

Plumbing the Depths, Scouring the Surface: Henry Mayhew's Scavenger Hermeneutics

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THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, HAYDEN WHITE asserted in 1987, “while undeniably belonging to history, does not yet—for us—belong to ‘the past.’”¹ While history, defined by White as linear and progressive, can declare the Victorian period over, such a narrative cannot account for the persistence of the “nineteenth-century chronotope” into White’s own moment, principally in the form of Marxist, psychoanalytic, and structuralist forms of analysis. Like any unasked-for inheritance worth its salt, White reminds us, these modes of interpretation simultaneously inform, impel, and impair our understanding of both the present and of history itself; sites of deep ambivalence, they are at one moment the burden of tradition, only to be renewed in the next moment as a radical means of casting off the chains of the past. “‘The ‘nineteenth century’ is still alive in our own age,” White concludes, “in the form of residues of institutional practices and dogmas that are causes of as well as impediments to the resolutions of problems unique to our age, the very possibility of which was unimaginable to the framers of the great analytical systems . . . on which we still depend for the conceptualization of them.”² The century’s corpse thus outleant, we remain haunted by the school of suspicion, which has at any rate provided the present with its finest definitions of haunting.

But is the nineteenth-century chronotope *still* not over? Since White’s remarks nearly thirty years ago, there has been no shortage of calls to ditch the baggage of Victorian thought and get on with things in the new millennium, though to my knowledge few attempts to jettison or surpass Freudian and Marxist hermeneutics have followed White in understanding their challenge to be directed at nineteenth-century historiography in particular.³ To the contrary, recent accounts of the exhaustion of “depth” models in producing innovative cultural analysis and the subsequent call for descriptive attention to textual “surfaces” suggest, unconvincingly, that surfaces and depths simply represent interpretive options for the contemporary critic, rather than grasping them as a dialectical structure whose historically fused oppositions continue

to saturate the functions of criticism and to inform the ways in which the social world appears to us.⁴ Even Bruno Latour's more robust intellectual historical account of why we could never have been modern calls less for the reexamination of the critical assumptions of what he calls "the second Enlightenment, that of the nineteenth century," than for moving beyond them.⁵ There is an unacknowledged historicism at work in such accounts, in which the nineteenth century first is reduced to a unitary account of its most influential modes of self-interpretation, and then, as a consequence, becomes further reducible to a set of critical approaches that can allegedly be chosen or discarded without reference to history.⁶ White's thesis runs askew of such accounts, in which history plays second fiddle to the antsy search for a method; for him, to perceive the exhaustion of these critical resources is also necessarily to undertake "an inquest that is just as much into ourselves and our age as it is into the nineteenth century." The suggestion here is that we will not be able to fully extricate ourselves from the interminable assumptions of the nineteenth century because, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, we have not yet ceased struggling to disinherit ourselves from our unwanted benefactors.

In the following pages, I argue that present accounts of the exhaustion of depth hermeneutics signal a need for a reinvigorated sense of the complex transformations in the nineteenth-century public sphere that first helped to produce those hermeneutics and their respective dialectical valuations of depth and surface. This essay embarks on that project by turning to Victorian social investigator Henry Mayhew's writings in *London Labour and the London Poor* on the sewers and their scavengers, in order to reflect on the processes by which surface and depth were fused to one another throughout the nineteenth century, such that surfaces came to imply depths that in turn determined surfaces. While this dialectical mode of thinking is quite common currency today, contemporary critical discourse may have nevertheless lost touch with the empirical convictions that initially framed the various forms of a hermeneutics of suspicion. That is, one consequence of treating psychoanalytic and Marxist theories as purely methodological lenses through which objects in the world can be deciphered has been an erosion of our understanding of their status as historically contingent and contested responses to social perceptions and social transformations.⁷ Critiques of depth hermeneutics have invoked the obsolescence of psychoanalytic theory and ideology critique as methods for identifying what is not there; but in doing so they have also occluded their histories as forms of response to what is there. Part of my endeavor here is to describe in detail a double mode of relating to psychoanalytic and Marxist theory, as both methods *and* historical formations, in order to clarify what is at stake in declaring either as an end to or a new beginning for critique.

At the broadest level, then, I am arguing that contemporary debates over method and the alleged petering out of critique are in fact debates over the status of a particular historical legacy—that of the nineteenth century—for the present. My overarching contention concerns the imbrication of history and method and the problematic effects of arbitrarily separating them. Yet, as I will continue to stress, interest in the historicity of our theoretical paradigms has been conspicuously absent from current methodological disputes, even though it is their attested historical irrelevance that is explicitly at stake in the present, and even while many of the major cultural-theoretical innovations of the last seventy-five years have been, in a manifest but nevertheless unremarked sense, theories *of* the nineteenth century. Before turning to Mayhew, I want to draw out some of the conceptual problems, both methodological and historical, that are raised for contemporary cultural analysis by thinking of theory in light of its various commitments to the nineteenth century.

Theory can belong to the nineteenth century in at least two significant ways: either because its methodological principles can be traced back to a critique of political economy animated by the upheavals of the 1840s or a fin-de-siècle theory of the psyche with one foot planted in Jean-Martin Charcot's Salpêtrière Hospital; or because its own interventions take the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural transformations of the nineteenth century as the primary historical objects grounding its own insights. My claim is that for almost a century much of what we have considered not only to be theory, but to constitute the very heart of theory, ought to be understood as a fusion of *both* of these operations—with examples ranging from Walter Benjamin's arcades and Raymond Williams's long revolution to Bruno Latour's pasteurization of France, Michel Foucault's analysis of modern sexuality, and the unfolding of Jacques Rancière's aesthetic regime.⁸ Such theories have shuttled back and forth between a methodological commitment to ensuring the longevity of nineteenth-century hermeneutics through reexamination, adaptation, and critique, and a historical commitment to an ongoing revisionist project that, for diverse and often incommensurable reasons, takes the long nineteenth century as the relevant period for producing theoretical innovation in the present. These theories derive their force from a very particular dialectical operation, according to which the critic oscillates between taking up the nineteenth century as *method* and as *topos*: between, that is, *inhabiting* the nineteenth century, as a subject endowed with particular capacities for intellection and interpretation, and *redescribing* the nineteenth century in the present as a historical object. This oscillation, then, serves as a means of discovering one's own intellectual and affective horizons and conditions of historical embeddedness and the limits to one's own capacities for social and cultural diagnosis.

Thinking about this volatile point of connection between history and method can also help to shed light on the epistemological confusion in the ongoing methodological debates. In general, it has not been clear whether what is under scrutiny in these debates is a claim about a historical formation or about a set of subjective capacities for interpretation. This confusion is evident in the tension arising between tacitly historical claims, like Latour's bravura assertion that "critical theory died long ago," and methodological calls for the voluntary disarticulation of the manifest from the latent, such as Heather Love's provocation that contemporary critics need to be "willing to exchange" one mode of critique for another.⁹ The relationship between method and history is dramatized as a struggle between a critical subjectivity that imagines itself free to choose between heuristic strategies and dispositions, and a historical object consigned to a benighted past from which it can no longer exert claims on the present. Method moves on, relieved of its history. This account of critical subjectivity runs directly counter to the account I offer in the previous paragraph, in which the apparent choice of method necessarily entrenches one in a particular history or lineage of the subject beyond one's control. By contrast, at the moment that method imagines itself finally untethered from the burdens of one tradition, it reverts to a valorization of the free play of critical faculties. I am not suggesting that individuals cannot make heuristic choices, select between interpretive commitments and descriptive conventions, or should not try to overturn established and traditional methodologies. Rather, I am cautioning that precisely those choices that constitute one's individuality and critical agency ought to be seen as constrained and compromised by history, rather than enabled by elegiac declarations of supersession, obsolescence, and moving on.

Just as recent methodological critiques have argued that surface content can be deliberately chosen as the locus of value, so the imputation of depth associated with Marxist and psychoanalytic theory has also been portrayed as an act of autonomous willfulness. To be more precise, symptomatic reading has been described in pseudo-psychological terms as motivated by an intentionality saturated with aggression toward its objects, characterized by heroics and mastery.¹⁰ Here again, the link between historical formation and subjective capacity remains unexamined. More specifically, this account of aggressive mastery identifies critic with analyst in the interpretive encounter, despite a significant current in poststructuralist thought aligning critic with analysand.¹¹ This would be a relatively minor oversight were the current critique of depth interpretation confined, for example, to a particular brand of symptomatic reading. But this critique has taken aim at the very foundations of the

hermeneutics of suspicion; at the residual humanism of all close reading practices; and, even more broadly, at the “iconoclastic gesture” that is alleged to be the basis of demystification.¹² This identification of critic with masterful analyst makes it difficult to think of critical subjectivity as constituted by a language other than its own—that is, by its text or object—and of interpretive method as a mode of discovery in which the critic’s own embeddedness in a social history is made explicit.¹³ To sideline this crucial insight about the heteronomy of critique in favor of a comparatively unhistorical conception of method as subjective and voluntaristic does not strike me as substantially different from the portrait of the heroic critic associated with symptomatic reading. In both cases, what remains constant, before and after the alleged obsolescence of critical theory, is a vision of free choice: critique dies, but the critic’s subjective freedom lives on, evidently unconstrained; it has not even been hazarded.

The epistemological confusion of constraint with freedom derives from a nearsightedness regarding the historicity of method. One way to bring this historicity back into focus is to reconstruct a perspective from which the hermeneutics of suspicion can reappear as one set of contingent responses among others—many of which have now been lost, rendered illegible, or distorted, partly due to the preeminent role that depth hermeneutics has played in contributing to our images and narratives of the past. Indeed, I take it as axiomatic that psychoanalytic, Marxist, or Nietzschean theories do not exhaust the manifold conceptions of surface and depth operative throughout the nineteenth century. As a preface to descending into Mayhew’s particular underworld, one might recall that the half-century between the *Communist Manifesto* and *The Interpretation of Dreams* saw the construction of the first modern sewer systems, as well as the mining and extraction of buried natural resources on an industrial scale; the unearthing of fossils for evolutionary study and the rise of theories of deep geological time; the sinking of the transatlantic telegraph cable and the digging of the London Underground; the discovery of the x-ray, the so-called opening up of the Congo, the use of vivisection in the exploration of the stomach, and the first sounding of the Marianas Trench. Once we reflect on the sheer variety of nineteenth-century profundities, it is difficult to grasp why a single innovation, such as the unconscious or the economic base, would come to figure as the only significant conception of depth worth preserving. Might not these heterogeneous substrata of the nineteenth century offer up the seeds for some new mode of interpretation that resists over-identification with the worn out, boiled down ideological narratives of the past, without assimilating historical difference too easily to the proclaimed methodological needs of a unitary present?¹⁴

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Few works of social analysis evince a more palpable anxiety about the entanglement of methodological choice with attachment to historical formations than *London Labour and the London Poor*. Originally written in the late 1840s for his weekly column as *The Morning Chronicle*'s "metropolitan correspondent," Mayhew's sprawling documentary of London's underclasses consists of transcriptions of hundreds of interviews, vignettes, and first-person anecdotes, hemmed in on all sides by towering heaps of statistical data. For Mayhew, the challenges of finding subjects to interview and of encountering unforeseen meanings in London's rapidly transforming streets loomed large, and they posed a major problem for his primary goal of unmasking hidden economic processes. As I will show, Mayhew discovered a historically situated emblem of this methodological impasse in London's vanishing scavenger economies—the sewer scavenger, in particular. In the sewer scavenger's method of haphazardly reclaiming objects of value from flowing rivers of waste, Mayhew saw the glimmer of an alternative interpretive mode: a scavenger hermeneutics, characterized by its unmethodical view of how value buried in the depths could be returned to the surface, and intimately related to his own contingent process of scouring London for valuable interlocutors. Yet, crucially, while this residual mode of recollecting value served as a partial model for Mayhew, the scavengers themselves were to become casualties of the very same historical transformations and economic processes whose laws Mayhew had set out to expose. His text, then, allows us to glimpse these scavenger hermeneutics, but only as they become legible in the context of the critical promise of a primarily suspicious mode of analysis. Mayhew's urgent hopes and legitimate fears about the historicity of method, I argue, speak directly to the perceived exhaustion of critique in the present.¹⁵ Mayhew's impasse is still very much our own.

Along with contemporary texts by Marx and Friedrich Engels and, later, the Freudian case study, *London Labour and the London Poor* is animated by a tension between a methodological commitment to exposure and critique and a phenomenological impulse toward description and interview. Torn between these dueling lures of rule and example, Mayhew was beset by a host of epistemological dilemmas as soon as he began his surveys. How to transform unreliable "sentiments" about the social world—"opinions engendered by feelings"—into objective, data-driven analysis? And, once these subjective limitations were overcome, how then to transcend "the very mummery of statistics," which could not distinguish the meaning hidden in mountains of mute data? The

goal was to produce “something *more* than bare facts”—namely, “theory,” which “consists not of *one* fact but an *infinity*”—and yet Mayhew also remained skeptical that theory could ever do full justice to its facts. “If theory may occasionally teach us wrongly,” Mayhew’s conundrum went, “Facts without theory cannot possibly teach us at all.”¹⁶

The social and political stakes of these questions about the methodological value of feeling, fact, and theory were never far from view. When Mayhew was theorizing social systems, the question of whether one ought to “proceed from principles to facts, or recede from facts to principles,” gave way to more pressing ethical considerations: “I believe the facts which I publish in my present communication,” he wrote in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849 of the “cheap-clothes trade” in London’s East End, “will lay bare a system unheard of and unparalleled in the history of any country; indeed there appears to be so deep laid a scheme for the introduction and supply of underpaid labour to the market, that it is impossible for the working man not to sink and be degraded by it to the lowest depths of wretchedness and infamy.”¹⁷ Much like Engels’s reports on industrial towns, Mayhew conducted his social surveys with the goal of collecting enough accurate data about the wages and costs of London’s underclasses to yield a rigorously objective and demystifying analysis of the systemic socioeconomic abuse operating deep beneath the surface of Victorian society.

If they are conceived in terms of this innovative demystifying impulse, the individual monologues and interviews that comprise the bulk of *London Labour and the London Poor* take on a supplementary function. Displaying what W. H. Auden called an “amazing ear for speech,” Mayhew urged his readers to treat the curdling scorn of a girl selling milk and the frustration of a fish fryer confronted with his own malodorousness as testimonial illustrations of verifiable social laws.¹⁸ However, Mayhew could never make the contingent and empirical aspects of his text synthesize comfortably with the systematic; the subordination of anecdote to rule quickly proved to be wholly untenable. As Anne Humpherys has observed, while Mayhew’s “plan was first to collect systematically from each of the trades in London the facts or statistics about costs and wages and to elucidate their ‘attitudes and feelings’ about the causes and cures of their current situation . . . this plan . . . was rendered obsolete almost immediately by what Mayhew found when he actually began to collect his facts. Only the first few letters follow this outline conscientiously and, as the series developed, one part of it—the interviews—began to dominate.”¹⁹ The anecdote rapidly supplements the theory—until the theory disappears amidst the sheer quantity of anecdotal evidence, which in turn loses its evidentiary function. Mayhew’s text thus represents the

outcome of what we might call an unbalanced hermeneutics of suspicion, in which observation and transcription exceed the exigencies of analyzing the unseen.

While this imbalance may have been a liability from the standpoint of Mayhew's demystifying project, his interviews also allowed readers to realize that the abstractions of his critical analysis were not fully distinct from the abstractions of the political economic system it sought to criticize. "By counterposing statistical generalities with actual life-histories and individual witness," E. P. Thompson astutely observed of Mayhew's conflicting hermeneutic tendencies, "he is both offering a running commentary—and criticism—of the generalities, and offering a different framework within which they may be read."²⁰ Did the labor of exposing systemic economic problems provide insight into otherwise hidden social laws—or was social theorization itself a misguided mode of abstraction that redoubled the abstractions of the dominant order? One could never be certain whether the human voices in Mayhew's interviews evidenced domination by rather than freedom from an exploitative social system, nor whether their stubborn individuality was a rejoinder to the political economic system or to the swollen heap of data it was alleged to supplement. Those very subjects Mayhew sought out for his interviews appeared to resist being used as evidence of theory, and to disrupt and ultimately overwhelm the conceptual organization of his project.

What is most relevant about this dimension of Mayhew's work for contemporary methodological inquiry is that we see here how making heuristic choices entails inhabiting distinct, historically situated positions with different affective and temporal horizons. That is, if Mayhew seems at one and the same time to deploy demystification as a technique of objective social analysis while also producing a text whose subjective weave was resistant to its own objectifying vision, then we ought to understand this methodological contradiction as an index of Mayhew's complex understanding of the historicity of the present. Raymond Williams's conception of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formations is especially pertinent here. In Mayhew we witness the emergent promise of depth hermeneutics as a radical mode of analyzing the dominant social order, but, as we will see shortly, we also hear the initial threat entailed by the incorporation of this hermeneutics into the dominant order, rendered through the voiced resistance of the residual communities that Mayhew interviewed.²¹ One method lurched feverishly forward toward an increasingly abstracted future, while another clung tightly to the degraded remnants of a vanishing past.

This central theoretical problematic of Mayhew's project is epitomized by his analysis of the transformation in mid-nineteenth-century Britain of

the relationship between value and waste into a dialectical relationship: a relationship that we can recognize today as inherent to the hermeneutics of suspicion and that finds its most concise articulation in Freud's equation of money with feces. Rapid changes in the scale of urban life and in patterns of production, consumption, and sanitation, as well as a developing conception of the cityspace as an abstract totality, produced a situation in which value could be extracted from even the most abject and worthless of modernity's egested remnants—as it was, for example, in the collection of the 900,000 tons of dust produced annually within London through the consumption of some 3.5 million tons of coal.²² If all the accumulated treasure of the modern consumer economy was producing an unprecedented quantity of filth, that very same filth was in turn exposing an unprecedented magnitude of value. The relation of waste to value was coming to be grasped as an objective law pertaining to a closed system of surfaces and depths, what Georges Bataille called a "restricted economy": what goes up, must come down—and then come up again.²³ Nothing can be allowed to molder away or disappear; value should be regurgitant, eternally returning.

Within the context of this new regime of value, it is difficult yet crucial to distinguish the dominant process, where the injunction to extract value came increasingly to organize the social order, from the radical potential that seemed ready to emerge through the decoding and unveiling of the rules governing that process. In Mayhew's case, the latter manifested itself as an ardent hope that, by identifying the laws of the restricted economy, one could put an end to the exploitation and misery of London's lower classes, since with the proper organization "even the picking up of the most abject refuse of the metropolis might become the source of great riches" (*LL* 2:170). Mourning Britain's squandered opportunity to use its apparently quite potent excrement as fertilizer, Mayhew became a prophet of ordure and garbage, urging readers to consider "how vastly important it is that in the best of all possible ways we should *collect, remove, and use* the scavengery and excrementitious matter of our streets and houses" (*LL* 2:162). Why should so many of London's denizens live in squalor and poverty when the city sat atop a gold mine of sewage, "a precious ore, running in rich veins beneath the surface of our streets"? In the new city, waste would relieve want, and society's depths would save its surfaces.

While Mayhew was hopeful that exposing the hidden value in waste would ultimately transform a restricted economy, his vision ran the risk of reduplicating the ideology it was attempting to reform by positing a new relationship between waste and value as an unvarying law of inversion and substitution. *Plus ça change*: the more things changed on the

surface, the more they were explained by Mayhew as having always been there, lying in the depths. A critique of abstraction that itself consisted of counterabstraction might easily be incorporated by the very processes it sought to criticize. Indeed, it was precisely this recursive, redoubling dynamic that Paul Ricoeur identified as the central characteristic of the hermeneutics of suspicion in his study of Freud. "The man of suspicion carries out in reverse the work of falsification of the man of guile," Ricoeur put it. "*Guile will be met by double guile.*"²⁴

However, Mayhew's divided methodological commitments once again reveal his complex historical consciousness. For if Mayhew's demystifying vision elides any configurations of value and waste that did not conform to the rules of the restricted economy, his detailed interviews with the city's "street finders" and other scavengers nevertheless register with urgency the threatening social ramifications that marked the onset of the new regime of value, especially for marginal, noncapitalist modes of accumulation. For some fifty pages, Mayhew pursues mudlarks sifting through muck puddles on the riverbanks, and dredgermen trawling the Thames for corpses and coal; dustmen carting off ashes and nightmen emptying cesspools; rag-gatherers and bone-grubbers pounding the pavement for scraps, and pure-finders scouring the gutters for dog crap to sell to tanneries. For these residual scavenger economies, waste was certainly a source of value, but it was a value whose recuperation depended on *finding* things, and so was contingent and variable, not essential and fixed as it was in the dominant economy. Mayhew depicts a complex process in which a scavenger economy, where value might or might not be encountered—in the form of forks found in a pile of ashes, scraps of cloth found in the alleyway, or coins lost to the river of excrement—was being supplanted by a closed and calibrated system, in which waste yielded value as a matter of course, and to which all other forms of valorization were supplemental.

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Now we had better go down into Mayhew's sewers, about which he had more to say than about most other topics in *London Labour and the London Poor*: "Some few years ago," we read, "the main sewers, having their outlets on the river side, were completely open, so that any person desirous of exploring their dark and uninviting recesses might enter at the river side, and wander away, provided he could withstand the combination of villainous stench which met him at every step, for many miles, in any direction" (LL 2:150). This open access had begun

to decline even before the great renovation commissioned in 1858, and by the time of Mayhew's writing the city had already installed reinforced brick walls with locked iron doors at the riverside entrances to the old tunnels. Previously, low-lying neighborhoods had been flooded with murky, "excrementitious" sewer water whenever the river was high, so that "the streets of Shadwell and Wapping resembled a Dutch town, intersected by a series of muddy canals." As an adjunct to this increased concern for public safety, the city also criminalized any act of entering the sewers on unofficial business and instituted a hefty "reward of 5£ offered to any person giving information so as to lead to the conviction of any offender" (*LL* 2:150).

Despite these enclosures, Mayhew was able to interview some of the "sewer-hunters," "toshers," or "shore-men," who persisted in entering the sewers in spite of these prohibitions, scavenging what by Mayhew's tabulations represented fairly significant earnings, "superior even to those of better-paid artizans, and far beyond the amount received by many clerks" (*LL* 2:152). Clad in "long greasy velveteen coats, furnished with pockets of vast capacity, and their nether limbs encased in dirty canvas trowsers," the toshers explored London's underbelly, armed with "a pole seven or eight feet long, on one end of which there is a long iron hoe," used alternately to cast out for leverage when they fell into deadly sinkholes, and "to rake about in the mud" for objects of value. Their haul was varied, consisting of coins ("shillings, sixpences, half-crowns and occasionally half-sovereigns and sovereigns"); other discarded metals, including loads of cutlery, "ladles, silver-handled knives, mugs . . . and now and then articles of jewelry"; as well as bones, bits of rope, and other miscellany that found its way down the drain. Always eager to calculate sum totals—the late 1840s saw, for example, £6500 fished out of the Thames each year, and roughly 210,000 cigar ends discarded each week—Mayhew himself seems almost shocked to learn that, "incredible as it may appear . . . the property recovered from the sewers of London would have amounted to no less than 20,000£. per annum," a sizable sum even when split among an estimated 200 toshers working the tunnels on a semi-regular basis (*LL* 150-52).

Mayhew's intense focus throughout *London Labour and the London Poor* on sewers, sewage, and the forms of life they sustained has drawn a good deal of critical notice, and it is not too surprising that his epic tabulations of trash and excrement have proven irresistible to a certain strand of psychoanalytically inflected historicist scholarship. What better confirmation of Freud's equation of "the finding of treasure with defæcation" could one hope to find than Mayhew's assertion that the contents of the London sewer were "a precious ore, running in rich

veins beneath the surface of our streets"?²⁵ Thus Christopher Herbert, for example, writing on Mayhew in 1988 and again in 2002, perceives in this Freudian reaction-formation the template for understanding Mayhew's exploration of the socioeconomic dimensions of Victorian filth.²⁶ Drawing on the Victorian anthropological interest in *taboo*, Herbert's entrancing analysis turns to the rats that run rampant in Mayhew's sewers as the emblem of this versatile capacity for substitution: "Explicitly symbolizing the covert principle of *London Labour*, the equivalence of the sanctified and the unclean," the rats are untouchable and sacred, reviled and adored.²⁷ And, just as Freud describes the Rat Man's reaction to the fantasied vermin attacking his anus as a "horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware," so Herbert too ascribes a Freudian attraction-repulsion to Mayhew's own bourgeois ambivalence, as he gazes upon London's mountains of trash and rivers of sewage and interrogates the people who navigate them.²⁸ Unknown pleasure and fantasied disgust, fascination and revulsion, come to be the affective limits of Mayhew's subterranean world of filth and lucre.

A few years before Herbert, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* had already pushed this Freudian logic of latency and manifestation even further, positing that, in "articulat[ing] the sewers as a symbolic system . . . [Mayhew] repeats one of the dominant tropes of western metaphysics: truth lies hidden behind a veil."²⁹ Aligning Mayhew's tunnels with the "ditch of truth" running beneath Victor Hugo's Paris, Stallybrass and White portray the sewer and its contents as the social and political realizations of the insights of psychoanalytic theory: "The basic constitutive elements of the symbolic system of both 'Wolf Man' and Hugo are the same: the veil, excrement, the 'truth,' and pleasure." Stallybrass and White then embark on a chain of substitutions: the white wolves in the walnut tree in turn lead to the feral rodents burrowing their way into the so-called sewer of the Rat Man's body, then back to Hugo and finally to Mayhew's vermin-infested concrete tunnels: "The rat was a phobic mediator between high and low, a kind of debased coinage in the symbolic exchange underpinning the economy of the body," they inform us. "The symbolic figure of the rat overran not only the boundaries between city and sewer: it gnawed away at the distinctions which separated . . . bourgeois beloved from prostitute, mother from abscessed maid, the pure from the contaminated."³⁰ An entire system of psychosocial and socioeconomic diagnosis emerges, eked out of a small cadre of endlessly substitutable terms: rats and sewers, gold coins and veiled anuses.

Such interpretations get to the heart of the hermeneutics of depth and surface that opened my discussion, and point the way to my broader

concern with the isolation of method from history in recent conceptions of theory. With their identifications of covert principles and hidden truths, these readings epitomize a style of suspicious reading that has frustrated a more recent generation of readers: the surface of Mayhew's text is taken to impute a depth that in turn determines its meaning. Yet this frustration has to my mind occluded the far more salient question—implicit in readings like Herbert's and Stallybrass and White's but as yet unexplored—of what happens to a psychoanalytically driven historicist criticism when it is turned back toward the historical moment that contributed to the development of its own method. This extraordinarily generative point of contact between history and method has remained largely unexamined in theorizations of suspicious reading and surface reading alike. Surely it is no wonder that Victorian accounts of sanitation and sewage are riddled with family resemblances to Freud's conceptions of filth or Marx's theory of ideology, since the interpretative centrality of the relation of the hidden to the shown was emerging at the very same historical moment that waste buried beneath the surface was being shown to possess untold value. The sewer and the unconscious stand together as two great monuments to the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the return of the repressed, but it is ultimately unclear which of these technological innovations can better interpret the other. The Rat Man's dream of a girl with shimmering turds for eyes might help explain the contingencies of value that shaped pure-finding, dust-collecting, and sewer-searching as dwindling vocations in the nineteenth century, but then again, perhaps the interpretation of dreams is better explained by the enclosure of the sewers.

In short, I am questioning the assumption that Mayhew's sewers can not only be illuminated by the ubiquitous archaeological metaphors of Freudian theory, but that they are in effect reducible to psychoanalytical categories. By recasting in the language of inevitability the same social phenomena Mayhew had portrayed as transitional, contested processes, the psychoanalytic reading erroneously takes the record of how value came to be understood as embedded within waste as an ineluctable psychological relation. To make this claim is to forget that the reason depth hermeneutics has proven so efficient in accounting for the psychosocial phenomena of the nineteenth century is primarily because its method reduplicates the history in which it is embedded. This reduplicative effect has made it extremely difficult not to read the establishment of the relationship between waste and value backward—not to put the cart before the horse's ass, so to speak—and not to paper over the traces of different modes of valuation found buried in sites like *London Labour and the London Poor*. Rather than merely confirming a hermeneutics of

suspicion, Mayhew's text teaches us something new about the conditions of possibility for their emergence.

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The sewers and the sewer-hunters fascinated Mayhew, but not simply because they repulsed him. Within an intellectual and interpretative tradition that awards ambivalent attraction-repulsion a near canonical status as the affective motivation for engaging with the squalid and the worthless, this is a major and important distinction. His description in the sewer-hunting section has none of the characteristic animus and aestheticized disgust that is so easy to find in nineteenth-century prose, especially on the sewage question. The loping critical cadence and exhilarated negativity of revulsion that at times fueled writers as diverse as William Wordsworth, John Ruskin, Engels, and Edwin Chadwick as they inveighed against the unwanted filth of their rotten century are nowhere to be found in Mayhew's interview with his tosher "informant." We do not run up against that Freudian "horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware," or vicariously experience "enjoyment extorted by violence, an enjoyment which arouses horror."³¹ That particular emetic thrill is gone, and with it the principles of inversion and substitution that spin excrement into gold, and bring the depths back to the surface.³²

Instead, what comes across in Mayhew's presentation of the sewer-hunters is his fascination with the alternate model of subjectivity he encounters, where the dialectic of attraction and repulsion has been disassembled: "Bless your heart the smells nothink," Mayhew's informant reports, "It's a roughish smell at first, but nothink near so bad as you thinks, 'cause, you see, there's sich lots o' water always a coming down the sewer, and the air gits in from the gratings, and that helps to sweeten it a bit" (*LL* 2:153). The words, of course, are not strictly Mayhew's, but his own commentary does little to alter the general tenor of the testimony: bad—but not too bad; could be worse; worth the trouble. This even-keeled attitude stands out against the obsessive fixation with the objects of one's repulsion that has so often rightly been attributed to bourgeois observation of nineteenth-century underworlds; especially when it came to the London sewers, few mid-century reformers had ever unclamped their nostrils and admitted that it could have been worse. Encountering the sewers through the well-adjusted eyes of those with well-adapted noses allowed Mayhew to offer a focused phenomenological account of "the offscouring of the city," through which an alternative mode of valuation of the depths can be glimpsed (*LL* 2:150).

Mayhew saw in this mode of scavenging the outlines of a potentially transportable historical and hermeneutic procedure that did not merely reduplicate the abstractions of the dominant order. At the broadest level, this is a claim about Mayhew's careful attunement to the ways in which subjective critical capacities, such as conferring recognition and ascribing value, are embedded in and therefore limited by particular social and historical contexts: *London Labour and the London Poor* provides us with a vantage point from which the choice of interpretive method or, more generally, of imputing and recollecting value necessarily appears constrained and altered by external circumstance—a point from which phenomenological experience bleeds into historical formation. In the case of the toshers, then, the lack of the recoil of disgust allowed flecks of value to appear, submerged in a medium of waste that nevertheless remained a fundamentally different substance. Rather than realized as profit, value had literally to be grasped in the form of objects: "I'd put down my arm to my shoulder in the mud and bring up shillings and half-crowns, and lots of coppers, and plenty of other things," the informant recalls of his early days on the job, adding almost wistfully that "I once found a silver jug as big as a quart pot, and often found spoons and knives and forks and every thing you can think of" (LL 2:153). Offering a vision of the sewer as the site of a prolific fecundity, the tosher's recollection of plunging shoulder-deep into the muck serves as a redolent counterpoint to the "nightmarish world overwhelmed by excremental filth" readers have often seen in Mayhew's text.³³ Contamination and defilement are certainly to be found in *London Labour and the London Poor*, but the tosher's tale does not recall the deprivations of the urban cesspool so much as the repletion of a dinner table. Invoking silver ewers and steaming saucepans, it suggests a relationship between consumption and expulsion, between the city's mouths and its anuses, that is not organized by the pollutant metaphors of filthy lucre.

In lieu of a Midas-like fantasy of insatiable appetites, the plenitude the tosher attributes to the sewer suggests a more fluid thematic of partial restrictions, chance encounters, and human finitude. The sewer may contain everything you can think of, but, for instance, Mayhew's informant also explains that "you can't go in every day, the tides don't answer." Within his narrative, limitations on the sewer's prolificness are inseparable from the numerous perils and existential threats that arise while searching the tunnels. Frequent references to the many ways one might die while plumbing the depths—collapsing sinkholes, hordes of devouring rats, transient clouds of "foul air" reputed to "cause instantious death," and sudden overwhelming floods—offset the vision of the city's dregs as a potential source of value. The probability of encountering

objects of worth in the mud sits adjacent to the possibilities of being left to die in the tunnel and turning into the bones that will be found by others. These references lend the entire section the remonstrative air of an *et in Arcadia ego*, as transience and the proximity of loss assert themselves even amidst the apparently pastoral bounty of the sewers: "Do you recollect hearing on the man as was found in the sewers about twelve year ago?—oh you must—the rats eat every bit of him, and left nothink but his bones," the tosher recalls of a subterranean Yorick, adding, "I knowed him well, he was a rig'lar shore-worker" (LL 2:154).

The limitations imposed by the existential dangers of scouring the tunnels vacate the sewers of any sense of necessity, and instead emphasize their openness. In such a permeable, contingent system, where objects might flow out to sea and be lost or simply prove impossible to bring back up to the surface, value and waste cannot logically entail one another. What goes down does not necessarily come back up, but neither does that mean everything left in the sewers is devoid of value. In fact, we are told that immense objects of value are regularly left below. Mayhew writes of "pieces of iron, nails, various scraps of metal, coins of every description, all rusted into a mass like a rock, and weighing from a half hundred to two hundred weight altogether": "These 'conglomerates' of metal are too heavy for the men to take out of the sewers, so that if unable to break them up, they are compelled to leave them behind; and there are very many such masses, I am informed, lying in the sewers at this moment, of immense weight, and growing larger every day by continual additions" (LL 2:152). In the singular logic of the toshers' economy, greater value may mean a less recuperable object. This inverse relation is counterintuitive from the rationalizing perspective of a restricted economy, since it severs the recognition of value from the realization of value. It is as though someone were to sink a gold mine atop a mother lode but never bother to extract it. To leave something valuable lying in a ditch seems absurd; there must always be a way to haul it up to the surface. Mayhew's own baffled fascination is apparent in his observation about the "continual additions" to the "conglomerates," at once increasingly valuable and statically valueless. Yet the tosher meets Mayhew's lack of understanding with his own: "I never thought about taking a hammer along with me into the sewer, no," he replies to Mayhew's implied question. "I never thought I'd want it" (LL 2:154).

The image of the stubborn conglomerates is immediately compounded by another that throws the alterity of the sewer-hunters' economy into even sharper relief. Within the contingencies of the open system, the theme of abundance persists as a feeling of anticipation that whatever physically reclaimable objects happen to be found will offer themselves

for the taking, as though the tosher were being addressed by the sewer. In particular, Mayhew notes, the toshers “always find the coins standing edge uppermost between the bricks in the bottom, where the mortar has been worn away,” slotted in the cracks as though they were waiting like ripe vegetables to be plucked from the ground, or like wriggling, revenant fingers poking up through the mud, forming a surface within the depths (*LL* 2:152). The detail is of a piece with the fecundity the tosher attributes to the sewers, which culminates in satiation rather than endless consumption. Rather than imagining value to be the hidden meaning of waste—hidden, above all, from itself—the image of the golden coins, standing vertically in their slots, suggests a fantasy that the sewer is aware of its own worth. Alongside the toshers, with their specialized knowledge and affective openness to the tunnels, the very structure of the sewer environment participates in its own valuation. Some things will be lost, absolutely, but others will make themselves available if you know where to look.

It is not an ordinary kind of writing that can discern both an open sewer speckled with disintegrating value and a closed one teeming with capitalizable waste; a restricted economy of endless substitutions and eternal returns from the deep and a general economy of sunken surfaces, submerged loss, and unmastered expenditure; a site of pastoral filth and the tidy economic promise of a technorational future. At each and every turn, Mayhew offers a multifaceted vision of nineteenth-century depths. Where symptomatic readings have seen Mayhew’s sewers as the repository of ideologically saturated socioeconomic fantasies, I have argued that Mayhew’s narrative provides an account of the social conditions necessary for the emergence of depth hermeneutics. Where contemporary critics have pointed to the exhaustion of these interpretive models, *London Labour and the London Poor* takes us back to the scene of the crime, where the voices of residual scavenger economies reinterpret the premises of Mayhew’s own project, and speak back to the alleged critical malaise of the present by exposing its historicist biases. In the terms of White’s “inquest that is just as much into ourselves and our age as it is into the nineteenth century,” reading Mayhew’s scavengers unexpectedly illuminates both corpse and coroner alike.

Mayhew’s treatment of the various scavenger economies helps us to see how a mode of critical writing that scrounges for its own material will offer a radically different perception from a writing adhering to more

widely available models of social analysis. There is an alternative reduplication at work in the text, whereby the ubiquitous third-person accounts of finding objects are mirrored by Mayhew's account of the underlying contingency of finding his sources. The narration of scavenging—"in these holes the clusters of articles are *found*"; "they always *find* the coins standing edge uppermost"; "these men *find* plenty of means to evade the vigilance of the sewer officials"; "despite their large gains, they are to be *found* located in the most wretched quarter of the metropolis"; "do you recollect hearing on the man as was *found* in the sewers about twelve year ago?"; "we *found* so many things . . ."—itself finds a methodological analogue in Mayhew's repeated assertion throughout the four volumes of *London Labour and the London Poor*: "I *found* one of these men, from whom I derived much information" (LL 2:152-53).

More than a mere refrain in his text, the expectation of finding, of the meaningful encounter, offered Mayhew a hermeneutic mode in its own right: a scavenger hermeneutics operating according to a principle of selection so open-ended and contingent on external circumstance as to differ in kind from the nearly ascetic rigor of the scientific demystification against which Mayhew continued to define his project. This mode is not unrelated to Claude Lévi-Strauss's description of the *bricoleur* who works with whatever materials are at hand, or Michel de Certeau's description of reading as a "poaching" of language that is never one's own.³⁴ "In the course of my inquiries into the earnings and condition of one class of people," Mayhew expounded on his method, "sources of information respecting the habits and incomings of another are opened up to me, of which, for several reasons, I am glad to avail myself at the immediate moment, rather than defer making use of them till a more fitting and orderly occasion."³⁵ While holding out for a systematic mode of organization that never quite arrived, Mayhew nevertheless encountered in his own writing, on a tectonic level, what his scavengers encountered in their coins slotted in sewage: without knowing whether he would find anything, he was unshaken in the belief that the world is less stingy with its *disjecta membra* than with its hoarded riches.

This scavenger hermeneutics, gleaned by Mayhew from his subjects' own mode of finding meaning and value in their vanishing world, speaks directly to debates over interpretive method today. At the most granular level, thinking through the contingencies of scavenging—whether for waste discarded by the consumer economy, for meaningful interlocutors, or for meaning in a text—can offer an alternative to a social order that attempts to systematize the processes by which we determine and distribute value. Mayhew shows us a far more uneven, incalculable procedure of returning to the surface what has been lost to the sewers and displaced

to the margins of the social, as well as a different affective disposition: one that anticipates being addressed by the objects one is seeking rather than being faced with the task of decoding them. Mayhew's scavenger hermeneutics thus appears to offer a methodological alternative to the data-driven analysis that forms another part of his demystifying project.

Nevertheless, I have been careful not to suggest that Mayhew's scavenger hermeneutics represent a model of interpretation that is transportable to our own present moment, or that it could serve as an adequate solution to current disagreements about the longevity of critical theory. As I have stressed, Mayhew's scavenging for interlocutors cannot be separated from his broader concern with laying bare the ideological mechanisms of the mid-nineteenth-century capitalist regime of value. Indeed, the formal peculiarity of his text lies in the degree to which these two modes of inquiry are entangled. It is this entwinement that is of the greatest relevance to ongoing discussions of surface and depth reading, in part because we find it in Freud no less than in Mayhew. In fact, Mayhew's methodological oscillations closely resemble, in many ways, the dialectical model Ricoeur identified in Freud's psychoanalysis of culture, where a conception of interpretation as suspicion is inextricable from one in which interpretation serves as the "recollection of meaning," and demands "care or concern for the *object*," rather than distrust.³⁶ For Ricoeur, the very centrality and gravitas claimed by interpretation and decipherment in psychoanalysis depended on a prior implicit "belief that language, which bears symbols, is not so much spoken by men as spoken to men," involving an expectation of being addressed by the world in which we hear echoes of Mayhew and his toshers. The synthesis of these two modes, Ricoeur declared, yielded a writing in which critical demystification and phenomenological encounter were fused together. Mayhew's interpretive method can remind contemporary critique that the major hermeneutic systems of the nineteenth century were never as polarized as they have lately been alleged to be; even in Freud we find a tacit recognition of the heteronomous nature of interpretation theory that is lacking in recent accounts of surface reading.

More than simply suggesting that Mayhew's scavenger hermeneutics is opposed by but inseparable from his hermeneutics of suspicion, my goal has been to show how these divided and ultimately fragmentary methodological impulses took shape through attachments to and subjective identifications with different historical formations, and consequently to argue through Mayhew against the nearsighted reduction of theory and critique to purely methodological activities. Mayhew's vacillating identifications with the anxieties and hopes of both residual scavenger and emergent critical formations in *London Labour and the London Poor*

provide a valuable counterpoint to the voluntarism of contemporary theoretical debate, according to which we are free to choose our theoretical dispositions while remaining unencumbered by the historicity such choices necessarily imply. That accounts of surface reading have relied so heavily on the rhetoric of supersession and abrogation only drives home the need to attend with greater specificity to the complex historicity of theory.

This essay is neither a call to continue the project of the new historicism, nor a response to Fredric Jameson's related injunction to "always historicize." Rather it is a provocation grounded in the observation that we still do not have a full picture of the conditions of possibility and historical processes that, over the course of the nineteenth century, led to the development of depth hermeneutics and endowed it with an enduring explanatory power. As Foucault implied forty years ago in his critique of the repressive hypothesis, the consolidation of disparate forms of knowledge and experience within psychoanalytic theory was the outcome of collisions between wildly divergent and seemingly incommensurable discursive spheres: religious, economic, scientific, political, aesthetic. In order to discern whether a psychoanalytic hermeneutics has lost its claim to validity as a means of social diagnosis in the present, we will need just such a vivid elaboration of relevant courses of collision and exchange, whereby transformations in apparently autonomous zones of social activity came to influence each other in unforeseeable ways. *London Labour and the London Poor* offers us a glimpse of what such a picture of the nineteenth century might look like, showing how the production of hermeneutics proves to be imbricated with the retrieval of objects lost down drains and reclaimed from gutter pipes, the accumulation of towering stacks of sociological data, and the valorization of sewage. Far from being exhausted, these various surfaces and depths call out for an enriched genealogical understanding of the social transformations in the nineteenth-century public sphere that afforded differing hermeneutic modes their legibility, even as the forms of life and of recognizing value that surrounded them have disappeared or been irreversibly altered. Reading Mayhew today, we are confronted with the need for a criticism that can comprehend this legibility, but without reducing the family resemblances between method and object to stark assertions of identification and difference, without recasting historical alterity as a unitary conception of depth and surface: "Tho' much is taken, much abides," we might recollect: "The deep / Moans round with many voices."³⁷

NOTES

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1 Hayden White, "The 'Nineteenth Century' as Chronotope" (1987), in *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature and Theory, 1957–2007* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010), 246. The term "chronotope" comes from Bakhtin, for whom it designated "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature," in M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

2 White, "The 'Nineteenth Century' as Chronotope," 246.

3 For an exception, see John Kuchich, "The Unfinished Historicist Project: In Praise of Suspicion," *Victoriographies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 58–78.

4 For two examples of this tendency see Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no.1 (2009): 1–21; and Heather Love, "Close But Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 371–91. For a rejoinder, see Carolyn Lesjak, "Reading Dialectically," *Criticism* 55, no. 2 (2013): 233–77.

5 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (1991; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 35.

6 See for example Rita Felski's call to reinvigorate the present state of critical thought by putting "context temporarily in abeyance," in "Context Stinks!" *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 573–91.

7 Historians of science and technology writing on the construction of the modern sewers and underground spaces have been central to my thinking on this subject, though they have only rarely considered such historical transformations as generative of methodological insights. For especially relevant examples, see Rosalind M. Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society and the Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); and David L. Pike, *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005). In a related vein, Michel de Certeau has made the complex argument that psychoanalytic theory needs to be understood at once as a significant mode of historiography in its own right and as a product of its international histories as an institution: de Certeau, "Psychoanalysis and Its History," in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3–16.

8 The first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* is in many ways the exemplar of this operation of theory, since its imaginative conceit was to envision the emergence of modern sexuality in a world where the insights of psychoanalysis were of only marginal importance. Psychoanalytic theories of sexuality therefore constituted the methodological core of the book, even while the revisionary historical account of the period of Freud's early activity (his stint in Trieste scouring male eels for their penises) serves to upend the premises of that method in the most radical manner. The centrality of psychoanalytic thought to Edward Said's enduring investment in nineteenth-century literature, and to the notion of contrapuntal reading more generally, similarly exemplifies the two interpretive modes animating theories of the nineteenth century.

9 Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 248; Love, "Close But Not Deep," 388.

10 Love, "Close But Not Deep," 381: "This approach leaves little room for the ethical heroism of the critic"; Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 10: "Such an embrace involves accepting texts, deferring to them instead of mastering or using them as objects, and refuses the depth model of truth, which dismisses surfaces as inessential and deceptive."

11 See especially Roland Barthes's characterization in "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers" (1971) of the teacher/critic/writer as analysand in a classroom of students whose silent scribbling and skeptical questioning echoes that of the analyst: reprinted in Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 194–96; and John Brenkman's postulation of the analysand as a "plausible figure for the modern cultural interpreter or literary critic," in *Culture and Domination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), x. Alternately, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautioned against this reformulation, warning that it would "provide an excuse for the will to power of the literary critic" in "The Letter as Cutting Edge," in *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 13. In a related vein, consider Paul de Man's early deconstructive argument that "when modern critics think they are demystifying literature, they are in fact being demystified by it," in "Criticism and Crisis" (1967), *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), 18. We might also in this regard think of theoretical currents within and alongside Marxist thought conferring the potential for a politically disruptive or socially critical agency to the novel and other aesthetic forms. The point is not that such formulations account for a majority of psychoanalysis or Marxism, but rather that the problematic relationship of critical agency and authority to the technique of demystification had already been raised decades ago as a significant political difficulty for literary study *within* the various traditions of critical theory—a difficulty in which the critic's autonomy was far more visibly at stake than it is in current debates over method.

12 Latour, "A Few Steps Towards an Anthropology of the Iconoclastic Gesture," *Science in Context* 10, no. 1 (1997): 63–83.

13 Notably, Anne Anlin Cheng had raised a version of this point within the special issue of *Representations* that Best and Marcus edited: "Instead of objective history," Cheng writes, "psychoanalysis helps us attend to questions of historicity." Best and Marcus acknowledge but, I would argue, radically understate the challenge that Cheng's point poses to their polemical account of surface reading. "Psychoanalysis without Symptoms," *differences* 20, no.1 (2009): 92.

14 Cf. Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, "Queering History," *PMLA* 120, no. 5 (2005): 1608–17.

15 My thinking on this particular topic owes much to Amanda Anderson's nuanced study of the structure of ambivalent feeling that characterizes many nineteenth-century writers' attitudes toward different techniques of critical detachment in Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001).

16 I am indebted for my thoughts on Mayhew's method here to Herbert Tucker's presentation, "Outclassed: Henry Mayhew's Quixotic Taxonomies," at the November 2014 meeting of the North American Victorian Studies Association in London, Ontario. As Tucker put it in his talk, "Mayhew is theory." Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1967), 4:2 (hereafter cited as *LL*).

17 Letter XVII, 14 December 1849, reprinted in E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, eds., *The Unknown Mayhew* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 196.

18 W. H. Auden, "A Very Inquisitive Old Party," *The New Yorker*, Feb. 24, 1968, 123.

19 Humpherys, *Henry Mayhew* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 92.

20 E. P. Thompson, "The Political Education of Henry Mayhew," *Victorian Studies* 11, no. 1 (1967): 58.

21 Raymond Williams, "Dominant, Residual, Emergent," *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977): 121–28.

22 Mayhew's concise history of London dust collection epitomizes the shift to a restricted economy (LL 2:167–81). As late as 1846, dust-collectors would pay for the right to clear away the valuable refuse, which could be used to make bricks. Realizing that the failure to clear the dust would constitute a massive nuisance and public health risk, however, the dust-collectors joined together to underbid the city for access to the dust, and, by 1850, were receiving increasingly large commissions to remove the very same waste that they had previously paid to acquire. Their services had come to appear necessary in order for the modern city to thrive. As a taxonomical consequence of this transition from contingency to necessity, Mayhew is careful to point out, the dustmen of London no longer qualified as street *finders* or *collectors*, since strictly speaking they were now being paid "to fulfil a certain duty they have undertaken to perform [rather] than in any expectation of profit to be derived from the sale of the article" (LL 2:167). The conceptual organization of the urban economy was shifting radically, and, with it, the primary locus of value. Even though the profit from selling off the dust after collection still dwarfed the amount the city parishes paid for its removal, the value extracted from the dust itself was now deemed to be in excess of the service of removing it.

23 Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116–29.

24 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), 34.

25 Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Erotism," *Collected Papers* (New York: Basic Books, 1959): 2:49. It is worth recalling in this connection that Mayhew and his brother Augustus had recently published a novel-length fable about the desire for limitless wealth, *The Good Genius Who Turned Everything to Gold* (1847).

26 Christopher Herbert, "Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money," *Victorian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2002): 210, and "Rat Worship and Taboo in Mayhew's London," *Representations* 23 (Summer, 1988): 1–24. See also Catherine Gallagher, "The Body Versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew," *Representations* 14 (Spring, 1986): 83–106.

27 Herbert, "Rat Worship," 20.

28 See Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," *Collected Papers*, Vol. 3 (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

29 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986; Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 140.

30 Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 141, 146–47.

31 The former quotation is, again, from Freud's "Rat Man." The latter is from Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1979; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 488.

32 Pike has astutely observed that "it is difficult to reconcile the romantic nostalgia for the vanishing occupations of a previous order of capitalism documented in *London Labour* with the conventional Victorian discourse on the lower depths deployed by Stallybrass and White, or by . . . Alain Corbin, who characterized it as 'the incessant vacillation between fascination and repulsion.'" While I agree with Pike's distinction of Mayhew's attitudes from those often attributed to him, I remain unconvinced by Pike's own reductive formulation of a "romantic nostalgia" for Mayhew's identification with the scavengers. See Pike, "Sewage Treatments: Vertical Space and Waste in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London," in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life*, ed. William Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), 59.

33 Herbert, "Filthy Lucre," 209.

34 See especially de Certeau, "Reading as Poaching," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 165–76; and Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete," *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966). Lévi-Strauss's discussion of Mr. Wemmick from Dickens's *Great Expectations* is especially illuminating in this context.

35 Quoted in Humpherys, *Henry Mayhew*, 94.

36 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28–36.

37 Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses," in *Tennyson's Poetry*, ed. Robert W. Hill, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1999), 82.