Revisiting Metropolitan T(r)opographies:
Review of Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's
Neo-Victorian Cities: Reassessing Urban Politics and Poetics

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N*eo-Victorian Cities: Reassessing Urban Politics and Poetics* is the fourth volume of the well-established Neo-Victorian series, which already scrutinised tropes of trauma (2010), families (2011), and the Gothic (2012). The latest collection by series editors Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben tackles the urban as a significant element of neo-Victorianism. In the book, Julian Wolfreys, an expert on nineteenth-century (city) literature as well as its contemporary revisions, even goes so far as to argue that urban fiction constitutes a major sub-genre of neo-Victorian writing (see p. 127). Beyond a prominent array of canonical neo-Victorian novels, the city features strongly in graphic novels and films, particularly those of the steampunk, the Gothic, and the detective vein.

Since the 'urban turn' in the 1980s and spurred on by the 'spatial turn' of the 1990s, cultural and literary studies have equally enlisted a growing scholarly interest in the city. In comparison to Asa Brigg's (1963) or H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff's (1973) seminal cultural-historical explorations of Victorian cities, recent publications on the nineteenth-century metropolis take into account a variety of representations of the city ranging from architecture to urban experience and social life, film, art, and literature.[1] The plethora of publications, predominantly centred on London as the epitome of the (neo-)Victorian metropolis, has outlined

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representational characteristics concerning the contemporary and the nineteenth-century city, focussing on image, history, and narrative (Phillips 2006: 3). Lawrence Phillips's (2006) and Sebastian Groes's (2011) studies on the development of London literature since the Second World War both identify the writing by Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd as symptomatic for questions on metaphor and memory. Alex Murray's *Recalling London* (2007) takes into view the authors' historical fiction of the city in linking the cultural and political contexts of Thatcherite to that of Victorian London, while Julian Wolfreys's three volumes on *Writing London* (1998, 2002, 2004) trace the urban text from William Blake and Charles Dickens to Sinclair and Ackroyd. Likewise, Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart's *Restless Cities* (2010) thematically delineates the development from the nineteenth-century metropolis to the twenty-first-century megalopolis. The present collection also exemplifies how major neo-Victorian constructions of the city concern Gothic images, which often intersect with issues of class and gender as well as those of race and ethnicity in preoccupations with the imperial/postcolonial metropolis.

Yet Kohlke and Gutleben's *Neo-Victorian Cities* is the first publication which combines the aforementioned perspectives on the nineteenth and twentieth century in comprehensive conversation not only with regard to the past/present but particularly as a global mode of imagining the urban. The contention of the editors is that, as the nineteenth-century cityscape "laid the foundations of modern urban living" (p. 2), neo-Victorian cities significantly contribute to shaping "individual mindsets and, consequently, our present-day engagements with and understanding of metropolises" (p. 3). On the one hand, persistent ethical dilemmas such as alienation, precarity, exclusion, and Othering inform our perception of the postmodern city, just as prevalent anxieties and desires feed the continued fascination with the cities of past that underlie the ones presently inhabited (see p. 33). On the other hand, because the nineteenth-century city is perpetually reinvented – physically and imaginatively – in and for the present, it represents an already "remediated image or projection" (p. 3) which (re-)constructs the urban as a heritage site for preservation or economic exploitation, Gothic fascination and terror, or capitalist romance and exchange. Hence, it is the pronounced aim of *Neo-Victorian Cities* to "explore [...] material, conceptual, and aesthetic renderings, transformations, and reproductions of nineteenth-century urban space in and through various

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neo-Victorian media" (p. 33). To this end, the collection brings together eminent experts of neo-Victorian studies who assess neo-Victorian representations across different media, such as architecture, film, radio play, and of course the novel from a diverse range of approaches including postcolonialism, phenomenology, psychogeography, psychology, etc.

In their introduction, Kohlke and Gutleben take their cue from Penelope Lively's synoptic London novel *City of the Mind* (1991), which casts the city as "a kaleidoscope of time and mood" (qtd. p. 1). This image serves to envision the double cities of the neo-Victorian as both past and present, real and imaginary, thus as an apparatus through which to perceive transformations in (urban) societies (see p. 2). Moreover, it represents an apt metaphor for the excessive troping of the neo-Victorian city itself (see p. 8). Kohlke and Gutleben identify transitoriness as a central element of the urban, loosely borrowing Julian Wolfreys's notion of the city as "*becoming constantly*" (Wolfreys 2004: 21, original emphasis; see p. 6). This temporal characteristic is further pronounced in the paradoxical relation of the neo-Victorian, which attests to the permanent transience of cities through ongoing imaginative and physical transformations. While neo-Victorianism fosters preservation and nostalgic reiteration and thereby seems to resist urban impermanence and fleetingness, it likewise contests, deconstructs, and distorts (see p. 7). Kohlke and Gutleben point out that the city of both past and present is simultaneously Self and Other, functioning as an uncanny *Doppelgänger* (see p. 8). This, according to the editors, not only emphasises neo-Victorianism's "*quintessentially Gothic*" nature (qtd. p. 8, original emphasis); they also demonstrate that a "Gothic sense of the city" (p. 5) has persisted in urban fiction since Dickens's visions of 'attraction and repulsion': the dual character of the metropolis oscillating between fascination/wonder and anxiety/terror. Besides these affects, the unreadability and mutable entirety of its physical space cast the nineteenth-century city as well as the postmodern megalopolis as an ineffable and sublime monster:

> Focussing on the same, often Gothicised features of the urban omnispace – slums, lofty bridges, gas-lit night-time streets, silhouetted buildings in the fog, thieves' dens, subterranean city spaces – neo-Victorian 'architexture' reworks not just

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past cities, but also their prior stylised re-imaginings in a
cumulative adaptive chain. (p. 17)

Within this double Gothicised haunting – spatially and temporarily – the
protean transitoriness of the neo-Victorian city, moreover, in seeming
timelessness, stresses the additive and adaptive features of the city-text (see
p. 17).

　　In this respect, Kohlke and Gutleben note the centrality of the
palimpsest in neo-Victorian representations of the metropolis: "the
palimpsestic trope posits the past city's supersession through incorporation
and accretion rather than displacement and eradication" (p. 11). They
identify cultures of memory, intertextuality, and architectural palimpsests as
three main interpretative vantage points of the metaphor (see p. 11).
However, it is the self-reflexive notion of these processes of adaptation in
"[p]hysically or imaginatively rebuilding, rewriting, and rereading Victorian
cities" (p. 9) which makes the neo-Victorian use of the trope so interesting.
Kohlke and Gutleben argue that neo-Victorian writings on the palimpsestic
city rather employ the metaphor within an ethical turn as commemorating
historical traumas than only for an intertextual playfulness of a self-reflexive
postmodernism (see pp. 14-15).[2] Closely related to the palimpsest is the
labyrinth, which is once more Gothicised, because the image is mainly
constituted by historicist layers of neo-Victorian imaginings and
predominantly functionalised as "Macabre Maze" (p. 18). Neo-Victorian
fictions take up familiar 'beasts' from classics by Robert Louis Stevenson,
Oscar Wilde, Arthur Machen, and Bram Stoker, as well as urban myths,
particularly that of Jack the Ripper. In this conflation between the city and
the monstrous, according to Kohlke and Gutleben, the neo-Victorian urban
domain "constitute[s] a form of Gothic repetition rather than innovation in
figuring the metropolis" (p. 19). This also entails the manifold recyclings of
the trope for the malevolent drives of the Id or urban squalor foregrounding
entrapment, not only for marginalised social groups, but also for the
endemically evil city itself (see pp. 21-22). In a sense, this idea of
inescapability also applies to neo-Victorian representations of the gendered
city: albeit giving a voice to formerly excluded female figures, they revive
the erotic charge of the labyrinthine matrix explored from an essentially
male vantage point on the urban, resurrecting the traditional trope of the city
as the 'Babylonian Whore' in peopling the streets with prostitutes. This not

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only stresses the problematic commodification of urban society, but underlines the overt commercialisation of some neo-Victorian visions themselves.

A number of significant issues arise from the introduction's concern with the kaleidoscopic character of neo-Victorian politics and poetics of the city in their "power of re-enchantment by re-imagining metropolises and urban experiences" (p. 35). Especially because of the reiteration of traditional urban tropes and the employment of dominant contemporary metaphors of the city, it is the strategies employed in reconsidering the metropolis in a specifically neo-Victorian way which are of particular interest. How does the notion of the urban as a sub-genre of the neo-Victorian, counter to approaching the neo-Victorian as a strain in contemporary urban imaginings, proffer a deeper insight into the maze of the imagined city?

Although uncovering divergent strategies of troping, the twelve contributions are structured so as to correspond to those overarching issues of the neo-Victorian outlined in the introduction (the palimpsest, the Gothic, and commodification) and therefore resonate evocatively with one another and overlap in thematic foci. The first section of the book entitled 'Capitalising on the Palimpsestic City' investigates the temporal, spatial, and textual overwritings of neo-Victorian cities, respectively their uncovering. According to the editors, the neo-Victorian metropolis "confronts us with the paradoxical (post)modernism of the nineteenth-century urban milieu and the disconcerting 'neo-Victorianness' of the still unredeemed postmodern city" (p. 37). Whereas this seems to emphasise notions of memory and historiography, the first article makes clear that neo-Victorian employments of the trope go beyond spatialities of the local and the urban, encompassing those of the global and the rural as well.

In the first article, Kate Mitchell asserts that the colonial city "proves multiply palimpsestic" (p. 50) because it encompasses the traces of the mother city London adapted to the present; besides, it includes its own idiosyncratic historical layers of physical materiality and of literary representations. With the example of Robyn Annear's non-fiction book *Bearbrass: Imagining Early Melbourne* (1995) and A.L. McCann's novel *The White Body of Evening* (2002), Mitchell shows how both texts imagine the city as a palimpsest by overlaying the contemporary metropolis with its nineteenth-century double in the image of the British metropolis on the one

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hand and that of the Australian bush on the other hand (see pp. 45 and 60). Whereas Annear nostalgically re-invokes the bush myth of nineteenth-century nascent nationalism and thereby creates the idea of Melbourne as a unique antipodean city, McCann debunks this myth by challenging the notion that Australian identity is linked to the bush (see pp. 44-45 and 57). In relocating the Australian Gothic, long associated with the rural landscape and colonial oppression, to the city, McCann's novel re-centres the urban as the very foundation of Australianness (see p. 58). Representing the colonial city as a reproduction of a metropolitan Other as well as the Other of the Australian bush, the text emphasises the interplay between past and present, metropolis and colonial city, city and country (pp. 64-66). Breaking the boundaries of the association of the urban with Gothic urban squalor and offering a new postcolonial perspective of the neo-Victorian city, Mitchell's article, together with Elizabeth Ho's closing contribution, constitutes one of the most memorable essays in the present volume. Nevertheless, it might have been interesting to take into account John Griffiths's recent publication on *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939* (2014) in which he argues that the city 'Down Under' was relatively untouched by imperial saturation and became more internationally oriented around the turn of the century. Indeed, scrutinising colonial urban spaces, such as Hong Kong, Belfast, and Mumbai, as well as cities like Budapest, Dubai, and New York the contributions of this collection suggest the neo-Victorian city as a globalised phenomenon.

The second chapter by Nathalie Vanfasse on Ayeesha Menon's BBC radio play *Mumbai Chuzzlewits* (2012), which adapts and relocates Charles Dickens's novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) to modern-day India, resonates with some of these 'new' preoccupations of the neo-Victorian palimpsest. First, with regard to contemporary global cities, the play invokes the hubs of global capitalism, Mumbai and Dubai, as a continuation of the nineteenth-century British capital with reference to its monetary mind-set as well as its social blight and squalor (see pp. 71-72 and 85-87). Second, however, the cities are not only reminiscent of or haunted by its Victorian double: due to the geographical and temporal transposition of former London to present-day Mumbai, the text also creates a rupture with the city's exploited colonial past in underlining how cities formerly situated on the margins of the Victorian world have become its rival in global urban competition (see pp. 72-74). Third, the palimpsestic refashioning of Dickens's Victorian

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hypotext into Menon's neo-Victorian hypertext entails processes of hybridisation, although Vanfasse critically remarks that this appropriation does not really live up to critical postcolonial rewriting (see pp. 89-92). It is, fourth, mainly in the intriguing transmedial reduction of descriptions of city life through immediate speech, action, and sound in the radio play that Vanfasse detects a genuine evocation of the contemporary Indian metropolis (see pp. 75, 78, 81). It would have been interesting to know whether beyond the superimposition of Victorian sound pollution, the adaptation also references other (textual) Indian cities, e.g. the prolific soundscape of Delhi evoked in Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980). All in all, the question remains whether the superimposed neo-Victorian city represented in *Mumbai Chuzzlewits* serves as a mere cipher for global capitalism that generalises the urban "discriminatory apparatus" (Benevolo 1980: 786) to one of social blight leaving a blind spot to the generic paradox of the urban (see pp. 87 and 92), i.e. the fact that the majority of Dubai's inhabitants – both rich and poor – belong to an international diaspora of migrant workers.

Especially with regard to the intertextual and intertemporal character of the palimpsestic city, Isabelle Cases's subsequent study on Geoffrey Fletcher's book *The London Nobody Knows* (1962) and Norman Cohen's film adaptation (1967) makes fascinating reading. Cases's analysis shows that the neo-Victorian is not only to be discovered in the contemporary/ postmodern metropolis but already in the transformative phase of the post-Fordist city during the 1960s.[3] Due to its constant becoming – decay and regeneration – the city "already appears as a palimpsest" (p. 120), which implies that the neo-Victorian is as old as the Victorian city, something insinuated by Mitchell's essay on colonial Melbourne too. Rather than denoting a specific past identified as 'Victorian', the adjective, according to Cases, must be "understood in its social and cultural rather than strictly chronological implications" (p. 107). The neo-Victorian city thus not only materialises globally, it is also present in other decades. Consequently, the DVD release of the documentary in 2005 and the radio programme on the book in 2012, briefly mentioned in the closing of the article, might in turn represent a neo-Victorian reading trying to revive the city of the 1960s that is currently further gentrified (i.e. the East End) or those post-war landmarks that are slowly erased from the urban texture due to their 'lesser' ethic and aesthetic value (i.e. Castle House demolished for Strata SE1). Furthermore, the multi-palimpsestic character of the neo-Victorian suggests that we might

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trace the neo-Victorian urban in other texts of the past as well. This calls for a re-reading of canonical neo-Victorian texts in their precise cultural-historical context, such as Ackroyd's and Sinclair's writing as emplaced in the British capital of the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, Cases sees Geoffrey Fletcher's book as a response to urban transformation that announces later works by Ackroyd, Sinclair, and Patrick Keiller (pp. 122-123). While the film adaptation by Cohen re-interprets the Victorian flâneur's fragmented experience in a cinematic narration, its documentary style falls prey to the 'slumming trope', dwelling on East End poverty, alcoholism, and squalor (see pp. 110-112). In comparison, Fletcher rather serves as a composite figure whose interest in the lost and forgotten Victorian buildings seems to privilege off-track *genius loci* (see pp. 101, 108-109, 114). Thus, despite his ambiguous politics of appalled fascination and social critique, escapism and nostalgia, his voyeuristic and testimonial tendencies merge in a more ethical dimension that, albeit less politically informed, still premonitions that of later London psychogeographers (see pp. 103 and 114).

In the last chapter of this section, Julian Wolfreys suggests that neo-Victorian city texts are rather "para-Victorian" in nature (p. 134), as they constitute self-reflexive acts of parallel proto-phenomenological Victorian writing. In their revision of literary precursors (e.g. Dickens), the appropriation of characters (e.g. Jekyll and Hyde), or the imitation of conventions (e.g. the Gothic), neo-Victorian novels reiterate many clichés and stereotypes about the city itself (see pp. 127-128). For Wolfreys the 'newness' of neo-Victorian texts, besides implicit phenomenological preoccupations, resides in the self-conscious foregrounding of perception in relation to place. Looking at phenomenological apprehensions of the city in canonical texts, he analyses the "performative tracing" (p. 130) of the city in the different relations between place and subjective existence. In Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) the sensual onslaught on the protagonist signals the phenomenological interpretations by the viewing subject, who perceives the city in fragments of disappearance and loss, yet also monumental persistence (see p. 136). Wolfreys elucidates how neo-Victorian representations of the metropolis attest to the fundamental truth about its constant becoming: in taking up the language of place also in its historicity novels become shaped by the pattern of the city (see pp. 134 and 140). Because of the unperceivable nature of the city, Charles Palliser in his *The Quincunx* (1989) resorts to established tropes or phenomenological

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representations, which underline how the city is in fact "a continuum for, and between subjects" (p. 144). This is equally evident in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), where "London serves to determine the form of the narrative in situating its subjects' responses to the capital" (p. 145). Not only does this stress the notions of perception and feeling as constitutive of the production of cities, it also proves the modern character of Victorian urban fiction in its traces of non-normative modes of the phenomenological (see pp. 145-146). In this way, neo-Victorian writing constitutes a continuum of the Victorian project, albeit one that haunts the period from the future, not offering new images of London, but presenting new possibilities for understanding the urban (see p. 146). However, it remains open in how far these new ways of uncovering our perception of the city actually resemble an idiosyncratic trait of neo-Victorian revisions of the city or a general characteristic of contemporary urban fiction.

This equally concerns a related aspect of neo-Victorian cities addressed in the second part of the book: 'Gothicising the Metropolitan Deathscape'. Since the Gothic revival towards the end of the nineteenth century, this mode of writing has formed its own prolific sub-genre of city texts. Two recent publications, Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard's collection *London Gothic* (2010) as well as Sara Wasson's *Urban Gothic of the Second World War* (2010), take into account the development and manifestation of the London Gothic from Dickens until today. As already outlined in the editors' introduction, the Gothic forms a central idea in neo-Victorian writing; In their preceding volume, *Neo-Victorian Gothic* (2012), Kohlke and Gutleben even argue that the neo-Victorian is essentially Gothic and predominantly urban (see Spooner 2013: 185). Indeed, in her review of the collection, Catherine Spooner questions the thematic alignment between the Gothic and the neo-Victorian and their common attitude on historical repression (see Spooner 2013: 181-182). According to Spooner, the difference is constituted by the double vision of neo-Victorianism, which takes into account the eruption of the past into the present and the simultaneous transfer of contemporary Otherness to the past (see Spooner 2013: 182). Thus, if the articles in this section seem to retrace some covered ground, particularly on contemporary urban fiction, they still offer new neo-Victorian angles and approaches to the city.

Jean-Michel Ganteau's chapter proposes a new vista on a paradigmatic text of the urban Gothic, Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the*

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Limehouse Golem (1994), by reference to another dominant trope of neo-Victorian writing, namely that of trauma. Taking its cue from Lisa Katherine Avery's study *Vulnerable London* (2007), Ganteau's claim is that "neo-Victorian visitations of the metropolis essentially […] thematise and dramatise the general idea that ours are acutely vulnerable times" (p. 152). From that vantage point, he contradicts Elizabeth Ho's reading of the novel as occluding trauma and sidestepping feminist interpretations, because the psychogeograpical approach of the text with its emphasis on emotional geographies makes precariousness visible (see pp. 156-157). Moreover, he borrows a term from Nicholas Royle, "veering", which denotes a poetics of repetition, digression, recurrence, and deviation that contradicts stereotypical Gothic motifs and thus reduces Victorian Otherness (see pp. 160-161). Urban vulnerability is mainly dramatised through the theatricalisation of the monstrous city (see p. 165). Exposing freakishness as a traumatic response to vulnerability, the neo-Victorian Gothic text in line with postmodern aesthetics thereby challenges the status of the monster as Other and emphasises the precarious subject (see p. 155). For Ganteau the novel consequently presents a mode expressing relational ethics that promote a concern for the vulnerability of the precarious excluded Other manufactured by post-industrial urban life (see p. 172). In their introduction, Kohlke and Gutleben read this as a warning against the capitalist metropolis and contemporary urban politics, which create "new patterns of socio-economic and gendered exclusion, inequality, and victimisation" (p. 23). Although this contribution sometimes seems to 'veer' from the focus of urbanism, Ganteau successfully argues that vulnerability challenges the idealised citizen and thus may actually "become an inspiration for urban politics" (p. 172).

Mariaconcetta Costantini in her analysis of Gothic London in Dan Simmon's *Drood* (2009) also underlines the political implications created by social vulnerability, especially with regard to traumas produced by capitalistic and colonial exploitation. In reference to Robert Mighall's definition of London as one of the "quintessential Gothic cities" (qtd. p. 177), she expands on prototypical images such as urban pollution, crime, segregation, threatening ethnoscapes and their emphasis on lower urban strata concentrated in the labyrinthine underworld of slums, sewers, tunnels, catacombs, and burial grounds with the accompanying psycho-social metaphorisations of horror, fear, and disorientation. Indeed, it is the

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persistence of anomic urban forces that are hidden in the vertical city, a space for social redundancy and abjection, that is invoked in allusion to the invasion-fear in nineteenth-century Gothic texts (see p. 182). By palimpsestic constructions of urban degradation, the novel, according to Costantini, emphasises the idea of "a reckless socio-economic system" (p. 191) which emerges in the neo-Victorian and continues to haunt today's cities. The present Gothic focussing on political issues and ethical values therefore challenges the "middle-class rhetoric of reform and progress prevailing in both ages" (p. 179).

Susan K. Martin's 'Neo-Victorian Cities of the Dead: Contemporary Fictions of the Victorian Cemetery' continues the preceding analysis of the underworld as the city of death. The graveyard, as Martin shows, serves as a synecdochic double for the city in neo-Victorian novels by replicating its social divisions, its eroticised commodity culture, and its eventual initiation of the necropolis as the city of the dead. A recent profusion of this metaphor in neo-Victorian novels, e.g. in Dan Simmons's *Drood* (2009) as well as in Tracy Chevalier's *Falling Angels* (2001), Lee Jackson's *The Welfare of the Dead* (2005), and Lyn Shepherd's *Tom-All-Alone's* (2012), suggests that death has taken the central place in these re-visions of the nineteenth century. However, this seeming move from sex to death only constitutes a variation of the topic where the erotics of death take on former ideas of the abject body in an enhanced form or underline the urban commodification of the body (see p. 204). In their replication of urban space and its social conditions, the nineteenth-century 'Cities of the Dead' thereby become an imaginary space enabling new capitalist understandings of metropolitan sociality (see p. 212). The mid-century city with its problems of poor housing, supply, transport, water removal, sanitation, disease, crime, and mortality is thus depicted as a necropolis – a giant graveyard of commerce (see pp. 206-207). Yet, Martin argues that the neo-Victorian novels, despite their exploration of common tropes of the abject, the uncanny, and death, do not include haunting in the conventional sense (see pp. 221 and 224). Indeed, the use of the cemetery as a counter-replica of the city signals a meta-fictional comment on neo-Victorian writing: commercialisation with a difference. The parallel between metropolitan and necropolitan returns to the idea of the city's destruction. What is only indirectly implied in these neo-Victorian visions, however, is that subterranean space, like the city above, inherits the essential urban paradox of death as well as (re)birth in its

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ambivalent spatiality of precipitated crisis on the one hand (e.g. cemeteries, water pipes, and sewers), and the progressive, modernist space of the London Underground on the other hand.

It is the latter to which Paul Dobraszczyk turns in his essay on two London Underground films: as *Death Line* (1972) presents a neo-Victorian vision of the nineteenth century during the 1970s and its loose remake *Creep* (2004) features references to the Second World War, respectively the Cold War, this contribution revisits the idea of neo-Victorian spatial, temporal, and textual doublings. Dobraszczyk highlights that the London Underground is not only the physical counterpart and Victorian forbearer of the postmodern city, but that due to a heightened awareness of time space it becomes immanent (see p. 227): The Victorian/Underground is envisioned as a space of horror in which the atavistic past erupts into the contemporary city (see p. 231). In continuation of the Victorian Gothic literary tradition, *Death Line* focuses on the Underground as a tomb of the abandoned and predominantly works as a social critique of the British class system (see pp. 232-237). The remake *Creep* is similarly informed by the multi-layered Victorian past, but expands to other subterranean topographies that underline its labyrinthine quality, deconstructing conventional 'secure' social distinction (see pp. 237-240). Once more, the neo-Victorian urban Gothic discourse emphasises the obsessive repetition of past traumas and lays bare the ruins of capitalist economy (see p. 243). Although Dobraszczyk's analysis of another medium stands out in this section, its critical perspective on the neo-Victorian city would have benefitted from considering Lawrence Phillips's article on the two movies in his *London Gothic* collection as well as David Ashford's recent *London Underground: A Cultural Geography* (2013).

The third and final section of *Neo-Victorian Cities*, 'Romancing the Commodified Metropolis', explores capitalist iconographies of the neo-Victorian urban with regard to postcolonial and gender politics as well as pornographic and heritage industries, raising questions of trauma and political agency on a global scale. Laura Helen Marks's discussion of the neo-Victorian pornographic film adaptation *Jekyll and Hyde* (1999), written by Raven Touchstone and directed by Paul Thomas, takes into view the legacies of gender and class mapped onto the neo-Victorian metropolis (see p. 279). Filmed in Budapest, the sex movie produces trans-spatial and poly-palimpsestic urban constellations analogous to those of Melbourne and

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Mumbai, functioning as a modern city's Victorian Other while reflecting its West/East, upper/lower class, virgin/whore dichotomy (see p. 262). For Marks, this female authored and driven film re-centres the urban female actor of the prostitute, who only haunts the margins of Stevenson's text and marks the marginalisation of women in the nineteenth-century city, as a narrative agent (see pp. 249-250). But even though Marks shows how the film's pornotopia genders in unexpected ways, it – like the city – still capitalises on female sexuality for pleasure and profit. Actually, the protagonist Molly/Flora as both prostitute and slayer resonates with the victim-hero/perpetrators of such female figures as Elizabeth Cree in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* or even Kate, the protagonist in *Creep*, which signals traumatic vulnerability. Marks underlines that the "sexually desirous self [is] rendered monstrous and murderous by a society intent on regulating female sexuality" (p. 274). The protagonist's suicide at the end suggests that Molly/Flora has inherited and internalised societal shame with regard to her double role as virgin/whore, presenting her as still imprisoned within patriarchy (see pp. 275, 279). This initially also applies to the gendered spatial divide represented in the film: the pastoral serves as the restorative part of good femininity, while the city corrupts and resembles monstrous desires (see pp. 268-269). Yet the Jekyll/Hyde *Doppelgänger*-motif actually implies that it is essentially always both.

Ironically, the romantic comedy *Kate and Leopold* (2001), analysed by Margaret D. Stetz with regard to its steampunk poetics and politics, propagates a similar notion of the corrupting modern city and 'good' femininity residing in the pastoral past. Stetz outlines steampunk as an off-spring of the Gothic as well as a hallmark of the urban genre which, due to its delight in time travel and its worship of scientific pioneering, shares with the neo-Victorian the interpenetration of one era by another (see p. 284). Taking into account steampunk's ideological scepticism, Stetz states that the film represents the nineteenth-century city (i.e. New York) as well as its twenty-first-century incarnation as an emblem of capitalist excess, cannibalistic consumerism, and socio-economic injustices (see pp. 285-287). The Victorian city thus serves as prototype and *Doppelgänger* of postmodernity's unreal cities, its virtual commodities, and dehumanising exchange values (see p. 287). Succumbing to images of "moral darkness" (p. 304) and the fatalism of the city in the film's dystopic elements, the paper however only partly follows the trace of the comic and mainly omits

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steampunk's creative mash-up aesthetics and subcultural politics, which
might open new vistas of a productive urbanism (see pp. 293-295).[4] In *Kate
and Leopold*, the gentlemanly scientist from the nineteenth century saves the
twenty-first-century female character, who is sexually and spiritually
exploited by the corrupted metropolis, from her bleak urban existence; Kate
decides to follow Leopold into the past and to his English country house.
Although this is identified by Stetz as "deeply conservative" (p. 298), the
notion that the Sussex estate and its heir are "out of step with the pressures
and temptations of capitalism in *both* centuries" (p. 292, original emphasis)
seems rather short-sighted: as the author's own reference to H.G. Wells's
The Time Machine (1895) reveals, the conveniences and comforts of life –
especially those of the untainted countryside – owe their existence to a "dark
underworld" (p. 301). Equally, the New York marriage market, where
American women are sold for British titles, underlines the country's
involvement within the new capitalist system and hints at its exploitative
feudal past. On the one hand, the film thus conforms to the (gendered)
binary of city and country; on the other hand, it embodies their complicated
complicity as outlined in Mitchell's and Marks's essays.

Just as the New York film scrutinised by Stetz serves as another
example of the "wider neo-Victorian spatial practices" (p. 302), so does
Barry Sheils's following contribution on Glenn Patterson's Belfast novel
The Mill for Grinding Old People Young (2012). Sheils stresses "Ireland's
exceptional importance to revisionary readings of the 'Victorian'" (p. 309),
and especially urban representations in Irish neo-Victorianism, which all too
often seems to rely on the country as a symbol for the anti-urban. For his
psychoanalytical reading of the novel, Sheils asserts: "It is precisely this
inseparability of politics and perversity which connects Ireland to the
problem of reading the Victorian unconscious, and which suggests an
affinity between Irish question and neo-Victorianism" (p. 313). Colonial
Belfast represented a particular key to the Irish question, because the city
was both a site of political protest and an exemplary Victorian city due to its
industries and capitalist modernity (see p. 327). Belfast resisted Victorian
hegemony accompanied by its own Victorian pleasure economy, so that it
constituted a place of interrelations and complicity, unmaking distinctions
between Irish and British, progress and destruction, city and country (see
pp. 309, 312, 315, 319). Sheils detects references to psychoanalysis's
formative evolution in the text that reflects on this turn to perversity: the

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memoirs of a Belfast manufacturer, urbane moderniser and gentleman-scientist present the protagonist as lobbying for greater modernisation and liberalisation of trade, finally becoming a dissident murderer for his conviction. The queerness of modernity and the protagonist's desire for it is revealed as an uncanny mingling of erotics and death (see pp. 323-324). On the backdrop of Belfast's modernising port, this notion of catastrophic modernity is particularly pertinent in the textual figures of the ship and the gun (see p. 325). Sheils contends that the city serves as a psychoanalytic explanation for its own perverse investment in Victorian progress (see p. 307).

     The last contribution of the collection ties in with these questions on colonial and capitalist city-politics. More than that, however, Elizabeth Ho's article, in the words of the editors, "testifies to the fact that Victoriana as a whole has gone indiscriminately global" (p. 32). Author of the seminal *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* (2012),[5] Ho's interest here lies within the material imperial legacy, namely neo-Victorian heritage building projects and their representational spaces. She shows that Hong Kong's present urban redevelopment ambiguously celebrates the city's imperial past, while the recycling of imperial buildings also contests its British history and struggles to reconcile itself to its Chinese identity (see p. 331). Ho's study of *1881: Heritage* (2009), the conversion of the Victorian Marine Police Headquarters into a complex including a luxurious hotel, themed restaurants, a heritage museum, and high-end shopping mall, elucidates that Otherness, namely that of a colonial history, has been carefully manufactured in this adaptive re-use project (see pp. 331-333). On the one hand, she comments how this underlines general criticisms of commercialisation, Disneyfication, surveillance, Romanisation of law and order, sanitation, privatisation, and a loss of local identity (see pp. 340-345); on the other hand, Ho also elaborates on how in "branding itself as part of global Victoriana" (p. 342) Hong Kong asserts its idiosyncratic place within the global competition of metropolises, particularly concerning the heritage industry. Although from a neo-Victorian point of view this underlines neo-imperialist and neo-liberal tendencies which transform former colonial Victorian spaces into spectacles of consumption (see p. 341), Ho exposes how the venue is also re-appropriated via personalising photographs by visitors to the site (see p. 346). One might critically remark that this also belongs to the urban marketing strategy of the city itself, in which personal

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photos disseminated privately and via the internet lead to the expansion of a simulated image of the metropolis. However, Ho convincingly argues that these snapshots represent a democratic art form, which allows people to consume without consuming by adapting, re-using, and personalising the Victorian and its set of nostalgia, melancholia, and trauma (see pp. 346-347). In reference to Lauren Berlant, she also counters the critique of the intimisation of urban public space in offering an intimate public life created by emotional contact, which promises alterities based on a common historical as well as lived experience (see pp. 348-349). Ho's contribution not only offers a fresh reading of neo-Victorian heritage projects, but also reveals how the turn towards postcolonial and global dimensions opens new vistas for an analysis of broader neo-Victorian spatial practices beyond the asylum, the prison, the boudoir, the East End, London, or Britain (see p. 350).

Overall, Kohlke and Gutleben's *Neo-Victorian Cities* is a welcome contribution within the ephemera of writing on the urban phenomenon. It offers thought-provoking ideas on how to come to terms with transformations of the twenty-first-century urban age and the 'becoming' of contemporary cities. The selected essays make fine and inspiring readings on the city across a range of different regions, genres, and media seldom achieved in other approaches to the urban. The thematic resonances between chapters, helped on by internal cross-references and the links set up in the densely developed opening chapter, establish the frame for further innovative research, while the analyses of recurrent key-texts, like Ackroyd's novels, and the many references to other examples of the neo-Victorian literary oeuvre prove a useful introduction to neo-Victorian and/or urban writing for the uninitiated. Only concerning the redundant, albeit haunting, evocations of Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's paradigmatic definition of neo-Victorianism as an "*act of re(interpretation), (re)discovery, (re)vision*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, qtd., e.g., on pp. 212, 285, and 333), the collection would have benefitted from a more concise editing. With hindsight, a clear delineation between the neo-Victorian city, neo-Victorian urban texts, and neo-Victorian urbanology that underlie the different approaches on 'Neo-Victorian Cities' in the collection would have helped to qualify the idiosyncrasies of the aesthetics and discourses, poetics and politics of neo-Victorian urbanisation, urbanism, and urbanity.

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Yet, it is the strength of the editors' introduction to not only decipher the concentrated troping of the neo-Victorian city, but also to comment on notable short-comings. For example, Kohlke and Gutleben argue:

> Th[e] utopian aspect *in potentia* […] is still rather lacking in neo-Victorian productions which on the whole tend to privilege the Gothic versions of the malfunctioning, hostile, and malefic city as a site of divisive inter-class and inter-cultural conflict, violence, and trauma." (p. 36, original emphasis)

Although Kohlke and Gutleben contend that the binary of city and country is "complicated and collapsed in neo-Victorian texts" (p. 13), some articles of the volume reveal a rather nostalgic approach one could classify as a neo-pastoralism of urban writing. This anti-urban tradition generally casts the city as a jungle, voracious giant, machine or whore, a Babylonian place of social chaos, deprivation, decline, disease, contamination, and corruption, inhabited by prostitutes, criminals, and immigrants (see Pleßke 2014: 180-182). Kohlke and Gutleben propose that further studies on the spatial practices and the material city, such as in spaces of industry, manufacturing, transport, galleries, exhibition halls, mass media, city institutions, and spaces of public entertainment, actually promise new vistas on how nineteenth-century urban layouts, structures and social frameworks inform their twenty-first-century counterparts (see p. 35).

While this short-sightedness concerning the paradox at the heart of the city certainly stems from a generic characteristic of much of the selected primary material, the different takes on traces of ideal notions of the 'Golden City' and creative urban revisions, as insinuated in steampunk subcultures of resistance or the production of the city in heritage spaces of consumption, underline that this also presents a problem of the neo-Victorian approach to the urban itself. For one, its self-referential and repetitive invocation of the monstrous Victorian city either neglects the urban-generic ambivalence or simply interprets it as a sign of the quintessential Gothic nature of neo-Victorianism. Mitchell, however, interestingly outlines in her paper that the two poles of urban attraction and repulsion metafictionally stand in for the fascination with "abjection from the Victorian" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 9, qtd. p. 60). Considering

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the ambiguity of the city without falling prey to a troping of the urban in academic discourses on the neo-Victorian is hence imperative to undermine a reiteration of the fear of the Victorian urban itself. In the words of the editors, it calls forth a compensating memory work as "the very principle of the neo-Victorian undertaking per se" (p. 31).

Consequently, both the enhanced multi-palimpsestic readings of the neo-Victorian and its kaleidoscopic point of view, invoked by Kohlke and Gutleben as a metaphor to describe the interpretative neo-Victorian lens, paradoxically seem to obstruct differentiated insights into urban 'becoming'. The (neo-)Victorian city is rendered a laboratory of societal processes synonymous with those of the nation, (post-)modernity, (neo-)imperialism or capitalism, losing its idiosyncrasy as a spatial and cultural entity, in a sense, even its urbanity (see Pleßke 2014: 77-82). The fact that the city is qualified as a mere cipher, e.g. in the notion of consumerism as a way of urban life, on the one hand raises the question whether the neo-Victorian city simply serves as a trope itself in neo-Victorian writing. On the other hand, some articles for which the urban features as a mere backdrop of the neo-Victorian could have worked with more critically informed theories on the city. Two strands in current neo-Victorian research that inform notable contributions in this collection deserve special mention, because they not only tie in with major developments and concerns of the contemporary city, but also present new ways of looking at the Victorian city for literary, cultural, and urban studies. The first one is the postcolonial neo-Victorian city, which, according to Kohlke and Gutleben, "ought to gain increasing prominence in the agenda of neo-Victorianism's future investigations" (p. 33). Here, selected articles from the collection already add significantly to existing studies.[6] Secondly, the global approach of neo-Victorianism brings into view urban centres which have remained largely undiscussed and exemplifies that "the Victorian city also clearly embodied 'processes' that have since gone 'global', reproduced around the world in the omnipresent creeping urban sprawl" (p. 35). It not only emphasises the phenomenon of global metropolitanism, but also stresses that, beyond tropes of labyrinths, flâneurs, and prostitutes, universal and transnational urbanisation might have already been a Victorian phenomenon.

In summary, *Neo-Victorian Cities* is a highly welcome and much needed contribution, which significantly complements both neo-Victorian and urban studies by re-perspectivising the study of the Victorian city as

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well as the contemporary city from its implied double vantage point in the reading of the urban. Future studies will need to address the paradoxical findings of the present volume, particularly concerning nostalgic iterations of an anti-urban image that contradicts the basic assumption of the neo-Victorian city's protean character and its becoming. It remains to be seen whether a larger scope of neo-Victorian city texts will live up to the potential of neo-Victorian cities and delineate the idiosyncratic discursive practices of the neo-Victorian urban.

Notes

1. For example, see Dana Arnold's *Re-presenting the Metropolis* (2000), Linda Nead's *Victorian Babylon* (2000), Alan Robinson's *Imagining London, 1770-1900* (2004), Nicholas Freeman's *Conceiving the City* (2007), and Paul Newland's The *Cultural Construction of London's East End* (2008).
2. In my own writing, I have identified the palimpsest as the master metaphor of contemporary urban fiction *per se* in a historical, psychogeographical, socio-cultural, intertextual, and hypertextual sense (see Pleßke 2014: 304-354). Instead of palimpsestic as denoting the process, I suggest employing the adjective "palimpsestuous" in the sense of a dynamic structure indicating both being and becoming (see Pleßke 2014: 304).
3. For example, see critical assessments by neo-Marxist urbanologists of the period belonging to the school of urban political economy, such as Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells, and David Harvey.
4. Moreover, in correlation with the multi-temporal readings of neo-Victorian steampunk and its ideas of science fiction and time-travel, it might actually be interesting to identify future urban visions of this genre, e.g. in the novels of China Miéville.
5. Ho's monograph was reviewed by Eckart Voigts in *Neo-Victorian Studies* 5:2 (2012).
6. For example, see Jane Jacobs's *Edge of Empire* (1996), Felix Driver and David Gilbert's *Imperial Cities* (2003), Madhu Dubey's *Signs and Cities* (2003), and John McLeod's *Postcolonial London* (2004).

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