

Drifting the street with Dickens – Making an art of becoming mad¹

Peter Gunn ²

I travel in order to get to know my geography.

Note of a madman, c. 1907 (quoted by Walter Benjamin)

At length these flickering sparks would die away, worn out – the last veritable spark of waking life trailed from some late pieman or hot potato man – and London would sink to rest. And then the yearning of the houseless mind would be for any sign of company, any lighted place, any movement...

Dickens, *Night Walks*, 1860

...an author is great because he cannot prevent himself from tracing flows and causing them to circulate, flows that split asunder the catholic and despotic signifier of his work...

Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 1972

The real is beyond the automaton, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs...

Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*

Why write? More to the point, and certainly more to the point tonight, why speak? I don't know about you, but I tend to find that in writing, and particularly in writing psychoanalytically, I do not always know where I am going – I might find this out later, in the course of the writing, but sometimes not even then. As far as speaking is concerned, it is certainly the case that we don't know always know where we're going when we open our mouth. This is especially the case when speaking to a psychoanalyst.

Well, having written this talk and now, tonight, speaking it, I do have some idea about where I'm going. I want to take one or two steps outside the psychoanalyst's consulting room and on to the street. I am doing so in order to ask another question: Why walk?

Posed in this way, in association to the other two, the question seems out of place. We don't ask ourselves why we walk. Of course, we often see walking as utilitarian. We assume that it always has some more or less clearly articulable purpose. Thus, we speak of walking to the top of a mountain or, more mundanely, of walking to the shops. But what if, before any question of purpose, we return to that simple question: Why walk?

Might walking, like writing and speaking, be, first of all, a kind of articulation? Considered in this way, walking would have no clear end in view. Just as with certain kinds of writing and speaking, the end of this walking is, you might say, the journey: the manner of its articulation.

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Earlier this year I spent some days walking or, better, wandering, the streets of central London. I did so partly as a way of preparing for this talk. I suppose that I appeared, to all intents and purposes, no different to any one of the many thousands of tourists who visit that great city every year. My sightseeing persona becomes even harder to disclaim if I admit that, far from my wandering being aimless, I had a mission. My mission, as I understood it, was to in some way, and in some sense, retrace the footsteps of Charles Dickens.

My provisioning for this expedition included a suitable Baedeker: *Walking Dickens' London*, by Lee Jackson.³ This has suggestions for a number of walks, along with detailed commentaries and some maps. I supplemented this with the much more detailed maps contained in *A to Z's Central London Super Scale*.

Of course, no Baedeker can take the place of Dr. Who and his Tardis. It is true that for those of us who are not Time Lords, or not mad, it is impossible to revisit the actual streets of mid-Victorian London. The author of my guidebook is kind enough to point this out:

What this book can never show you is the people: wealthy men in stove-pipe hats and silk suits; the more dandified 'fast' sorts with colourful waistcoats and jewelled tie-pins; poorer men dressed in coarse fustian; well-to-do-women in various sizes of crinoline, according to the year and fashion; working-class girls parading a handful of feathers and ribbons, or a particular kind of bonnet, to compete in style.⁴

My guidebook-author then offers a consolation prize, but one which rather undercuts the value of his book: if we cannot see the people who populate Dickens' novels by walking, we do meet them in our reading of him.

What then does it mean then to be guided in an activity called 'walking Dickens' London?' Certainly, even with all this guidance, I still managed to go astray in all the twisting, irregular lanes and alleyways of present-day London. But perhaps this is, in the end, what a Dickensian walker might aim for – to go astray. After all, as Dickens tells us in a quasi-autobiographical article with that very title, 'Gone Astray', this is purportedly what happened to him as a small boy.

I will come back to this article, but my own limited experience of walking the frenetic and swirling streets of central London does seem to confirm that it can induce a kind of eccentricity. And what if, at the same time as walking London, we imagine that we are also walking Dickens? Against all guidance, I would go so far as to propose that the delirium so induced might be a way of entering into something approaching Dickens' own phantasmagoria.

But why not just read Dickens? My experience here is also limited, but for a different reason. I am less inclined to read the writing which creates Dickens' London, or at least, to reading that part of it which explicitly presents itself as fiction. Yet I think that this is Dickens' real art, his artifice of reality: creating the phantasmagoria which is his own, quite peculiar, London. It is this which gets us in.

Beyond the hordes of eccentric characters one encounters in his novels, what his writing creates is the reality-effect of an encounter with his London, with all the eccentricity of its life. Indeed, in this direction his writing goes so far that we can be engulfed in the pulsating energy of his London. This is an energy which is, finally, not only relentless, but out of

bounds. In particular, the rhythm of this London pays no respect to the familiar routines of everyday life; the life which entrances Dickens is, as he terms it, 'houseless'.

But then, once again, why walk? Dickens' fiction is, I think, only one of the ways in which we can find ourselves drawn into his London. One indication of this for me is that in my reading, limited though it is, the reality-effect of 'houselessness' is demonstrated most clearly not in his *bona fide* fiction but in his reportage. This is, furthermore, a reportage which frequently derives its realism from the concreteness of walking. Just because of the journalistic conceit, the effect is that the reality being reported becomes all the more at odds. But it is in this way that, to take the excerpt from 'Night Walks' which I am using as one of my epigraphs, the decentering energy of Dickens' London is given full flight, and at the very time when most are, or should be, safely tucked-up in bed.

In going to the lengths of actually walking London, was I then wanting to short-cut the process: did I want to be engaged in this articulation of houselessness even more directly? In walking, and despite arming myself with guidebook and map, was I wanting to throw myself into that same seething and pullulating life by which Dickens' himself was, in his walking, in life and in report, led astray?

There was however a second imperative for my walking.

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In my clinical work I have been in contact with a number of people who could be described as being already imbued with Dickens' centrifugal life. Indeed, so imbued are they that going astray has the appearance of also being something like a mission. But for these people this is a mission in which even the imperative seems to have gone astray; it is, we might say, a mission whose imperative comes from an enigmatic, but all-encompassing elsewhere.

Impelled by such a mission, the emissary may have no idea of the end in view. What is often discernible, nevertheless, is an overwhelming imperative to return to some point of origin. If this seems paradoxical, this can go so far that what is arrived at is, in the end, death. That is, what is returned to is a point from which there is no return. Of particular interest, in the present context, are two men for whom such a mission to return seems to require taking to the streets, and especially the streets of their youth.

If however I refer to their youth, I have to admit straight away that I find that any reading of these men to be fundamentally untenable. This is certainly true of any reading which has recourse to historical beginnings. There is one quite practical reason for this. I am not aware that either of these men has produced any writing, certainly none which would constitute some kind of testimony. Furthermore, my knowledge of their speech is quite limited, and largely indirect.

Nor can I have recourse to those indirect accounts in order to construe the undoubtedly wretched pilgrimages of these men in the genre of *Bildungsroman*, that is, as troubled coming-of-age stories in the manner of some of Dickens' fictional heroes. Even to 'read' these men by way of the very sketchy generic narrative which I have so far outlined risks the additional imposition of the 'One-Mission', the Mission which suits all.

I spoke just a minute ago of walking Dickens, and, more specifically, of walking Dickens' London. If I cannot, or will not, read these men, can I walk them? In posing the question in this way I want to stress that I am not saying 'walk *with* them'. I am not so inspired that I see

myself as offering a road to redemption here. But nor do I mean ‘walk with’ in the way that one might speak of walking with Dickens, as if one’s ambulatory effort might somehow revitalise the Victorian shade by that name.

Much as Lacan was driven, both at the beginning and at the end of his career, by ‘schizograpia’, the inspired writing of the schizo,⁵ I found myself propelled by inspired walking. If in walking London I sought to actually enter into, in my own way, the labyrinthine city which Dickens’ fiction creates, part of my inspiration, you might even say, my madness, came also from the fact that this is what my two men seem compelled to do: to actually enter into, even to find a home in, a phantasmagoria of their own making.

Whether in the case of Dickens or these two men, what forced itself upon me was not something which could be ascribed, in any direct way, to the individuals concerned. What forced itself upon me, and what inspired me, was the energy, or, more precisely, the mobilisation of energy. But it was also this which put me at risk, if only because, propelled by this energy, I might cease to be myself; I too risked going round the bend and becoming lost.

But if ‘I’, that is, the ‘I’ of me, of my-self, became lost, this was really what I was aiming for. I was certainly not driven by a compulsion to return home, or, at least, not so far as I was aware of it. If my circuit was guided it was guided by the pursuit of the same houseless reality which Dickens creates in his writing. Inasmuch as it would keep me from going off the rails, in this pursuit any street-map of London, however accurate, would, finally, only be a distraction.

For this very reason however, I think, that my circuit held the possibility of a going round which is also a becoming.⁶ If it bordered on madness, this was a becoming which is also a returning. But, just because of that, this becoming also held the possibility of creating something new.

Speaking of becoming, I also realise that this is also becoming rather abstract. Allow me therefore to go back, back to what, on the face of it at least, seems much more concrete: walking. To start with, and to set the scene, as it were, for my two men, let me say something about my own walking experience, guided as I was by my Dickens, that is, by the reality of Dickens gone astray.

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My starting point was often Charing Cross Railway Station. It was only in preparing this lecture that I learnt that it was in this area, on the north bank of the Thames just off the Strand that, as a 12-year old boy, Dickens toiled in Warren’s blacking factory labelling bottles of boot polish.⁷

According to G. K. Chesterton in what leisure time he had during this period Dickens had, ‘no other resource but drifting, and he drifted over half of London’. Chesterton continues that in his drifting Dickens,

...did not go in for ‘observation,’ a priggish habit: he did not look at Charing Cross to improve his mind or count the lamp-posts in Holborn to practise his arithmetic. But unconsciously he made all these places the scenes of the monstrous drama in his miserable little soul. He walked in darkness under the lamps of Holborn, and was crucified at Charing Cross.... The undying scenes we can all see if we shut our eyes are not the scenes that we have stared at under the directions of guidebooks; the scenes we

see are the scenes at which we did not look at at all... about a sin, or a love-affair, or some childish sorrow.⁸

No doubt Dickens' drifting was a diversion from the deadening monotony of the production line. But it was more than that. This was a subversion of the ready-made itself. His drifting took him away not only from the ready-made of the bottles to which he repetitively applied the label, 'WARREN'S BLACKING', but also from this self-same Dickens, this Dickens already labelled as the 'WARREN'S BLACKING' Dickens.

In his drifting, whether as a boy or as an adult, Dickens entered into the raw, chaotic life of London. According to Chesterton, even as a boy he had the capacity to allow this life to also enter into him, not by way of possession, but by way of what he already possessed, 'his miserable little soul', and the turmoil heaving within it. It was this which enabled his flight into that abysmal life to also be a flight into creativity.

The value of this drifting for Dickens was, it seems to me, that it facilitated flight. In surrendering to these detours Dickens did not so much escape from the deadening routine of the factory as take himself to flight.⁹

In taking flight Dickens could not be directed by a plan, whether as laid down in a guidebook or, alternatively, in some program of enquiry or advancement. His drifting 'went with the flow', as we say, with no aim, or, at least, no conscious aim. In walking, Dickens submitted himself to the flow of images, but only in order to actively 'see' the dramatisations which his mind's eye created. If these were fictions, even hallucinations, they were all the more real in being his.

As a boy newly arrived from Kent, Dickens was immediately drawn to the district known at the time as the Parish of St Giles. The area is located just to the east of the present-day entertainment district known as Soho. It takes its name not from the church but from a leper hospital which was built on the same site in the twelfth century.¹⁰

St Giles included the Rookeries, a quite small but also very densely populated enclave of extreme poverty just to the north of the church. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Rookeries was described as 'the worst sink of iniquity.'¹¹ The whole area was notorious for its poverty and crime. But, as Peter Ackroyd points out, 'even now, vagrants roam its streets and close to the church there is still a centre for the homeless.'¹²

Dickens gives us something like a direct account of his dramatic articulation of life in 'Meditations in Monmouth-street', one of the journalistic 'scenes' in *Sketches by Boz*. In Dickens time Monmouth Street formed the north-western boundary of the Seven Dials, an area not far from the Covent Garden fruit and vegetable market.

The street was, as the narrator of this story describes it, 'the only true and real emporium for second hand wearing apparel'. In the 'scene' the narrator does what my guidebook author says cannot be done. He does what, if we confine ourselves to the terms of well-ordered historical time, is impossible. Walking through this 'burial place of the fashions' he 'sees' these remnant clothes and their owners brought back to life:

We love to walk among these extensive groves of the illustrious dead, and to indulge in the speculations to which they give rise; now fitting a deceased coat, then a pair of trousers, and anon the mortal remains of a gaudy waistcoat, upon some being of our

own conjuring, and endeavouring, from the shape and fashion of the garment itself, to bring its former owner before our mind's eye.¹³

If the 'times' and the fashions have changed, Monmouth Street had remained the same 'true and real emporium' for a century or more. But can the same be said today, that is, today in the 21C? We are at a great remove from the 'men in stove-pipe hats and silk suits'. Not only that, but the street itself, the historical Monmouth Street of the 1830s, has disappeared altogether.¹⁴

But the narrator shows us that what we are met with in this exuberant emporium has an immediacy which takes it beyond mere fancy, and even beyond Dickens' own time. Taking a step or two further on, he comes across a 'cellar-board full of boots and shoes'. Having taken that further step, not only does he bring their dead owners to life in his mind's eye, but he now brings that life into the streets of his present-day London.

Two pairs in particular of these boots and shoes catch the narrator's eye. It seems that what they evoke for him is a meeting which he has observed, just a day or two ago, between two strangers, a market-gardener and a servant-maid. What instils life into these shoes is the curiosity stirred in our narrator by this couple's vaguely libidinous encounter:

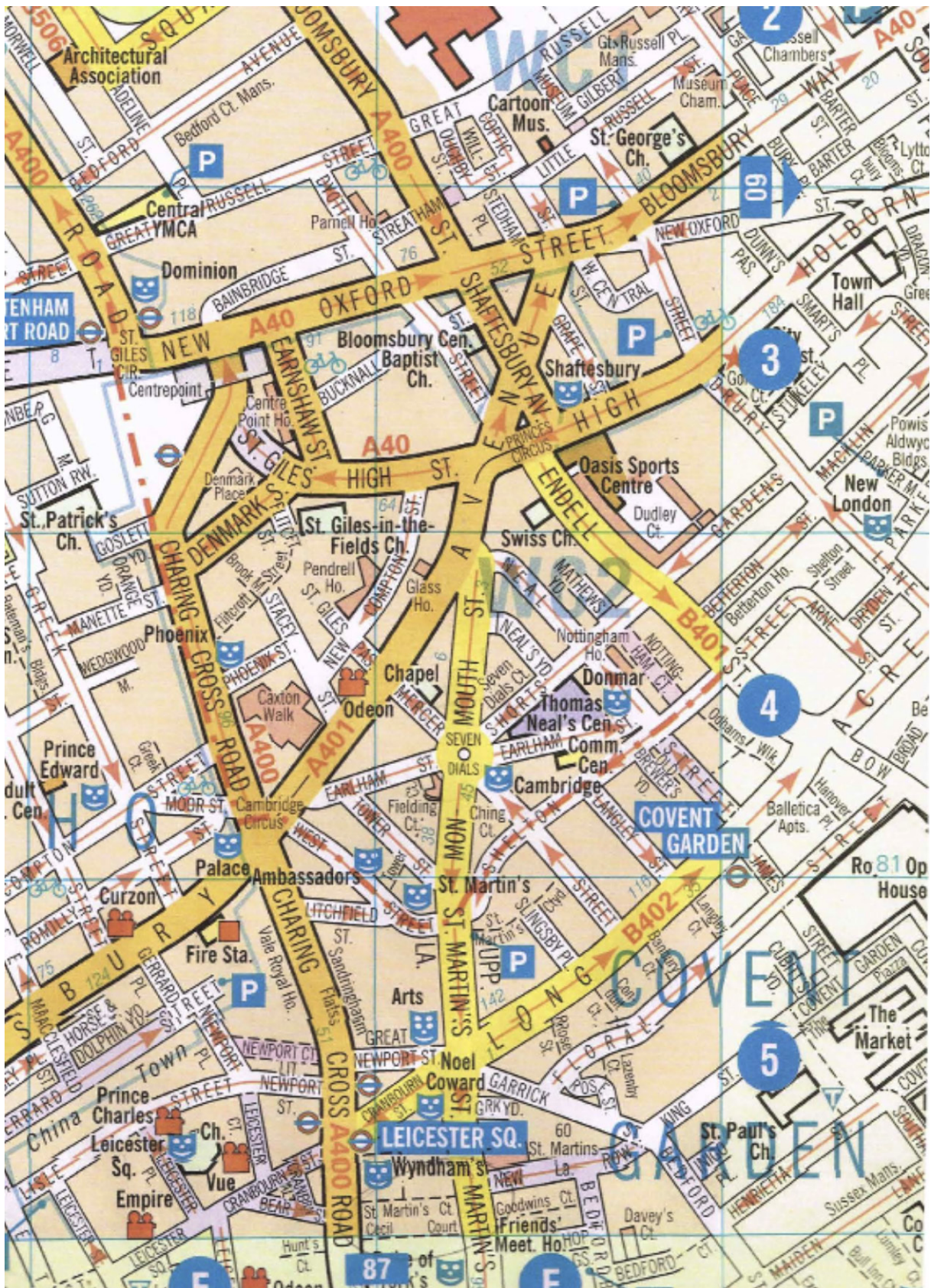
This was the very man after our own heart; we knew all about him; we had seen him coming up to Covent Garden in his green chaise-cart, with the fat tubby little horse, half a thousand times; and even while we cast an affectionate look upon those boots, at that instant, the form of a coquettish servant-maid suddenly sprung into a pair of Denmark satin shoes that stood beside them, and we at once recognised the very girl who accepted his offer of a ride, just on this side of the Hammersmith suspension-bridge, the very last Tuesday morning we rode into town from Richmond.¹⁵

If Dickens is able to have his narrator instil libidinous life into discarded boots and shoes in such a hallucinatory scene, it is because through the soles of his own worn-out shoes this libidinous life had already been able to find a home in that other soul, the one which he possessed all along. Yet such is the immediacy of this life that it goes beyond even Dickens' present-day: it goes to the present-day as such.

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Seven Dials and Surrounding Streets, c. early 19C, map held at the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London (from James G. Hepburn, *A Book of Scattered Leaves: Poetry of Poverty in Broadside Ballads of Nineteenth-Century England*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, 2000, p. 35).



Seven Dials and Surrounding Streets (excerpted from Map 59, A-Z Super Scale London, Edition 4, 2012, Geographers' A-Z Map Company Limited, Sevenoaks)

I would now like to contrast Dickens' extremity of walking with that of my two men, who I will call Neville and Albert. They speak of having lost, or been abandoned by, their souls. But it seems that it is they who are left by the wayside.

Let me begin with Neville. His soul was either destroyed or stolen from him. Neville knows that powerful people have set things up this way. He can see through the *façade* which they have constructed. The problem is that he is left 'walking around poor and lonely on this planet.'

He also speaks of particular figures as being responsible for this, including his family of origin and his ex-girlfriend. They are now enjoying a good life and, indeed, living it up at his expense. This good life is associated with those cities of the world which are considered by many to be the most glamorous and also the most gaudy. For Neville these cities are determined by the alleged predilections of these figures who are close to him: New York and LA, in the case of his family, and London, in the case of his ex-girlfriend.

There is however another city which is prominent in Neville's world: Sydney. This is his hometown: 'I'm a Sydney person,' he says. He grew up there, so he knows it's real. Neville goes back to Sydney at regular intervals, and for extended periods. In the lead up to these tours he speaks of everything being pointless, and of feeling like killing himself.

On these occasions a Cross looms large in his sights, that is, the notorious entertainment district in Sydney which goes by that name. 'I would be better off on the streets of The Cross,' he says. Part of the appeal of Kings Cross (to give the district its semi-official name), might be that it has a medically-supervised injecting centre. This shooting gallery gives him safe, and free, access to his drug of choice, heroin. More importantly however, in walking the streets of The Cross there is always the chance that he will run into someone who can confirm the reality of what has happened to him.

What about Albert? He speaks of his soul having being born into him, as a separate feminine entity, when he was eleven. At the time he was flying to Australia on his own. His parents had divorced some time before and he was being sent back from the UK to Australia to live with his mother.

Albert's soul left him following an incident when later, as a teenager, he sexually assaulted a younger boy. His soul had wanted this for him, but even so Albert felt abandoned. He speaks of wanting to be reunited with his soul. One of the ways in which he seeks to do this is to make himself houseless.

He also speaks of his belief that life is a circle, and that important figures in his life who he had lost would return, if not in this life, then in the next. This includes his 'real' mother, who is not the mother whose body gave birth to him.

In his twenties Albert returned to London, the city of his own birth. During this period he spent a lot of time on the street. On one occasion he attempted to walk across the whole of Greater London, from a suburb in the south to a town some way to the north, a distance of around forty-four kilometres.

Such a walk is perhaps not so remarkable in itself. Dickens himself was famous for his very long walks. On one occasion, when his libidinal interest in the eighteen year-old actress Ellen Ternan was placing an unbearable strain on his domestic situation, he walked from his house in central London to Gad's Hill Place, his country house in Kent, a distance of forty-eight

kilometres. Gad's Hill Place was where Dickens spent time with Ellen and where he wrote *Great Expectations*. And it is in that novel he has his character Pip do a similar walk as a twenty-something, but in the reverse direction.

What makes Albert's walk remarkable is that he took it to a further extremity: he did it naked. Indeed, so extreme was this walk that it may have been a suicide attempt. It seems that life had become too much, and he wanted to expose himself to the elements in order to catch pneumonia.

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I propose that, in common with Dickens, what Albert and Neville are seeking to encounter in walking through their respective vertiginous metropolises are signs of life. In 'Gone Astray' the narrator-Dickens finds himself rivetted by the 'cross of gold' on the dome of St Paul's. It is this same dome which also provides an initial point of orientation for the young Pip when he makes his entry into London in order to pursue his own great expectations.¹⁶ For all three then we could perhaps take The Cross, in its different manifestations, as exemplifying such a sign.

But here I think the similarities end.¹⁷ If Albert and Neville might be said to go astray, it is only in order to fly to The Sign of Life, that being the marker of home, the home of their real soul.

Neville's centripetal point is where it's all happening: The Cross, The Cross of the King. If perambulating his Cross is full-on, for Neville it might nevertheless only be this circling which can provide him with a point of reference for what is, otherwise, a blown-away existence.

Albert has to go further, indeed, to the extremity of the border with death. For Albert, I suggest, we have life as all-together too much. By passing over that border, by returning to the next life, his walking might, paradoxically, be a way of going on to life. This is an Escheresque *mise en abyme*, but a *mise en abyme* which is given some reality by the labyrinth of his London. By negotiating it he would really arrive home; that is, he would arrive at his soul, the soul which, imbued with life as it was, had previously taken flight. Paradoxically, it is only when reunited with the beyond-life of his soul that he can go on in this life.

If then both Albert and Neville are imbued with centrifugal life, this is life imposing itself on them and becoming too much. It drives them to find in the phantasmagoria of the city the life-centering-point which has abandoned them, namely, the soul. Dickens, by contrast takes flight from the sign, in the sense that it is by setting-off from that central orienting point that he is able to produce his own phantasmagoric reality.

The Great Wen (which is how London was referred to in the nineteenth century), presented Dickens with life in its overfullness; it too was life becoming-too-much. But rather than falling into this horrific *mise en abyme*, Dickens walked it. In walking Dickens was able to make this becoming-too-much-life his own, that is, his own becoming-mad. In *becoming-mad* rather than *being* mad Dickens was, furthermore, inspired to create the florid *mise en scènes* which form the centrepieces of both his fiction and his journalism.

For Albert and Neville, walking is an attempt to do with boots something which is of an entirely different order of impossibility to what Dickens does in such scenes. If for Dickens walking was a way of plumbing the depths of Monmouth Street in order to give life to the

boots of the dead, for Albert and Neville walking is a way of trying to pull yourself up, as the saying goes, by your bootstraps. It is a last resort in the attempt to encounter that lost soul which is my own, innermost life. This soul, however, has no existential reality; it is rather a logical necessity. It is the necessary anchoring point for any existential reality, including the very possibility of creating that reality.¹⁸

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At this stage I imagine that some of you might be thinking of getting home, and being safely tucked up in bed. So, let me end with some remarks about the end.

I am reminded that in the last essay which he published, just before his own death, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze says of Dickens that ‘no one has described [better] what *a* life is...’¹⁹ In making this assessment Deleuze places the stress on the indefinite article ‘a’: what Dickens describes better than anyone is not any biographical life, but *a* life, that is, life itself in the here and now, and life inasmuch as it inhabits, but remains separate from, the individual. Apart from the letter ‘a’, which for some of you might recall Lacan’s *objet a*, this life also has a much older designation, although it is not one which Deleuze himself uses: the soul.

Deleuze takes a scene in *Our Mutual Friend* as exemplifying Dickens’ description of this life. Central to it is the character Riderhood, described by one commentator as a ‘venal, manipulative purveyor of corpses.’²⁰ He obtains these corpses by fishing them out of the river Thames. In the scene, Riderhood himself has been fished out of the Thames. This follows an accident in which his boat has been run down by a steamer in the ever-present London fog.

Riderhood is not quite dead however, and, notwithstanding his disrepute, all the onlookers, positioned as they themselves now are in this borderland between life and death, are galvanised to do their utmost. This is how Dickens tells it:

All the best means are at once in action, and everyone present lends a hand, and a heart and a soul. No one has the least regard for the man; with them all, he has been the subject of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it *is* life, and they are living and must die.²¹

Riderhood is brought back to life, but for Dickens, or, at least, Dickens as Deleuze reads him, what is manifested in that earlier, liminal moment is beyond that life. Here is how Deleuze describes the scene:

Everybody bustles about to save him, to the point where, in his deepest coma, this wicked man senses something soft and sweet penetrating him. But to the degree that he comes back to life, his saviors turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death.²²

This spark given off in the proximity of death is *a* life as such, a singular, and most animate life. It is only this life, inasmuch as, in that moment, it plays with death. But this spark of life also shows us something quite tragic about the human condition. This is life manifestly separable from the individual, in this case Riderhood. It is only in his body, for the time being, that this life happens to live.

This is what Deleuze wants to emphasise: the haecceity, the ‘thisness’, the singularity, of this event of life:

The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens... It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of A immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil...

This singular, playful, and, therefore, creative, spark of life, comes on the very verge of absolute exhaustion, whether that exhaustion is arrived at in the course of living, or waking, or walking, or writing, or perhaps even in the course of speaking. And it is, I think, this same spark to which Dickens refers in the excerpt from *Night Walks* which is one of my epigraphs:

At length these flickering sparks would die away, worn out – the last veritable spark of waking life trailed from some late pie-man or hot potato man – and London would sink to rest. And then the yearning of the houseless mind would be for any sign of company, any lighted place, any movement...²³

If this dereliction is the tragedy of the human condition, for Albert and Neville there is, I suspect, a much greater tragedy: they have no housing in the first place. In this situation there is no play, and certainly no playing with death. Lacking symbolic covering, they are *played*. For this reason also the pure, and absolute, certainty of death might, in the end, become the only safe harbour to aim for.

For the rest of us, and, in particular, for those few of us who are foolish enough to set off on the journey of a psychoanalysis, it is, I suggest, in straying from home to this extremity of houselessness that such *a*, singular, life might be encountered. Having arrived, exhausted,²⁴ at that point, it is then up to each one to make what we can of that spark, while we can.

¹ Public Lecture presented as part of the Freudian School of Melbourne public lectures series, 2013.

² Analyst Member of the School. The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

³ Jackson, Lee. *Walking Dickens' London*, Botley: Shire, 2012, 7.

⁴ Jackson, Lee. *Walking Dickens' London*, Botley: Shire, 2012, 7.

⁵ Lacan, Jacques. “Ecrits Inspirés: Schizographie” (1931). *Annales médico-psychologiques* 2: 508 – 522. See also Lacan’s reference to this in the Seminar *Le Sinthome*, lesson of 10th February, 1976 when he asks, ‘what was it that inspired [Joyce’s] writing?’

⁶ In addition to Freud and Lacan, this exploration of the encounter between Dickens and madness has been influenced theoretically by the work of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. However, apart from the discussion of ‘life’ at the end, in the main text I confine myself to allusions to Deleuze’s terms of art. ‘Becoming’ is a term which Deleuze takes from Nietzsche. Very briefly, it refers to the processual yet repetitive nature of being. Always in becoming, being is driven by the necessity of constantly taking the risk of reaffirming chance, as when Zarathustra plays dice with the Gods. (See, e.g., Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, London: Continuum, 2006, 23 ff.)

⁷ On this episode in Dickens’ childhood see, amongst many other accounts, Robert Douglas-Pankhurst, *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist*, Cambridge: Belknap Press, Harvard University, 2011: 30 – 31.

⁸ Chesterton, Gilbert. K. *Charles Dickens*, London: Methuen, 1906, 41. In my reading of Chesterton I am aware that I am going well out on a limb.

⁹ I allude here to Deleuze’s term ‘line of flight’. For Deleuze flight (*fuite* [leakage]) is active rather than reactive; it is that rupture or leakage which is the concomitant of becoming and creativity. To flee

‘...is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than flight.... It is also to put to flight—not necessarily others, but to put a system to flight as one bursts a tube.... To fly is to trace a line, lines, a whole cartography – see Deleuze, Gilles & Parnet, Claire. ‘On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature’. *Dialogues II*, London: Continuum, 2006, 27. Flight is “...a sort of delirium. To be delirious is exactly to go off the rails (as in *déconner* [to talk crap; to be off one’s rocker], etc). There is something demoniacal or demonic in a line of flight’, *Dialogues II*, London: Continuum, 2006, 30.

¹⁰ Beames, Thomas. *The Rookeries of London: Past, Present, and Prospective* (1852). London: Bosworth: 19, and also, <http://www.thephoenixgarden.org/history/the-leper-hospital-1117-1539/>.

¹¹ Beames, Thomas. *The Rookeries of London: Past, Present, and Prospective* (1852). London: Bosworth: 25. According to Peter Ackroyd the Rookeries was “an island of tenements roughly bounded by St Giles High Street, Bainbridge Street and Dyott Street.” – Ackroyd, Peter. *London: The Biography*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2000, 137.

¹² Ackroyd, Peter. *London: The Biography*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2000, 131.

¹³ Dickens, Charles. ‘Meditations in Monmouth-street’. *Sketches by Boz*. London: Penguin, 1995, 98.

¹⁴ In 1845 the old Monmouth Street was renamed Dudley Street and, in the 1880s, as part of a slum clearance operation, it was incorporated into the new Shaftesbury Avenue – see Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaftesbury_Avenue and Hepburn, James. *A Book of Scattered Leaves: Poetry of Poverty in Broadside Ballads of Nineteenth-Century England*. Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2000, 36). The present-day Monmouth Street runs off this same section of Shaftesbury Avenue to form one of the hands of the Seven Dials. See the two maps of the area reproduced below, the first from the early 19C, the second from the present-day.

¹⁵ Dickens, Charles. ‘Meditations in Monmouth-street’. *Sketches by Boz*. London: Penguin, 1995, 102.

¹⁶ Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. London: Penguin, 2003, 165.

¹⁷ Attempting to say, in relation to each of these men, and by contrast with Dickens, what going astray might mean, is inevitably to confine each of their madnesses within the straitjacket of my own Dickensian imperative. It is only in this context, outside the clinic, that I feel I can take the liberty of making these remarks. I do so for the purpose of trying to give an account of what it is, which impels my madness, not theirs.

¹⁸ In putting forward these propositions I am of course drawing implicitly on the work of Freud and Lacan. I have in mind, in particular, what Lacan says in ‘The Third’ about the pure functionality of the S_1 as at once orienting and productive with respect to the chaosmos of the real: “My S_1 only has the meaning of punctuating this whatever [this not-all of the real] – this signifier – letter that I write S_1 – signifier which only writes itself from making it without any effect of meaning. The homologue, all in all, of what I have just told you about the *objet a*”.

¹⁹ Deleuze, Gilles. ‘Immanence: A Life’. *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. New York: Zone, 2005, 28.

²⁰ Colebrook, Claire. *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life*. London: Continuum, 2010, 136.

²¹ Dickens, Charles. *Our Mutual Friend*. London: Penguin, 1997, 439.

²² Deleuze, ‘Immanence: A Life’. *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. New York. Zone, 2005, 28.

²³ Dickens, Charles. *Night Walks*. London: Penguin, 1977, 74.

²⁴ For Deleuze exhaustion refers not just to physical exhaustion but to the exhaustion of possibility itself; exhaustion is exhaustive. Nevertheless, as with flight, exhaustion is not passive, albeit that in exhaustion, ‘one remains active, but for nothing’ – Deleuze, Gilles. ‘The Exhausted’. *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 153). In taking action to the limit of the possible, exhaustion borders on the impossible. Deleuze indicates this with a quote from Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* which I have slightly extended: ‘That the impossible should be asked of me, good, what else could be asked of me. But the absurd!’ – Beckett, Samuel. ‘The Unnamable’. *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. New York: Everyman’s Library, 1997, 385.