision reinforced by his rejection (as John Rokesmith) by Bella Wilfer, after which:

He went down to his room, and buried John Harmon many additional fathoms deep. He took his hat, and walked out, and, as he went to Holloway or anywhere else—not minding where—heaped mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon’s grave. His walking did not bring him home until the dawn of day. And so busy had he been all night, piling and piling weights upon weights of earth above John Harmon’s grave, that by that time John Harmon lay buried under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, “Cover him, crush him, keep him down!”. (OMF2.14.378)

This repetitive, anxiety-ridden process of burial recalls Harmon’s father’s ‘precautions’ against resurrection, but differs in working not only to maintain death, but also to conceal that death (or

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\(^{447}\) ‘And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works’. (Rev. 20:13)

\(^{448}\) Father and son are also both described as furniture, the elder in the objects left in his room and the younger by the Boffins when taking him on as a secretary, which they ‘have always believed [...] to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it’ (OMF1.15.179).
rather non-death) under a new identity. Harmon’s identity becomes a paranoid version of Hegel’s pyramid, one which seeks to deny that which it memorialises and preserves. The process is never fully completed though: even Harmon’s first name—John—persists as a trace of what is buried. The novel comes close here to Freud’s conception of repression, with Rokesmith seeking to render his past inaccessible, but differs from Freud in that this repression is willed rather than unconscious.

Uncanny Return

Rokesmith’s identity, then, is constructed like a monument, taking the place of a death it also conceals. In this section I extend my discussion to the formation of this identity, including how it emerges from a moment of blankness or negation. Rokesmith’s identity and the architectural structures of the novel, especially the Bower and the river, are inter-related I argue, and all are based upon absences and invisibilities.

The presence of death is typical of uncanny architecture as it is defined by Anthony Vidler, one example of which is Herman Melville’s story ‘I and My Chimney’ (1856), where the narrator’s house is built around a chimney that is his ‘superior’ in every way. Vidler reads this chimney as a ‘pyramid-tomb’, on which the house depends for ‘sustenance and support’, an analysis supported by the narrator’s remark that: ‘The architect of the chimney must have had the pyramid of Cheops before him’. Like the dust-mounds, the chimney is suspected of harbouring a secret. In the words of Mr Scribe, a ‘master-mason’, who may be lying, ‘there is architectural cause to conjecture that somewhere concealed in your chimney is a reserved space, hermetically closed, in short, a secret chamber, or rather closet’. There is also, as with Harmony Jail, a potentially disingenuous will:


450 Architectural Uncanny, p. 43. ‘Chimney’, p. 252.

Captain Julian Dacres, long a ship-master and merchant in the Indian trade [...] died a bachelor, and in this very house, which he had built. He was supposed to have retired into this country with a large fortune. [...] but lo! upon opening the will, his property was found to consist but of the house and grounds, and some ten thousand dollars in stocks.452

This ‘mystery’, like that of the secret closet, is never settled. As with the river in Our Mutual Friend, the chimney is over-determined, imitating several forms of architecture previously discussed, including the authoritarianism of Gogol’s Gothic cathedral (‘it stands, solitary and alone—not a council of ten flues, but, like his sacred majesty of Russia, a unit of an autocrat’), Alice Wilson’s cellar (‘Very often I go down to my cellar, and attentively survey that vast square of masonry. [...] It has a druidical look’), and the labyrinth (‘never was there so labyrinthine an abode’).453

For Vidler, Melville’s story anticipates Freud’s essay on the uncanny, specifically the section which describes being lost in an Italian town. Harmon’s attempt to retrace his footsteps and find the scene of his death functions, I suggest, in a similar way. Melville’s house has a centre that cannot be reached (the chimney), and always returns the walker to where he started: ‘it is like losing oneself in the woods; round and round the chimney you go, and if you arrive at all it is just where you started and so you begin again and get nowhere’.454 Freud, after suggesting that the feeling of uncanny repetition ‘recalls the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states’, relays an anecdote:

As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away

452 ‘Chimney’, p. 269.
once more, only to arrive by another détour at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery.455

This repetition, as Steve Pile notes, is not just a return to the same spot, but the return of a repressed desire to have sex with these women whose character is not in doubt.456 Pile draws attention to Freud’s reference to dreaming, suggesting that cities and dreams are closely connected, ‘both because they are never simply works of the mind or of chance, and also because they embody paradoxical and ambivalent elements’.457 Here, ambivalence emerges in a split between Freud, who wants (apparently) to escape, and the city, which entraps him, expressing its own (and his repressed) intention. The city takes on the role of the unconscious, which is both inside and outside the subject.

John Harmon undergoes a similar experience of repeated return when he attempts to re-enact his own attempted murder. As with Freudian trauma, Harmon cannot remember what happened, but hopes to repeat it. He begins from Pleasant Riderhood’s pawn-shop, but is unsure of the route, asking himself, ‘Did we go by this alley? Or down that little lane?’ (OMF2.13.365). He comes ‘straying back to the same spot’, observing ‘I have nothing else in my mind but a wall, a dark doorway, a flight of stairs, and a room’ (OMF2.13.365). At this point:

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun. “This is like what I have read in narratives of escape from prison,” said he, “where the little track of the fugitives in the

455 ‘The Uncanny’, p. 236.
457 ‘Sleepwalking in the Modern City’, p. 85.
night always seems to take the shape of the great round world, on which they wander; as if it were a secret law.” (OMF2.13.365)

Another repetitive, circling search is described by Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), in relation to Todgers’s boarding house:

Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers’s, had travelled round and round 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.458

Unlike the ‘melancholy’ visitors to Todgers’s, Harmon’s experience is an anxious one. Potential visitors can see Todgers’s, though they cannot reach it, whereas Harmon aims only for an absence. For Harmon, as for the ‘fugitives’ he describes, it is a ‘secret law’ rather than the sight of a chimney-pot that keeps him moving. Wegg, who seeks a secret in the dust-mounds, also moves in a circle at one point; hauled back by Venus while attempting to excavate some objects, he ends up ‘unconscious of his bearings’, staggering ‘round and round’ in confusion (OMF3.6.489). Harmon’s desired object, or secret, is both outside and inside, a space that cannot be reached and a memory that cannot be recalled. Harmon can only circulate around this point, the point of his own death, which he has entombed within himself as the basis for his new identity. His movement, and the movement of the ‘fugitives’, forms a topographical representation of the structure of the Lacanian subject, often depicted as a torus. The subject is organised around a constitutive lack that is both central and inaccessible, which can be circumnavigated but never reached.459

What Harmon lacks is a clue: ‘I have no clue to the scene of my death’ he remarks (OMF2.13.366). While Hexam looks for clues on the river, for Harmon it erases all memory, like the mythical river Lethe:

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458 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 127.
As to this hour, I cannot understand that side of the river where I recovered the shore, being
the opposite side to that on which I was ensnared, I shall never understand it now. Even at
this moment, while I leave the river behind me, going home, I cannot conceive that it rolls
between me and that spot, or that the sea is where it is. (OMF2.13.370)

The surface of the river might, at times, be read, but its underside, which carried Harmon, resists all
conscious thought. It is a blank which cannot be comprehended, but which must nonetheless exist,
since it separates two knowable times (before and after Harmon’s ‘death’) and two knowable places
(the banks of the river). While Harmon’s identity is founded on death, as is Boffin’s Bower, aligning
them with Hegel’s pyramid, only the river comes close to capturing the nature of the psychoanalytic
unconscious.

The Hollow down by the Flare

To conclude this chapter, I turn to a moment which mirrors the opening scene, casting further light
on the river as a form of invisible architecture (and anti-architecture, that which dissolves
architectural thought). This is the ‘hollow down by the flare’ (OMF1.3.29), another place where
meaning is inferred through reading ambiguous surfaces (which is one possible definition of literary
analysis). Looking at the fire, Lizzie tells Charley, her brother, that the ‘dull glow’ next to the coals
‘comes like pictures to me’ (OMF1.3.28), making it a kind of phantasmagoria in which Lizzie sees
images of the past and future. It is also like Gogol’s street, which serves as a history of architecture
for those ‘too lazy to leaf through thick tomes’ (A133). For Lizzie, who is illiterate, the hollow by the
flare is her ‘library of books’ (OMF1.3.30).

Not everyone can see what Lizzie sees: ‘Show us a picture’, demands Charley, ‘Tell us where
to look’, to which she replies ‘Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley’ (OMF1.3.28). The images are highly
subjective, a form of vision Jonathan Crary associates with a shift away from the fixed viewpoint of
the camera obscura towards the panorama, phantasmagoria and kaleidoscope, mobile visual
technologies which spread rapidly in the early nineteenth-century. This produces ‘a freeing up of
vision, a falling away of the rigid structures that had shaped it and constituted its objects’. 460 Such vision is like Freud’s imagined view of Rome in Civilization and its Discontents (1930), an attempt to explain the persistence of memory in the unconscious:

On the Piazza of the Pantheon we should find not only the Pantheon of today, as it was bequeathed to us by Hadrian, but, on the same site, the original edifice erected by Agrippa; indeed, the same piece of ground would be supporting the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and the ancient temple over which it was built. And the observer would perhaps only have to change the direction of his glance or his position in order to call up the one view or the other. 461

Here, what one sees is a function of the gaze of the observer, not an objective external reality.

Lizzie’s fire is the same; she responds to Charley’s request for knowledge of the future by relaying her own intuitions: ‘Well! There am I, continuing with father and holding to father, because father loves me and I love father’ (OMF1.3.29). Although Lizzie can see this ‘as plain as plain can be’ (OMF1.3.30), Charley sees ‘deuce-and-all in the hollow down by the flare’ (OMF1.3.29). Such vision is blocked to him, forcing him to pay attention to Lizzie, just as Lizzie closely watched their father in the opening scene. Charley’s education, which gives him knowledge that is rational and logical—‘That’s gas, that is’ he remarks (OMF1.3.28)—prevents him from reading the fire as Lizzie does. She, like Alice Wilson in Mary Barton, is privy to knowledge the educated cannot access.

The domesticity of this scene, which sees Lizzie attempting to produce a coherent narrative, opposes the cold, senseless river, from which Harmon finds it impossible to draw any narrative.

Symbolically, the hearth is the heart of the home, as it is literally in ‘I and my Chimney’; Gottfried Semper identifies it as ‘one of the four fundamental elements of architecture, along with the earthwork, the roof and the screen wall’. 462 Here, though, ‘The fire was in a rusty brazier, not fitted to

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the hearth’ (OMF1.3.21), signalling a disjunction with conventional domesticity. Both house and family are fractured, held together only by Lizzie’s persistent expenditure of force. The moral influence of the kitchen, and hence hearth, is ironically recognised by Eugene Wrayburn, who insists on having a kitchen in the apartment he will share with Mortimer, even if they never use it, claiming ‘its moral influence is the important thing’ (OMF2.6.284). In nineteenth-century Britain, the virtuous woman was vital to the functional domestic interior, as Deborah Gorham observes. Lizzie plays this role in the house (or rather ‘old windmill’ [OMF1.13.163]) she shares with her father, attempting to counteract their straightened circumstances.

The hollow by the flame recalls the chapter of The Old Curiosity Shop where Nell encounters the man who gives her the tarnished coins, whose job is to tend a furnace (image 11). 'It’s like a book to me' he tells her:

the only book I ever learned to read; and many an old story it tells me. It's music, for I should know its voice among a thousand, and there are other voices in its roar. It has its pictures too. You don't know how many strange faces and different scenes I trace in the red-hot coals. It's my memory, that fire, and shows me all my life.  

Fire is associated with memory, which it contains, unlike the river, which erases memory. Like the river, the fire dislocates the subject, separating him from his memory, but only so that it can be re-incorporated by viewing the pictures it produces. Ultimately, the fire produces a sense of unified subjectivity, it ‘shows me all my life’. Significantly, Lizzie cannot see into the river as she can the fire. When attempting to read her father’s fate in it:

she stood on the river’s brink unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death. (OMF1.6.70-71)

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463 See The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (London: Croom Helm, 1982).
464 OCS, p. 335.
When there is a commotion on the river, due to Rogue Riderhood being run down, everything that takes place on the bank is described, but nothing on the river itself, which remains an indecipherable blank:

Boats were putting off, torches were lighting up, people were rushing tumultuously to the water’s edge. Some man fell in with a splash, and was pulled out again with a roar of laughter. The drags were called for. A cry for the life-buoy passed from mouth to mouth. It was impossible to make out what was going on upon the river, for every boat that put off sculled into the fog and was lost to view at a boat’s length. (OMF3.2.441)

As soon as the narrator’s gaze passes onto the river, it dissolves, unable to confirm what is occurring. Unlike every other aspect of the city, except perhaps the dust-mounds, the river cannot be penetrated by the gaze of the novelist. It undoes the totalising view of the city which Moretti identifies as a powerful drive within Our Mutual Friend.
At one point, the river and the hollow by the flare come together. In the chapter ‘Tracking the Bird of Prey’, Wrayburn and Lightwood join a police inspector who hopes to arrest Hexam when he returns from a night spent on the river. Eugene’s ulterior motive is to observe Lizzie, so while the inspector hides under a moored-up boat, he ‘turn[s] his eyes upon the building where, as he had been told, the lonely girl with the dark hair sat by the fire’ (OMF1.13.163), then moves to the window. Marcus Stone’s illustration (image 12) puts the viewer in the position of Eugene, gazing at Lizzie as she watches the fire, making us complicit in his voyeuristic gaze. Alan Shelston compares Lizzie here to Florence in *Dombey and Son*, and Louisa in *Hard Times* (1854), suggesting she has no notion of her future, which is represented by Eugene’s hidden figure. Lizzie has, however, already projected a version of her future, as described to Charley, making it more accurate to say that her future is a contested region.\(^4\)\(^6\) Stone’s picture is counterposed by a later illustration of Bella (image 13), who sits in the same pose. But Bella watches a fireplace rather than a brazier, surrounded by rich furnishings and holding her baby, as Mr Boffin looks on, apparently possessing everything Lizzie lacks.

Eugene sees Lizzie only by the light of the fire, into which she stares:

> She sat on the ground, looking at the brazier, with her face leaning on her hand. There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful firelight; but on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire. (OMF1.13.163)

An intricate network of gazes is established here. The inspector looks for Hexam, while Eugene looks at Lizzie, separated from her by the window, and she looks at the fire. The firelight also ‘gazes’ at Lizzie, allowing Eugene to see the ‘flicker’ (or perhaps stain) on her cheek, but preventing her from seeing him, since by contrast he is in the dark. In Stone’s illustration, the brazier even seems to have eyes, which gaze out of the frame towards the viewer. Whereas Lizzie previously translated pictures

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\(^4\)\(^6\) ‘Nell, Alice and Lizzie’, p. 170.

Image 13. Mr. Baffin does the Honours of the Nursery Door, Marcus Stone.
for Charley, here she becomes a picture herself for Eugene (and the reader). Static and fixed where the fire is shifting, she is described in painterly terms, as a ‘deep rich piece of color’ (OMF1.13.164).

Eugene watches her as one looks at a painting, ‘long and steadily’, but only ‘glance[s] slightly’ (OMF1.13.164) at the bills on the wall advertising drowned people. In Benjamin’s terms, Eugene sees Lizzie ‘auratically’, and views the bills transiently, like frames in a film reel.466 Eugene reveals the nature of his gaze when he tells Mortimer, ‘Best not make a show of her’ (OMF1.13.166). This, of course, is what Eugene has already done.

The play of vision puts Eugene’s gaze, and the implicitly male gaze of the viewer, in a privileged position. Yet this gaze remains inhibited. While Eugene can see the clue, or trace, on Lizzie’s cheek—her tears—he cannot be sure what they indicate. He is in the same position as Hexam on the river, unable to penetrate beneath the surface he attempts to read. Moreover, the light which aids him threatens to turn against him. Not only does its ‘fitfulness’ resist his ability to read Lizzie, as it resisted Charley, but the larger gaze—the ‘gaze outside’ in Lacan’s terms—could at any moment pick him out. As the men continue to watch for Hexam, the inspector warns, ‘it will be light at five [...] and then we shall be seen’ (OMF1.13.167). The gaze, like the river, cannot be controlled, even when it seems to serve the desire of the subject.

Reading operates in both directions here. That which enables, such as daylight, is also that which threatens. This, too, is the position of the river in relation to Gaffer and Lizzie. Its uncanny ambiguity is linked to what is unrepresentable and unseeable within it, which includes death, on which Rokesmith’s identity is based; an identity which literally emerges from the river. Death also haunts Boffin’s Bower, but remains incomplete, subject still to traces of life and to life’s possible return, making the Bower and its dust-mounds uncanny sites which seem to harbour an unknown secret. The concept of the secret expresses the belief in a stable meaning in the city, even if such meaning is hidden. Yet Our Mutual Friend shows that there are parts of the city which are both

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incorporated within its structure and work to undermine that structure, so that meaning can never be definitive.

The questions of vision and the unconscious raised in this chapter are also relevant to the next, which turns to Zola’s Paris. It explores very different forms of architecture: the department store and the boulevard, in which nonetheless the question of what can be seen and what resists vision remains important. Vision in these novels, however, takes a new form. Invisibility operates in a different way to in Gaskell and Dickens, though one which Gogol’s essay anticipates. Architecture becomes invisible through its materials, especially the employment of glass and iron. The key issue this raises, and which the next chapter explores, is whether the unknowability of the city can persist in such structures, and if so, how this manifests itself.
Chapter 5—Zola’s Transparent City

This chapter focuses on the invisibilities, openings up and transparencies produced by (and against) city architecture in the work of Émile Zola. The city Zola explored most thoroughly was the Paris of the Second Empire (1852-70), the setting for the two Rougon-Macquart novels I discuss: La Curée (The Kill) (1872) and Au Bonheur des Dames (The Ladies’ Paradise) (1883). These are the second and eleventh books in the twenty-novel cycle composed by Zola between 1871 and 1893, subtitled ‘A Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire’.

I argue that the architecture which dominates these novels—in particular Haussmann’s boulevards and the modern department store—comes closer to bringing about total visibility and connectedness than anything else I have considered. Yet even while seeming to achieve total openness in the city, the boulevard and the department store continue to engage in the repression and exclusion of other spaces, especially working-class spaces, in ways based not on darkness and obfuscation, as in Mary Barton or Dombey and Son, but on the promotion of visibility to an absolute and overwhelming principle. This takes place, I propose, through a blending of architecture and commodities which incorporates the commodity’s mystifying character into the city’s structure.

The Spectacle as Relation between Part and Whole

The appearance of totality created by both department store and boulevard anticipates what Guy Debord calls the ‘Society of the Spectacle’; a world where relationships between people are mediated not just by commodities, as Marx argued, but also by images: ‘The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images’. In this section I develop a reading of Debord that explores this concept, and posits it as a method of

reading Zola’s Paris, before discussing the relevance of Eisenstein and montage to reading Zola in the next section, which leads into a discussion of the novels.

As Graham MacPhee observes, Debord extends ‘the concept of reification developed by Georg Lukács’ to visual experience. For Debord, spectacle is the condition of modern capitalism. It gives an appearance of unity, while in fact separating people from the real conditions of their social life:

The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated—and precisely for that reason—this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation.

The spectacle is both an appearance of totality (‘society itself’) and a particular ‘sector’. In it, a part of society separates from the whole only to turn back upon it as an illusory image of completeness. For Debord, this is an extension of the fetish character of the commodity, which has become absolutely hegemonic: ‘The real consumer [...] becomes a consumer of illusion. The commodity is this illusion, which is in fact real, and the spectacle is its most general form’. The phrase ‘real consumer’ is just short of paradoxical. For Marx, the consumption of commodities is already an alienated position, where the commodity appears to have an independent existence rather than merely embodying relations between people. In Debord, this is taken further: now the subject’s relationship is no longer with commodities, which at least have a material existence, but with the image of the commodity, or rather the commodity as image. Commodities, already the embodiment of alienated social labour, are now consumed primarily as illusion, alienating them even from their own materiality. The spectacle is thus the alienation of an alienation.

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468 MacPhee, p. 70.
469 Debord, p. 12.
470 Debord, p. 32.
471 Capital, p. 43.
This dream-state is, as I will show, a description of the department store in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, where the commodity has begun to replace architecture, taking on a new power to define and determine space. Image is also dominant in *La Curée*, in the new mansions and boulevards of Haussmann-era Paris. This illusory dream-world, for Debord characteristic of the twentieth-century, is for Benjamin a feature of the nineteenth. Significantly for readings of Zola’s Paris, Benjamin unites fashion and architecture in describing this world: ‘Fashion, like architecture, inheres in the darkness of the lived moment, belongs to the dream consciousness of the collective. The latter awakes, for example, in advertising’.472 This ‘dream consciousness of the collective’ is close to Debord’s spectacle, except that Benjamin sees a possibility of awakening from this dream within advertising, which as the heart of capitalist image making is, for Debord, the last place we should expect to find truth.473 In *Au Bonheur des Dames*, I argue, this idea that truth emerges from within commodification manifests itself in the store’s deployment of images that are both dream-like and truthful, in that they present openly the new regime of reification. In *La Curée*, meanwhile, there is a tension between image and the material world, especially between the projected future of the city (as spectacle) and the reality of its streets (even if this is a lost or compromised reality), particularly in Chapter 7, where the upheaval of a new boulevard under construction recalls the transformation of Staggs’s Gardens in *Dombey and Son*.

One aspect of Zola’s work which this comparison to Debord highlights is the relationship between part and whole. This has been important throughout the thesis, especially in Gogol (see Chapter 1), in whom the extent to which the part can invoke or inhibit access to the whole is perhaps the key question of the arabesque, and of the city. *Mary Barton* and *Dombey and Son*, too, are concerned with connections between parts (cellar and bourgeois home, or home and business), and between those parts and the city as a whole. *Our Mutual Friend*, meanwhile, raises the question of

472 *Arcades*, p. 393.
473 See Benjamin’s discussion of a poster for ‘Bullrich Salt’. He asks, ‘didn’t that poster furnish an image for things that no one in this mortal life has yet experienced?’ *Arcades*, pp. 174-75.
whether a part (the river) has the capacity to render the whole incomprehensible. Debord sees this relationship primarily in terms of the commodity, but also in relation to the city:

The diffuse form of the spectacle is associated with the abundance of commodities, with the undisturbed development of modern capitalism. Here each commodity considered in isolation is justified by an appeal to the grandeur of commodity production in general—a production for which the spectacle is an apologetic catalog. The claims jostling for position on the stage of the affluent economy’s integrated spectacle are not always compatible, however. Similarly, different star commodities simultaneously promote conflicting approaches to the organization of society; thus the spectacular logic of the automobile argues for a perfect traffic flow entailing the destruction of the old city centers, whereas the spectacle of the city itself calls for these same ancient sections to be turned into museums. So the already questionable satisfaction allegedly derived from the consumption of the whole is adulterated from the outset because the real consumer can only get his hands on a succession of fragments of this commodity heaven—fragments each of which naturally lacks any of the quality ascribed to the whole.\footnote{Debord, pp. 42-43.}

For Debord, the part par excellence is the commodity, which draws its desirability from the entire edifice of commodity production. This produces a desire the commodity can never satisfy, since it is only ever a fragment of the whole, which it nonetheless signifies. This is also the condition of the city in modernity. The city writer, or in Benjamin’s terms, the flâneur, has access to a world of fragments (objects, streets, buildings, and so on), among which s/he walks and writes, seeking to develop connections. To consider how these fragments relate to one another and to the city is to explore the city’s invisible architecture. The potential anxiety this generates is that the city might not ever be understandable as a whole. In this sense the city stands against capitalism, which totalises, or
perhaps points to the truth of capitalism: that its assertions of its own totality are in fact a sign that there is no such totality, that it exists only as lack; that is, as desire.\footnote{475}

One model for this state posited by Benjamin is the World Exhibition, which also throws light on the structure of the \textit{Rougon-Macquart} cycle. Benjamin quotes Sigfried Giedion on this topic:

Exhibitions: ‘All regions and indeed, retrospectively, all times. From farming and mining, from industry and from the machines that were displayed in operation, to raw materials and processed materials, to art and the applied arts. In all these ways we see a peculiar demand for premature synthesis, of a kind that is characteristic of the nineteenth century in other areas as well: think of the total work of art. Apart from indubitably utilitarian motives, the century wanted to generate a vision of the human cosmos, as launched in a new movement.’ Sigfried Giedion, \textit{Bauen in Frankreich} <Leipzig and Berlin, 1928>, p.37. But these ‘premature synthesies’ also bespeak a persistent endeavor to close up the space of existence and of development. To prevent the ‘airing out of the classes’. [G2,3]\footnote{476}

The exhibitions are conceived as totalising structures, bringing together apparently disparate regions, times and products in a kind of synthesis. Giedion associates this with the nineteenth century’s desire to produce a ‘total work of art’, an important theme in Gogol’s \textit{Arabesques} (see Chapter 1) and in Zola’s novel \textit{L’Oeuvre} (1886), where Claude Lantier, based partly on Cezanne, dreams of painting a masterpiece which would encompass ‘Paris in all its glory’.\footnote{477} But the Exhibition can only produce a ‘premature synthesis’, just as Claude’s great work is never completed, his radical approach to art emerging at the wrong historical moment. The totality of the Exhibition is only a facsimile or approximation of a unified world. Benjamin’s commentary puts this concept into Marxist terms, as the closing up of ‘existence’ and ‘development’. For Benjamin, the synthesis attempted by the Exhibition inhibits historical movement, denying the existence of genuinely different times and

\footnote{475} See for instance \textit{Seminar XI}, pp. 214-15.\footnote{476} \textit{Arcades}, p. 175.\footnote{477} \textit{The Masterpiece}, p. 211.
places by insisting that everything can be encompassed by one capitalist system. This prevents the ‘airing out of the classes’; the recognition of class conflict which is the necessary precursor to genuine social change.

Zola’s Rougon-Macquart cycle parallels this Exhibition structure in several ways. It covers disparate activities, including farming (La Terre), mining (Germinal), art (L’Oeuvre) and commerce (Le Ventre de Paris and Au Bonheur des Dames), bringing them all under the purview of a single grand scheme. If the Exhibition’s organising principle is Giedion’s ‘vision of the human cosmos’, for Zola it is the ‘Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire’. David Bell suggests that ‘the structure of Second Empire society as Zola conceives it possesses an underlying and encompassing logic that unifies initially distinct domains in a surprisingly tight manner’. The nature of this logic, as it is laid out in Zola’s 1880 essay on the ‘experimental novel’, is scientific. Zola displays a confidence that the whole social world is in principle knowable, so that detailed knowledge of the particular will lead to the discovery of general laws: ‘We naturalistic novelists submit each fact to the test of observation and experiment, while the idealistic writers admit mysterious elements which escape analysis, and therefore remain in the unknown, outside of the influence of the laws governing nature’.479

For Marxism, the particular relates to the general through ‘mediation’, in the sense that commodities mediate social relations.480 For Fredric Jameson, mediation is

480 Capital, pp. 42-50.
posited on the existence of what I have referred to as a “level” [...] a realm or zone within the social that has developed to the point at which it is governed internally by its own intrinsic laws and dynamics.\textsuperscript{481}

In ‘The Brick and the Balloon’, Jameson discusses this concept in relation to architecture, abstraction and land speculation (a theme of \textit{La Curée}), identifying the need ‘to insert a “mediation” between the economic level [land ownership, the city as a whole] and the aesthetic one [the particular building]’.\textsuperscript{482} Buildings are ‘semi-autonomous’ structures here, a concept I discussed in Chapter 3.\textsuperscript{483} Debord, in the passage quoted above, sees the city in this way. The ‘spectacular logic’ of the automobile operates semi-autonomously, as a desire that cities should be opened up to promote ‘flow’, which is also the logic of Haussmanisation in \textit{La Curée}. The city’s own, alternative, spectacular logic conflicts with this. It calls for the preservation of the old parts of the city as museum exhibits (that is, visual commodities). In acknowledging this conflict, Debord registers what Jameson calls the ‘contradiction’ between different parts of a single totality (the spectacle), implicitly recognising that the city is a particularly important site of such contradiction.\textsuperscript{484}

Following Benjamin, Debord and Jameson, the novels in this chapter can be understood as dramatisations of both the drive towards and the resistance to processes of ‘spectacular totalisation’, as undertaken by semi-autonomous parts of the modern city. In order to develop this idea further, I now move to a reading of Eisenstein’s approach to Zola, which reads his work as an example of film-like montage. This section in particular resonates with Chapter 1, where I discussed Eisenstein’s reading of Gogol in terms of montage, including in relation to space, as illustrated through Piranesi’s sketches.

\textsuperscript{482} ‘Brick’, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{483} ‘Brick’, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{484} ‘Brick’, p. 31.
Zola and Montage

One thinker who addresses the relationship between part and whole in Zola directly, but differently to Debord or Jameson, is Sergei Eisenstein, who reads Zola’s work as a demonstration of organic unity within montage, anticipating cinema. As discussed in Chapter 1, this is also a characteristic Eisenstein ascribes to Gogol. Eisenstein elsewhere discusses Dickens as a prototype for cinematic montage, finding him to be a key influence on D.W. Griffith.485 He thus identifies montage-like qualities in three of the authors discussed in this thesis.

Eisenstein begins his discussion of Zola in Nonindifferent Nature by stating that his novels contain ‘the structuring principles of pathos in film’.486 This structure is montage, understood as an organic unity, even, or especially, when it consists of juxtaposed (or contradictory) elements. The creation of such a unity is a highly ‘ecstatic’ process for Eisenstein, with a crescendo-like quality:

the primary indication of pathos in composition is a state of continuous ‘ecstasy’, a continuous state of ‘being beside oneself’, a continuous leap of each separate element or sign of the work of art from quality to quality, in proportion to the quantitative growth of the ever-heightening intensity of the emotional content of a shot, sequence, or scene in the work of art as a whole.487

There is a combination here of continuity and disjunction, the latter in the ‘leaping’ from shot to shot and ‘quality to quality’, the former in the ‘ever-heightening intensity’. Writing on Griffith and Dickens, Eisenstein makes clear how this differs from early American montage. Griffith is the ‘greatest master’ of ‘parallel montage’, a typically American form where juxtaposed elements do not become a whole, instead remaining separate. Eisenstein reads a social significance into this distinction:

the montage concept of Griffith, as a primarily parallel montage, appears to be a copy of his
dualistic picture of the world, running in two parallel lines of poor and rich towards some
hypothetical ‘reconciliation’ where ... the parallel lines would cross, that is, in that infinity,
just as inaccessible as that ‘reconciliation’. 488

Eisenstein observes this tendency in Dickens, suggesting that this alternating structure is ‘the eternal
theme of Dickens’s books, nor does he move beyond these divisions. His mature work, *Little Dorrit*, is
so divided into two books: “Poverty” and “Riches”. 489 What Eisenstein does not take into account is
that there *is* a ‘leap’ between these categories in *Little Dorrit*, made by the Dorrit family themselves
when they come into their wealth. The problems this transition causes are a major theme of the
novel, which dramatises (though without resolving) the problem of ‘reconciliation’, rather than, as
Eisenstein suggests, positing it as a hypothetical solution. This theme of parallel lives of rich and poor
is also found in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, which also ask how and where these parallel lines
might cross, without simply asserting that they will (though these novels resist the idea that a ‘leap’,
that is a revolution, might be needed to bridge this gap).

Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, however, has a different structure. Eisenstein reads the series
as an example of semi-autonomous, juxtaposed parts forming a single ecstatic whole, observing that
‘the great novelist set each of the twenty novels in the well-defined and self-enclosed material of a
precisely delineated and limited environment’, and yet that in each novel, ‘invariably the same basic
situations of man’s animal existence are resolved: love and death’. 490 In Zola, one is ‘dealing with the
work of a novelist whose method could be compared in twenty parallel aspects’, forming a
‘colonnade’ that supports the structure of montage, which thus becomes architectural. 491 (Eisenstein
is also interested in Gogol’s use of architecture; see Chapter 1.) Each novel is a self-contained part,

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489 ‘Dickens, Griffith’, p. 234.
490 *Nonindiferent Nature*, p. 60. Eisenstein also suggests that the same pattern of heightening montage exists in
Zola’s later works, which ‘show the same ecstatically frenzied leap in respect to the whole set of preceding
novels, and this is equally true of the theme and material as well as of the style’. His oeuvre thus moves from a
family to the whole of France, then the whole of humanity, in moving from the *Rougon-Macquart* to the *Three
Cities* (1894-98) and then the *Four Evangelists* (1899-1903). *Nonindiferent Nature*, p. 80.
but the series also forms a whole, or totality, even when the connections between novels are not direct. Indeed, it is striking that there is almost no sense of continuity between novels; though *Nana* (1880) follows on from *L’Assommoir* (1877), tracing Nana Coupeau’s career as an actress and prostitute, the milieu and characters in the two novels are almost entirely different. Though Zola covers both country and city in his novel cycle, Eisenstein’s model is especially relevant to the city. As Franco Moretti observes, Zola’s Parisian novels are ‘mostly confined to very small spaces, whose boundaries are crossed only on special occasions [...] or else, at the risk of one’s life’.\(^492\) Richard Lehan notes that ‘over half of the novels in the series deal with the world of Paris, and the rest cannot be separated from its influence’.\(^493\) In the city, the whole seems especially ungraspable, and connections between different parts of the urban landscape, or between social classes, are frequently rendered invisible.

What Eisenstein provides is effectively a Marxist version of the German Romantic desire to find the absolute within the individual part, which animated the debate around the arabesque, as discussed in Chapter 1. In Eisenstein, the absolute is replaced by the totality, which is not outside the system, and does not pre-exist it, but which nonetheless retains a semi-mystical aspect in Eisenstein’s references to ‘ecstasy’.

For Eisenstein, the montage structure of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle also structures each individual novel. He praises Zola’s production of emotional crescendo and his attention to the material world:

he does not depend mainly on literary style to ‘heat up’ the environment and situation—through a complicated system of metaphoric constructions, rhythmic refinements, or the timbre or the sound of cleverly arranged words. Instead, Zola puts his heroes into a real situation with objects from the surroundings that are in the physical state he requires.

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\(^492\) *Atlas*, p. 90.
\(^493\) Lehan, p. 61.
This is the little iron stove burning so hot it induces stupor in the small room in *The Human-Beast*. [...] 

This is the stupefying, once again animal, hot atmosphere of the feathers and down of a slaughtered bird in the cellar of the Parisian market [in *Le Ventre de Paris*].

It is material things—or parts—in Zola which multiply in a montage-like manner to produce the effect Eisenstein identifies. In particular, he praises the way things turn into other things, including people, describing how Zola’s piling up of observations produces a state of ‘being beside’ oneself. Zola’s material is:

arranged sequentially, according to the degree of increasing intensity of frenzy, in such a way that, placed in a row side by side along the rising line of this intensity, the materials seem to eject out of each other.

For Eisenstein, this form of montage provides a model for the ecstatic recognition of social totality. As Debord’s analysis suggests, however, the impression of totality may be an illusion; a part turned against, or turned into, the image of the whole. Despite his praise of Zola, Eisenstein is aware of this possibility, which he describes in conventionally Marxist terms:

the nature of Zola’s utopia [...], of course, suffers from the narrow-mindedness of the inevitable fetters of petty bourgeois, albeit rebellious, images, which imposed the same imprint on the one-sidedness of what appeared to him as total ‘objectivity’ in the composition of a picture of real life in his ‘naturalistic’ description.

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494 *Nonindifferent Nature*, p. 64.
495 On people and things, especially places, turning into one another in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Au Bonheur des Dames*, see Andrew Ballantyne, ‘Shops and Subjects’ in *Conjuring the Real: The Role of Architecture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. by Rumiko Handa and James Potter (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pp. 153-90.
496 *Nonindifferent Nature*, pp. 69-70.
Nowhere in his work does Zola rise above Fourier’s teachings, which were not perceived very profoundly.\footnote{Nonindifferent Nature, p. 84. Benjamin comments that Zola ‘takes up Fourier’s ideas in his book Travail [1901]’. ‘Paris, the Capital’ [1935], p. 5.}

For Eisenstein, Zola is ultimately limited, and limited by ‘petty bourgeois images’, the very things he so often critiques. The reference here to images which appear objective provides a point of connection to Debord, and to Benjamin, by making Zola’s apparently scientific approach itself part of the dream or spectacle which he depicts. The reference to Fourier is also significant in relation to Au Bonheur des Dames, where, as I discuss later, the phalanstery, Fourier’s utopian community, is one of the metaphors applied to the department store.

More recently, a modification of Eisenstein’s organic theory has been proposed by Jacques Rancière in The Future of the Image. Rancière argues for the concept of the ‘sentence-image’—the inextricability of language and image in modern culture—which he sees as having a ‘paratactic syntax; that is, as being composed of juxtaposed elements.\footnote{Jacques Rancière, The Future of the Image, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007), p. 48.} This is a syntax which ‘might also be called montage’. Taking a passage from Le Ventre de Paris (1873) as his example, and thereby following Eisenstein’s identification of Zola with montage, Rancière suggests that one of the key elements of the modern sentence-image is that order is not secured within it. Montage is invented, by Zola among others, as ‘a measure of that which is measureless or as the disciplining of chaos'; this does not lead, however, to ‘the conflictual complementarity of the organic and the pathetic, conceptualized by Eisenstein’. Instead, there is often (perhaps always) an element of the scene or image which acts to ‘put some disorder back into montage’.\footnote{Future of the Image, p. 48, p. 49.} In Rancière’s example this is a cat, who looks on critically at the scene of montage, fatally undermining its unity, but without proposing another. As with the river in Our Mutual Friend, a particular part fractures the unity of the whole.

In Zola’s Paris, the image of organic unity is often projected, but this is usually an attribute of semi-autonomous parts of a society rather than of society as a whole. Zola’s wager seems to be that
the sum of these semi-autonomous areas will add up to a social whole, which exists nowhere as a thing in itself. While this approach tallies closely with the ideas of Lefebvre and Jameson, whose work I have frequently cited, the very fact that such parts can produce the illusion of transparent totality puts into question all appearances of totality, so that Zola’s individual novels serve as a critique of his project as a whole. With this in mind, I now turn to *La Curée*, and especially to the ways in which that novel imagines the city as at once a site of opening up and enclosure, dream and ruin.

**La Curée and Haussmann’s Paris**

*La Curée*, translated by Brian Nelson as *The Kill*, focuses on the lives of Aristide Saccard, a clerk turned wealthy land speculator, his second wife Renée, and his effeminate, sexualised son Maxime, the latter two of whom embark on an affair during the course of the novel. I argue that the novel deploys forms of montage and visibility which both open up and obscure the city, as all the main characters are implicit in an attempt to erase the old city in favour of the new. This involves an opening up of new boulevards and a projection onto the city of the dream-like bourgeois interior. Ultimately, as at the end of *Mary Barton*, this process replaces one form of invisibility with another, exchanging the unseen for the unseeable.

Zola’s introduction indicates that the novel is conceived as an allegory or synecdoche for the broader decadence of the Second Empire:⁵⁰⁰

I wanted to show the premature exhaustion of a race which has lived too quickly and ends in the man-woman of rotten societies, the furious speculation of an epoch embodied in an unscrupulous temperament, the nervous breakdown of a woman whose circle of luxury and shame increases tenfold native appetites.⁵⁰¹

Each of these ‘three social monstrosities’ (K3) is embodied by one of the central characters: Maxime is the ‘man-woman’, a ‘creature of indeterminate sex’ who ‘matched the follies and fashions of the

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age’ (K4.158); Saccard the speculator who joins the ‘blaze of unrestrained luxury’ (K2.49) that engulfs Paris; and Renée the woman whose body is ‘exhausted’ and mind ‘unhinged’ (K6.243) by her incestuous affair with Maxime. This society is specifically urban: as Richard Lehan points out, La Curée is the first Rougon-Macquart novel to ‘establish the meaning of Paris as both the center of France and the center of Zola’s narrative world’.502 Philippe Hamon writes similarly, but more broadly, that in French literature, ‘By the middle of the century, everything revolved around Paris as if around the sun, in the literal as well as figurative sense’.503 Benjamin observes this tendency, including an 1855 quotation in the Arcades that calls Paris ‘the capital of creation!’, in the context of imagining its future in the year 2855. As I have already suggested, this is also the function of the World Exhibitions, which for Giedion appear to contain ‘all regions’ and ‘all times’.504

The architectural context for the novel is the Haussmannisation of Paris between 1853 and 1870, when new boulevards cut through the old city, promoting the movement of both soldiers and capital.505 As Alison Walls notes, the boulevards helped make the new grands magasins possible, facilitating deliveries, window displays and access for customers.506 In this sense, La Curée prepares the ground for Au Bonheur des Dames. The scene which most strikingly depicts the new boulevards as cutting through, or opening up, Paris is described retrospectively, as having taken place before the death of Saccard’s first wife, Angèle, in 1854, on the Buttes Montmartre. This scene recalls the end of Balzac’s Pere Goriot (1835), where Rastignac gazes out over Paris from the Père-Lachaise cemetery, challenging it with the words ‘It’s between the two of us now!’507 Saccard has by this time amassed so much knowledge of the planned building work that ‘he could have prophesied how the new

503 Hamon, p. 91.
504 Arcades, p. 196.
neighbourhoods would look in 1870’ (K2.67). He projects the future city on top of the old, while looking over a Paris described through a series of telling metaphors:

On this particular day they dined at the top of the hill, in a restaurant whose windows looked out over Paris, over the sea of houses with blue roofs, like surging billows that filled the horizon. [...] beneath the pale sky the city lay listless in a soft and tender grey, pierced here and there by dark patches of foliage that resembled the broad leaves of water-lilies floating on a lake; the sun was setting behind a red cloud and, while the background was filled with a light haze, a shower of gold dust, of golden dew, fell on the right bank of the river, near the Madeleine and the Tuileries. It was like an enchanted corner in a city of the ‘Arabian Nights’, with emerald trees, sapphire roofs, and ruby weathercocks. At one moment a ray of sunlight gliding from between two clouds was so resplendent that the houses seemed to catch fire and melt like an ingot of gold in a crucible.

‘Oh! Look!’ said Saccard, laughing like a child. ‘It’s raining twenty-franc pieces in Paris!’ (K2.68)

This passage is an example of Eisenstein’s ecstatic montage: it shifts the view of Paris from houses to the sea, then a lake, then an ‘enchanted’ oriental city, then finally melting gold, in a continuously heightening sequence of juxtaposed but intertwined images. The nature of these images is significant. The first (sea and lake) position Paris as landscape, as does Baudelaire, Benjamin’s ‘lyric poet of high capitalism’, since he uses the techniques of pastoral to describe the modern city. One unattributed quotation in the Arcades reads: ‘In passing from all these Romantic poets to Baudelaire, we pass from a landscape of nature to a landscape of stone and flesh’. Zola does something similar, making Paris a landscape, or rather the painterly image of a landscape, the appearance of its greenery as ‘water-lilies’ anticipating Monet’s famous series of water-lily paintings (1890s

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508 Arcades, p. 252.
onwards). The next move is into literature, fantasy and spectacle, as Paris becomes a scene from the Arabian nights, then a source of magical wealth, with coins falling from the sky; this image has a mythical and sexual resonance, recalling Zeus coming to Danaë as a shower of gold. The sublimity of the sea, which stands for expanse and openness, turns within a few lines into the enclosure of an oriental dream. This duality registers the city’s vastness, yet also makes it seem comprehensible; aesthetically at least, if not topographically.

Saccard then shadows forth the city’s coming destruction, remarking to Angèle ‘How stupid they are, those great cities! It has no idea that an army of picks will fall upon it one of these fine mornings’ (K2.68). He describes the cuts that will be made in a passage that metaphorically dissects of Paris, which takes the form of a giant body, recalling Mary Poovey’s argument that the opening of the city in the nineteenth-century develops from the opening of the body in the eighteenth (see Chapter 2). As Saccard continues, it becomes clear that the dream of Paris’s future is also its ruin, its opening up identical to its domination by military and speculative capital:

‘Look over there, near the Halles, they’ve cut Paris into four pieces.’

With his outstretched hand, open and sharp as a sabre, he indicated how the city was being divided into four parts.

‘You mean the Rue de Rivoli and the new boulevard they’re building?’ asked his wife.

‘Yes, the great transept of Paris, as they call it. [...] When the first network is finished the fun will begin. The second network will cut through the city in all directions to connect the suburbs with the first network. The rest will disappear in clouds of plaster. Look, just

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509 The connection between Zola and impressionism (and Manet) is explored by Zola in L’Oeuvre. Zola’s first article in defence of Manet was published in 1866, though Monet’s seminal Impression: Sunrise was not painted until 1872, and first shown in 1874, both after La Curée was written. William Berg suggests Zola ‘undertakes in literature a visual revolution like that of Manet and the impressionists in painting—against the precept and prejudice of abstract thought’. Berg, pp. 31-33, p. 47. Rancière has similarly argued (citing Le Ventre de Paris) that Zola forms part of an ‘aesthetic revolution’ beginning around 1850, which disrupts the ‘order of stable relations between the visible and the invisible’. Jacques Rancière et al, ‘Aesthetics and Politics Revisited: An Interview with Jacques Rancière’, Critical Inquiry, 38.2 (2012), 289-97 (292); Future of the Image, p. 12. On Zola and Manet see also F.W.J. Hemmings, The Life and Times of Émile Zola (London: Elek, 1977), pp. 52-67.
follow my hand. From the Boulevard du Temple to the Barrière du Trône, that’s one cut; then on this side another, from the Madeleine to the Plaine Monceau; and a third cut this way, another that way, a cut there, one further on, cuts everywhere, Paris slashed with sabre cuts, its veins opened, providing a living for a hundred thousand navvies and bricklayers, traversed by splendid military roads which will bring the forts into the heart of the old neighbourhoods.’

Night was falling. His dry, feverish hand kept cutting through the air. Angèle shivered slightly as she watched this living knife, those iron fingers mercilessly slicing up the boundless mass of dark roofs. [...] She fancied she could hear, beneath the gloom gathering in the hollows, distant cracking sounds, as if her husband’s hand had really made the cuts he spoke of, splitting Paris from one end to the other [...]. The smallness of this hand, pitilessly attacking a giant prey, became quite disturbing; and as it effortlessly tore apart the entrails of the great city, it seemed to take on a steely glint in the blue twilight. (K2.68-69)

The end of this passage invokes the novel’s title, la curée, literally ‘the part of an animal fed to the hounds that have run it to ground’. Here it is Saccard who has torn the city apart, recalling Baudelaire’s false etymology of his name: ‘my name is something terrible [...] As a matter of fact, the badelare was a saber with a short, broad blade and a convex cutting edge, hooked at the tip’. Yet there is a difference: in ‘Le Soleil’ Baudelaire fences with the city as a kind of defence, or play, whereas Saccard goes in for the kill, brutally disembowelling the city. Saccard’s hand does not hold a sword, but becomes it, his ‘iron fingers’ taking on a ‘steely glint’. The use of iron in the new architecture is also implied here. If iron is the century’s ‘architectural unconscious’, as Benjamin suggests (see Introduction), then this is an image of the unconscious acting on the city with a destructive force, like the railway in Dombey and Son (see Chapter 3).

The new Paris is not only a savage opening, however. It is also the scene for Maxime and Renée’s love affair, during which it becomes a luxurious domestic interior, as in the couple’s view of the Parc Monceau, seen from Saccard’s townhouse:

They enjoyed looking at this charming corner of the new Paris, this clean, pleasant bit of nature, these lawns like pieces of velvet, interspersed with flower-beds and shrubs, and bordered with magnificent white roses. Carriages passed by, as numerous as on the boulevards; the ladies on foot trailed their skirts languorously, as though they were walking across their drawing room carpets. (K5.168)

Their passage through the boulevards is described similarly:

They often drove through the city, going out of their way to pass along certain boulevards, which they loved with a personal affection. [...] They drove on, and it seemed to them that the carriage was rolling over carpets along the straight, endless roadway, which had been made solely to save them from the dark backstreets. Every boulevard became a corridor of their house. (K5.168-69)

In both cases they are separated from what they view, first in a house and then in a carriage. They are at once outside and inside, remaining enclosed among the newly exposed spaces (or ‘veins’) of the city. Philippe Hamon reads this passage as an example of the ‘exposition’ character of Zola’s writing, arguing that in nineteenth century France, ‘the dream of transparency goes hand in hand with the dream of transforming the world or the house into a collection, a museum, or a place at a universal exposition’. This suggests a reconciliation between Debord’s competing spectacles of ‘flow’ and ‘museum display’, as the external and internal spaces of the city become one. For Hamon, this exposition world dominated French literature after 1850, developing out of the earlier Romantic

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512 Hamon, p. 75.
fascination with ruins. For Benjamin, this is the natural habitat of the flâneur, in which bourgeois space takes on the appearance of universal space:

The domestic interior moves outside. It is as though the bourgeois were so sure of his prosperity that he is careless of façade and can exclaim: My house, no matter where you choose to cut into it, is façade. Such façades, especially, on the Berlin houses dating back to the middle of the previous century: an alcove does not jut out, but—as niche—tucks in. The street becomes room and the room becomes street.

The street becomes a space of enclosure, where domestic space and city space are intertwined. Sharon Marcus emphasises this in her reading of Zola’s *Pot-Bouille* (1882), set in a Paris apartment block, which she frames as a response to ‘the critical tendency to oppose the city and the home, and hence assume that a novel about domestic interiors cannot be a novel about the city’. Marcus, like Benjamin, demonstrates that home and city are intimately connected, even when (as in *Dombey and Son*) they appear fundamentally opposed.

The key domestic setting in *La Curée* is Saccard’s mansion, built in the Second Empire style and located in the Rue Monceau in the 17th arrondissement, just off the Boulevard Malesherbes, inaugurated in 1861. It is based on the Hôtel Menier on the Parc Monceau, four drawings of which are included in Zola’s notes for the novel, having a ‘pretty lodge vaguely suggestive of a little Greek temple’ (K1.15), a ‘great glass awning’ (K1.5) over the steps on the street side, and a ‘far more sumptuous’ (K1.15) façade on the park side, where:

The display of decoration was profuse. The house was hidden under its sculpture. Around the windows and along the cornices ran volutes of flowers and branches; there were balconies shaped like baskets full of blossoms, and supported by tall naked women with wide hips and

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513 Benjamin offers his own version of this transition: ‘In the years 1850-1890, exhibitions take the place of museums’. *Arcades*, p. 407.
515 Sharon Marcus, p. 169.
jutting breasts; and here and there were faithful escutcheons, clusters of fruit, roses, every
flower it is possible for stone or marble to represent. (K1.16)

This arabesque design produces an overwhelming visual spectacle which is both fantastical and
meaningless, its evocation of classical images and natural fecundity serving only to indicate excess. It
is architecture divested of all quality, becoming pure quantity, a mere heap of capital. The same is
true of the goods in Mouret’s department store, as will be seen. Such ecstatic excess suggests a
reversal of Eisenstein’s reading of Zola: as well as providing a blueprint for socialist film-making,
Zola’s ecstasy signals the profusion of capitalist consumption, which renders invisible anything
outside its own sphere. Spectacle and ‘true’ montage here become all but indistinguishable.

Finally, Saccard’s house is accompanied by ‘an enormous hothouse’ (K1.16), which is ‘a
miniature version of the new Louvre, one of the most typical examples of the Napoleon III style, that
opulent bastard of so many styles’ (K1.16-17). This is exactly what Gogol condemns when he
describes colossal architecture being turned into ‘little bridges and gates’ (A126). The ‘new Louvre’
referred to here is the extension built from 1852-57 and connected to the Tuileries Palace, itself
burnt down during the Paris Commune in May 1871 (as depicted in Le Debacle [1892]), so that the
hothouse foreshadows the family’s collapse. Its windows have ‘sheets of glass so wide and clear that
they seemed like the window-fronts of a big modern department store, arranged so as to display to
the outside world the wealth within’ (K1.17); this turns the interior into an exterior, but maintains its
enclosure, so that the space of the city is colonised by bourgeois taste.517 Benjamin refers to ‘the
dreamy and, if possible, oriental interior’, giving a quotation from Gutzkow that evokes the Arabian
Nights (as Saccard’s view of Paris also does), and serves as a commentary on La Curée:

Everyone here dreams of instant fortune; everyone aims to have, at one stroke, what in
peaceful and industrious times would cost a lifetime of effort. The creations of the poets are

517 On glass architecture in the nineteenth-century, mainly in a British context, see Victorian Glassworlds.
full of sudden metamorphoses in domestic existence; they all rave about marquises and princesses, about the prodigies of the *Thousand and One Nights*.  

Saccard’s ascent from clerk to one of Paris’s wealthiest men is just such a metamorphosis. The hothouse, meanwhile, embodies Benjamin’s ‘dreamy’ and ‘oriental’ interior, offering the most ‘acrid form of intoxication’ ([K4.157]) to Maxime and Renée. The heat and tropical plants (‘vanilla plants [...] Indian berries [...] quisqualias’ ([K4.159]) intensify Maxime’s sexual otherness: ‘He seemed born and bred for perverted sexual pleasure [...] this creature of indeterminate sex’ ([K4.158]). The oriental is also evoked by the hothouse’s visual transformation of the exterior: ‘Through the little panes of the hothouse they could catch glimpses of the Parc Monceau, clumps of trees with fine black outlines [...] even tints reminiscent of Japanese prints’ ([K4.158]). The park, elsewhere a domestic interior, becomes an Asiatic scene, like the commodified images available in the Ladies’ Paradise, where during one sale Mouret displays ‘Chinese and Japanese curiosities, a few trinkets at low prices, which the customers were eagerly snatching up’; both instances have no connection to the reality of Asia, serving only to signify exoticism.  

The hothouse also takes on more generally a fantastical, but deadly, Asian otherness: ‘They were a thousand miles from Paris, from the easy life of the Bois and official receptions, in a corner of an Indian forest, of some monstrous temple of which the black marble sphinx became the deity’ ([K4.160]). In the very text in which Paris becomes the centre of the world, it also dissolves into sheer spectacle, into fetishised or commodified desire, becoming an interior which is nothing but façade, defined by sexual and architectural excess. This makes the lives of anyone outside this privileged bubble absolutely unreadable for those within, unless in egotistical terms, as new sources of stimulation.

Only in the final chapter of the novel is a boulevard under construction directly depicted. Saccard, alongside four other members of the Compensation Authority, visits ‘the large demolition

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518 *Arcades*, p. 214.
site that was to become the Boulevard du Prince-Eugène’ (K7.247), where the destruction imagined by Angèle has been realised:

tall, gutted buildings, displaying their pale insides, opened to the skies their wells stripped of stairs, their gaping rooms suspended in mid-air like the broken drawers of a big, ugly piece of furniture. Nothing could be more forlorn than the wallpaper of these rooms, blue and yellow squares hanging in tatters, marking the positions, five or six storeys high, right up to the roofs, of wretched little garrets, cramped holes that had once contained, perhaps, a whole human existence. [...] The gap yawned still wider in the midst of these ruins, like a breach opened by cannon. (K7.247-48)

The buildings are like dissected corpses, their ‘pale insides’ exposed to view. The ‘suspended’ rooms recall the ‘fragments of unfinished walls and arches’ (DS68) in Staggs’s Gardens, or the suspended stories of Gogol’s dream city (see Chapter 1). This is an exposure of the working-class interior such as the ‘good spirit’ is imagined to bring about, or which James Kay hopes to produce in Manchester (see Chapters 3 and 2). Here, though, there are no human inhabitants. Only traces remain, like the squares of wallpaper marking where rooms used to be. These ghostly impressions of vanished lives are like the lines indicating the heights of the Harmon children on the wall of Harmony Jail (see Chapter 4), inscribing architecture as the site of loss, or as a negative image of the human (perhaps photographically so: Benjamin notes that Atget took photographs of ‘deserted Paris streets’, as if they were crime scenes, unsettling the viewer).520 One inspector identifies another trace of habitation: ‘It’s extraordinary [...] Saccard, look at that kitchen up there; there’s an old frying pan still hanging over the stove. I can see it quite clearly’ (K7.248). This sign of domesticity is isolated and effectively unreadable: though it can be seen clearly, it signifies only absence. Like a Benjaminian fragment, the frying pan breaks out of historical chronology, existing in a state of suspension which is both spatial (it is ‘hanging’) and temporal, since it is only visible now, while the buildings are being destroyed. The ‘gap’ between the buildings, the line of the future boulevard, signifies that the area is

520 ‘The Work of Art’, p. 27.
also in this state of spatio-temporal suspension; it is like the gap in the street which Dombey’s house becomes before being restored to bourgeois luxury, as will also happen here. This is not an absolute blank, but a negative presence, an absence of something: the lives and buildings which are on the verge of erasure.

Another inspector, a former knife-grinder, spots the room where he lived years earlier through a ‘breach in the wall’ (K7.250) of one building, making him ‘stop short’ (K7.249). Memory is exposed here along with the domestic interior:

You see the cupboard; that’s where I put by three hundred francs, sou by sou. And the hole for the stovepipe, I can still remember the day I made it. There was no fireplace, it was bitterly cold, all the more so because I was often on my own. (K7.250)

Saccard’s response is that of the improver: ‘There’s nothing wrong with pulling these old hovels down. We’re going to build fine freestone houses in their place. [...] There’s nothing to stop you taking up residence on the new boulevard’ (K7.250). This reply, though, excludes other former residents of the street, whose only presence remains the traces which the new houses will replace.

Saccard’s own memory also returns, as he recalls the dinner with Angèle on the Buttes Montmartre. This is not a cause for melancholy, but satisfaction:

The realization of his prophecy delighted him. He followed the cutting with the secret joy of authorship, as though he himself had struck the first blows of the pickaxe with his iron fingers. He skipped over the puddles, reflecting that three million francs were waiting for him beneath a heap of rubble, at the end of this stream of mire. (K7.251)

Saccard claims ‘authorship’ of the building work, imagining he has not only foreseen the reconstruction of the city but actively produced it. Authorship also has a wider significance here, representing Paris shifting from an unintentional to an intentional city. Through this memory, too, Saccard protects himself from the destruction and ruin around him, transforming it into a site of fantastical wealth as he did on Montmartre; this time the three million francs he will earn in
compensation from his ownership of the buildings, an alchemical transformation of waste into money that is also seen in *Our Mutual Friend* (see Chapter 4). This does not mean Saccard’s world is secure however, since the structure his money creates is as unstable as those in *Dombey and Son*:

‘The golden stream had a source at last. But it was not yet a solid, established fortune, flowing with an even continuous current’ (K7.253). Saccard’s wealth remains transitory, vulnerable and ephemeral.

The opening up of the city, then, is also a closing down, as it becomes increasingly defined in terms of money and the commodities and houses which money can buy. The next section explores the way the department store extends this principle, giving it its fullest realisation by allowing it to dominate and transform a single architectural space.

*Au Bonheur des Dames* and the Commodified World

The ruin in Chapter 7 of *La Curée* is the opposite of both Saccard’s fantastical hothouse and the modern department store of *Au Bonheur des Dames*. But they are opposites in the way that fashion and death are for Benjamin: two sides of the same dialectical image which turn into one another (Fashion satisfies the desire for a ‘new tempo of life’, yet also ‘stands in opposition to the organic. [...] To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse’).\(^521\) In this sense, ruin haunts the department store, undermining the appearance of totality which, I will argue, it works to bring about.

This dialectical opposition of ruin and totality helps interpret the final sentence of Benjamin’s 1935 exposé of the *Arcades*: ‘With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins before they have crumbled’.\(^522\) Such economic destabilisation is evident in the rapid fortunes made in *La Curée* and *Au Bonheur des Dames*, where Octave Mouret, the store’s owner, tells Baron Hartmann (a character derived from Haussmann) that his new mode of business is ‘based on the rapid and continuous turnover of capital, which had to be converted into goods as many times as possible within twelve months’ (LP3.74). The department store...

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\(^{521}\) *Arcades*, p. 65. ‘Paris, the Capital’ [1935], p. 8.

\(^{522}\) ‘Paris, the Capital’ [1935], p. 13.
store is a bourgeois monument precisely through this instability, which makes it anti-monumental in the conventional sense: not single but multiple, not fixed but ever-changing, like the commodities which fill it.

The store also displays a contradictory relationship between whole and part, being both a fragment which appears to be a whole (one building containing the entire world), and a whole made of fragments (having many different departments and goods). Throughout, this duality is tied to the architecture of the store. The text opens with Denise Baudu, the novel’s main protagonist, arriving in Paris to seek work in a draper’s shop. Her first view of the Bonheur des Dames department store, based largely on the Bon Marché, where Zola did extensive research, is of visual excess:\(^{523}\)

> With its series of perspectives, with the display on the ground floor and the plate-glass windows of the mezzanine floor, behind which could be seen all the intimate life of the various departments, the spectacle seemed to Denise to be endless. (LP1.4)

The store turns itself inside out, plate-glass windows allowing its goods to spill onto the street and confront passers-by. It appears to Denise to be ‘endless’, yet is also broken up into a ‘series of perspectives’ and ‘various departments’. As Brian Nelson observes, the store is ‘a microcosm of capitalist society’; its departments, including haberdashery, perfume and ladieswear, where Denise finds a job, compete with one another like separate businesses (as do the individual employees, who work on commission), yet these semi-autonomous regions are nonetheless part of a greater whole.\(^{524}\) Debord provides a way to reconcile these opposed characteristics, by positing that they are two sides of the same phenomenon:

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The origin of the spectacle lies in the world’s loss of unity [...] Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness.\textsuperscript{525}

In the spectacle, the illusion of unity is produced not against but through the separation of spectators. Octave Mouret, the store’s owner and a great seducer of women (‘entranced and affectionate in their presence’ [LP1.33], yet also displaying ‘brutality’ and ‘disdain’ [LP3.77] towards them) embodies the uniting/separating centre that makes this possible, especially in the panoptical viewpoint he adopts during the first of three great sales which take place in the novel (in Chapters 4, 9 and 14): ‘Mouret [...] planted himself beside the hall balustrade. From there he dominated the whole shop, for he had the mezzanine departments around him, and could look down into the ground-floor departments’ (LP4.94).\textsuperscript{526} The customers he surveys are focused not on each other but on the commodities laid before them; they are united only in the ambiguous and mediated form of being oriented towards a shared object.

It is the internal structure of the store that allows Mouret to take this position. Michael Miller’s description of the Bon Marché after its reconstruction in 1869 by L.A. Boileau and Gustave Eiffel, an event paralleled in Chapters 8 and 9, illustrates the new openness which glass and iron have produced:

Together they devised a plan that would employ a framework of thin iron columns and a roofing of glass skylights to work to the best advantage of a giant retail operation. The role of the iron was to provide for open, spacious bays in which large quantities could readily be displayed and through which vast crowds could move with ease. The skylights, capping what

\textsuperscript{525} Debord, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{526} Benjamin notes Giedion’s discussion of the department store axiom ‘Welcome the crowd and keep it seduced!’ Arcades, p. 40.
in effect was a series of interior courts, were to permit a maximum influx of natural light, which was deemed necessary for display purposes.\textsuperscript{527}

The transparency of the store’s public areas gives the impression that everything is open to view, yet this is balanced by a ‘provision for central offices on the top floors and a depot that could send and receive packages and store merchandise in a first-level basement’ as well as machinery for heating in a second basement.\textsuperscript{528} As part of his research, Zola employed an architect, Frantz Jourdain, to produce a full architectural plan of his fictional building in 1882. This involved extensive use of iron, glass and colourful decoration, and ‘specif[jied] what materials were to be used, disposition of interior spaces, type of decoration, even cost estimates’.\textsuperscript{529} Jourdain later used large parts of this plan in his commission for the Samaritaine department store between the 1880s and 1920s.\textsuperscript{530} The openness of such a design allows Mouret to see and ‘dominate’ the store, and maximises the visible accumulation of goods, creating a situation where, as Mouret puts it, ‘the customer found herself snared [...] she bought a whole set of clothes, then got caught by unforeseen attractions, yielding to the need for all that is useless and pretty’ (LP3.75). Mouret becomes a surrogate for modern capitalism here, seducing the overwhelmingly female customers of the store while remaining wholly indifferent to them.

The customers’ pliability in the face of capitalism leads to their transformation into things. One of the most telling instances of which, as several critics have noted, are the mannequins with ‘round bosoms’ and ‘wide hips’ (LP1.6) (also characteristics of the female statues on Saccard’s mansion) whose heads have been replaced with price tags.\textsuperscript{531} Mirrors ‘reflect the dummies,

\textsuperscript{527} Miller, p. 42. Janet Beizer suggests the renovation makes the store ‘the potential home of the Unheimlich’, making the discussions of Chapter 4 relevant here. ‘Au (delà du) Bonheur des Dames: Notes on the Underground’, Australian Journal of French Studies, 38.1 (2001), 393-406 (p. 403).

\textsuperscript{528} Miller, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{529} Meredith Clausen, Frantz Jourdain and the Samaritaine (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1987) p. 20.

\textsuperscript{530} Clausen, pp. 44-49.

\textsuperscript{531} Danielle Bishop discusses the metaphorical significance of ‘losing one’s head’ in ‘Au Bonheur des Dames: A Novel of Construction, Constructors, and the Constructed’, Excavatio, 23.1-2 (2008), 243-54 (pp. 250-51). Alison Walls notes the violence and loss of identity in this image (Walls, p. 72), as does Susie Hennessey in Consumption and Desire in Au Bonheur des Dames, The French Review, 81.4 (2008), 696-706 (p. 699). For Bowlby, the dummies represent a descent into image and fragmentation under capitalism. Bowlby, p. 73.
multiplying them endlessly, seeming to fill the street with these beautiful women for sale with huge price tags where their heads should have been’ (LP1.6). For Jean, Denise’s adolescent brother, these commodity-women are ‘amazing’ (LP1.6), embodiments of desire which make him ‘pink with pleasure’ (LP1.6). Jean, having ‘the beauty of a girl’ (LP1.6), is another of Zola’s effeminate, sexualised male characters, like Maxime. More significant than Jean’s desire, though, is that this commodification of women is completely exposed, yet only gains in effectiveness as a result. Women are invited to buy into—and hence become—the very commodities that produce an illusory and unattainable image of femininity, thus participating in their own reification. Eisenstein quotes this passage as an example of ecstatic montage, but reads it in the opposite way, as an instance of things becoming people rather than people becoming things: ‘the mannequins not only come alive but are incarnated into women’. This again suggests that Eisenstein’s ‘true’ montage might not be the opposite of capitalist spectacle but its inverse side, since the two are here inseparable. It is Benjamin, rather than Eisenstein, who can help account for this duality of ideology and utopia, through such concepts as the dialectical image.

Architectural transparency also reveals competition between stores, thus appearing to empower consumers. As Mouret tells Hartmann:

Now competition was taking place before the public’s very eyes, people had only to walk past the shop-windows to ascertain the prices, and every shop was reducing them, content with the smallest possible profit; there was no cheating [...] just continuous business, a regular profit of so much per cent on all goods, a fortune put into the smooth running of a sale, which was all the larger because it took place in full view of the public. (LP3.75)

Customers can see and assess the store’s commodities, but, as critics have pointed out, only at the expense of being seen and assessed as commodities themselves. As Mouret’s gaze demonstrates,

the visual field is not neutral but a network of power relations. When Hartmann admires Mouret as the ‘inventor of a machine for devouring women’ (LP3.77), the machine in question is the spatial structure of the store itself, which turns women into the architects of their own destruction. Women become like the goods which enter the chute leading to the store’s receiving department, depicted as a consuming mouth: ‘Everything entered through this yawning trap; things were being swallowed up all the time, a continual cascade of materials falling with the roar of a river’ (LP2.36). 534 This river of commodities invites comparison with a later passage, describing a display of silks:

material was streaming down like a bubbling sheet of water, falling from above and spreading out on to the floor. [...] And at the bottom, as if in a fountain-basin, the heavy materials, the damasks, the brocades, the silver and gold silks, were sleeping on a deep bed of velvets [...], their shimmering flecks forming a still lake in which reflections of the sky and the countryside seemed to dance. Women pale with desire were leaning over as if to look at themselves. Faced with this wild cataract, they all remained standing there, filled with the secret fear of being caught up in the overflow of all this luxury and with an irresistible desire to throw themselves into it and be lost. (LP4.104)

The allusion here is to the myth of Narcissus, undone by his love for his own reflection. 535 In the department store, though, the viewer is gendered as female, and in place of a reflection she sees only commodities, which are both ‘still’ and ‘wild’. As with the mannequins, truth is not hidden but located on the surface: the women see commodities in place of themselves because that is what the shop incites them to become. The wish to ‘throw themselves into it and be lost’ is the desire to become part of the ideal commodity world, which as Debord shows no single, purchasable commodity can encompass. This desire—to be consumed rather than consume—seems realised when, in an Eisensteinian ‘leap’ from one image to another, the crowd becomes the river: ‘A compact mass of heads was surging through the arcades, spreading out like an overflowing river into the

534 Consumption and the underground are connected elsewhere in Zola, including in the consuming mine entrance in *Germinal* and in Les Halles market and its cellars, positioned as the city’s belly in *Le Ventre de Paris*. 535 Bowlby also makes the link with Narcissus. Bowlby, p. 72.
middle of the hall’ (LP4.108). The crowd adds to the concentration of commodities, becoming part of the landscape of the store.

This moment employs one of a number of metaphors used by Zola, that of the pastoral landscape. Another, the machine, has been indicated already, and others—battlefield, temple, bedroom, palace and phalanstery—are used elsewhere. Taken together, these reveal that the store is fundamentally multiple. It embodies a new kind of instability, distinct from that in *Dombey and Son*. There, buildings deviated from relatively fixed models (home and office), but here there is no centre from which to deviate. The ‘natural’ no longer opposes the ‘artificial’, but has become part of it. The shop’s architecture has taken on the flexibility of modern capitalism, based on ‘the rapid and continuous turnover of capital’ (LP3.74). As Rachel Bowlby observes, the store is ‘a model in miniature of an entirely new form of existence’, ceaselessly creating new seasons, new times and new places. In Debord’s terms, ‘The diffuse form of the spectacle is associated with the abundance of commodities’.

The machine metaphor is first introduced when the shop appears to Denise as ‘regulated and organized with the remorselessness of a machine: the vast horde of women were as if caught in the wheels of an inevitable force’ (LP1.16). The store is here like the factories of industrial Manchester (it later seems like the ‘confused interior of a factory’ to Denise [LP1.28]), and the train of *Dombey and Son*, which dashes Carker to death under its wheels (it too is compared to a ‘monster’ [LP2.49]). In Zola’s railway novel, *La Bête Humaine* (1890), Jacques Lantier’s train, La Lison, at times carries a similar destructive force. When it crashes, witnesses see ‘the train rearing up in the air, seven carriages climbing one on top of the other, and then everything falling back with most dreadful splintering sound into a jumbled mass of wreckage’.536 This risk of destruction is found in another metaphor, that of the ‘battlefield still hot from the massacre of materials’, where ‘half-destroyed stacks of cloth were still standing, like ruined houses about to be carried away by an overflowing river’ (LP4.117), after the first great sale. War and desire coexist here, with clothes heaped up like

'the greatcoats of disabled soldiers', while discarded silk and underclothes ‘gave the impression that an army of women had undressed there haphazardly in a wave of desire’ (LP4.117). This evocation of female desire is central to the metaphors of the store-as-temple and the store-as-palace, as in the window display which resembles a ‘chapel built for the worship of beauty and grace’ (LP1.6) and in Mouret’s claim to Hartmann that he is ‘building a temple to Woman, making a legion of shop assistants burn incense before her’ (LP3.77). This is the production of Woman as goddess, desirable but unattainable; an ideological process which, once again, is not hidden but laid open to view. In the final sale, the temple becomes a bedroom, a tent made of curtains being ‘evocative both of the tabernacle and the bedroom. It looked like a great white bed, its virginal whiteness waiting, as in legends, for the white princess, for she who would one day come’ (LP14.398). Woman is idealised as both virginal and sexual, but also made absent. The only woman appropriate to this interior is a legend or a dream, an impossible woman who will nonetheless ‘one day come’. This woman operates like invisible architecture; she is what the store implies, or promises, as a guarantee of its present and future solidity.

The store-as-palace metaphor is invoked most fully following the shop’s renovation, when the main gallery comes to resemble Gogol’s dream-city of suspended stories:

It was like the concourse of a station, surrounded by the balustrades of the two upper storeys, intersected by hanging staircases, and with suspension bridges built across it. The iron stair cases, with double spirals, opened out in bold curves, multiplying the landings; the iron bridges, thrown across the void, ran straight along, very high up; and beneath the pale light from the windows all this metal formed a delicate piece of architecture, a complicated lacework through which the daylight passed, the modern realization of a dream-palace, of a Babel-like accumulation of storeys in which halls opened out, offering glimpses of other storeys and halls without end. (LP9.249)

This is architecture as ornament or arabesque, with ‘spirals’, ‘lacework’, an ‘accumulation of storeys’ and ‘halls without end’. It is an inversion of Piranesi’s prison drawings (see Chapter 1) that transfers
them from the underground to the sky, and of Staggs’s Gardens (see Chapter 3), also compared to ‘Babel’. Here, the industrial (‘a station’) and the fantastical (‘dream-palace’) come together. The utopian, as well as ideological, nature of this architecture emerges in the metaphor of the store-as-phalanstery, closely connected to the store-as-machine. Employees are ‘nothing but cogs, caught up in the workings of the machine, surrendering their personalities, merely adding to the mighty common whole of the phalanstery’ (LP5.134). The phalanstery was Charles Fourier’s socialist utopia, projected to ‘accommodate about 2,000 people in a communal organisation’, in vast buildings operating as ‘cities in miniature’, complete with all amenities, including ‘[p]athways over roofs [...] to give access to the natural open-air environment’. The association with machinery is appropriate, Benjamin suggesting that:

The phalanstery can be characterized as human machinery. This is no reproach, nor is it meant to indicate anything mechanistic; rather, it refers to the great complexity of its structure <Aufbau>. The phalanstery is a machine made from human beings.

The phalanstery transforms the rationalism of industrial capitalism into a utopian project, hinting that utopia and capitalist ideology can coexist within the same concept, or the same architectural space.

The symbolic flexibility of the store’s internal structure is connected to another phenomenon: the piling up of commodities, which both promotes visibility and allows commodities to replace architecture. Mouret tells Hartmann that the business’s strength is ‘multiplied tenfold by accumulation, by all the goods being gathered together at one point, supporting and boosting each other’ (LP3.75). This is evident when Mouret rearranges a silk display constructed by Hutin, a sales clerk, saying ‘[b]ut why are you trying to make it easy on the eye? [...] Don’t be afraid, blind them... Here! Some red! Some green! Some yellow!’ (LP2.48). The blinding effect of Mouret’s display is

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538 *Arcades*, p. 626.
symbolic of the wider ideological concealment performed by architecture and commodities. It is the store’s visibility, as well as its ongoing expansion, which overwhelms the smaller businesses surrounding it. Denise’s uncle Baudu, who runs a small draper’s shop, believes ‘the neighbourhood was being gradually overrun and devoured’ (LP1.24). The old shops cannot counteract the outside world as the Ladies’ Paradise can: when it rains, water seems to run ‘right up to the counters’ (LP1.27). These shops are defined by darkness rather than light; as the department store expands, Baudu’s shop is ‘overcome by the somnolence of ruin; empty corners formed dark cavities’ (LP8.209), making it invisible in comparison with the store’s brightness.

The Ladies’ Paradise also turns its goods into architecture. Denise is attracted by a window display where ‘umbrellas, placed obliquely, seemed to form the roof of some rustic hut, beneath which, suspended from rods and displaying the rounded outlines of calves, were silk stockings’ (LP1.4). This is an erasure of architecture, but also realises the dream of architecture, as defined by the nineteenth-century German architect Gottfried Semper, author of The Four Elements of Architecture (1851):

The architect’s general task is to provide a warm and liveable space. Carpets are warm and liveable. He decides for this reason to spread out one carpet on the floor and to hang up four to form the four walls. But you cannot build a house out of carpets. Both the carpet on the floor and the tapestry on the wall require a structural frame to hold them in the correct place. To invent this is the architect’s second task.539

In the first great sale, Mouret creates an oriental hall which really does include such a house of carpets:

First of all, the ceiling was covered with carpets from Smyrna, their complicated designs standing out on red backgrounds. Then, on all four sides, were hung door-curtains [...] On the

floor there were still more carpets; thick fleeces were strewn there, and in the centre was a carpet from Agra. (LP4.88)

The commodities are no longer contained within architecture, but become architecture. The original dream of architecture, Semper suggests, is not to provide structure, but to produce a condition of total enclosure. The department store’s achievement is to bring this about while simultaneously appearing to open itself up into endless vistas.

In *Au Bonheur des Dames* as well as *La Curée*, then, transparency simultaneously produces ideological enclosure and utopian promise. In both texts the city takes on a montage character, which is at once ecstatic in Eisenstein’s terms and spectacular in Debord’s. The part turns against the whole in an image of totality, but also fractures into an apparently endless series of parts. In the department store in particular, the instability of the city is no longer a weakness but a strength, with the adoption of the commodity character allowing it to ceaselessly reinvent itself in new forms. Stasis is here no longer a source of stability, as it seemed to be at times in the Manchester of Chapter 1, but a form of decay.
Conclusion—Thoughts on Whiteness

I have pursued the concept of ‘invisible architecture’ across a range of texts that engage with the problem of how to open up or uncover the nineteenth-century city, how to comprehend the hidden forces, structures and ideologies that hold it together. I have argued that what is unseen or unseeable in the spaces and structures of nineteenth-century cities has a real and active effect upon the lives of those within them, and on the narratives these cities generate. I have also argued that such structures are often based upon absence or death, which architecture covers over but cannot fully conceal, undermining its stability and security. As well as this destabilising effect, what is invisible can have an ideological role, implying a hidden core or unity within the city. It is also at times utopian, pointing away from the material city and towards the absolute (Chapter 1), times and places before or after the city (Chapter 2), the unconscious and the gaze (Chapter 4), or a fantastical world of spectacle and image (Chapter 5).

The trajectory of the thesis has been, in general, from the unseen to the unseeable, and from opacity to transparency. This movement is concluded here, as I consider the concept of whiteness as a final way to explore the nature of invisible architecture. Whiteness, at once a colour and an apparent absence of colour, brings together in its ambiguous surfaces many themes of this thesis: the interplay of visible and invisible; the production and dissolution of repression; the drive towards cleansing and exclusion; the relationship between concrete and abstract architecture, and between ideology and utopia. Although I refer to the white walls of modernism, I am most interested in the whiteness of the nineteenth century, as it is manifested in the buildings and objects of industrial and metropolitan cities. I explore this through examples drawn from a selection of texts, including those discussed in earlier chapters.

My aim is not only to draw together the themes and arguments of the thesis, but also to suggest that nineteenth century whiteness is both a precursor and a dialectical opposite to the whiteness of modernist architecture, as practised by Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter
Gropius and others.\textsuperscript{540} In this way the present chapter aspires both to close the thesis and to open it up to a new historical perspective. If, as Mark Wigley has argued, the hidden logic of modernist architecture is to make decoration and the absence of decoration one and the same while claiming to erase ornament completely, then I suggest that this duality exists in an unreconciled form in the whiteness of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{541} Nineteenth century whiteness, I argue, is strikingly multiple, alive with the contradictions which are submerged in the white walls of the international style. It is a whiteness that cleanses but also dirties, erases but also exposes, conceals ornamentation but also functions as ornament. Such whiteness is a compelling example of invisible architecture. Like the cellar, the river and the department store, it carries a powerful ideological force, yet retains a utopian aspect, seeming to offer in its blankness the hope of limitless possibilities. Though not itself a space, whiteness is paradigmatic of the spaces and structures I have considered so far. More than perhaps any other form of invisible architecture, it is both fascinating and disturbing, at once dazzlingly visible and hauntingly empty. Herman Melville’s celebrated chapter of \textit{Moby Dick} (1851), ‘The Whiteness of the Whale’, raises and explores these contradictions, making it an appropriate point of departure.

\textbf{The Whiteness of the Whale}

Melville’s chapter on whiteness comes a third of the way through \textit{Moby Dick}, after chapter 41, which describes Captain Ahab’s monomaniacal pursuit of the white whale. This leads the narrator, Ishmael, to the startling recognition that ‘It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me’.\textsuperscript{542} Ishmael suggests that while whiteness is associated with pre-eminence and virtue, as in ‘the innocence of brides’, the ‘ermine of the judge’ and the white man’s ‘ideal mastership over every dusky tribe’, at the same time ‘there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[540] The differences between these architects is of less importance here than their shared modernism, but for more detail see Alan Colquhoun, \textit{Modern Architecture} (Oxford: OUP, 2002).
\item[541] \textit{White Walls}. See for instance p. 19: ‘Having been stripped of decoration, the white surface itself takes over the space-defining role of decorative art’.
\item[542] Herman Melville, \textit{Moby Dick} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 204; ch. 42.
\end{footnotes}
which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood’.  

What is disturbing about whiteness is precisely this ‘elusive something’, unknown and unseen, which lies below the surface, while also constituting part of that surface.

The play of surfaces activated by whiteness suggests that it might be read as a signifying structure, or perhaps as the breakdown of such a structure, which is how Monika Gehlawat reads Moby Dick itself: ‘The whiteness of the whale [...] does not carry any implicit meaning, but in its refusal to signify, it provides a passive, blank space upon which meaning, desire and loss may be inscribed’.  

This non-signifying signification is evident when Ishmael compares his fear of whiteness to a newborn colt’s fear of a buffalo hide, though it has never seen a buffalo:

Though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic sign gives forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt, somewhere those things must exist. Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright.

Whiteness signifies the existence of the inexpressible, like the Gothic towers valorised by Gogol, which reach towards a God they cannot represent. Like Gogol, Ishmael comes close to Schlegel’s conception of the arabesque as a non-representative symbol of something great but unknowable (see chapter 1). Here, though, what is signified is not an inexpressible presence but an all-consuming absence, the precise nature of which intrigues and disturbs Ishmael:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way?

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543 Moby Dick, p. 205; ch. 42.
545 Moby Dick, p. 211.
546 Moby Dick, p. 212.
Whiteness seems to operate like the psychoanalytic unconscious, which for Lacan is ‘inaccessible to contradiction, to spatio-temporal location and also to the function of time’. As he notes, ‘the unconscious is the elusive’, and elusiveness is what Melville’s text is interested in, through the hunt for Moby Dick, the elusive white whale. In this respect it mirrors the uncanny, where Heimlich is always also Unheimlich. Like the uncanny, the determining feature of whiteness is its very indeterminacy, which manifests itself as the potential ‘annihilation’ of the perceiving subject, threatened with a collapse of monadic identity in the ‘heartless voids’ of the universe.

The whale and its whiteness also function like the Lacanian ‘real’, which is what ‘eludes’ the analyst, and cannot be pinned down. The real is never fully present, only ever being experienced as a ‘missed encounter’. Such missed encounters are felt as trauma, which cannot be remembered, like John Harmon’s ‘death’ and rebirth in Our Mutual Friend (see Chapter 4). In this sense the trauma motivating Moby Dick is the original encounter between Ahab and the whale, a missed encounter since it achieves no resolution: neither party died, though Ahab lost his leg. To turn this missed encounter into a full, authentic encounter, which must end in death, since the real is what annihilates, is Ahab’s goal. As Kevin Goddard has argued, Ahab makes the whale an overdetermined symbol, his desire to kill it an ‘obsession with pinning meaning down, reducing all metaphysical uncertainties to a single tangible object’. According to Goddard, Ishmael is by contrast open to indeterminacy, which activates his soliloquy on whiteness as what opposes and undoes meaning.

For Lacan, the reality system ‘leaves an essential part of what belongs to the real a prisoner in the toils of the pleasure principle’, meaning that an image or echo of the real forms part of the

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547 Seminar XI, p. 31, p. 32.
same screen that blocks us from it. This is, in effect, the conclusion Ishmael reaches when he suggests that whiteness reveals colours and images to be mere forms of painting (or perhaps whitewashing), behind which subsists a devastating and overpowering reality. The key passage comes at the end of the chapter:

And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues [...] are but subtile deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colourless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge—pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper [...]. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?

Whiteness is a skin or medium, a ‘mystical cosmetic’ apparently empty or transparent in itself which nonetheless produces the colours of the world around us. The white whale, though part of this cosmetic, functions as a gap or split that reveals it as a screen concealing something deathlike and inaccessible.

This screen of whiteness is so familiar that it is often impossible to detect, as Melville suggests when he returns to the subject allegorically in chapter 68, ‘The Blanket’. Here, Ishmael attempts to define whale skin, finding it to be an almost unachievable task:

from the unmarred dead body of the whale, you may scrape off with your hand an infinitely thin, transparent substance, somewhat resembling the thinnest threads of isinglass, only it is almost as flexible and soft as satin; that is, previous to being dried, when it not only contracts and thickens, but becomes rather hard and brittle. I have several such dried bits, which I use

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551 Seminar XI, p. 34, p. 55. For the original context of the dream, see The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 652.
552 Moby Dick, p. 212; ch. 42.
for marks in my whale-books. It is transparent, as I said before; and being laid upon the printed page, I have sometimes pleased myself with fancying it exerted a magnifying influence. At any rate, it is pleasant to read about whales through their own spectacles, as you may say. But what I am driving at here is this. That same infinitely thin, isinglass substance, which, I admit invests the entire body of the whale, is not so much to be regarded as the skin of the creature, as the skin of the skin, so to speak.\footnote{Moby Dick, p. 332; ch. 68.}

This whale skin, like whiteness, has become so ephemeral it is transparent, but it might also subtly modify the way we view the world, acting as ‘spectacles’ which seem to exert an ideological effect (‘magnifying’ certain things, and hence minimising others). Is Melville hinting that all readers have such ‘spectacles’, which determine how they read the world, including \textit{Moby Dick} itself, surely the greatest ‘whale-book’ of all? In this case the skin works like Derrida’s ‘white mythology’, defined as ‘metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being, and which yet remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest’.\footnote{Jacques Derrida, ‘White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy’, trans. by F.C.T. Moore, \textit{New Literary History}, 6.1 (1974), 5-74, (p. 11).} White mythology is metaphor which has forgotten it is metaphor, making the logos of the white man appear universal. The ‘invisible drawing’ it conceals is equivalent to invisible architecture, which simultaneously provides structure and vanishes from view. This vanishing helps explain why the ‘skin of the skin’ of the whale cannot be pinned down, even if we know it to be there, as Ishmael does.

Defined by indefinability, the whale-skin is best described as \textit{a sign of the absence of the real}. It signifies that which we cannot access directly, but which nonetheless haunts our imaginary; something whose existence we might attempt to explore by means of the symbolic, like Ishmael’s whale-books. This is the place occupied by \textit{Moby Dick}. It is also one possible definition of invisible architecture: invisible architecture is what we cannot (or do not) access, though it structures what we perceive; its existence manifests itself in traces, which are signs of the absence of the real. The
texts discussed in this thesis are, then, like the whale-books, examples of sites on which such traces can be detected.

**Two Theories of Whiteness**

Aside from Melville, two accounts of whiteness which inform my approach should be mentioned here. These are Mark Wigley’s *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (1995) and Richard Dyer’s *White* (1997). While neither is primarily concerned with the nineteenth century, or with the city, they provide a useful framework for exploring how whiteness relates to invisible architecture, as I consider in this section, before moving to discuss specific instances of nineteenth-century whiteness.

Wigley starts from the apparent paradox that while the white walls of modernist architecture are central to the way it operates, they have been consistently overlooked by critics and commentators. Whiteness is usually described as blankness, absence, purity or neutrality, when it is in fact profoundly ideologically active. This appearance of neutrality is, as with all successful ideology, part of its power. More than anything else, Wigley argues, whiteness defines the way modern architecture is understood, especially its claims to reject the ceaseless movements of fashion. Whiteness is:

supposed to be the look that terminates the obsessive turnover of looks, acting as the stable surface behind the parade of ephemeral fashions, the neutral or neutralizing ground with which a building can test itself and other buildings for unwanted fashion injections by making them appear as ornamental ‘stains,’ as Le Corbusier put it, that stand out against its clean surface.\(^{555}\)

In fact, though, white walls are a form of clothing or mask. Whiteness becomes what it claims to replace: another style or fashion with embedded ideological interests.

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\(^{555}\) *White Walls*, p. xxii.
Wigley’s work provides a way of interrogating claims that whiteness cleanses the visual field, removing disruptive elements. Such claims discount the productive and architectural nature of whiteness, says Wigley, mistaking the construction of new or altered forms of space and vision for the revelation of an essential truth. Wigley implicitly follows Henri Lefebvre here, for whom space is always a social product. Thus the white wall, like the white shirt, ‘plays a crucial part in the very constitution of the category of the sensual that it appears to bracket out’. According to Wigley, this idea is implicit in Le Corbusier, for whom ‘[t]he white surface does not simply clean a space, or even give the impression of clean space. Rather, it constructs a new kind of space’.  

Richard Dyer’s *White*, concerned mainly with cinema and television, explores whiteness as a racial category, paying attention to how whiteness as a colour is implicated in maintaining this category, and determining the social and cultural position of white people. Dyer separates out three discourses of colour: whiteness as hue, whiteness as skin, and whiteness as symbol, which interact to determine the overall position of whiteness in Western culture. Central to his argument is the claim that the social power of whiteness comes not from stability but indeterminacy, particularly a combination of visibility and invisibility:

Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen. To be seen as white is to have one’s corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal. The paradox and dynamic of this are expressed in the very choice of white to characterise us. White is both a colour and, at once, not a colour and the sign of that which is colourless because it cannot be seen: the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, non-existence and death, all of which form part of what makes white people socially white. Whiteness is the sign that makes white people

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556 *White Walls*, p. 7.
visible as white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible.

Whiteness lies on the surface, but signifies something more elusive—the ‘white soul’—which can only be comprehended as a remote, inaccessible, and perhaps ultimately absent, depth. This provides an authority to white people, but also raises the unsettling threat of annihilation which Ishmael recognises, and which Dyer describes as ‘the desolate suspicion of non-existence’. For Dyer, the social power of whites and the conceptual openness of whiteness are connected, since indeterminacy, or ‘non-particularity’, opens up the field of self-determination to white people. This is a freedom typically denied to people of other ethnicities, who, in Western art and images, tend to be more closely defined and hence constrained. Assigned roles they cannot easily escape or circumvent, non-whites are, representationally at least, locked into particular and limited identities.

**Whiteness in the City I: Concealment and Revelation**

Whiteness in the nineteenth century city is often associated with a desire to bring about the neutral, pure space Wigley and Dyer describe and critique, to cleanse the visual field and open it up to view. But because the white wall has not yet been clearly established as a ‘natural’ foundation for architecture, as in modernist design, this cleansing often takes the opposite form of covering up and concealing. Whether whiteness is understood as concealing or revealing the city fundamentally alters it, shifting its meaning towards either the production of falsity or the revelation of truth. In this section I compare James Kay and Friedrich Engels’s approaches to the whitewashing of buildings in Manchester as an illustrative example of this dichotomy, which remains, I argue, unsettled in the nineteenth century. This is the first of three sections to read the various resonances of whiteness in the nineteenth-century city, the second and third of which look at ornament and the concept of being ‘targeted’ or picked out by whiteness. I then finish by looking at Carker from *Dombey and Son*, as a figure who captures elements of all three sections.

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For Kay, in _The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes_, whitewashing the buildings of the poor is fundamental to the project of cleansing and socialising industrial Manchester. In one statistical table, alongside ‘No. of houses reported as requiring repair’ and ‘No. of houses wanting privies’, he includes ‘No. of houses reported as requiring whitewashing’. This prominence suggests whiteness is an important sign of hygiene and cleanliness, but also of visibility, since the desire to survey the houses of the poor coincides with the desire to open them up to the middle classes (see chapter 2). This is, as Mary Poovey observes, a desire to redefine the city in terms of abstract space—space understood in terms of the rational, statistical and measureable.558

Whitewashing statistics are insufficient to fully allow the city’s representation within abstract space, however, Kay remarking that ‘this column fails to indicate [the houses’] gross neglect of order, and absolute filth’. Whitewashing does at least start to bring into view what cannot be seen, helping overcome the difficulty of obtaining ‘satisfactory statistical results concerning the want of furniture, especially of bedding, and of food, clothing and fuel’, by presenting such items—or rather their lack—on a blank field.559

Kay later returns to the question of whitewashing, noting that under the auspices of the Special Board of Health in Manchester, ‘More than a thousand houses have been whitewashed’, and, while laying out advice for the future organisation of the city, stating that ‘Each habitation should be provided with a due receptacle for every kind of refuse, and the owner should be obliged to whitewash the house, at least once every year’. In both cases, whitewashing is associated with a scheme to monitor and regulate the city, the second including a proposal for the continuance of ‘special police regulations’ to secure order, and the election of ‘a body of commissioners’ to oversee house construction.560 Regular whitewashing, Kay implies, should be part of a move towards greater surveillance and greater state power. For Kay, therefore, there is no concealment in whitewashing; it is associated with the removal of disorder, waste and criminal activity. Alfred Loos famously claimed

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558 See Chapter 2 and Lefebvre, pp. 38-40.
559 Kay, p. 18.
560 Kay, p. 45, p. 70.
that ornament is crime, since it represents ‘wasted manpower’ and ‘wasted capital’. Here, crime is ornament, or waste, which whiteness helps to sweep away, leaving behind simplicity and order.

For Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, whitewashing holds a quite different moral valence. Rather than cleansing and revealing, it signifies deception and dissimulation. Describing Ashton-under-Lyne, a factory town near Stockport, Engels comments on the stark contrast between its broad, relatively clean streets full of new houses and the concealed back lanes behind. Whitewash plays its part in this façadal structure: ‘there are even in Ashton streets in which the cottages are getting bad, [...] where the walls have cracks and will not hold the chalk whitewash inside’. As it leaks from the walls it is supposed to conceal, whitewash indicates the falsity of the facade of respectability and comfort which the main streets maintain. These streets, too, will soon begin to crumble, leaving behind only hovels and ruins. Whitewash plays the same role in Ancoats, a working-class district of Manchester, in the north-east of which ‘lie many newly-built-up streets; here the cottages look neat and cleanly, doors and windows are new and freshly painted, the rooms within newly whitewashed’. Yet, ‘cellar dwellings are to be found under almost every cottage; many streets are unpaved and without sewers; and, worse than all, this neat appearance is all pretence, a pretence which vanishes within the first ten years’.

This pretence is like Ishmael’s ‘mystical cosmetic’, which conceals the palsied universe behind. It brings to mind the Devil’s-Dust cloth Engels describes, which is so poorly made it is ‘liable to tear or grow threadbare in a fortnight’. Whiteness becomes associated with the substandard goods which herald the coming of consumer culture. ‘Devilsdust’ is also the name of a character in Disraeli’s *Sybil* (1845); abandoned as a child, he enters a cotton factory, gaining employment in ‘the manufacture of waste and damaged cotton, the refuse of the mills’ and getting his name from this material, from which Devil’s-Dust cloth is made. Devilsdust is a form of refuse himself, his name a

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562 Engels, p. 84.
563 Engels, p. 95.
564 Engels, p. 103.
façade with nothing behind; at the end of *Sybil*, he drops his nickname to give himself another, Mr Mowbray, after the town where he lives.\textsuperscript{565} Devil’s-dust cloth also suggests the cotton dust which has poisoned Bessy, a factory-girl, in *North and South*. She describes this as ‘fluff’, or ‘Little bits, as fly off fro’ the cotton, when they’re carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up’. Though this dust cannot be ignored, its insidious effects are unseen, with many factory workers opposing the installation of ventilation equipment, claiming ‘it made ‘em hungry, at after they’d been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it’ (NS102). The same dust the workers consume kills them, an irony which replicates the false consciousness of workers under capitalism, believing themselves reliant on a system that gradually suffocates them.

The use of the term ‘whitewashing’ in its metaphorical sense of deception (a usage the OED first records in 1763) is also present in Engels.\textsuperscript{566} Engels writes that a Liberal report on the condition of the factories, though written ‘on the side of the bourgeoisie’, still ‘cannot whitewash the manufacturers’.\textsuperscript{567} The German verb here is *weißwaschen*, used again when Engels describes how, following a violent response to popular uprisings in 1842, the bourgeoisie ‘tried to whitewash itself by expressing a horror of popular violence by no means consistent with its own revolutionary language of the spring’.\textsuperscript{568} Whitewashing is for Engels as much a linguistic and rhetorical activity as an architectural one, but in either case constitutes an attempt to cover over an unpleasant truth, making it a form of repression.

Charlotte Brontë reveals the morality inherent in this view of whitewashing in the preface to *Jane Eyre*; she writes that the world finds it:

> convenient to make external show pass for sterling worth—to let white-washed walls vouch for clean shrines. It may hate him who dares to scrutinise and expose—to rase the gilding,

\textsuperscript{565} Disraeli, p. 98, p. 420.  
\textsuperscript{566} OED, whitewash, v. 2a.  
\textsuperscript{567} Engels, p. 187.  
\textsuperscript{568} Engels, p. 240.
and show base metal under it—penetrate the sepulchre and reveal charnel relics: but hate as it will, it is indebted to him.\footnote{Charlotte Brontë, \textit{Jane Eyre}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} edn (London: Norton, 2001), p. 1, pp. 1-2.}

Brontë shows that defining whitewashing as deception implies a kind of truth beneath it, even if this truth is only the truth of death, as in the ‘charnel relics’ whiteness is said to conceal, and which return us to Melville’s description of whiteness as a paint covering ‘nothing but the charnel-house within’. Both are references to Matthew 23.27, where scribes and Pharisees are ‘like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness’. This biblical association of whiteness and death is also found in \textit{Mary Barton}, where Mrs Wilson describes Mary as ‘thou whited sepulchre’ (MB220), and Mary’s ‘dead whiteness’ (MB301) is emphasised. Also in \textit{Mary Barton}, John Barton associates the white plumes he sees on the heads of carriage horses in London with funerals (MB98), highlighting the connection between fashion and death that interests Benjamin in the \textit{Arcades Project}, and which is the topic of Baudelaire’s ‘Danse Macabre’, where fashionable society consists of ‘perfumed skeletons’ who ‘reek of death’.\footnote{The \textit{Flowers of Evil}, p. 199. In French: ‘Vous sentez tous la mort! Ô squelettes musqués’.} Whiteness is linked to fashion here, in the white bones of the skeleton, a connection which exists in Wigley’s work, and in Brontë if fashion is the same as the ‘external show’ that conceals death. The same link is implied in Melville’s description of whiteness as a ‘mystical cosmetic’.

What Brontë indicates about Engels and Kay is that despite their radical differences, both are invested in an understanding of whiteness which links it to concealment and exposure, especially exposure to death, though for Kay whiteness is what \textit{promotes} exposure, while for Engels it is what must \textit{be exposed}, as it is for Brontë. Both writers, however, situate it within the same logic of revelation and concealment.

In the next part I continue to pursue the concern with fashion indicated here, but now in relation to ornament. I read the whiteness of two interior spaces: the house of the Thorntons in


\footnote{The \textit{Flowers of Evil}, p. 199. In French: ‘Vous sentez tous la mort! Ô squelettes musqués’.}
North and South and the department store during the period of the ‘white sale’ in Au Bonheur des Dames. Again, whiteness is found to be that which both conceals and exposes.

**Whiteness in the City II: Ornament and Fashion**

The most striking example of whiteness in Gaskell’s Manchester is Mr Thornton’s house in North and South. Whiteness serves here, I suggest, to protect the bourgeois interior, and its accompanying ornamentation, from the city. It also, though, indicates the failure of this attempt, signifying a hardening or freezing of the interior in the face of the city, as the two remain basically antithetical. Only modernism’s erasure of ornament partially succeeds in uniting interior and exterior, as structures such as Le Corbusier’s Maison Dom-ino, a 1914 design supposed to provide cheap European housing, remove walls altogether. Yet modernism also, I argue, constitutes a continuation of the attempt to preserve ornament by other means, making it fully invisible (unseeable), rather than merely hidden (unseen). Another means to preserve the interior is to turn whiteness into brightness, shifting its role from preservation against to domination of the city. This is the case in the white sales held in Zola’s department store, discussed in the latter part of this section.

Thornton’s large mansion, which is out of place in the factory town of Milton (Manchester), amongst ‘long rows of small houses’, is accessed through a lodge-door at the end of a ‘long dead wall’ (NS111). Gaskell’s ideal of greater closeness between workers and owners, laid out by Thornton at the end of the novel, seems to be realised here. This is an illusion however, since the factory next to the house presents a continual threat to bourgeois life, which can only be maintained by a rigid rejection of its surroundings and a paranoid adherence to cleanliness (NS431-32). This is apparent in the house’s drawing-room, which seems ‘as though no one had been in it since the day when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence’ (NS112). The carpet is covered by ‘a linen drugget, glazed and colourless’ (NS112), while chairs, sofas and ornaments are similarly protected. Here, ‘Everything reflected light, nothing absorbed it’, and the room has ‘a painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look about it, which impressed Margaret so unpleasantly that she was hardly conscious of the peculiar
cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere’ (NS112). Signs of immense care and labour are evident, but employed ‘solely to ornament, and then to preserve ornament from dirt or destruction’ (NS112). The room’s whiteness has a deathlike and inhuman quality, but also a suggestive duality; it preserves ornament through concealment, but at such a high cost of time and effort that the act of preservation becomes itself a form of ornament.

This relates to Benjamin’s account of ‘dwelling’:

[The nineteenth century] conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling’s interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet. 

Such encasement is a protection from the external world, and an attempt to deny that world’s existence. In Thornton’s house, though, the external world is so close it touches the very threshold; it is due to its noise that Margaret can ‘hardly catch her father’s voice, as they stood on the steps awaiting the opening of the door’ (NS111). These are the same steps where she later confronts the striking workmen, standing between them and Thornton (NS178-79). In both cases the steps form the narrowest of borders between classes, a border which because of this narrowness must be all the more closely policed. The dust sheets are another such border, thin but absolute.

In this environment, encasement, rather than protecting the bourgeois subject, serves as a constant reminder of what is rejected: the creeping encroachment of the city, which perhaps gives the room its ‘painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look’. Significantly, the covers are not comforting velvet but unsettling white linen, restricting the inhabitants’ ability to dwell in the manner described by Benjamin, which ‘has to do with fashioning a shell for ourselves’. If the shell is what must be fashioned, it is also what is fashionable, consisting of ornament and decoration. In this house, confrontation with the city has frozen the shell solid, revealing fashion’s deathlike face. Yet death is

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571 Arcades, p. 220.
572 Arcades, p. 221.
not concealed below the surface; it is rather the consciousness that fashion is *nothing but* surface, like Poe’s ‘man that was used up’, who removes additions and accessories until there is nothing left of him. This is a counterpart to Benjamin’s claim that the catastrophe is not some future apocalypse, but merely the fact that things keep on happening in the same way. The Thorntons’ freezing of the shell in the face of the city might be the only alternative to the trend observed by Benjamin, and constitutive of Manchester according to Engels, of ‘the dissociation of the proprietor from the workplace’. Such dissociation is a form of alienation, and ‘culminates in the emergence of the private home’. For Benjamin, then, the home is not independent of the city, but what the city produces, albeit in a negative manner. This process can be seen in Mr Dombey’s two houses (see Chapter 3), and in Wemmick’s house in *Great Expectations.*

Though the ornamentation of Thornton’s drawing-room seems opposed to the clean lines of modernist architecture, in fact whiteness and transparency play the same role in both cases, of simultaneously replacing and becoming ornament. The difference is that the ornament which modernism rejects still subsists in Thornton’s house underneath the white surface laid over it, meaning ornament and the absence of ornament coincide. If, however, ornament is a staving off of social realities which cannot be sustained indefinitely, as Benjamin suggests, then ornament must itself be protected by separation or encasement, or risk these realities breaking through. Following this logic, the white walls of modernism might not just be a negation of, but a successor to Thornton’s house; not simply a rejection of ornament, but, in a peculiar dialectical way, ornament’s preservation. Whiteness implies a hidden depth—Dyer’s ‘white soul’—inside which ornament might still be imagined to exist, waiting, in Gaskell’s words, ‘to be discovered a thousand years hence’. The subject of modernism retreats inside this interiority, which the white surface both evokes and disavows. As a result, interiority is imagined to be a facet of individual being rather than a species of dwelling. This is a reformulation of Benjamin’s claim that under modernity ‘dwelling has

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573 *Selected Tales*, pp. 40-48.
575 *Arcades*, p. 226.
Such a displacement of dwelling onto interior subjectivity is part of what Foucault calls the production of the modern soul, which is the illusion of an essential interior identity, emerging out of the exercise of disciplinary power.\textsuperscript{577}

As well as preserving ornament against the threat of the city, nineteenth-century whiteness can function as an active assertion of ornamentation, as in the great white sale organised by Octave Mouret in \textit{Au Bonheur des Dames}. Here, whiteness does not signify the defeat of the bourgeois interior, but its culmination. This event is based on the \textit{blanc} sales held in the Bon Marché department store, which evolved from an attempt to compensate for the Winter off-season, soon becoming the most important sales week of the year, with sales topping 1,000,000 Francs.\textsuperscript{578} In Zola’s hands the sale becomes an opportunity for Mouret to fashion a new, artificial world that renders invisible the one outside. As the shoppers enter they are confronted with ‘nothing but white, all the white goods from every department, an orgy of white, a white star whose radiance was blinding at first, and made it impossible to distinguish any details in the midst of this total whiteness’ (LP14.397). This is the logical conclusion to Mouret’s window displays, designed to ‘blind’ (LP48) the customers. The galleries are ‘like a polar vista, a snowy expanse unfolding with the endlessness of steppes draped with ermine’ (LP14.397), but also harbour a ‘suffocating hothouse heat’ (LP14.2.399). This impossible scene asserts the power of the commodity to reshape nature, undoing its most fixed connections. The white sale is the triumph of the department store over the city that surrounds it, a denial of its dirt, cold and weather.

For Benjamin, Fourier’s remarks on the Phalanstery—to which Mouret’s store is compared (LP5.134)—serve as a commentary on this phenomenon:

Fourier on the street-galleries: ‘To spend a winter’s day in a Phalanstery, to visit all parts of it without exposure to the elements, to go to the theatre and the opera in light clothes and

\textsuperscript{576} \textit{Arcades}, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{577} \textit{Discipline and Punish}, pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{578} \textit{Miller}, pp. 70-71.
colored shoes without worrying about the mud and the cold, would be a charm so novel that
it alone would suffice to make our cities and castles seem detestable’.579

Exposure to the elements is replaced by exposure to the unrestricted power of the commodity.
Whiteness brings this commodity-status to the fore, implying a fundamental connection between the
vast array of different objects, while still allowing the appearance of endless variety: ‘There was
nothing but white, yet it was never the same white, but all the different tones of white, competing
together, contrasting with and complementing each other, achieving the brilliance of light itself’. This
recalls Whistler’s ‘Symphony in White’ paintings of the 1860s, where whiteness takes multiple
different forms, all retaining a shared connection to the feminine and the sexual. In a similar way
Mouret’s display culminates with a white tent ‘evocative both of the tabernacle and of the bedroom’
(LP14.398). The idea of a ’symphony’ is one Zola shares, describing a ‘harmonic phrase’ that runs
throughout the display, expanding with ‘the complicated orchestration of some masterly fugue’
(LP14.398). The brilliant light which seems to emerge from this symphony is another form of
Ishmael’s mystical cosmetic, reimagined as an effect of capitalism, as pure exchange value. By
contrast, the city seems, in Fourier’s words, ‘detestable’. The city is the Lacanian real which the white
interior, as imaginary, denies. Two forms of invisible architecture are in play here: the commodity,
made dazzlingly, blindingly visible, and the city itself, which recedes from view.

In a similar fashion, white linen offers resistance to the degrading effects of the city in
L’Assommoir (1877), where Gervaise’s descent into alcoholism and poverty is marked by a gradual
transition from running a laundry proudly displaying the ‘whiteness of the linen’ in its window, to
barely subsisting in a tiny room full of ‘rubbish, dust, and muck’.580 This fall, which takes Gervaise
from cleanliness to dirt, and visibility to invisibility, results from her inability to maintain a barrier of
whiteness against the city.

579 Arcades, p. 44.
If whiteness can form a protective barrier, it can also be a means of targeting and isolating subjects. In this sense it is aligned with the law, and with social regulation of the city. This is the topic of the last of my three sections on whiteness in the city, which now reads the *subject him or herself* as the ‘ornament’ which legal and social control aims to erase or overcome.

**Whiteness in the City III: Targeted by Whiteness**

James Kay’s view of whiteness as allied to social regulation, discussed above, emerges in Dickens and Charles Kingsley, often in connection with prisons and the police. Whiteness is involved here not only in what the subject sees, but how the subject is seen, part of the Foucauldian construction of the subject under the gaze of the law. I explore several examples of such targeting in this section.

In Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850), Alton’s ‘prison thoughts’ following his conviction for rioting testify to a process of isolation and observation in which whiteness plays a part:

> The smooth white walls, the smooth white ceiling, seemed squeezing in closer and closer on me, and yet dilating into vast infinities [...] Oh, those smooth white walls and ceiling! If there had been but a print—a stain of dirt—a cobweb, to fleck their unbroken ghastliness! They stared at me, like grim, impassive, featureless, formless fiends; all the more dreadful for their sleek hypocritc cleanliness.\(^{581}\)

The whiteness ‘stares’ at Alton, effectively accusing *him* of being the ‘stain of dirt’ he cannot locate on its surface. The combination of ‘squeezing’ and ‘dilating’ simultaneously pins him down and renders him insignificant. Perhaps surprisingly, both these processes are also associated with the bourgeois interior, which is the prison cell’s inverse, in *Mary Barton*, where mention is made of an Italian punishment:

> The supposed or real criminal was shut up in a room, supplied with every convenience and luxury; and at first mourned little over his imprisonment. But day by day he became aware

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that the space between the walls of his apartment was narrowing, and then he understood
the end. Those painted walls would come into hideous nearness, and at last crush the life out
of him.

This allegory for bourgeois life is associated with the ‘diseased thoughts’ of John Barton, while the
white walls of his cell trap Alton within his own mind (MB164). A similar topic is covered by Charlotte
Perkins Gilman in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, where the walls are not blank but covered with patterns of
‘florid arabesque’, which both demand and resist interpretation, as does the city (see Chapter 1). 582

The expansion of the interior, meanwhile, appears frequently in the Arcades Project,
including in a passage quoting Adorno’s commentary on Kierkegaard’s Diary of a Seducer (1843),
which describes a living room: ‘When we sit at a distance from the window, we gaze directly into
heaven’s vast horizon ... Cordelia’s environment must have no foreground, but only the infinite
boldness of far horizons’. For Adorno, this is an effect of alienation: ‘The contents of the interior are
mere decoration, alienated from the purposes they represent, deprived of their own use value,
engendered solely by the isolated dwelling-space’. 583 In the white prison cell, alienation is no longer a
feature of the commodified interior, but of the imprisoned subject, who in being prevented from
working (one of Foucault’s definitions of madness) is also deprived of his own ‘use value’, becoming a
‘mere decoration’ or stain on the white surface. 584

Something similar can be observed in Our Mutual Friend, where the police inspector visited
by Mortimer and Eugene works ‘in a whitewashed office, as studiously as if he were in a monastery
on the top of a mountain, and no howling fury of a drunken woman were banging herself against a
cell-door in the back-yard at his elbow’ (OMF1.3.24). Whiteness is again linked to isolation, and to
lonely thoughts, but also to ‘whitewashing’ as erasure, since the inspector ignores the presence of
the drunken woman. As well as disregarding individuals, the inspector has the power of isolating

582 Gilman, p. 15.
583 Arcades, p. 219, p. 220.
584 Foucault describes madness as the ‘absence of an ouevre’, meaning both the absence of work and the
them, symbolised by the ‘bull’s-eye’ (OMF1.3.24) lamp he carries, which is turned on John Harmon by his ‘satellite’ (OMF1.3.24) (one of his officers) when Harmon is questioned. Harmon responds by adopting the false identity of Mr Julius Handford, resisting the attempt to pin him down.

White bull’s-eyes also feature in Bleak House, in Mr George’s shooting gallery. This gallery, in the region of the Haymarket and Leicester Square, is reached by ‘a long whitewashed passage’ in a building ‘composed of bare walls, floor, roof-rafters, and skylights’; it contains ‘two whitened targets for rifle shooting’.\(^{585}\) When George conceals Gridley in a ‘bare room’ partitioned off from this gallery, Inspector Bucket observes them from a skylight, his gaze operating like the bull’s-eye lamp in Our Mutual Friend, targeting the supposed criminal. Gridley’s face is turned white by this pursuit, becoming ‘colorless’\(^{586}\). Whiteness, in fact, seems to follow George around; he meets Mr Bagnet, an ex-artilleryman, in a whitewashed room which ‘contains nothing superfluous, and has not a visible speck of dirt or dust in it’.\(^{587}\) This military connection reinforces the sense of whiteness as a form of targeting that picks out the subject, hailing him in an Althusserian interpellation. The whitewashed target also signifies bankruptcy, the economic erasure of the subject, in chapter 34, when Phil, engaged in ‘whitening the targets’, suggests Mr George also whitewash himself. George’s protest is a moral one: ‘Do you know what would become of the Bagnets in that case?’; Phil, meanwhile, continues with the ‘allegorical scoops of his brush’, implying that whiteness always defers and transforms meaning.\(^{588}\) Being targeted by whiteness, then, involves both highlighting and erasing, constriction and dilation; it constructs the subject even as it threatens obliteration.

**Carker’s Whiteness**

The final whiteness I want to consider brings together the qualities of concealing and revealing, ornamentation and targeting discussed in this conclusion, adding to them a disturbing sexuality. It is the whiteness of Mr Carker in Dombey and Son. I conclude the thesis with this discussion of Carker,

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\(^{586}\) *Bleak House*, p. 371.

\(^{587}\) *Bleak House*, p. 407.

\(^{588}\) *Bleak House*, p. 496, p. 497, p. 498.
using him as a last instance of one of the key characteristics of invisible architecture: its capacity to act from a place of hiddenness or (more insidiously in Carker’s case) from a position of erasure.

Carker is taken for granted by Dombey, effectively seen as an empty cipher. Yet he is one of the major driving forces of the novel’s narrative, bringing down both of Dombey’s houses from within. It is in this respect that he signifies the structural position of the invisible architectures I have been considering here: the Gothic towers which produce a sudden trauma, the working classes who erupt from the underground, the railway which opens up the unseen parts of the city, the river which exerts a determining influence over the plot of Our Mutual Friend, the influence of capital within the commodity architecture of Zola’s Paris; all are Carker-like in acting from a state of invisibility. Carker is also an appropriate endpoint for this conclusion because whiteness is a fundamental part of his unreadability. It is both a distinction which picks him out against the background of the city and a barrier which prevents him being interpreted, by Dombey at least. It is also a site on which signifiers play, like the skin of Moby Dick, alienating and disturbing Florence and Edith. Reading ambiguous signifiers, as in the hollow down by the flare, or the peculiar language of Aikiy in ‘The Overcoat’, has been a technique of this thesis, so that in this too Carker is an apt endpoint.

A figure of repression, Carker is ‘always closely buttoned up and tightly dressed’ (DS13.183-84), a process aided by the ‘stiff white cravat’ he affects ‘after the example of his principal’ (DS13.183), Mr Dombey; thus simultaneously submitting to Dombey’s authority and intimating a desire to supplant him. In Dombey, the white cravat symbolises respectability, spotlessness and pride, as well as an ideological rejection of all that does not fit with his world view. Most striking, though, are Carker’s ‘two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke’ (DS13.183). The blankness and evenness of these teeth forms a deathlike wall that stands in place of the viscerality of Carker’s body. They hint at the possibility of cutting, castration, or consumption, as when they seem for an instant ‘prone to bite the hand they fawned upon’ (DS26.401), or when Carker approaches Edith ‘more as if he meant to bite her, than to taste
the sweets that linger on her lips’ (DS31.469). They act like a bull’s-eye lamp, being turned on Mrs Skewton ‘like a light’ (DS37.554) when Carker tries to remove her from the room, and holding Rob in a state of fear, as though ‘he had come into the service of some powerful enchanter, and they [the teeth] had been his strongest spells’ (DS42.621). As if to emphasise this whiteness, Carker rides a ‘white-legged horse’ (DS46.671), raising him above the dirt of the street. He has a ‘smooth white hand’ and, like a cat, conceives ‘a natural antipathy to any speck of dust’ (DS22.316). Though smoothness and whiteness are qualities emphasised by Edmund Burke in his concept of beauty, here such signifiers are reversed, becoming the signs of an inscrutable surface that hides a cruel avarice and a desire to conquer women, evident in Carker’s treatment of Alice Brown and his attitude towards Florence and Edith. In his misogyny Carker is a recasting of Quilp from The Old Curiosity Shop, except that his demonic nature is hidden behind a facade of white teeth.

Carker’s most powerful tool is his appearance of neutrality and blankness, allowing him to slip beneath Dombey’s notice, and to control the transactions of the company, described by Morfin as ‘a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue’ (DS53.790). He acts at one point ‘as if there were no more spots upon his soul than on his pure white linen, and his smooth sleek skin’ (DS32.496-97). This is the same pretence which invisible architecture maintains, erasing its own presence. The presence of what is invisible, though, can still be felt throughout the texts considered here, which, as I have argued, explore the ways in which spatial ideologies are produced in and by the city. City spaces might at times seem natural, even smooth and spotless, but they are frequently predicated on a repression of elements which call the city’s order and unity into question. Like Carker, invisible architecture has the power not only to maintain the city but also to unsettle it, pulling it apart from within with the force of what it represses.

589 Fusso, p. 119.
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