DICKENSIAN LONDON
AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

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Conceived as the first survey of Victorian photography within the context of Dickensian studies, this exhibition and its catalogue feature a diversity of image-making practices, including portraiture, spirit photography, architectural representation, social documentation, photomontage, and allegorical mise-en-scène. The vast differences between these approaches are reflected in the organization of the exhibition, which follows three lines of inquiry, each indicative of a theme explored in visual terms. The first, "Counterfeit Presentments and Apparitions," evokes the paradoxical relationships between Dickens's experience as a daguerreotypist, his sustained interest in ghostly apparitions, and the dubious claims of spirit photographers. With "Icons and Relics" the focus shifts to the illusion of "having been there" and the evocation of Dickens in certain views of old London. The third segment, "Fiction and Artifact," explores the characterization of street types, which varies from the allegorical language of artistic expression to the ever-illusive pursuit of objective documentation.

By the time the discovery of photography was publicly revealed in early 1839, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was already an accomplished writer. Among the titles contributing to his rising fame were Sketches by Boz (1836-39), The Pickwick Papers (1836-37), and Oliver Twist (1837-39). While the French and the English quarreled over each other's claims regarding the priority of the photographic invention, Dickens remained focused upon Nicholas Nickleby, a task completed by October 1839 as daguerreotypomaniac spread far and wide.

OF COUNTERFEIT PRESENTMENTS AND APPARITIONS

While Dickens left no testimony concerning the advent of the medium, it is known that he experienced the trial of sitting for Richard Beard, England's first daguerreotypist, as early as spring 1841. Disgruntled by the process, he advised a friend against having her portrait taken: "If anybody should entreat you to go to the Polytechnic Institution and have a Photographic likeness done—don't be prevailed upon, on any terms. The Sun is a great fellow in his way; but portrait painting is not his line. I speak from experience, having suffered dreadfully." Not atypical, this response reflects the physical and mental discomfort associated with the infancy of daguerreotypic portraiture. Blinded by bright sunlight and restrained by a cast-iron headrest, Dickens would have been forced to endure some thirty seconds of total silence and uncomfortable immobility. The unfamiliar, mysterious, and startling nature of the ritual left many an observer aghast.

Despite the misery of this initial encounter, the novelist agreed, though not without reluctance, to pose more frequently as the technology evolved. Around 1849, at least two plates were exposed by Amonre Clader, Beard's main competitor in London (plate 1). Then, in late December 1852, John J. E. Muyall orchestrated another of what Dickens described as an "interview between myself and the Sun", a fruitful sitting that produced five daguerreotypes. While Dickens still sensed the "slight rigidity and desperate grimness" that he viewed as "some of the peculiarities inseparable from the process," this time he was enchanted with one of the plates. His response was unequivocal: "I am disposed to think the portrait,
ly far the best specimen of anything in that way, I have ever seen." The ability to realize the promotional potential of this image was impeded, however, by the absence of a negative which precluded mass distribution. The solution was to engage a skillful engraver to reproduce the one-of-a-kind image. Not surprisingly, there exists an engraving of Dickens based upon a daguerreotype by Mayall. Laterally reversed, this engraving differs from the corresponding daguerreotype in the fact that Dickens sports his famous beard, which was not present at the time of the Mayall sitting. While this suggests a delay between the exposure of the plate and the printing of the engraving, it is not unlikely that this was the very same picture he had seen enthusiastically.

As Arlene Jackson has proposed, it may even be this successful sitting that led to the well-documented account of portraiture published in the March 1853 issue of Household Words, Dickens's own monthly magazine. While his thoughts on the subject were confined to personal letters, his role as editor-in-chief would have led him to approve, if not to oversee the articles that appeared in his magazine. In the first of these, simply entitled "Photography," staff writer Henry Morley and the journal's assistant editor William Henry Wills explored Mayall's establishment in detail. "It was all wholesome latter-day magic that we went up to see practised under a London skylight." Having observed the handling of the camera, Wills added to the scene in "the very head quarters of spectrason" to witness the breathtaking apparition conjured by the action of mercury vapor upon the silver-coated copper plate. A few months later, while reviewing the proofs for a subsequent article on Charles Wheatstone's stereoscope, Dickens complained that the text was too "dreadfully literal" and urged Wills to put "some fancy" into it. One imagines that he was hoping for a more lively account given the astonishing perceptual experience produced by this simulacrum of three-dimensional space.

Three years later, in the midst of writing Little Dorrit, Dickens declined Mayall's request for a renewed sitting (as leading photographers were in the habit of updating their stock of celebrity portraits to maintain prominence in the field). "I fear it will not be in my power to sit," wrote Dickens, "I have so much to do and such a distillation to multiply my counterfeit presentations." Analogous to the term representation, this archaic figure of speech taken from Shakespeare's Hamlet (III, iv, 54) may have been intended by Dickens to reinforce his dislike of the sitting process, but it may also reflect the uneasiness with which he viewed himself in a daguerreotype, the so-called "mirror with a memory," as Oliver Wendell Holmes put it in 1861. Renowned for his power to observe others with exceptional perceptiveness, Dickens was unaccustomed to ponder his own physiognomy in a like manner. As he stated in response to the excitement brought about by the splendid result of his December 1852 sitting, "I suppose it must have something good in it. I don't pretend to such a knowledge of my own face, as I claim to have of other people's faces." Finally, this portrait may have been the image used for the engraving discussed above, whose retouched board may explain Dickens's uneasy attitude toward photographic truth. Yet, despite his continuing reservations, Dickens eventually consented to more "counterfeit presents" and he, like other celebrities, gained tremendous public exposure when the collecting of mass-produced carte-de-visite became all the rage in the late 1850s. Shown in the exhibition is a larger cabinet card published by the New York firm of G. G. Rockwood on the occasion of the novelist's second North American lecture tour held in 1867-68 (cat. no. 36).

Among Dickens's contemporaries, there were others who responded with mixed emotions, but none with as much foreboding as Honore de Balzac, whose sitting of May 1842 in the Parisian studio of Louis-Auguste Bisson led him to dread photography in no uncertain terms. According to the later recollections of Nadar, the leading portraitist of his generation, Balzac believed that "all physical bodies are made up entirely of layers of ghostlike images, an infinite number of lethargic skins laid one on top of the other. Since Balzac believed man was incapable of making something material from an apparetion, from something impalpable—that is, creating something from nothing—he concluded that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Repeated exposures culminated the unavoidable loss of subsequent ghostly layers, that is, the very essence of life." Though Balzac's theory found few proponents, by the 1860s a number of amateur photographers—some might say charlatans—devised clever ways to capitalize upon the spectral connotations of camera images and the growing fascination with spiritualists and mediums. Known as spirit photographs, these amusing "counterfeit presentations" of a different sort purportedly revealed the existence of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. Cognizant of the accidental blurring of moving subjects in early pictures, spirit
Photographers made the best of this peculiar characteristic. Various frauds and some of his most combed deliberate miniatures with lengthy or double exposures and the fleeting presence of shrouded figures. One of the most common tricks was to simulate the "ghosts" by playing through a long exposure in order to see an aspect as seen through specters and apparitions.

Dickens's own interest in ghosts and spirits is reflected first and foremost in A Christmas Carol (1843), but also in The Haunted Man and the Ghosts Bargot (1846) and in a number of other known short stories, including "The Haunted-house" (1859) and "The Signal-Man" (1866). While making the most of these supernatural phenomena from a literary perspective, he depicted the fraudulent claims of spiritualists and often mocked their pretensions in his journalistic essays. Perhaps the most satirical of these denunciations can be found in "Rather a Strong Blow," a scathing review of William Howitt's History of the Supernatural (1865). In order to debunk the spiritualist humbug preached by the author, Dickens highlighted some of the articles of faith presented to the readers as dogma "with the view of assisting him to make converts." At one point, the reviewer informed "the candidate for examination in pure belief" that a visit to "the spirit-photography department" of "Mummer" was of little value, as many of his clients had, according to Howitt, "found deceased friends photographed with themselves." Known as the originator of spirit photography, William H. Mumler first came to prominence in Boston in 1861. Such an early reference to him in British literature demonstrates how quickly spiritualists capitalized upon the alleged evidence and produced the visual evidence of spiritualism. Then universally regarded as unimpeachable, scientific claims and prohibitive services eventually raised suspicion. By 1869, the fraud of hisلاقية methods were exposed in a well-publicized preliminary court hearing held in New York. Dismissed for lack of evidence, the case did little to prevent the growth of spirit photography, which spread so quickly by the early 1870s. Exemplifying the three instances of purported ectoplasmic manifestation included in the exhibition is plate 13 by Frederick A. Hudson, the earliest British practitioner of the genre. Despite his loyalty towards spiritualism and the spirit photographers' abuse of people's credulity, Dickens knew the importance of catering to his audience's craving for the supernatural; however reluctantly, he was in demand for his "counterfeit presences." Such compromises reflect the audience's awareness of market forces and his willingness to adapt accordingly.

Of Icons and Relics

From the very infancy of photography, observers noted the medium's inherent ability to convey a sense of place in telling detail. What was already apparent in such early urban depictions at Daguerre's Boulevard du Temple (1836-39) or Talbot's Nelson Column (1844). The case with which photographs of citiescapes and architectural monuments create the illusion of "being there" undoubtedly owes something to the camera's predisposition for linear perspective and hyperrealism, but according to Roland Barthes there exists a more fundamental explanation. In his essay "Rhetoric of the Image," the phenomenologist explains: "The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the being-there of the thing (which any copy could provide) but an awareness of its having-been-there. What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then." Perhaps it would not be entirely fanciful to suggest that a similar notion of "having-been-there" is also at play within the world of Dickensian imagination. As Tony Lynch has noted in his gazetteer, "A fine sense of place is also apparent in the works of Dickens; you generally know where you are with Dickens: The English, that he knew leaps from his pages—at times exciting; at times heavy with the elusory atmosphere that we associate with the grimmer aspects of the Victorian—yet always with that sense of "being there." Lynch's inquiry, which surveyed the resonances of the English sites associated with the writer and his work, amply demonstrated that "locations were invariably borrowed from reality and then rebuilt in his imagination." While much of Dickensian London
has disappeared, some sense of the architectural sources and urban settings that inspired him can be glimpsed, as if "having been there," from nineteenth-century photographs. It is unfortunate, however, that only a limited number of relevant images were produced during the writer's lifetime, as the first concerted effort to photograph old London did not originate until the mid-1870s.12

While Russian photographers were preoccupied with representing the city's architectural heritage from the very beginning, their British counterparts did not share a similar urgency until later in the century. This may be due, at least in part, to the impact of the British patents on the daguerreotype and calotype processes which impeded the initial growth of the medium. In addition, it is as if the well-established graphic tradition perpetuated by wood engravers and popular illustrators like George Cruikshank and Hablot K. Brown (known as "Phiz"), both of whom worked closely with Dickens, sufficed to fulfill the representational needs associated with urban issues. Nonetheless, there was one area in which early British photographers excelled and produced in abundance: the portrayal of the nation's industrial might and technological tours de force. This can be seen not only in the documentation of the expanding network of railway stations and bridges, but also in the proliferation of images depicting new building techniques and architectural experiments.

Foremost among the icons of British ingenuity in the Victorian era is the Crystal Palace designed to house The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, the world's first universal exposition held in London in 1851. Acclaimed for its unprecedented scale, its conservatory-like design of iron and glass, and its modular construction, the Crystal Palace has come to symbolize the love of experiment, the practical expertise, and the sense of pride that marked the Industrial Age in Great Britain. Even Dickens, who expressed reservations about the exhibition, marveled at the complexity of the ambitious undertaking: "Two parties in London, relying on the accuracy and good faith of certain iron masters, glass-workers in the provinces, and of one master carpenter in London, bound themselves for a certain sum of money, and in the course of four months, to cover eighteen acres of ground with a building upwards of a third of a mile long (1,851 feet—the exact date of the year) and some hundred and fifty feet broad."13

Two months into the fair, Dickens, who had only visited it on two occasions, made clear that he had enough of the crowds, the media hype, and the overwhelming display. "I find I am 'used up' by the Exhibition," he wrote to his acquaintance. "I don't say 'there's nothing in it'—there's too much. . . . So many things bewildered the . . . I am not sure that I have seen anything but the Fountain," by which he meant the wondrous crystal waterworks adorning the building's central transit, "and perhaps the Amazon," a sculpture by August Kiss.14 Though initially conceived as a temporary structure, theiners'97, building and a fountain were eventually dismantled and rebuilt with alterations in the nearby suburb of Sydenham. Two views of this second incarnation of the Crystal Palace are part of the exhibition, including the breathtaking stereoscopic daguerreotype from around 1855 reproduced as plate 2.15

As anyone who has looked through a stereoscope can attest, even a prior understanding of the principles of binocular vision does little to lessen the sensual wonder evoked by the device. In this particular instance, several factors contribute to heighten the illusion, thereby making the awareness of the thing "having been there" an even more complex perceptual conundrum. In the first place, this double "mirror with a memory" is itself a mirror image of a symmetrical reflection depicted as if caught in liquid crystal. When viewed as intended within the self-contained world of the stereoscope, these properties, together with the marked spatial disparity and steep perceptual lines of the composition, coalesce into a stunningly modernistic simulacrum of spatiotemporal reality. Reminiscent of the novel sensation associated with the velocity of early railway travel, this viewing experience does indeed bring out "an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the here-then."16 Though long obsolete as a technology of virtual entertainment, the stereoscope still retains its uncanny ability to bring us back to the future.

As noted above, such engaging testimonies of Britain's industrial might were not uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century, when photographers repeatedly bore witness to those projects deemed to become architectural landmarks and cultural icons. Yet, until such time as the expanding railway system brought an end to the centuries-old tradition of coach travel, practically no one was engaged in documenting old London with the camera.

The urgency of the matter came to the fore in 1875—five years after Dickens's death—with the imminent destruction of the Oxford Arms, a picturesque sixteenth-century hostelry located in
Warwick Lane, a short distance from St. Paul’s Cathedral. Alarmed by the thought of this irreparable loss, the antiquarian Alfred Hackwood, joined forces with other like-minded preservationists to commission photographs of the structure from the father-and-son firm of Alfred and John Boole of Panfield (see plates 3 and 4). This initial assignment gave rise to the Society for Photographic Relics of Old London, a project that resulted in the publication of one hundred and twenty views representing a sampling of threatened architectural relics and other notable sites. Of these images, only the first twenty-four were taken by A. & J. Boole, with all but one of the remaining negatives exposed by Henry Dixon (or his son Thomas James, who apprenticed with him before formally entering into partnership in 1886). Largely printed by the carbon process, the resulting photographs were issued by annual subscription until the demise of the Society in 1886. Twenty-five of these evocative images, each imbued with a palpable Dickensian atmosphere, form a major component of the exhibition (cat. nos. 1-25). Eight of them are reproduced within these pages (see covers, plates 3-8).

As the antithesis of the progressive spirit of experimentation underlying the conception of such iconic monuments as the Crystal Palace, it was a fear of modernization and its threat to the city’s architectural heritage that served as the raison d’être of the Society for Photographic Relics of Old London. Like Dickens’s ambivalence towards the Great Exhibition and its trumpeting of cultural progress and social advancement within an imperial frame of reference, London’s desire to safeguard its architectural relics was tempered by the conflicting imperatives of fast-paced urbanization and cultural preservation. Although the Society’s efforts to raise public awareness failed to save more than half of the photographed structures, its concern gained broader exposure as other organizations joined the argument for preservation. Seen from another perspective, the Society’s photographs afford a rare opportunity to view a number of sites relevant to Dickens and his writings.

From Druce Laze and Aldersgate Street to Barnard’s Inn and Temple Bar, there are numerous connections that can be readily identified. Some of the most pertinent of these parallels are explored elsewhere in this catalogue. For the moment, let us return to the awareness of the subject having-been-there, which, according to Roland Barthes, differentiates photography from other forms of “counterfeit presents.” While the Society’s photographs provide concrete evidence—by virtue of their indexical bond with reality—that these structures once existed, it is interesting to consider the temporal relationship with Dickens. When these urban sites made their impression upon the novelist, London photographers, as we have seen, were not yet engaged in the systematic portrayal of the city’s architectural patrimony. One: Dickens weaved fragments of these recollections into the fabric of his immensely popular narratives, the places themselves began, at least in the popular imagination, to acquire new connotations which remain to this day. While no evidence suggests that the Society’s photographers consciously intended to capture these Dickensian connotations, one might argue that the very awareness of his “having-been-there” is now inseparable from these images. Thus it is tempting to view these supposedly objective documents of urban relics as an altogether new form of psycho-normal imaging, the architectural spirit photograph.

OF FICTION AND ART amateurly
Having explored how Dickens and the phenomenology of photography can be viewed in a common light, I now wish to turn to the notion of characterization, which, like conveying a sense of place, is another representational strategy shared by the novels and certain Victorian photographers. Defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “the artistic representation (as in fiction or drama) of human character or motives,” the art of characterizing has always been regarded as an index of Dickens’s genius. Blessed with an acute sense of observation, a fertile imagination, and the ability to metamorphose fact into fancy, Dickens rose to prominence as the very epitome of literary characterization. His influence in this regard, like that of Shakespeare, crossed over disciplines and can be traced within diverse strands of photographic practices. Evidence of his imprint can be found from the illusive pursuit of objectivity professed by social documentarians to the artistic aspiration of painters-turned-photographers and other aesthetics.

Among the earliest intimations of Dickensian characterization within British photography is Henry Mayhew’s seminal social-reformist publication London
Inclined to underscore the legitimacy of his own observations, Mayhew may have been tempted to exploit the purported value of his photographs, and by a universally held belief. Until such time as the alleged missing plates are recovered, it may be wise not to mistake Mayhew’s captious any more than his “counterfeit presentations,” since without the indication “from a daguerreotype by Beard,” few would posit that the genesis of these character studies is to be found in photographs. Admittedly baffling, however, is the specific reference to Beard which, if these reservations are well founded, implies collusion or, at the very least, a willingness on his part not to reveal the truth. Whatever the case may be, there is little doubt that Mayhew’s study, like Dickens’s emphatic focus upon the plight of the lower classes, helped to galvanize public opinion in favor of social reform.

Also contributing to this contentious debate were visual artists, some of whom strongly believed in the potential of art to raise awareness, elicit compassion, and effect change. Foremost within this circle was the Swedish-born photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander, who studied the Italian masters while training in Rome as a painter. Influential as an early advocate of art photography, Rejlander drew from diverse artistic and literary traditions as he produced genre scenes of domestic life, biblical recitations, and moral allegories. Using friends and neighbors as studio models, he staged metaphorical portraits and narrative scenes that were intended to be interpreted in symbolic terms. Among the themes that he pursued with conviction around 1860 was the depiction of impoverished youths as street peddlers, archivists, and waifs. Three of these poignant characterizations can be viewed in an exhibition, a seemingly resigned castemerger that is likely to have been inspired by Mayhew’s typology of street workers and downtrodden outcasts (cat. no. 32).

Nowhere, however, is Rejlander’s empathy for the concerns of social reformists more evident than in *Handsome* (plate 15), a heartrending composition first exhibited in 1861. The product of a skillful mise-en-scène, this pictorial fiction dramatizes the weariness and despair of a ragged lad stumbling through the night. To achieve a compelling simulacrum of reality, Rejlander even rechred the upper part of the image in order to show the boy as illuminated by a bull’s eye lantern, used at that time by the London police to patrol the urban underworld. First popularized by Dickens in *Sketches by Boz* (1836-39), the thrill of wandering the city streets at night in search of the
Among the pictorial works that Barnardo may have had in mind when he stated his case were the well-known composite photographs of Henry Peach Robinson, who learnt micrasc photomontage techniques from Rejlander. Believing that "a method that will not admit of the modifications of the artist cannot be an art," Robinson advocated the assemblage of photographic fragments in order to achieve seamless compositions technically beyond the reach of single negatives. Contemporaneous with Barnardo's court appearance is the large-plate photomontage In the Days of the Work is Done (1877), a moral tale of piecemeal collaged into nearly invisible fashion from six different negatives. According to Robinson, the idea for this genre scene of rural domesticity came to him as he first met the seventy-four-year-old crossing sweep who served as his male model. Also on view within the exhibition, together with the preceding work, is the seemingly straightforward Dawn and Sunset from 1885 (plate 4), for which three negatives were joined to attain an admixture allegory of the ages of man. It is interesting to note that despite the combined representation of old age, motherhood, and infancy, the tale overlooks the age of maternity. Not universally embraced at the time as a legitimate practice, this art of photomontage gave rise to a heated debate concerning the assumed role of the photographic medium as a conveyer of unmediated factuality. Yet, in the eyes of the art photography establishment, the figure of H. P. Robinson loomed large as the leading exponent and chief theorist of the emerging Pictorialist aesthetics that would dominate the scene for years to come.

dispossessed had become a trendy, if vociferous practice by the time Rejlander conceived his allegory of homelessness. A scrutinized portrait of the reading of this emblematic image is the character of the crossing sweep simply known as Jo, whom Dickens brought to life in Bleak House (1852-53). That the two have long been associated is confirmed by Alfred H. Wall, the critic and champion of Rejlander's work, who specified that "Humbley was 'another photograph of Rejlander's, which was widely popular... of a little outcast of the street, another 'Poor Joe' asleep in a doorway.'" Hence, the alternative title Poor Jo, which is sometimes encountered in the literature, as is A Night in Town, a third designation for the same image published in The Photographic News of 8 October 1886. Widely popular in mid-nineteenth century art and literature, depictions of orphans and beggar children were even more common within photographic circles, where the high-minded principles of artists like Rejlander represented only one of many possible forms of production. As shown by other works displayed in the exhibition, there were those who specialized in the mass manufacturing of inexpensive carte-de-visite intended for a flourishing middle-class market (though, upon occasion, even Rejlander made use of this popular format to reach a broader audience). An entirely different perspective, that of the application of photography to advertising and propaganda, is exemplified by the ornate broadside promoting the good deeds of Dickens's home-town chapter of the Royal Scarem and Matinee's Orphan Schools and Female Orphan Home (plate 10).

A related example, not part of the exhibition but historically significant, is the controversial series issued around 1875 of before-and-after portraits of orphans said to have been socially reformed by Dr. Thomas John Barnardo. Formally accused of having manipulated the appearance, demeanor, and personal history of these children to suit the promotional needs of his charitable foundation, Dr. Barnardo argued that the results were artistic license as were painters and art photographers. Rejecting this argument, the court chastised Dr. Barnardo for attempting to pass what it called "artistic fictions" as hard evidence of changing social conditions.
Meanwhile, in 1877, as Robinson first exhibited _When the Day's Work is Done_, new photographs full of Dickensian flavor appeared in British bookshops. This was the latest undertaking of John Thomson, a fellow of the Royal Geographical and Ethnographical Societies with ten years of experience as an expeditionary photographer in the Far East, but no affiliation to the art-photography community. Initially released in twelve monthly installments, _Street Life in London_ is comprised of seven high-quality Woodburytypes 1 with descriptive texts, some of which were written by Thomson, but whose majority is due to his co-author, the journalist and union activist Adolphe Smith (Headingly). Deliberately conceived in the tradition of Mayhew's _London Labour and the London Poor_ (and perhaps Dickens, as some suggest), 1 this modest publication sought to remind the British public that "as our national wealth increases... the poverty that nevertheless still exists in our midst" cannot be ignored. 2 Viewing "the precision of photography" as the most objective means "to portray these harder phases of life," Thomson and Smith argued that "the unquestionable accuracy of this testimony will enable us to present true types of the London Poor and shield us from the accusation of either underestimating or exaggerating individual peculiarities of appearance." 3

From this body of work, the exhibition presents eleven forms of livelihood assumed by the underprivileged as they struggled to survive in the face of adversity (cat. nos. 37-47). From chimney sweeps and public disinfector to shoesharps and sandwich men (plate 12), a sampling of the most picturesque street characters is represented, with undeniable compassion, for the scrutiny of those who could afford the pricey photographs. 4 Yet, despite Thomson's noble intentions, the objectivity which he strove to achieve proved as unattainable for him as it would be for later social documentary photographers. Forced by technological constraints to peg his willing subjects in predetermined settings, Thomson was also susceptible to the inevitable forces of social conditioning and cultural bias that informed his personal vision. As Reuben Stein has shown, "to a significant extent Thomson's celebrated urban realism derives from the methodology of his Asian documents; these sympathetic glimpses into familiar daily life grew out of a highly developed colonial gaze, embedded in the relations of class and racial types." 5

While Thomson's endeavor deserves credit for pioneering the use of photography as a weapon of social critique, it is equally important to acknowledge that it remains "counterfeit presentment" of street life in London.

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Having surveyed the three visual themes that make up Dickensian London and the Photographic Imagination—Counterfeit Presentment and Apparitions, Icons and Relics, Fiction and Artifice—I want to conclude this essay with a few remarks concerning the relationships between truth, fiction, and imagination. If there is one recurring notion that seems relevant to the exhibition as a whole, it is the realization that fiction is ubiquitous within the photographic imagination. Probing beneath the surface of daguerreian mirrors, alluring ghost images, factual testimonials, stereopticon characterizations, and seamless photomontages reveals ample evidence that things are not always as they appear to be. Time after time, the ground shifts below the thin emulsion encapsulating the photographic representation.

While Dickens objected to the scams of spiritualists on the grounds of people's unwavering credulity in the photographic image, he questioned the very ability of the new art to convey truthful representations at all. In his view, the process yields no more than a "counterfeit presentment," more sham than truth. Reflecting upon some of the London neighborhoods that fed the novelist's imagination, we are reminded how difficult it is to dissociate these sites from his "having been there" and from the related tales that he so convincingly brought to life. A related pattern of shared inspiration and collective memory is also discernible in Rejlander's allegories, such as _Homedes_, which exemplifies not only Dickens's influence but, also, perhaps, that of Mayhew upon the novelist. Likewise, as we contemplate Poor Joe's predicament, the formal treatment of Rejlander's boxed figure even brings to mind such references as Michelangelo and Raphael. As for the once widespread belief in the unqualified objectivity of typological surveys, there is now no escaping the process of deconstruction that can discern even the most subtle underlying ideologies. Indeed, photographs are no longer perceived to be the truth once believed.
the truthful "windows on the world" that they were once believed to be.

As a final note, I would like to linger for a moment along Portsmouth Street, where passersby can still enter the "Old Curiosity Shop" immortalized by Charles Dickens, or so the sign reads on the shop front.

Though most scholars now reject this claim as unsubstantiated, the association is so deeply ingrained in the popular imagination that it defies dissuasion. In the view of it included in the exhibition (plate 9), the ghost of Dickens is particularly palpable. While the building's dubious claim surely qualifies it as a "counterfeit presentment," its historical significance as a structure erected in 1857 makes it status doubly interesting as a relic of old London and an icon of Dickensian fiction. Adding further dimension to this richly evocative site are three figured in London fog is the loaded cart of Hogarth Poole, the waste-paper dealer occupying the premises, together with the thrones, and the child in the street doorway, all of whom seem mesmerized by the hidden photographer.

Like the rubbernecker standing along the perimeter of Thompson's minaret-like, these characters remind us of the mediating agents whose presence—like that of Dickens—may be unseen, but is none the less indelible from the very fabric of the image.

NOTES


1. Ibid. Dickens's emphasis.

2. For a reproduction of this uncut engraving, see Arlene M. Jackson, "Dickens and Photography" in Household Words, "History of Photography," no. 2 (April-June 1862): 147.


Incidentally, another headless daguerreotype of Dickens, a signed profile that may have been produced during the same sitting, sold for £40,000 at Christie's South Kensington on 11 May 2000 (sold, no. 119). For more up-to-date information on Mayall, including compelling evidence that his Regent Street studio was operational as early as May 1852, see http://www.artsacres.offbeater.co.uk/ DMayall.htm. Based upon this latter evidence, my inclusion would be to associate the headless daguerreotypes with the December 1852 sitting, rather than with the 1853-55 period cited by Hannavy (ibid, 111-12).


1. Ibid, 56.

7. Dickens to Wills, 5 August 1853. Letters of Charles Dickens, 7:125. "The Stereoscope," also known to have been authored by Morley and Wills, appeared in Household Words, no. 181 (10 September 1853): 37-42.


11. See, for example, Philip Collins, Dickens on Gyges: An Uncollected Article, with Introduction and Notes," The Dickensian 95 (January 1963): 5-14.


13. Ibid., 203.


18. Ibid.

The carbon process is a permanent photographic process, which uses carbon pigment of any color to form an image in slight relief. It was introduced on a commercial scale in the mid 1860s to alleviate the troublesome fading of albumen prints.

This work originated as a series of essays commissioned by the Morning Chronicle newspaper in 1848-50. Published without illustration, the installments were issued as numbered letters under the general title Labour and its Price. According to Peter Ackroyd, the figure of the crossing sweep in White House may have been inspired by one of Mynheer’s earlier accounts. See his Dickens (London: Smith, Stevenson, 1990), 641-44.

As quoted in Robert A. Sobieszek, Masterpieces of Photography from the George Eastman House Collection (New York: Asheville Press, 1985), 182. Reitanter paid further tribute to Dickens in the two versions of a work from around 1860 entitled Hard Times, one of which, obtained by double exposure or some other means of superimposition, anticipates the later craze for 3D photography.

Among those who shared Reitanter’s artistic aspirations was Lewis Carroll, whose haunting interpretation of Alice Liddell as The Begger Maid (1880) is widely regarded as a masterpiece.

The case against Dr Barnardo was first visualized in The Catechism and Dr Barnardo (London: National Poyntz Gallery, 1974). See also Jeff Bristow, "Print as Image: The Crisis of Photographic Realism in John Thomson’s Street Life in London," Image 5th, nos. 3-4 (fall/winter 1993): 29-32.


Presented by Walter Woodbury in 1866, the Woodburytype is a photomechanical printing process yielding continuous-tone images in slight relief (like carbon prints) which they resemble. Woodburytypes are valued for their rich tonalities that are not subject to fading. In 1881, an abridged version was associated under the title Artist Anecdot.


As quoted by Thomson and Smith in the preface to Great Life in London (London: Sampson Low, Martine, Sonne, and Rivington, 1877-78).

Ibid.

As noted on the protective wrapper for the initial installment issued on 1 February 1877, each set of three Woodburytypes and their description constituted a sliding and 1/2 conscience.

Stein, "Street Figures," 246.
2. Unknown photographer, Ode's Crystal Fountain in the Crystal Palace, Sydenham. ca. 1855 (cat. no. 52).
Wm. B. Becker Collection/American Museum of Photography.
George Eastman House Collection.

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S. A. & J. Bowl, Cloth Fair (Now 'Church and Looking East), 1877 (cat. no. 10). George Harman House Collection.
9. M. L. (possibly Millar & Lang), The Old Curiosity Shop, Portsmouth Street, ca. 1890s (cat. no. 29)
George Eastman House Collection.
"PROWLING ABOUT" LONDON: DICKENS’S PEN AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC LENS

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"If in this age three things are diamonastically required of Man in the miscellaneous thoroughfare of the metropolis. Firstly, that he have his boots cleaned. Secondly, that he eat a penny ice. Thirdly, that he get himself photographed." Thus wrote Charles Dickens in September 1860, one hundred forty-three years before this exhibition’s exploration of the connections between Dickens, London, and nineteenth-century photography.

Charles Dickens enjoyed a long and intimate relationship with London, and perhaps no other English writer has been so closely connected to the Victorian city. His contemporary, the writer and social commentator Walter Bagehot, praised Dickens’s penning of London with a painting metaphor: "There are scarcely anywhere such pictures of London as he draws." This opinion is echoed by twentieth-century literary critics, for whom Steven Marcus speaks when he names Dickens "one of the great poet-novellists of the modern city." Dickens even linked his brief writer’s block in 1844 when he lived in Genoa, Italy, to his inability to walk the streets of London: "Put me down on Waterloo Bridge at eight o’clock in the evening with leave to roam about as I like, and I would come home, as you know, panting to continue writing." Dickens’s avid pedestrianism (he enjoyed walks of fifteen to twenty miles at a brisk pace, preferably at night) allowed him to observe and represent the myriad sights/sites of the city. His literary genius, informed by his strong emotional identification with city "Others”—children, the disabled, the poor, fallen women, and criminals—resulted in fifteen novels and numerous stories, sketches and essays. Dickens’s genius found food enough for a lifetime of writing in his childhood suffering as a virtual orphan. His parents, anticipating bankruptcy (shortly thereafter, his father was arrested for debt, and the family moved into the Marshalsea debtor’s prison), sent him to work at a boot-blacking warehouse, pasting labels on boxes of boot blacking (polish). At age twelve, he worked six days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and earned six shillings a week. He lived alone in lodgings, bought his own food, and became well acquainted with the streets of the city.

Later, in his twenties, working as a newspaper reporter, Dickens increased his knowledge of the city and its inhabitants, and began writing his journalistic sketches of London life, Sketches by Boz. Dickens never stopped portraying the city, its vitality and its darkness. In the 1830s Oliver Twist deliciously anticipates his escape from authority: "London! that great large place! nobody—not even Mr. Bumble—could ever find him there!" while in 1870 Dickens transports readers to a London opium den in his unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood.

Dickens, dying unexpectedly at the age of 58 in 1870, did not live long enough either to see John Thomson’s series of photographs or read Adolphe Smith’s comments on the photographs, published in 1877-78 as Street Life in London. However, he did experience the invention and rising popularity of photography, since both his lifetime, 1812-1870, and the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901, intersected the development and early years of photography as technology and art, 1825-1915. Dickens noted
the popularity of photograph-albums filled with photographic portraits, decreed the sensationalist photographing of “an appalling accident” of a high-wire performer, disbelieved in spirit photography, and cited the photographing of criminals as evidence of technological advancements. Photography becomes an historical marker in *Great Expectations*, when the protagonist Pip introduces his orphan state: “I never saw my father, or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photography).”

Beyond Dickens’s awareness of photography as a growing cultural phenomenon, his ability to visualize characters and scenes in his work was repeatedly compared with photography and painting. In 1856, George Eliot, later a famous novelist herself, praises Dickens’s working-class characters as figures portrayed with “the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture.” In a retrospective of Dickens’s career after his death, R. H.utton lists as one of his “great literary gifts” the “power of observation to enormous that he could photograph almost everything he saw.” But some critics complained of what seemed to them overwhelming detail. George Brinley compared Black humour to “a daguerrotype of Fleet Street at noonday... though the daguerreotype would have the advantage in accuracy of representation.” The wealth of detail exhausted William Forysthe: “The eye of the spectator [of a painting] can take in the whole of the picture at once, but the mind of the reader must go through the successive points of a description until it becomes fatigue by the multiplicity of details.”

Some of the discomfort about physical detail might arise from Dickens’s subject matter, because Dickens creates characters “soiled with the miry and sooty of the London streets,” chronicling the so-called “lower regions of London society.” As such, Dickens as a social reformer and artist may participate in the dilemma facing photographers whose work is featured in this exhibition, the dilemma of the power relations between artist and subject, articulated so clearly in John Tagg’s *The Borden of Representation*. At what point do “the insatiable appropriations of the camera” further marginalize the poor, rather than *awakening the social conscience* of those persons more economically advantaged? Also, the issue of what it really means to be “true to life” in one’s representations of street life and street people arises in the work of both Dickens and Thomson.

*Oliver Twist*’s prostitutes, thieves, fences of stolen goods, and boy-pickpockets earned their living from the Victorian street, and it was this novel that Dickens prefaced with his famous defense of his novel’s truth to life, its literary realism. Behavior such as *Nancy the prostitute*, Dickens wrote in his 1841 Preface,

>[involves] the best and worst shades of our nature: much of its ugliest hue, and something of its most beautiful; it is a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility; but it is a truth. I am glad to have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I should find a sufficient assurance (if I wanted any) that it needed to be told."  

Nancy’s amalgam of sin and virtue later became the basis of Dickens’s most riveting performance of his fiction, the murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes. Dickens’s insistence on the “truth” of his portrayal reverberates in claims made in the Preface to *Street Life in London*, by photographer John Thomson and social reformer Adolphe Smith:

“We are fully aware we are not the first in the field...[but] we cannot be too frequently reminded of the poverty that nevertheless still exists in our midst.

And now we also have sought to portray these harsher phases of life, bringing to bear the precision of photography in the illustration of our subject. The unquestionable accuracy of this testimony will enable us to present true types of the London Poor and shield us from the accusation of either understating or exaggerating individual peculiarities of appearance."
The authors of *Oliver Twist* and *Street Life in London*, respectively, are seen as intertwined. Misfits and their representations, and claim that work like theirs needs to come before the public's eye and heart. Both expect to be doubted, but while Thomson and Smith use language indicative of nineteenth-century empiricism and social sciences and as “narrowness,” Dickens defends the possibility of individual moral redemption even for the prostitute Nancy, and by extension, for all the city's fallen. He draws on the geography of the city to make his point: "He did not doubt that there lay festering in Saint Giles's as good material towards the truth as any tubing in Saint James's," thereby leveling the moral distinction between London's poor slums and its affluent areas.17

Thompson's most important visual predecessor was Henry Mayhew, whose illustrated series *Engravings based on Daguerreotypes* by Beard, accompanied by commentary, was entitled *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). Mayhew attempted to classify "street folk" into types such as "the wretched and the sufferer—the tramp and the citizen," relying on "contemporary anthropological discourses on race and class."18

Mayhew saw costermongers (those who sell items from a street barrel or stall) as "a distinct race," set apart from the respectable, largely middle-class Victorians who made up his primary audience.19

The engraving reprinted here from Mayhew's work, entitled *Street Life of Dogs' Collar*, appears as an almost sinister figure, his hat and sallow hair dipping over one eye, and wearing most of his inventory around his neck and arms. He is as severely maimed as Jacob Marley's ghost in *A Christmas Carol*, and like Scrooge and Marley is visually imprisoned by his commercial pursuit. Catherine Gallagher's claim that "costermongers form the city dweller the ubiquitousness of the competitive marketplace"20 completes the thematic link between this street seller and the selfish greed of Scrooge and Marley by showing both the costermonger and Marley as victims of their own commerce. "I wear the chain I forged in my ghostly walk," when then asks Scrooge to estimate the weight of his own "manacles of greed."21 Mayhew's dog-collar seller and Thomson's costermongers in Covent Garden (cat. no. 47) are part of London's limitless marketplace, where "everything can be got with money," as *Pride and Prejudice* wrote.22 But as much as Dickens, having been a hungry twelve-year-old alone in the city, is aware of London as a market, having "stared at the pineapples" in Covent Garden, the city and its people transform any single meaning.23 Dickens's London remains as mysterious as it is various, and the commodities for sale dressed by Mayhew—dog collars to fit any size canine, hot eels, plum "duff," penny "gafts," rat-poison, cigar ends, and second-hand "curiosities"—point beyond themselves to the amazing lives lived in the city. Dickens's power as an artist and Mayhew's limitation as a social observer derive from their respective abilities to participate in the experience of the working poor. Whate Mayhew carefully isolates his costermonger from his reader by portraying him as working-class, physically, morally, and potentially criminal, Dickens works his way fictionally beyond human types toward human selves, always seeing his characters with a compassionate eye. Thus Bill Sikes, house-breaker, kidnapper, even murderer, can still strangely arouse the reader's sympathy when, running from the law on the outskirts of the city, he stops to help fight a fire, and for a moment, regains a sense of identity within a human community.24

When Thomson began to publish his photogravures in *Street Life in London*, he was well aware of Mayhew's and Dickens's work. His writing partner in

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Street Life, Adolphe Smith, refers directly to Dickens, in passages such as his commentary on "Hookey Alf, of Whitechapel," an epileptic amputee with an individual history behind his physical deformity (cat. no. 44). Smith refers not only to Captain Cuttle from Dombey and Son (1846-48), but to Dickens’s belief in practical help rather than institutionalized charity: 

[...]ence my belief that time spent among the poor themselves is far more productive of good and permanent results, than liberal subscriptions given to institutions of which the poor know no more than can be gleaned from the hurried perusal of an abbreviated prospectus. In this manner Dickens acquired his marvelous stores of material and knowledge of the people. Exaggerated as some of his characters may seem, their prototypes are constantly coming on the scene, and as I talked to "Hookey" it seemed as if the shade of Captain Cuttle has penetrated the wilds of Whitechapel.26

Smith refers to Dickens’s use of exaggeration, often marked by "signature" gestures or traits that help the reader distinguish between Dickens’s usually quite large cast of characters in each novel.27 Cuttle’s irrepressible hope for the best, expressed in his poignant groping toward verbal and moral order in the tag phrase, “When found, make a note on,” serves as a “hook” or refrain to his character. Significantly, Smith “reads” the London of the 1870s through a Dickensian lens, evoking sympathy in the reader for “Hookey’s” damaged body and “spoilt manhood,” for his inability to “fulfil the same duties as a man in sound health.”28 But in stressing “Hookey’s” incompleteness, Smith diminishes his selfhood. Unlike Dickens, Thomson and Smith can’t get past “Hookey’s” namesake, the hook where his hand used to be. The visual “hook” of the photograph has hooked them. Thomson’s photo shows a young girl staring right at the artificial limb, a stare Smith wistfully misinterprets as the child’s moral drive to “penetrate the group and reclaim a drunken parent from the scene.” Dickens, whose work some critics faulted for what they termed the “nastiness of dwelling on offensive peculiarities in his characters” and his “cruel consideration of physical defects” is both a realist and a romantic, using scars and deformities to express the painful life experiences of characters, as well as to award moments of emotional and spiritual transcendence to characters with such physical limitations.29 Captain Cuttle’s fidelity to his friends, his emotional wisdom that Dickens clearly values over the business savvy of the wealthy merchant Paul Dombey, St. hooks the reader in the end.

Fascinated by London’s physical violency and decay, and sensing that acts of imagination could transcend the deadliness of materiality, Dickens knew his world wouldn’t last forever. In an early sketch, “Scotland Yard,” he concludes by predicting that the London he and his reader now inhabit will disappear and escape detection by future antiquarians and researchers.

Almost three decades later, in The Uncommercial Traveller, he finds decaying London churches, “buildings at the heart of the world’s metropolis,” that are less known to most Londoners than “Pyramids of Egypt,” an archaeological analogy that shows his acceptance of the city’s mutability.30 He wrote this acceptance into his fiction, unafraid to question the institutions he saw failing the Victorian poor, including the Church of England.

In Bleak House, the orphaned street-sweeper Jo sits munching bread near Blackfriars Bridge, looking up uncomprehendingly at St. Paul’s Cathedral. The cathedral dominates the London skyline, and Dickens referred to it as the heart of London, that “when it should cease to beat, the City would be no more.”31 Henry Dixon’s photograph, Oxford Arms Inn from the Old Bailey towards St. Paul’s (Plate 3), with a hazy St. Paul’s looming in the background, visually reverses the fates of the two buildings, making the inn seem permanent and enduring, despite its broken rail and busted windows, and St. Paul’s distant and dreamlike. In actuality, the Oxford Arms has been demolished (1877), while St. Paul’s withstood the German’s bombing during WWII.
Although every photograph in the exhibition can be linked to Dickens's work in one fashion or another, the remainder of this essay considers only nine of them, beginning with the "spirit" photograph by Frederick Hudson, entitled Lady Helen Novenham and the Spirit of Her Daughter (plate 13). Dickens "had more than once publicly ridiculed the Spiritualist movement,"*53 and his skepticism appears in short stories such as "The Haunted House," and essays such as "Rather a Strong Door." However, Dickens did believe in the narrative power of ghost stories which pervade his canon, and particularly his Christmas books. Ghosts walk not only in Bleak House, but they swing from a rope in Great Expectations, and come to reclaim furniture in "Chambers."*54

Thomson's photograph Street Doctor (plate 11) shows upon close examination a poster to the left of the doctor, advertising a London theatrical performance of "Poor Jo," an adaptation of Bleak House. However much Dickens bemoaned the lax copyright laws that allowed American publishers and theatrical entrepreneurs to cannibalize his novels, the influence of his fiction was undeniable.*55 The street doctor himself, a purveyor of "cough lotions and healing ointments," is the poor man's solution to the difficult problem of medical care for the poor in the city. Dickens revered legitimate physicians such as Alan Woodcock in Bleak House, while his friend and protégé Wilkie Collins celebrated the successful cure of quack "doctors" such as Captain Wragge in No Name (1862). Visual display of his wares helped sell the "medicines" of the street doctor, as the Victorian age witnessed the burgeoning of patent advertisements.*56

Dickens coined the term "sandwich man," describing the London boardman as "a piece of human flesh between two slices of pasteboard."*57 In Thomson's photograph and Smith's text entitled The London Boardman (plate 12), the man is a walking sign for a product, a performance or a lecture by someone named "Renovs." The hand attached to the front of the boardman's head is there to arrest the attention of passersby, and contributes to the boardman's status. Smith has that boardman: "an often man who has fallen in the world," and as boardmen have reached a "pitch of degradation" in becoming a walking sign signifying something other than their own human identity. Dickens's most famous street-seller, Silas Wegg of Our Mutual Friend, avoids such anonymity by imagining he is the faithful retainer to the family near whose house he tells his dispassionate wares. Even the fantasy of connection, Dickens suggests, is better than no connection at all.

Henry Peach Robinson's Dawn and Sunset (plate 14), with its grouping of a mother holding a sleeping child, and an aging father, head bent, crutches leaning against his chair, epitomizes the domestic hearth represented repeatedly in Dickens's work. This photograph shows two sources of light: a hearth fire, occluded by a chair, and sunlight from a window shining in on flower pots. Alexander Welsh interprets Dickens's valorization of the domestic hearth as the "anthropis of the city," of "urban poverty and desolation."*58 One of Dickens's favorite painters, Sir David Wilkie, specialized in such scenes of domestic security and quietude; drawing this praise from Dickens: Wilkie "made the cottage hearth his grave theme, and . . . surrounded the lives, and cares, and daily toils and occupations of the poor, with dignity and beauty."*59 Dickens's idealization of the Victorian home and hearth has frequently been criticized as overly sentimental, but as Fred Kaplan explains, such depictions are evidence of Dickens's need to privilege emotion over a formalist aesthetic.*60 The presence of three generations in Robinson's photograph recapitulates the endings of several Dickens novels, especially the trios of grandparent or grandparent-surrogate, parent and child in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son, and Bleak House.

The moody photograph of The Old Curiosity Shop (plate 9), with a policeman and two anonymous men in bowler hats in the foreground, shows a shop on Portsmouth Street, near the south-west corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields, where lawyer Tussingham of Bleak House cohabited with his fifty-year-old wine, "that blithe in the glass to find itself so famous." Although this location was known to Dickens his close friend and biographer John Forster lived around
the corner), its identity as the original location for the Old Curiosity Shop is tenuous at best, a mixture of exploitation and appreciation which Dickens knew all too well from his American tours, during which fans "turningly stripped bits of flat from his coat to treasure as souvenirs."43 Jennifer Wickes sees a "permeability" between Dickens's fiction and advertisements of it, evidenced in products named after Dickens's characters, such as "Pickwick" cognacs, "Captain Cuttle" motor scooters, and "Mickeywhip" pens. Wickes notes that such practices have extended to our own time, in Smirnoff Vodka's panning caption next to a photograph of a martini: "Olive 'n Twist."44

The faux Old Curiosity Shop's subliming, "Immoralized by Charles Dickens," reminds us of the Victorian response to Little Nell's death, the outpouring of grief when the serialized novel concluded in 1841, as well as Oscar Wilde's Raubb, "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing."45 For Wilde, only sixteen years old when Dickens died, Dickens's literary influence seemed an irrelevant "curiosity," and for entrepreneurial Londoners, Dickens had become a brand name.

At last, then, we turn away from the populated commercial street with its shops and street-sellers, seen in work by Thomson, Smith, and Mayhew, and items from the Wm. B. Becker Collection, to depopulated buildings past their glory days, from the portfolio "Photographs of Old London: Just as the old clothes for sale in Monmouth Street, St. Giles, challenged Dickens to imagine the lives of the garments' former owners, these photographs challenge the viewer to imagine not only the buildings as they are pictured in the photographs, but what they were in their heyday.46 What lives were lived there, professional and personal? What aspect of Victorian England has been lost with the destruction of these sites?

Photographs of coaching inns, such as the King's Head Inn, the George Inn, and the Queen's Head Inn (cat. nos. 18-24), all in Southwark, an area on the south bank of the Thames between the Southwark and London Bridges, speak to the displacement of coaches by the railways, eloquently presented in Donnelly and Son and in the nostalgic imaginative journey of "Travelling Abroad." Although many coaching inns in Dickens are comically portrayed as having terrible food and even worse service, they also indicate a past rapidly being lost, so much so that in one sketch the narrator treats a post-chaise as an artifact of a bygone era, and hears the bells ringing, "WHAT'S-be-come-OF-THE-coach-cats."47 Inns also punctuate Dickens's narratives as way stations in characters' development. Pip's ascension to a gentleman and thus a suitable escort for Estella on her way as she journeys to Richmond in Great Expectations is only one such example. Coaching inns are, for a writer so convivial as Dickens, an excellent place to get a drink, and Dickens's canon effervescence with potables, from Micawber's rum and lemon peel punch in David Copperfield to "those delectable drinks, Pudd, Flip, and Dog's Nose," served up at the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters in Our Mutual Friend.

In Dickens's work, many roads lead to the Thames, the dark artery that flows through London, providing livelihoods and offering a ready-made grave for the desperate. The Thames is present from the beginning of Dickens's career, in sketches such as "Mrs. Linpeep's Lodgings," in which a kind landlady prevents a female lodger from committing suicide by drowning, to Dickens's last finished novel, Our Mutual Friend, in which poor river-side dwellers at Limehouse in East London earn their livelihood scavenging corpses from the Thames.48 St. Mary Osney Dock (cat. no. 25), also from Photographic Rarities of Old London, lay between the river and an old church, known as Saint Saviour's, in Dickens's time, and since 1905 as Southwark Cathedral.49 Dickens sounds the themes of secrecy and invisibility in Oliver Twist on the fateful night Nancy meets Rose and Mr. Browlow on London Bridge, describing the river area thus:

indistinct buildings on the banks . . .
The tower of old Saint Saviour's church and the spire of Saint Magnus, so long the giant watchers of the ancient bridge, were visible in the gloom, but the forest of shipping below bridge, and the thickly scattered spires of churches above, were nearly all hidden from sight.48

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In the exhibition photograph of the dock, two people, slightly blurrily, gaze from the dock into the river, framed by a gas lamp and the run-down façade of a riverside building. The Thames remains invisible in the photograph, but visible to the photograph’s blurred human, whose gaze on a disappearing world may be replicating even now.

If photographs of Victorian London are “an urban time machine,” as Richard Stein suggests, then so is the work of Charles Dickens, who transmitted his vivid imaginings of London through language. Dickens requires that we give up the need for absolute knowing, a need the enormity of the city defies anyway, and give in to the imagination (and most particularly, to his imaginative rendering of this landscape).” He tells us, what inexpressible food for speculation do the streets of London afford?... We have not the slightest commission for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent Garden to St. Paul’s Churchyard, and back into the bargain, without deriving some amusement—we had almost said instruction—from his perambulation.11

He asks us to adopt a more active habit of wonder, to activate not only our legs but our sympathetic imaginations. We are invited to join Dickens, Mayhew, Thomsons and others who were willing to “proud about” the city, see its people, and learn its places. “I am prouder about, meditating a new book,” Dickens wrote to a friend in August of 1860; the book that emerged was Great Expectations.12 In that spirit of discovery, I hope visitors to Dickensiana London and the Photographic Imagination will view the photographs and then return to Dickens’s canon to find some of the many other Londons he has drawn with his pen.

NOTES

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5 Steven Marcus suggests Dickens “needed these streets and those people for his work was meaningful and irreversibly connected with that epoch in his life when he was literally a wanderer in the city.” Mazas, 279-80. Dickens’s essay “Nights Walks,” takes the reader through London. See Uncommercial Traveller, 150; the essay is republished originally in All’s Well, 279-80.
10 Great Expectations, ch. 11.
14 The Burial of Representation: Visages on Photographs and Haplopor (Baltimore: University of Massachusetts, 1988) 92 and 118-9; Susan Stave describes the phenomenon of oppressed subjects as “the genetics of persuasions” in On Photography (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).

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George Eastman House Collection.
Growing up in the latter part of the twentieth century, I have often
needed to think what it would be like to live in a world
without mass media. What would life be like without
color photos in our daily newspapers, without live
newscasts from the latest crime scene, without the daily
conge of reality programs, and without the computer
on which I find myself composing this essay today? It
seems in our everyday lives we take realism for granted.

We often assume that these presentations of reality are
objective. We choose to suspend our disbelief long
enough to consume the information we have been
presented, and then it's back to the daily routine as we
feel newly nourished by the facts of the world. Artists
of Victorian London did not take the presentation of
"reality" for granted; rather they were fascinated by it.
The early daguerreotypes, followed by the development
of photographs, thrived in a culture "whose appetite
for accuracy had been whetted by eighteenth century
carvings, etchings, and the panoramic watercolors
of the early nineteenth century." Concurrently, the
literary movement that focused on realism, attempted
to take a closer look at the experience that was London,
and convey that experience to the Victorian public.

Formal realism in the novel, as defined by scholar
Ian Watt, is constructed of a set of narrative proce-
dures employed to create a "full and authentic report
of human experience" by relying on "a more largely
referential use of language than is common in other
literary forms." The literary employment of such
techniques by authors such as Charles Dickens was
also witnessed within the art world during this period
through the new medium of photography. Like

Dickens, photographers John Thomson and Oscar
Rejlander sought to depict, and sometimes stage, a
more "authentic report of human experience" through
photography. Through a comparative look at Dickens's
use of language in Oliver Twist (1837–39), Bleak House
(1852–53), and Great Expectations (1860–61), and
photographs by Oscar Rejlander and Henry Dixon,
one begins to see how the different "realisms"
presented through each type of media complement
each other while maintaining their own distinguishing
characteristics and sense of realism.

While photographers captured images through the
use of technology, authors such as Dickens rendered
an image by using techniques such as listing. In Oliver
Twist, Dickens introduces Fagin, a thief and corruptor
of youth, by first describing the "back-room" that he
occupies by stating: "the walls and ceiling . . . were
perfectly black . . . There was a deal table . . . a candle
. . . a ginger beer bottle . . . Several rough beds." These
items not only accompany the physical description of
Fagin, they serve, as scholar J. Hillis Miller proposes,
as "the starting point of an act of interpretation which
moves beyond them to the hidden ways of life of which they are signs." Dickens's metonymical
description places Fagin within the visual environment
and invites the reader to look beyond the "signs" of
Fagin's moral darkness.

"Victorians welcomed and embraced the optical
inventions and the more realistic realities they could
picture." However, these optical inventions also
were viewed as having their own set of limitations.
Dickens offers a comparison between the new art of
photography and portrait painting in Oliver Twist, in the
words of the housekeeper Mrs. Bedwin: "painters
always make ladies out prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any custom, child. The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might have known that would never succeed; it's a deal too honest.

A deal!" Dickens's claim at once recognizes the implicit realism involved in the new form of art, yet at the same time criticizes its level of realism and inability to soften the likeness. This illusion of the "honest" photographer led many Victorians to believe that the photograph could not lie. The likeness represented within the photograph was somehow an "authentic report" of reality.

Photography, as well as literature, relies heavily on the art of composition. The photographer, as well as the author, is always mindful of his/her composition. Some elements remain within the field of view while others are discarded. Some objects are brought forward while others are left within the background. The final arrangement of compositional elements is designed to present the artist's interpretation of the subject, often leaving the viewer with an incomplete, flawed perception of reality. This leads many to question the authenticity of realism and the incompleteness of any rendering, photographic or literary, leaving the viewer/reader with an impression of verisimilitude, yet never quite reaching that "full and authentic report."

While some have questioned the authenticity of Rejlander's photographic subjects, his photo entitled "Homeless" (plate 15) attempts to capture the solitude and despair of the homeless youth. Similarly, Dickens's character Jo in "Black House", a young homeless boy who sweeps horse manure from the streets of London for spare change, represents the societal outcast implicit in Rejlander's photo. Dickens's narrator speculates about Jo's thoughts:

To be hustled, and jostled, and moved on; and really to feel that it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business, here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I am here

somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am! It must be a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human . . . but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cats, go by me, and to know that in ignorance I belong to them, and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose decadcy I offend!" Both mediums share the ability to invoke sympathy in the mind's eye. Rejlander's image signals poverty through the boy's tattered clothing and the dirt that covers his skin, while Dickens's Jo feels "scarcely human" as later within the novel the physician Mr. Woodcourt considers "that in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unworn dog." Here Dickens captures Jo's essence as he likens him to animals. Dickens specifically chooses to list animals that are exploited by man rather than give the reader any sense of Jo's freedom or independence. His sense of self-degradation is reinforced by Woodcourt's analogous response to the difficulty in disposing of Jo.

Jo appears in "Bleak House" without origin, history, or any sense of belonging to the overall picture. Yet Dickens begins to empower Jo by allowing him within the narrative to lift the City of London with "Bleak House" and Chesney Wold as his disease carrying body infects Esther Summerson with her disfiguring illness that ultimately protects the scenes of Lady Dedlock. Contrary to Dickens's images of Jo, Rejlander's image of the homeless boy includes no characterizing scenry, no sense of anyone around him, and no sense of origin or history; moreover, Rejlander chooses to leave the boy helpless, alone, and personally with drawn from the city around him. While the evidence presented advocates dissimilarity in the artist's vision, Jo's eventual death makes clear that both artists envisioned a dismal ending to youth in poverty.

Seven years after Jo's untimely death, Dickens introduces his readers to Pip, another orphan entering the "Modern Babylon," London, in "Great Expectations." Although Pip's fate is quite dissimilar from Jo's, Dickens's development of Pip as a young man begins in his first lodgings away from his childhood home when he takes up residence within Barnard's Inn that originally stood as an Inn of Chancery to prospective barristers within London's legal district. Dickens again, creates a dismal view of London with Pip's thoughts of his new lodgings.

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We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought I had never seen so many dead trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cows, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or a dozen), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided, were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift... A freezing murrain of soot and smoke attend this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had drenched ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a merchant's hole.7

Dickens's description of the courtyard serves as an entry point to Dicken's image of the courtyard of Barnard's Inn by leading a sense of character to an otherwise static scene. The visibly flat courtyard and leafless trees of Dixon's image create a barren landscape that Dickens's use of descriptive terms like “dismal,” “dilapidated,” “crippled,” and “miserable” creates within the minds of his readers. Dickens uses Barnard's Inn as a staging ground for the second, of three, “stages” of Pip's expectations.8 Pip, within this dismal scene in London, learns the first points of middle-class life as his roommate Herbert Peggotty reminds him “that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth—for fear of accidents—and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put in any further than is necessary.”9 Dickens's images of Barnard's Inn not only capture the cold harsh exterior of the building, but they also capture the human experience. Pip's relationship with Herbert, the discovery of their history together, their first meal together, and Pip's awkward visit from Joe Gargery all collaboratively bring to life the many different experiences of living in Victorian London.

While the photographs vividly visualize the destruction of poverty and city life in London, Dickens's vision attempts to create the “fear and authentic” through narrative descriptions of the city as well as through the thoughts and feelings of his characters. Dickens's vision of Jo and Pip seem to underline the motifs within the photographs, exploring social and economic status through the poverty of Jo, while the “expectations” of wealth pervade Dickens's characterization of Pip. Dickens's “likenesses,” although they remain textual, penetrate deeply into the world of Victorian London, bringing life to the still image. Rejlander's photographs depict a homeless boy, tattered by poverty, dirtied by the streets of London, and faceless to a world that ignores him, while Dickens's Jo feels, like any of us would feel, trapped within the voiceless despair of poverty, less man human.

NOTES
5. Moore, 368.
6. Oliver Twist, 84.
8. Ibid, 719.
12. Ibid, 125.
13. Ibid., 141.
CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

A & J Boyd

1. Oxford, High St (24th June)
   (demolished 1877)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   25.5 x 19.0 cm
   Plate 15 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

2. Old Houses in Weygate Street (demolished 1877)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   22.9 x 18.5 cm
   Plate 5 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

3. Old Houses in Weygate Street (South Side Longest East) (demolished 1903)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   22.9 x 18.5 cm
   Plate 6 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

4. Old Houses in High St (South Side Longest East) (demolished 1903)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   25.5 x 19.0 cm
   Plate 2 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

5. Old Houses in Weygate Street (South Side Longest East) (demolished 1903)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   25.5 x 18.5 cm
   Plate 7 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

6. Old Houses in High St (South Side Longest East) (demolished 1903)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   25.5 x 18.5 cm
   Plate 8 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

7. Old Houses in High St (South Side Longest East) (demolished 1903)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   25.5 x 18.5 cm
   Plate 9 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

8. Old Houses in High St (South Side Longest East) (demolished 1903)
   Published 1876
   Carbon print
   22.9 x 18.5 cm
   Plate 10 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

9. St. Barnabas's on the Green and Civil Servant
   (demolished 1905)
   Published 1877
   Carbon print
   20.5 x 15.0 cm
   Plate 16 from SPROL portfolio
   George Eastman House Collection

10. Civil Servant (2nd Civil Servant Looking East)
    (demolished early 1960s)
    Published 1877
    Carbon print
    23.5 x 18.6 cm
    Plate 17 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

11. Civil Servant (2nd Civil Servant Looking West)
    (demolished early 1960s)
    Published 1877
    Carbon print
    23.5 x 18.6 cm
    Plate 18 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

12. Temple Bar (demolished in 1878)
    and inset rebuilt in Hermitage
    Published 1878
    Carbon print by Henry Dixon
    22.9 x 17.5 cm
    Plate 19 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

13. Old Houses in Cay's Inn Lane
    (demolished 1876)
    Published 1876
    Carbon print by Henry Dixon
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 23 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

14. Barnard's Inn Hall (extant)
    Published 1876
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 21.7 cm
    Plate 27 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

15. Barnard's Inn Garret (demolished)
    Published 1879
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 28 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

16. Barnard's Inn (Street View)
    (demolished 1910)
    Published 1879
    Carbon print
    22.9 x 17.8 cm
    Plate 29 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

17. Old Houses in Aldersgate Street
    (demolished 1876)
    Published 1879
    Carbon print
    22.9 x 17.8 cm
    Plate 30 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

18. King's Head Inn Yard, Southampton
    (demolished 1876)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 31 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

19. King's Head Inn Yard, Southampton
    (demolished 1876)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 32 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

20. King's Head Inn Yard, Southampton
    (demolished 1869)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 33 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

21. King's Head Inn Yard, Southampton
    (demolished 1869)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 34 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

22. George Inn, Southampton (extant)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    22.9 x 17.8 cm
    Plate 35 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

23. Queen's Head Inn Yard, Southampton
    (demolished 1886)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    22.9 x 17.8 cm
    Plate 36 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

24. Queen's Head Inn (Entrance), Southampton
    (demolished 1866)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    17.6 x 22.2 cm
    Plate 37 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

25. E. Maryport's Dock, Southampton
    (demolished 1866)
    Published 1881
    Carbon print
    22.9 x 17.8 cm
    Plate 38 from SPROL portfolio
    George Eastman House Collection

Frederick A. Hudson

26. Lady Holles' Monument and the Spirit of
    the Great
    (demolished 1872)
    4 June 1872
    A photograph de voix
    Win. B. Becker Collection
    Art Museum of Photography
    Rep. plate 13
27. "Mr Bells with the Spirit 'Country,' "Toon in London," 'Tommy,' and the later of a Victorian Writer"
ca. 1875
Albumen print
9.8 x 8.4 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company
(English firm, active 1840s–1920s)

28. "Self Portrait of Actors Barnaby Rudge"
ca. 1870–74
Albumen stereograph
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

Millar & Long
(British firm, active from ca. 1890)

29. "Mr. L. (possibly Millar & Long)," "The Old Landscape Map, Portland Street"
ca. 1890
Albumen print
9.5 x 7.2 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography
Reprod. plate 9

F. M. Park (British, dates unknown)

30. Mrs. Coller & Her Husband, Sirn"ca. 1875
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

Oscar Gustave Rejlander
(British, born Sweden, 1813–1875)

31. "Candy"
ca. 1860
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

32. "Nurse and Nurse"
c. 1860
Albumen print
5.0 x 2.25 cm
George Eastman House Collection
Reprod. plate 11

Henry Peach Robinson
(British, 1830–1901)

34. Dawn and Sunset
1880
Composite photogravure from three negatives
Printed by Ralph W. Wood Robinson, ca. 1902
5.6 x 7.6 cm
George Eastman House Collection
Reprod. plate 14

35. "How the Day's Work is Done"
1877
Composite photograph from six negatives
Platinum for Ralph W. Wood Robinson, ca. 1902
5.3 x 7.6 cm
George Eastman House Collection

36. "Goal Post"
ca. 1872
Albumen calotype card
George Eastman House Collection

37. "Life from the Booths"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.6 x 9.3 cm
Plates 5 from John Thomson and Adolphe Smith, Life in London
[Novel Surrey Stamp Office, Marquis, Smith & Warington, 1877–78]
George Eastman House Collection

38. "The Verdict"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.6 x 9.3 cm
Plates 6 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

39. "Great Dane"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 8.6 cm
Plates 17 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection
Reprod. plate 11

40. "The Temperature Range"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
9.1 x 5.7 cm
Plates 12 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

41. "The 'Wall Street'"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 7.6 cm
Plates 19 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

42. "Captain Gordon Letham"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.4 x 8.6 cm
Plates 18 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

43. "The London Barricade"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 8.5 cm
Plates 20 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection
Reprod. plate 12

44. "History of Whitehall"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.1 x 8.4 cm
Plate 29 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

45. "The 'Couper'"
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 8.7 cm
Plate 30 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

46. "The New Forest"
Published 1877
Woodburytype
11.2 x 8.9 cm
Plate 35 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

47. "The Embankment She-Bolt"
Published 1877
Woodburytype
11.1 x 8.4 cm
Plate 36 from Street Life in London
George Eastman House Collection

Unknown photographers

48. Bagg Book I
c. 1880
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

49. Bagg Book II
c. 1880
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

50. "The Crystal Palace, Sydenham"
(destroyed by fire 1936)
c. 1875
Albumen print
10.5 x 15.3 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

51. "Orphans from the Royal Hospital and Marines' Orphans During the Campaign of the Navy"
ca. 1875
Albumen print
5.6 x 7.8 cm (image); 9.0 x 12.2 cm (ribbon-shaped border)
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography
Reprod. plate 10

52. "Officer from the Crystal Palace, Sydenham"
(destroyed by fire 1936)
c. 1875
Stereoscopic daguerreotype
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography
Reprod. plate 2

53. "Mr. John Gals, Clerk (assistant)"
c. 1860
Albumen print
9.4 x 12.8 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Planned to coincide with the Eighth Annual Dickens Society Symposium being chaired by English Professor Natalie Cole at Oakland University on October 10-12, 2003, Dickens London and the Photographic Imagination brings together six-three nineteeth-century photographs inspired by the great novelist and his work. Of these, forty-one prints are borrowed from the outstanding George Eastman House Collection, Rochester, NY. Our warmest thanks go to Therese Mulligan, formerly Curator of Photographs, for supporting our initiative and making the loan possible. Also highlighted in the exhibition are twelve works generously lent by the Win. B. Becker Collection, the backbone of the innovative virtual museum located at www.photographymuseum.com. The Oakland University community is greatly indebted to Win. B. Becker for his continued support of our exhibition program.

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The details from the wood-engravings which appear throughout the catalogue are derived from Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor (London, 1851).