The Politics and Poetics of Transgression

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Methuen   London

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position of transcendence. The traces of this labour, of this act of discursive rejection, are marked out by nothing so much as the poet's attempt to found an illusory unity above and beyond the carnival. In each case however, this apparently simple gesture of social superiority and disdain could not be effectively accomplished without revealing the very labour of suppression and sublimation involved. Such a project is constitutive, not contingent.

The ambivalence of the poetic 'I' is thus inscribed in its ineluctable return *in writing* to that very scene from which it persistently declared its absence. Like the scene of seduction, Bartholomew Fair contained a phobic enchantment which, at least in Wordsworth, might well be called traumatic. 'Wo es war soll ich werden' could be the apt description of a poet-subject repulsed by social practices destined to become the very content of the bourgeois unconscious. Indeed, as we shall see below, it is not too much to claim that as the fair and the carnival were scripted as the alien space of undifferentiation, filth and excess, they simultaneously encoded the most powerful linguistic repertoires of the 'Imaginary'.

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The City:
the Sewer, the Gaze and
the Contaminating Touch

In the previous chapter, we looked at the return in writing to the scene of 'blank confusion' from which the author obsessively declared his absence. In the nineteenth century that fear of differences that 'have no law, no meaning, and no end' was articulated above all through the 'body' of the city: through the separations and interpenetrations of the suburb and the slum, of grand buildings and the sewer, of the respectable classes and the lumpenproleteriat (what Marx called 'the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass thrown hither and thither' (Marx 1951, I: 267)). In this chapter, we will move from the theatre, the poem and the scenes of 'authorship', to trace the transcodings of psychic desire, concepts of the body and the structuring of the social formation across the city's topography as this was inscribed in the parliamentary report, the texts of social reform, the hysterical symptom of the psychoanalyst's patient, as well as in the poet's journal and the novel.

It was in the reforming text as much as in the novel that the nineteenth-century city was produced as the locus of fear, disgust and fascination. Chadwick's *Report ... on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), for instance, was an instant best-seller, and more than 10,000 copies were distributed free (Chadwick 18; Finer 1952: 209–10; Hennock 1957: 117). In Chadwick, in Mayhew, in countless Victorian reformers, the slum, the labouring poor, the prostitute, the sewer, were recreated for the bourgeois study and drawing-room

as much as for the urban council chamber. Indeed, the reformers were central in the construction of the urban geography of the bourgeois Imaginary. As the bourgeoisie produced new forms of regulation and prohibition governing their own bodies, they wrote ever more loquaciously of the body of the Other – of the city's 'scum'.

The body of the Other produced contradictory responses. Certainly, it was to be *surveyed*, as Southwell and Wordsworth surveyed the fair, from 'some high window' or superior position. Chadwick insisted that satisfactory regulation depended upon breaking down those architectural barriers which kept the immoral 'secluded from superior inspection and from common observation' (Chadwick 1842: 243). At the same time, new forms of propriety must penetrate and subjugate the recalcitrant body: hence, the insistence upon 'regularity of diet', 'clean or respectable clothes', even *drill-masters* to restrain 'bodily irritability, and thence uncontrollable mental irritability' (Chadwick 1842: 246, 248; 1880: 274). Chadwick argued that calisthenics, 'which to the common eye are expensive and misbefitting luxuries, are in the experience of Sanitary Science, "formatives", necessary to impart mobility to all parts of the frame, to get rid of clumsiness and to augment health and productive force: – the objects of an economical administration' (1880: 275). But even as the bourgeoisie speculated upon new regimes for the body, they obsessively returned to the 'unutterable horrors' of the city, where there were no 'architectural barriers or protections of decency and propriety', to the imaginary place whose empirical existence a Scottish police superintendent asserted was a place where there lived 'a thousand children who have no names whatever, or only nick-names, like dogs' (Chadwick 1842: 124, 131–3).

SLUM AND SEWER

The relation of social division and exclusion to the production of desire emerges with great clarity in the nineteenth-century city. New boundaries between high and low, between aristocrat and rag-picker, were there simultaneously established and transgressed. On the one hand, the slum was separated from the suburb: 'the undrained clay beneath the slums oozed with cesspits and sweated with fever; the gravelly heights of the suburbs were dotted with springs and

5　An advertisement for Hudson's soap, printed in *The Graphic*, 1 August 1891

bloomed with health' (Dyos and Reeder 1973: 370). On the other hand, the streets were a 'mingle-mangle', a hodge-podge', where the costermonger, the businessman, the prostitute, the clerk, the nanny and the crossing-sweeper jostled for place.

Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) is traversed and fractured by contradictory formulations of these relations of high to low. His work begins with a Chapter 'Of races': 'the wanderers and the civilized tribes' (Mayhew 1861-2: I, 1). Mayhew's definition of the nomadic is a demonized version of what Bakhtin later defined as the grotesque. The nomad, Mayhew writes, is distinguished from the civilized

by his repugnance to regular and continuous labour – by his want of providence in laying up store for the future . . . – by his passion for stupefying herbs and roots, and, when possible, for intoxicating fermented liquors . . . – by his love of libidinous dances . . . – by the looseness of his notion as to property – by the absence of chastity among his women, and his disregard of female honour – and lastly, by his vague sense of religion.

(Mayhew 1861-2: I, 2)

Mayhew constructs the nomad in terms of his desires ('passion', 'love', 'pleasure') and in terms of his rejections or ignorance ('repugnance', 'want', 'looseness', 'absence', 'disregard'). In the slum, the bourgeois spectator surveyed and classified *his own antithesis*.

The nomads are improvident: 'like all who make a living as it were by a game of chance, plodding, carefulness, and saving habits cannot be reckoned among their virtues' (Mayhew 1861-2: II, 152). Their habits are 'not domestic': for those who inhabit the markets, streets, beer shops, dancing-rooms and theatres, 'home has few attractions' (1861-2: I, 11). They are indifferent to marriage: '[only] one-tenth – at the outside one-tenth – of the couples living together and carrying on the costermongering trade are married. Of the rights of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' children the costermongers understand nothing, and account it a mere waste of time and money to go through the ceremony of wedlock' (1861-2: I, 20). They are opposed to constituted authority and above all to the police: 'the hatred of a costermonger to a "peeler" is intense, and with their opinion of the police, all the more ignorant unite that of the governing power' (1861-2: I, 20); 'in their continual warfare with

the force, they resemble many savage nations, from the cunning and treachery they use' (1861-2: I, 16). They are ignorant of religion 'not 3 in 100 costermongers had ever been in the interior of a church, or any place of worship, or knew what was meant by Christianity' (1861-2: I, 21), whilst a 9-year-old mud-lark 'did not know what religion was. God was God, he said. He had heard he was good, but he didn't know what good he was to him' (1861-2: II, 156). Above all, the 'nomads' confront the bourgeois observer as a spectacle of filth.

As the nomads transgress all settled boundaries of 'home', they simultaneously map out the area which lies beyond cleanliness. However much Mayhew attempts to separate 'moral wickedness' from 'physical filthiness' (1861-2: II, 394), the very categories of his work (excluding as they do the railway man, the factory worker and the domestic servant) foreground the connections between topography, physical appearance and morality. The emergent proletariat is displaced by the lumpenproletariat whom Marx describes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

Alongside decayed *roués* with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origins, alongside ruined and adventurous off-shoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus*, brothel-keepers, porters, *literati*, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars, – in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass thrown hither and thither, which the French call *la bohème*.

(Marx 1951, I: 267)

Like Mayhew, Marx here concentrates on those who are marginal to the forces of production. And, paradoxically, it is this very group which stimulates his linguistic productivity. Marx ransacks French, Latin and Italian in his attempt to grasp this 'indefinite, disintegrated mass'. Marginal in terms of production, the lumpenproletariat are yet central to the 'Imaginary', the object of disgust and fascination.

Mayhew's *London Labour*, then, covers not *all forms of labour* but those forms which, lying on the margins of the nameable ('dubious', 'indefinite', 'disintegrated'), characteristically embody the carnivalized picturesque. Mayhew fixates upon bone-grubbers, rag-gatherers, 'pure'-finders (collectors of dog shit), sewer-hunters,

mud-larks, dustmen, scavengers, crossing-sweepers, rat-killers, prostitutes, thieves, swindlers, beggars and cheats. And his attempt at social analysis is inseparable from his scopophilia.

The emphasis upon dirt was also central to the discourse which traced the concealed links between slum and suburb, sewage and 'civilization'. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1971), for instance, Engels analysed the planning of a city whereby the 'dirty' was made invisible to the bourgeoisie. (We are particularly indebted to Steven Marcus's essay on Engels (Marcus 1973).) Manchester, he argued, was divided into three circles: an inner ring of commerce, where warehouses and offices were already partially concealed behind the expensive shops of the main thoroughfares; a second ring of working-class housing; and an outer ring of suburbs inhabited by the bourgeoisie. The inner and outer rings were joined by main thoroughfares along which a 'good' class of shops developed so as to service the bourgeoisie on their way to and from work. In the process, the working-class housing 'disappeared' behind a respectable front.

Engels represented the second ring, where the poor lived, in grim detail. In a Salford cow-shed, he found a man 'too old for regular work' who 'earned a living by removing manure and garbage with his handcart. Pools of filth lay close to his shed' (Engels 1971: 75). Off Long Millgate, Engels visits a court where 'the privy is so dirty that the inhabitants can only enter or leave the court if they are prepared to wade through puddles of stale urine and excrement' (Engels 1971: 58). From Ducie Bridge, he observes the River Irke, 'a narrow, coal-black, stinking river full of filth and rubbish' and of 'the liquid and solid discharges' from factories as well as of 'the contents of the adjacent sewers and privies' (Engels 1971: 60–1). (One might compare Dickens's vision of London in *Little Dorrit*: 'Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine river', whilst in 'fifty thousand lairs . . . the inhabitants gasped for air' (Dickens 1857: 29).)

But although Engels and Dickens attempt to analyse the city by tracing the sewer back to the suburb, the representation of filth which traverses their work is unstable, sliding between social, moral and psychic domains. At one level, the mapping of the city in terms of dirt and cleanliness tended to repeat the discourse of colonial anthropology. In 1881, Captain Bourke, a cavalry officer in the US

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Army, observed the 'characteristic dances' of the Zuni Indians in New Mexico. He watched the 'filthy brutes' drinking urine; he heard one dancer relate how they normally 'made it a point of honour to eat the excrement of men and dogs'; finally, when the dance which had taken place indoors was over, he ran from the room which had become 'foul and filthy' from the presence of a hundred Indians (quoted in Greenblatt 1982:1). (Here as elsewhere, we are indebted to Stephen Greenblatt's fine essay, 'Filthy rites' (Greenblatt, 1982).) Ten years later, Bourke published *Scatologic Rites of All Nations* (1891) in which he obsessively dwelled upon the filth of 'savages', contrasting them with Christians and Hebrews who were 'now absolutely free from any suggestion of this filth taint' (quoted in Greenblatt 1982:2). In Bourke's work the division between cleanliness and filth, purity and impurity, is that between Christian and pagan, the civilized and the savage. But the nineteenth-century sanitary reformers mapped out the same division across the city's topography, separating the suburb from the slum, the respectable from the 'nomad' along the same lines. Chadwick, the leading exponent of 'the sanitary idea' in Britain, asked 'how much of rebellion, of moral depravity and of crime has its root in physical disorder and depravity' and he argued that '[the] fever nests and seats of physical depravity are also the seats of moral depravity, disorder, and crime with which the police have most to do' (Chadwick 1874: 274). Chadwick connects slums to sewage, sewage to disease, and disease to moral degradation: 'adverse circumstances' lead to a population which is 'short-lived, improvident, reckless, and intemperate, and with an habitual avidity for sensual gratifications' (Chadwick 1842: 369–70). Like most of the sanitary reformers, Chadwick traces the metonymic associations between filth and disease: and the metonymic associations (between the poor and animals, between the slum-dweller and sewage) are read at first as the signs of an imposed social condition for which the State is responsible. But the metonymic associations (which trace the *social* articulation of 'depravity') are constantly elided with and displaced by a metaphoric language in which filth stands in for the slum-dweller: the poor *are* pigs.

In Mayhew, we can observe the same sliding between the metonymic and the metaphoric. At the beginning of Mayhew's work, the street-people are remarked upon for their 'greater development of

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the animal than of the intellectual or moral nature of man . . . for their high cheeks and protruding jaws' (Mayhew 1961: I, 2–3), and this vision of innate animality permeates even a sympathetic account of an old woman who had been a 'pure-finder'. She lies like 'a bundle of rags and filth stretched on some dirty straw' in a place 'redolent of filth and pregnant with pestilential diseases, and whither all the outcasts of the metropolitan population seem to be drawn' (1861–2: II, 144). That last phrase is troubling, implying that the 'filthy' are *drawn* to the filth (as pigs were said to be drawn to the mire). To the extent that the poor are constituted in terms of bestiality, the bourgeois subject is positioned as the neutral observer of self-willed degradation.

Transgressing the boundaries through which the bourgeois reformers separated dirt from cleanliness, the poor were interpreted as also transgressing the boundaries of the 'civilized' body and the boundaries which separated the human from the animal. Even Engels, despite his desire to demonstrate the culpability of the bourgeoisie for the slums, retains an essentialist category of the sub-human 'nomad': the Irish. Engels, indeed, works within a colonial discourse which had been formed in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century when the Irish had been constructed as a race living 'beyond the pale' (we witnessed Dryden's use of this construction in Chapter 2): they were said to be 'more hurtfull and wilde' than 'wilde Beastes'; they were accused of 'uncleannesse in Apparrell, Diet and Lodging'; they were said to live in a 'foul dunghill' in their 'swinesteads', snatching food 'like beasts out of ditches' (Davies 1612: 162–3, 181; Spenser 1970: 82–3). Engels particularly develops the association between the Irish and 'swinesteads':

the Irishman allows the pig to share his own living quarters. This new, abnormal method of rearing livestock in the large towns is entirely of the Irish origin. . . . The Irishman lives and sleeps with the pig, the children play with the pig, ride on its back, and roll about in the filth with it.

(Engels 1971: 106)

Engels was, in fact, quite wrong: there was nothing specifically Irish about keeping pigs in town, which was a common English practice. But by condensing the 'abnormal' practices of the slum into the figure

of the savage Irishman, Engels attempted to purify the English proletariat. He insisted upon the contingent, metonymic relation between the English poor and filth, whilst simultaneously establishing a fixed and 'natural' metaphoric relation between the Irish and animality.

Once the metaphoric relations were established, they could be reversed. If the Irish were like animals, animals were like the Irish. One of the sewer workers who talked to Mayhew described the sewers (which Irish labourers had helped to build) as full of rats 'fighting and squeaking . . . like a parcel of drunken Irishmen' (quoted in Wright 1960: 155). More generally, the links which associated the poor with animals and disease could be traced backwards; disease itself could be read as a member of the dangerous classes. In 1864, William Farr of the Registrar-General's Office wrote that 'zymotic poisons, as dangerous as mad dogs, are still allowed to be kept in close rooms, in cesspools and in sewers, from which they prowl, in the light of day, and in the darkness of night, with impunity, to destroy mankind' (quoted in Wohl 1983: 88).

However, 'close' and confined the slums were, they were not confined enough. As the orifices of the poor opened to contaminate the purity of bourgeois space (at the turn of the century 44 per cent of poor Glasgow children were defined as 'mouth breathers'), so in the bourgeois imagination the slums opened (particularly at night) to let forth the thief, the murderer, the prostitute and the germs – the 'mad dogs' which could 'destroy mankind' (Wohl 1983: 79). The discursive elision of disease and crime suggested an elision of the means with which to cope with them: like crime, disease could be policed. In 1843, Farr argued that 'the Legislature' should enact 'the removal of known sources of disease, and, if necessary, trench upon the liberty of the subject and the privilege of property, upon the same principle that it arrests and removes murderers' (quoted in Wohl 1983: 144). The notorious Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 allowed special policemen to arrest women, subject them to internal examination and incarcerate them in lock-hospitals if they were suffering from gonorrhoea or syphilis (Walkowitz 1980: 1–2). Justifying police regulations, W. R. Greg claimed that 'the same rule of natural law which justifies the officer in shooting a plague-stricken sufferer who breaks through a *cordon sanitaire* justified him in arresting and confining the syphilitic prostitute who, if not arrested,

would spread infection all around her' (quoted in Walkowitz 1980: 43–4).

In 1901, Charles Masterman published *The Heart of the Empire* in which he described the battle between 'the forces of progress' and 'social diseases'. In his introductory essay on the 'Realities at home', he described how town authorities were 'pushing their activities into the dark places of the earth; slum areas are broken up, sanitary regulations enforced, the policemen and the inspector at every corner' (quoted in Wohl 1983: 330). As the Empire shed light upon the 'darkness' of Africa, so the sanitary regime would shed light upon the city's 'dark places'. The connection between sanitation, light and policing can be seen in a Hudson's soap advertisement of the 1890s. In the picture, a policeman stands in the night holding up his lantern to illuminate a poster of Hudson's 'extract of soap'. At the top of the poster 'PUBLIC HEALTH' is written, and underneath: 'Dirt harbours Germs of Disease'. But the 'source of Danger' will be removed by using 'Hudson's' (in huge letters, occupying the centre of the poster). The bottom half of the poster is given over to the miraculous powers of Hudson's and concludes: 'Home, Sweet Home! The Sweetest, Healthiest Homes are those where HUDSON'S EXTRACT OF SOAP is in Daily use' (Wohl 1983: 71). The policeman and soap are analogous: they penetrate the dark, public realm with its disease and danger so as to secure the domestic realm ('Sweet Home') from contamination. The police and soap, then, were the antithesis of the crime and disease which supposedly lurked in the slums, prowling out at night to the suburbs; they were the agents of discipline, surveillance, purity.

The discipline of policing and sanitation depended in turn upon a transformation of the senses. As Foucault has argued, nineteenth-century policing found its privileged form in Bentham's Panopticon, which ensured the 'permanent visibility' of the inmate (Foucault 1979: 201). The gaze is structured in the Panopticon so that 'in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen' (Foucault 1979: 202). Throughout the nineteenth century, the 'invisibility' of the poor was a source of fear. In Britain, the Select Committee of 1838 noted that there were whole areas of London through which 'no great thoroughfare passed' and, as a consequence, 'a dense population of the lowest classes of persons' were 'entirely secluded from the

observation and influence of better educated neighbours' (quoted in Stedman Jones 1971: 166). The 'labouring' and 'dangerous' classes would be transformed, it was implied, once they became visible. On the one hand, there would be surveillance by *policing*; on the other, the inculcation of *politeness* through the benign gaze of the bourgeoisie.

But the bourgeoisie's organization of the gaze was always problematic. If the dominant discourses about the slum were structured by the language of reform, they could not but dwell upon the seductions for which they were the supposed cure. It was, perhaps, as a remedy for the ambivalence of the gaze that there was an increased regulation of *touch*. For even if the bourgeoisie could establish the purity of their own gaze, the stare of the urban poor themselves was rarely felt as one of deference and respect. On the contrary, it was more frequently seen as an aggressive and humiliating act of physical contact.

Thus even as the separation of the suburb from the slum established a certain class difference, the development of the city simultaneously threatened the clarity of that segregation. The tram, the railway station, the ice rink, above all the streets themselves, were shockingly promiscuous. And the fear of that promiscuity was encoded above all in terms of the fear of being touched. 'Contagion' and 'contamination' became the tropes through which city life was apprehended. It was impossible for the bourgeoisie to free themselves from the taint of 'the Great Unwashed' (an English expression which emerged in the 1830s). Even money bore their stain. One government official paid Freud in paper florins which had been ironed out at home. 'It was a matter of conscience with him, he explained, not to hand anyone dirty paper florins: for they harboured all sorts of dangerous bacteria and might do some harm to the recipient' (Freud 1909: 77). The capitalist commodity itself permitted, and even encouraged, alarming conjunctions of the élite and the vulgar. In late nineteenth-century Holland, the bourgeois Versehoors would clandestinely burn the packages which *Jürgens Solo Margerine* came in, so that the neighbours would not discover them in the garbage can (Wouters 1979: 10).

If the vulgar commodity could contaminate the home, the sorties of the home into the street were even more dangerous. In her book on good manners (*Goede Manieren*), Mrs Van Zutphen van Dedem

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devoted a whole chapter to the 'act of avoiding and excluding'. She listed places to be avoided which included slums, local trains and streetcars, third-class pubs, cheap seats at movie theatres, and crowds or celebrations in the streets (Wouters 1979: 11). But since the promiscuity of public space was unavoidable, one must make all the greater effort not to *touch* any 'undesirable'. The 'more refined person' was to avoid even

> the slightest contact, so far as possible, with the bodies and garments of other people, in the knowledge that, even greater than the hygienic danger of contamination, there is always the danger of contact with the spiritually inferior and the repugnant who at any moment can appear in our immediate vicinity, especially in the densely populated centres of the cities, like germs in an unhealthy body.
>
> (Quoted in Wouters 1979:11)

The 'healthy' body is *refined*, uncontaminated by the 'germs' of the 'spiritually inferior', yet it is constantly assailed by them.

The gaze/the touch: desire/contamination. These contradictory concepts underlie the symbolic significance of the *balcony* in nineteenth-century literature and painting. From the balcony, one could gaze, but not be touched. The gentleman farmer who presided over a harvest feast would commonly arrange the table so that he could sit at its head *inside the house*, distributing hospitality through an open window or door. Similarly, the bourgeoisie on their balconies could both participate in the banquet of the streets and yet remain separated.

The flâneur, on the contrary, appalled by the 'horror of one's home', sought out the urban carnival. 'Even when he flees from town', wrote Baudelaire, 'he is still in search of the mob' (Baudelaire 1983:71). Yet when he mingles with the crowd, he does not feel one of them. Indeed, Baudelaire sneered at George Sand's 'love for the working classes', and argued that 'it is indeed a proof of the degradation of the men of this century that several have been capable of falling in love with this latrine' (Baudelaire 1983: 67). Preferring 'harlots to Society women', Baudelaire nevertheless talked of 'contaminated' women and wrote obsessively of 'Hygiene Projects', 'Hygiene Morality'. 'Hygiene. Conduct. Morality' (Baudelaire 1983: 70, 96–102). He tried to abstain from 'all stimulants' by

obeying 'the strictest principles of sobriety', yet his sobriety at home was the spur to ever greater excesses in the city. The silenced desires of the bourgeois citizen ('A summary of wisdom: Toilet/Prayer/Work' (Baudelaire 1983: 99)) found their loquacious expression through the topography of Paris.

Within this social and psychic economy, a key figure was the prostitute. 'There is, indeed, no exalted pleasure which cannot be related to prostitution', wrote Baudelaire (1983: 21). It was above all around the figure of the prostitute that the gaze and touch, the desires and contaminations, of the bourgeois male were articulated. From the perspective of the righteous patriarch, every young man was 'meeting with, and being accosted by, women of the street at every step':

> His path is beset on the right hand and on the left, so that he is . . . exposed to temptation from boyhood to mature age, his life is one continued struggle against it.
>
> (Quoted in Walkowitz 1980: 34)

And the 'contamination' of the prostitute seeped into the respectable home. In 1857, a writer in the *Lancet* complained that

> The typical Pater-familias, living in a grand house near the park, sees his son allured into debauchery, dares not walk with his daughters through the streets after nightfall, and is disturbed in his night-slumbers by the drunken screams and foul oaths of prostitutes reeling home with daylight. If he look from his window he sees the pavement — his pavement — occupied by the flaunting daughters of sin, whose loud, ribald talk forces him to keep his casement closed.
>
> (Quoted in Trudgill 1973: 694)

In the 1850s, the fears of the 'respectable' increasingly concentrated upon 'the great social evil', prostitution. But through the discourse on prostitution they encoded their own fascinated preoccupation with the carnival of the night, a landscape of darkness, drunkenness, noise and obscenity.

This is not, of course, to deny the *regulatory* aspect of the construction of prostitution as 'the great social evil'. Following the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s, there was undoubtedly an increased categorization and surveillance of the 'unrespectable'

poor. A new disciplinary regime could be inscribed upon the bodies of prostitutes once they had been classified and confined. In 1873, Inspector Slogget recorded that the women in the Royal Albert Hospital in Southampton were 'clad alike in blue serge dresses, their hair neatly draped and wearing muslin caps' and seemed 'rather like a number of respectable young women in domestic service than registered prostitutes'. And William Acton claimed that the women in Aldershot Lock Hospital were 'most respectful; there was no noise, no bad language, no sullenness, no levity' (quoted in Walkowitz 1980: 223). (Undoubtedly, these were idealized accounts of 'reformation'. In Portsmouth, women in the lock-hospital rioted and smashed windows, and one commentator complained that they were given to 'insane frenzy', 'singing, dancing, swearing, or destroying the blankets and rugs given them to sleep in' (quoted in Walkowitz 1980: 216, 224).)

The 'prostitute', though, was just the privileged category in a metonymic chain of contagion which led back to the culture of the working classes. The social-purity crusade of Ellice Hopkins in Plymouth aimed not only at inculcating new standards in young men but also at establishing legal and institutional programmes to combat working-class 'immorality'. During the attempt to suppress Plymouth's Fancy Fair in 1886, Sergeant-Major Young claimed that numbers of young girls 'were being ruined in that place every week, and afterwards bringing contamination into the homes of the well-to-do as nurse girls, and servants' (Walkowitz 1980: 242, 244). When a girl disappeared at the fair, a migratory fiddler, Henry Greenslade, was prosecuted, but the trial was almost entirely devoted to 'the immoral influence of the fair' which, it was claimed, had destroyed the girl's character. Purity crusaders set up the Girls' Evening Home Movement (which emphasized reading, music, and cooking lessons) in opposition to the 'aimless street saunters' of working girls who could too easily stray 'to such places as the fancy fair' (Walkowitz 1980: 244). Similarly, Trinity Fair in Southampton was limited to one day whilst the Above-Bar Fair was abolished because of its 'moral delinquencies' and 'customary origins' (Walkowitz 1980: 245). Like the prostitute, the fair was conceptualized as the breeding ground of physical and spiritual germs which, through the mediation of servants, would bring 'contamination into the homes of the well-to-do'.

It is surely no coincidence, though, that the zeal for reform was so often accompanied by a prolonged, fascinated gaze from the bourgeoisie. In the 1830s, for instance, the plans to construct 'great thoroughfares', by means of which the 'civilized' would, by their mere visibility, improve the 'normally degraded', coincided with a flood of books which titillated the middle-class reader with tales of a hardened, semi-criminal race of outlaws, safe from public interference within ancient citadels of crime and vice' (Stedman Jones 1971: 180). Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1812), for instance, was avidly consumed both as a book and as a play in the 1820s and 1830s. In the book, Tom and Jerry find 'life' (i.e. drinking, dancing, swearing) in the East End of London, where 'lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, etc., were all *jigging together*'. It was common during this period for young bloods, sometimes protected by detectives, to visit Ratcliffe Highway ('a Babel of Blasphemy') to gaze at the sailors and prostitutes (Keating 1973: 587–8). Similarly in the 1880s, a time of crisis for the poor and of renewed moral panic amongst the bourgeoisie, there was 'an epidemic of slumming' (Stedman Jones 1971: 285). And again, there was a flood of writing *about* the slums which could be consumed within the safe confines of the home. Writing, then, made the grotesque *visible* whilst keeping it at an *untouchable* distance. The city however still continued to invade the privatized body and household of the bourgeoisie as *smell*. It was, primarily, the sense of smell which engaged social reformers, since smell, whilst, like touch, encoding revulsion, had a pervasive and invisible presence difficult to regulate.

Chadwick, the great sanitary reformer of the early nineteenth century, worked in Benthamite circles in the 1820s and from 1830–2 worked closely with Bentham himself (Schoenwald 1973: 676). In 1846, Chadwick wrote: 'all smell is, if it be intense, immediate disease, and eventually we may say that, by depressing the system and making it susceptible to the action of other causes, all smell is disease' (quoted in Schoenwald 1973: 681). Smell was organized above all around *disgust*. George Buchanan, a Medical Officer of Health, attributed to 'the influence of stink' not only 'loss of appetite, nausea' but also 'a general sense of depression or malaise'; another Medical Officer, John Liddle, found the smell of the poor's linen,

even when just washed, 'very offensive' (Wohl 1983: 81, 64). The Great Stink of 1858 only focused more intensively the bourgeoisie's obsessive concern with 'the unmistakeable and most disgusting odour of living miasm' (Wohl 1983: 81).

At one level smell was re-formed as an agent of class differentia-tion. Disgust was inseparable from refinement: whilst it designated the 'depraved' domain of the poor, it simultaneously established the purified domain of the bourgeoisie. The process is similar to that which we have already observed in Mayhew. Depicting the 'nomad', Mayhew was able to construct by back-formation the 'civilized': 'regular and continuous labour', 'providence', 'propery', 'chastity', 'religion' (Mayhew 1861-2: I, 2). Yet the imagined pleasures of the nomadic (including the smells) remained to undermine the 'civilized'. Mayhew's text, like the sanitary reports, testifies to one of the ways by which the nomad and the slum made their way into the bourgeois study and drawing room, to be read as objects of horror, con-tempt, pity, and fascination. Texts which were structured by anti-thetical thinking became gaps in the domestic scene through which contaminating desires leaked.

Like Chadwick, Mayhew was aware of the practical problems of sanitation. The subject of 'London Sewerage and Scavengery' was, he wrote, 'vast', concerning 'the cleansing of the capital city, with its thousands of miles of streets and roads on the surface: and its thousands of miles of sewers and drains under the surface' (Mayhew 1861-2: II, 179). But in describing the functional process of clean-ing, Mayhew articulates the sewers as a symbolic system. Indeed, he repeats one of the dominant tropes of western metaphysics: truth lies hidden behind a veil. But 'truth' is now conceived materially, as excrement. In Les Misérables, in what might be called, without irony, one of the most brilliant explorations of the semantics of the sewer, Victor Hugo wrote that there could be 'no false appearance' in the 'vast confusion' of the 'ditch of truth': '[the] last veil is stripped away. . . . This sincerity of filth pleases us and soothes the spirit' (Hugo 1980: 2, 369). What Dickens called 'the attraction of repul-sion' is developed and analysed in Hugo's text. Here the attraction is constructed as simply the revelation of the bodily functions, hidden by 'the last veil'.

Curiously, Freud's 'Wolf Man' conceptualized reality through the same image of the veil.

The Sewer, the Gaze and the Contaminating Touch

The world, he said, was hidden from him by a veil. . . . The veil was torn, strange to say, in one situation only; and that was at the moment when, as a result of an enema, he passed a motion through his anus. He then felt well again, and for a very short time he saw the world clearly.

(Freud 1918: 340)

The basic constitutive elements of the symbolic system of both 'Wolf Man' and Hugo are the same: the veil, excrement, the 'truth', and pleasure ('he felt well again'). But whereas Freud articulated the psychic formation of that system, Hugo represented its social formation. The sewer, Hugo wrote was

the conscience of the town where all things converge and clash. There is darkness here, but no secrets. . . . Every foulness of civilization, fallen into disuse, sinks into the ditch of truth wherein ends the huge social down-slide, to be swallowed, but to spread. No false appearances, no white-washing, is possible; filth strips off its shirt in utter starkness, all illusions and mirages scattered, nothing left except what is, showing the ugly face of what ends.

(Hugo 1980: II, 369)

The sewer here represents a non plus ultra of naturalist reason, truth itself which, unimaginable 'on the surface', can only subsist 'under the surface':

the spittle of Caiaphas encounters the vomit of Falstaff, the gold piece from the gaming house rattles against the nail from which the suicide hung, a livid foetus is wrapped in the spangles, which last Shrove Tuesday danced at the Opera, a wig which passed judge-ment on men wallows near the decay which was the skirt of Margoton. It is more than fraternity, it is close intimacy.

(Hugo 1980: II, 369)

The melodramatic coercion of extreme opposites into close intimacy here becomes the ultimate truth of the social. For indeed the signs of the sewer could not be confined 'under the surface'. The sewer – the city's 'conscience' – insisted, as Freud said of the hysterical symptom, in 'joining in the conversation'. Hugo imagines a social 'return of the repressed' in terms of the city's topography:

the cloaca at times flowed back into the town, giving Paris a taste

of bile ... The town was angered by the audacity of its filth, and could not accept that its ordure should return.

(Hugo 1980: II, 371)

Hugo, though, was writing about a past when 'the sewerage was opposed to any discipline' and in its 'confusion of cellars' mirrored the 'confusion of tongues': the sewer had been 'the labyrinth below Babel'. But at the moment when Hugo wrote, the sewers had been cleaned up:

Today the sewer is clean, cold, straight, and correct, almost achieving that ideal which the English convey by the word 'respectable'.

(Hugo 1980: II, 375)

Before the cholera outbreaks of the 1830s, the 'excremental crypt' had asserted itself by flooding, and through it had entered 'crime, intelligence, social protest, liberty of conscience, thought and theft, everything that human laws pursue' (Hugo 1980: II, 368). But the sewer had been transformed:

The sewer today has a certain official aspect ... Words referring to it in administrative language are lofty and dignified. What was once called a sluice is now a gallery, and a hole has become a clearing.

(Hugo 1980: II, 376)

As the sewer was more rigorously segregated from the city above, it was linguistically reformed, absorbed into the discourse of respectability. 'A good sewer', Ruskin declared, was a 'far nobler and a far holier thing ... than the most admired Madonna ever printed' (quoted in Wohl 1984: 101). The nobility of the Victorian sewer was nowhere more dramatically confirmed than in the opening ceremonies of Bazalgette's intercepting sewers, south and north of the Thames, which were attended by the Prince of Wales, Prince Edeward of Saxe-Weimar, the Lord Mayor, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York (Wohl 1983: 107). Yet paradoxically the sewer's improved status depended upon its invisibility. In 1865, the *Illustrated Times* depicted 'The Prince of Wales starting up the main-drainage works at Crossness': the pumping station is portrayed as a striking architectural monument and in the foreground of the picture a police sergeant holds a large flag. The

sewer was becoming acceptable because it was locked and patrolled to prevent contamination, 'the keyhole and the bolt securely in place', as Hugo wrote, with added protection from 'one of those prison locks' (Hugo 1980: II, 394). The only remaining trace of the sewer was 'a vaguely suspect odour, like Tartuffe after confession' (Hugo 1980: II, 376).

The sewer, however, like all the 'low and grotesque' systems we have here examined, could not entirely be closed off from above. Passing between the sewer ('the conscience of the town' which was now blocked off) and the city (with its 'noble buildings' (Hugo 1980: II, 367)) were the rats: 'and here, in the foetid darkness, the rat is to be found, apparently the sole product of Paris's labour' (Hugo 1980: II, 368). Indeed, Hugo claimed that despite the rebuilding of the sewers the 'immemorial rodent population' was 'more numerous than ever' (Hugo 1980: II, 376). Rats had, of course, been the objects of hatred before the nineteenth century (Zinsser 1985). But just as the meaning of the grotesque body was transformed by its diacritical relation to the emergent notion of the bourgeois body, so the symbolic meaning of the rat was refashioned in relation to the sanitary and medical developments of the nineteenth century. As the connections between physical and moral hygiene were developed and redeployed, there was a new attention to the purveyors of physical and moral 'dirt'. The rat was no longer primarily an economic liability (as the spoiler of grain, for instance): it was the object of fear and loathing, a threat to civilized life. Hence, the stories which Mayhew recorded of sewer rats attacking men 'with such fury that the people have escaped from them with difficulty' (1861-2: II, 151).

The rat, then, furtively emerged from the city's underground conscience as the demonized Other. But as it transgressed the boundaries that separated the city from the sewer, above from below, it was a source of fascination as well as horror. In one of Freud's case studies, Frau Emmy von N. spoke of 'a case of white rats' whilst '[she] clenched and unclenched her hand several times. "Keep still! – Don't say anything! – Don't touch me! – Suppose a creature like that was in the bed!" (She shuddered.) "Only think when it's unpacked! There's a dead rat in among them – one that's been gn-aw-aw-ed at!"' (Freud 1893: 107). It is true that the rat was only one of various animals about which Frau Emmy hallucinated,

but her particular fascination with rats is suggested by her 'extreme horror' at the story of Bishop Hatto who was supposedly eaten by them (Freud 1893: 131). (The story implies a dramatic contrast of high and low: the bishop, who preaches of a transcendent heaven, is destroyed by rats, which live in a physical 'hell').

Elsewhere Freud named one of his patients after the rat, and his case permits us to analyse 'the attraction of repulsion' in greater detail. Freud called his patient the 'Rat Man' because of his 'great obsessive fear' which was triggered by a story told him by an army officer about the punishment of a criminal in the East:
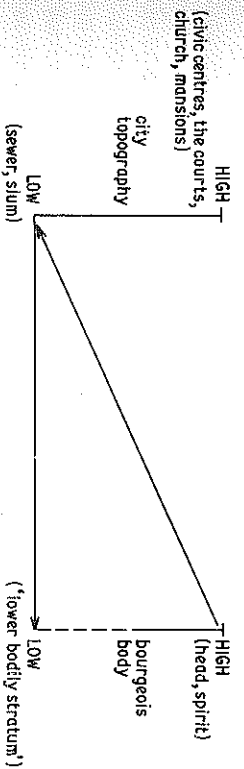
'a pot was turned upside down on his buttocks ... some *rats* were put into it ... and they ...' [the patient] had again got up, and was showing every sign of horror and resistance – '... bored their way in ...' – Into his anus, I helped him out.

(Freud 1909: 47)

But even as 'Rat Man' recalled this story, Freud observed, 'a very strange, composite expression' on his face, 'one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*' (Freud 1909: 48, Freud's italics). The pleasure was derived, Freud argued, from the 'anal erotism' (Freud 1909: 93) which his patient had repressed: the pleasure reappeared in the form of a negation and with the eroticism represented by the rat which bored into his anus. Thus, a bourgeois 'of irreproachable conduct' (Freud 1909: 40) found his way back down the axis of his body to the censored realm of excremental ambivalence.

Freud, to be sure, analyses the 'rat' as a sliding signifier within the domain of the psyche, but he nevertheless treats the concept of 'rat' as unproblematically *given*, the 'natural' symbol of his patient's repression. But the process of symbolization is in need of social as well as psychic explication. We would argue that, although symbolic systems are never entirely reducible to each other, one cannot analyse the psychic domain without examining the processes of transcoding between the body, topography and the social formation. We can perhaps clarify our argument with the aid of a highly simplified model, taking the symbolic axes of the bourgeois body analogically mapped by the city's topography.

The vertical axis of the bourgeois body is primarily emphasized in the *education* of the child: as s/he grows up/is cleaned up, the lower bodily stratum is regulated or denied, as far as possible, by the

HIGH (civic centres, the courts, church, mansions)

city topography

LOW (sewer, slum)

HIGH (head, spirit)

bourgeois body

LOW ('lower bodily stratum')

The hierarchy of the body transcoded through the hierarchy of the city.

correct posture ('stand up straight', 'don't squat', 'don't kneel on all fours' – the postures of servants and savages), and by the censoring of lower 'bodily' references along with bodily wastes. But whilst the 'low' of the bourgeois body becomes unmentionable, we hear an ever increasing garrulity about the *city's* 'low' – the slum, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the sewer – the 'dirt' which is 'down there'. In other words, the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city, and whilst the bodily low is 'forgotten', the city's low becomes a site of obsessive preoccupation, a preoccupation which is itself intimately conceptualized in terms of discourses of the body. But this means that the obsessional neurosis or hysterical symptom can never be immediately traced back through the psychic domain. To deconstruct the symptomatic language of the bourgeois body it is necessary to reconstruct the mediating topography of the city which always—already inscribes relations of class, gender, and race.

We would argue, then, that 'Rat Man' 'speaks' his body through the topography of the city, a topography which is in turn shaped and controlled by the divisions of the social formation. Body and social formation are inseparable. 'Rats', 'sewage', 'filth' are not transparent signifiers which lead directly back to some primal moment. If they speak the unconscious, it is only through the mediation of the slum. The vertical axis of the body's top and bottom is transcoded through the vertical axis of the city and the sewer and through the horizontal axis of the suburb and the slum or of East End and West End. Furthermore the topography of the city, as we shall argue in Chapter 4, is represented within the bourgeois household itself through the relation of the family to its servants, through the relation of 'upstairs' to 'downstairs'.

Indeed, an analysis of Rat Man's sociolect requires an examination of the relation between the topography of the city and that of the household. As a child, 'Rat Man' crept up his governess's skirt or stared in fascination at Fräulein Lina's abscesses (Freud 1909: 41–2). But to the analysand, such delights can only be thought of as the obsessions of a rat. Ergo, children themselves must be rats (Freud 1909: 97). This enables the patient with one part of his psyche to adopt the position of his father: he must be punished:

The notion of a rat is inseparably bound up with the fact that it has sharp teeth with which it gnaws and bites. But rats cannot be sharp-toothed, greedy and dirty with impunity: they are cruelly persecuted and mercilessly put to death by man, as the patient had often observed with horror.

(Freud 1909: 96)

As an adult 'of irreproachable conduct', he must shun not only rats but also those elements with which he associated them. Hence, his disgust at prostitutes (Freud 1909: 39). Knowing that rats were carriers of dangerous infectious diseases, 'he could . . . employ them as symbols of his dread . . . of *syphilitic infection*' (Freud 1909: 94, Freud's italics). And since the penis was itself a carrier of syphilis, 'he could consider the rat as a male organ of sex' (Freud 1909: 94).

But if the symbolization of rats positioned 'Rat Man' with his father as the censor of his own childhood pleasure, it also determined his phantasies of rebelling. When visiting his father's grave, he saw what he took to be a rat (Freud believed that it was really a weasel) and he imagined that it 'had actually come out of his father's grave, and had just been having a meal off his corpse' (Freud 1909: 96). He associated the punishment in which a rat bored its way up the criminal's anus both with his father and with the woman whom he was thinking of marrying (Freud 1909: 48). The German word for 'to marry' ('heiraten') was associated both with '*Ratten*' (rats) and with '*Raten*' (instalments): 'so many florins, so many rats', 'Rat Man' had told Freud. So in his fantasy, the middle-class fiancée was elided with the rat and the prostitute, the sewer and the slum. The rat then was a phobic mediator between high and low, a kind of debased coinage in the symbolic exchange underpinning the economy of the body. The symbolic figure of the rat overran not only the boundaries between city and sewer: it gnawed away at the

distinctions which separated patriarch from child, bourgeois beloved from prostitute, mother from abscessed maid, the pure from the contaminated.

Just as the rat was one of the dominant signs through which the bourgeoisie imagined the passage between 'the noble buildings' and 'the foetid darkness', so too the pig was to be transvalued. On the one hand, it was conspicuously present in the cities. In the middle of the wealthy suburb of North Kensington lay the Potteries, a seven-acre slum with open sewers, stinking ditches, and a stagnant, poisonous lake. The 1851 census revealed three pigs for every human there; the pigs provided bacon for the surrounding suburb whilst the inhabitants provided the servants, prostitutes, chimney-sweeps, and nightsoil men to 'service' the bourgeois households. Whilst the pig moved up the social scale to the middle-class table, the swill of the suburbs passed down into the slums.

A man 'who had moved in good society' told Mayhew that

[when] a man's lost caste in society, he may as well go the whole hog, bristles and all, and a low lodging house is the entire pig.

(Mayhew 1861–2: I, 255)

Indeed, the pig could appear in more troubling shapes than 'the entire pig' of the lodging house. Mayhew heard a strange tale from the sewer-hunters

of a race of wild hogs inhabiting the sewers in the neighbourhood of Hampstead. The story runs, that a sow in young by some accident got down the sewer through an opening, and, wandering away from the spot, littered and reared her offspring in the drain, feeding on the offal and garbage washed into it continually. Here, it is alleged, the breed multiplied exceedingly, and have become almost as ferocious as they are numerous.

(Mayhew 1861–2: II, 154)

This surreal narrative perfectly embodies the phobic inversion of the carnivalesque icon. It participates in the formation of a 'carnival of the night' which was to trouble the dreams of the bourgeoisie. The pig, reared in the slums, is displaced by an imaginary race of sewer pigs, living in darkness, multiplying like rats, eating garbage, threatening the high with the ferocity of the low.

In the symbolic formation of the city, the pig too, like the rat, could

figure as recalcitrant Other to trouble the fantasy of an independent, separate, 'proper' identity. It would surely be mistaken to see the pig and the rat here as merely the residual signifiers of a pre-capitalist formation. On the contrary, the reformation of the senses *produced*, as a necessary corollary, new thresholds of shame, embarrassment and disgust. And in the nineteenth century, those thresholds were articulated above all through specific *contents* – the slum, the sewer, the nomad, the savage, the rat – which, in turn, remapped the body. It is important to emphasize that this 'manifest content' was no incidental and contingent metaphor in the structuring of the bourgeois Imaginary. It was not a secondary over-coding of some anterior and subjective psychic content. Indeed it participated in the *constitution* of the subject, precisely to the degree that identity is discursively produced from the moment of entry into language by such oppositions and differences as we have explored here.

4

Below Stairs:
the Maid and
the Family Romance

Now let me call back those who introduced me to the city. For although the child, in his solitary games, grows up at closest quarters to the city, he needs and seeks guides to its wider expanses, and the first of these – for a son of wealthy middle-class parents like me – are sure to have been nursemaids. With them I went to the Zoo . . . or, if not to the Zoo, to the Tiergarten.

(Benjamin 1978: 3)

Thus Walter Benjamin begins his *Berlin Chronicle*, an attempt to set out 'the sphere of life – bios – graphically on a map' (Benjamin 1978: 5). And yet the map turns out to trace loss and transgression. In the city, one can 'lose oneself' amidst 'a maze not only of paths but also of tunnels' (Benjamin 1978: 8–9). There, Benjamin explores 'the limits', in a seedy railway hotel. There, he sits at the Romanische Café amongst artists and criminals, waited on by 'a hunchback who on account of his bad reputation enjoyed high esteem' (Benjamin 1978: 23). There, he observes in the Ice Palace 'a prostitute in a very tight-fitting white sailor's suit (Benjamin 1978: 40) about whom he will dream for years to come. And it is in the streets of the city that he feels 'the first stirrings of [his] sexual urge' (Benjamin 1978: 52). He has been sent by his parents to a relative who will escort him to divine celebrations at the synagogue. But between the secure places of home and synagogue lies the lure of the streets where he discovers 'an immense pleasure that filled me with blasphemous indifference towards the service, but exalted the street in which I stood'

Control of the major sites of discourse is fundamental to political change: the endless 'rediscovery' of the carnivalesque within modern literature is but a common trope *within* that particular site of discourse. In saying this we do not intend to minimize the enormous importance such a figure has within the Imaginary and hence within the political unconscious. As we have seen, the carnivalesque was marked out as an intensely powerful semiotic realm precisely because bourgeois culture constructed its self-identity by rejecting it. The 'poetics' of transgression reveals the disgust, fear and desire which inform the dramatic self-representation of that culture through the 'scene of its low Other'. This poetics reveals quite clearly the contradictory *political* construction of bourgeois democracy. For bourgeois democracy emerged with a class which, whilst indeed progressive in its best political aspirations, had encoded in its manners, morals and imaginative writings, in its body, bearing and taste, a subliminal élitism which was constitutive of its historical being. Whatever the radical nature of its 'universal' democratic demand, it had engraved in its subjective identity all the marks by which it felt itself to be a different, distinctive and superior class.

MMB = *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin: His Circle, His Influence.* Papers presented at the International Colloquium, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 7–9 October 1983.

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