

Chapter Three

Subjectivity Negotiating Multilayered Spaces

The new metropolis is exploding . . . in improbable cities where centrality is virtually ubiquitous and the solid familiarity of what we once knew as urban melts into air. (Soja, *Thirdspace* 239)

The city exists as a series of doubles: it has official and hidden cultures, it is a real place and a site of the imagination . . . We discover that urban ‘reality’ is not singular but multiple, that inside the city there is always another city. (Chambers 183)

The surges of anxiety were somehow worse up here in London Above, where he [Richard] was forced to reconcile these two universes. (*Neverwhere* 186-87)

I. Introduction

Space, as noted in the previous chapter, used to be seen as a backwater which lacks fluidity, circulation and movement. Different from the old view of space, space now is treated as active, changeable, and flexible; nevertheless, space can not be endowed with meanings until the subjects get involved in it. Lefebvre illustrates the production of space through the body and the city, because he opines that the body plays a pivotal role in his three moments of social space.¹⁴ He contends that “the lived,

¹⁴ As Lefebvre states, “Considered overall, social practice presupposes the use of the body: the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work. This is the realm of the *perceived* . . . As for *representations of the body*, they derive from accumulated

conceived and perceived realms should be interconnected, so that the ‘subject,’ the individual member of a given social group, may move from one to another without confusion—so much is a logical necessity” (Lefebvre 40). His words suggest that the production of space is forged through the subjects’ participation in space. Similarly, for Michel de Certeau, “it is not a space until it is practiced by people’s active occupation, their movements through and around it” (Clifford 54). It is subjects who operate and practice space. As de Certeau argues:

Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. “I feel good here”: the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice. (108)

In this quotation, he points out the importance of the bodily experience. The subjects feel their pain or pleasure via their body, and announce what they feel, like the phrase expressed here—“I feel good here.” Space has to be perceived, experienced and mobilized by subjects; otherwise, it becomes stable, dead, and even meaningless.

Gaiman in *Neverwhere* develops the relationship between the subject and cityspace through the figure of the stroller in different stages. Following the issue of spatiality, this chapter aims to examine how subjects negotiate spatiality in *Neverwhere* through Benjamin’s conception of the flâneur as a point of departure to elicit related issues: (1) the relationship between a stroller and cityspace; (2) the subject’s loss of direction in postmodern cityspace; (3) the return to orderly space

scientific knowledge . . . from knowledge of anatomy, of physiology, of sickness and its cure, and of the body’s relations with nature . . . Bodily *lived* experience, for its part, maybe both highly complex and quite peculiar, because ‘culture’ intervenes here, with its illusory immediacy, via symbolisms . . .” (40).

gained by females at the end of the novel.

II. First Strolling: Negotiating Cityspace, and Detecting the City

The spatiality can not produce meanings unless the subject activates it. The subject as a stroller is important in London literature, for many London writers (like De Quincey, Charles Dickens, etc.) often choose the figure of a stroller to outline London spatiality in their works. In De Quincey's *Confessions* the Opium Eater as a figure of a stroller presents his urban experience by observing a young prostitute in the street named Ann whose "condition is emblematic of urban alienation and therefore serves as a projection of the male observer's state of being and mind" (Nord 43). Charles Dickens himself loves walking and in his works he frequently adopts a stroller as the persona. For example, "[i]n *Bleak House* . . . it is possible to approach the main narrator as a *flâneur*, as a man who possesses . . . 'the key of the streets'" (Hollington 84). Strolling not only serves as a convention of writing London, but also is the contemporary London writers' main concern. For instance, as Heike Hartung asserts, "In Ackroyd's writings the figure of the 'walker' or 'wanderer' signifies the relationship between the subject and the city in various ways" (151). In *Neverwhere*, Gaiman also chooses the figure of a stroller (Richard) as his narratorial position. Although strolling the city had been a long tradition in literature, such an issue about strolling had not been theorized until Walter Benjamin's treatment of the *flâneur* appeared.

When it comes to the subject in urban spatiality, the *flâneur* is the dominant figure and the most theorized issue as well. Benjamin's discussion of the *flâneur* can help to explore the subject's relationship with urban space. For Benjamin, the city is the space which can be read as a text. The *flâneur*, a city stroller, is the one who

interprets the city and cuts to its underlying truth. Benjamin asserts that strolling is important for the flâneur, because he “goes botanizing on the asphalt” while walking the streets (36). The flâneur is an urban observer who “collect[s] and record[s] urban images, social interactions and social typifications . . .” (Frisby 92). As Graeme Gilloch comments, Benjamin “articulates a fragmentary, critical physiognomy of the cityspace which is concerned with deciphering urban objects and structures, with making them legible as hieroglyphs, signs and rebuses” (*Walter Benjamin* 243). Interested in the smells, the sights, and action of the city, the flâneur is curious about the truth of the streets by collecting evidence in the streets and observing the fleeting vision of the city. “Walter Benjamin casts the *flâneur*, or stroller, as a detective of street life” (Shields, “Fancy Footwork” 61). As Benjamin asserts:

He [the flâneur] only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist. (41)

It is obvious that in his watchfulness and sharp observation the flâneur takes on one of his many roles as the detective, because the misleading spectacle of the city is penetrated through the flâneur’s eyes.¹⁵ The flâneur as a detective is a distinctly

¹⁵ Under Benjamin’s discussion, the flâneur belongs to the male bourgeois class. Later elicited from other perspectives, the figure of the flâneur has many guises—detective, dandy, prostitute, rag-picker, consumer, tourist, traveler, internet browser or any walkers in the broadest sense (Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin* 243). Because of so many guises, Gilloch comments that “the *flâneur* comes to stand for everyone and no-one” (“The Return of the Flâneur” 109). For Gilloch, the meaning of the flâneur is so multiple that this figure is “exhausted” and “mortified” (109). However, my view is different from Gilloch, for I think that many guises of the flâneur enrich the meaning of this figure, and make this figure free from the limited time and space and thus reborn in different contexts. The figure of the flâneur is undoubtedly important. As Steve Pile notes, “‘The Flâneur’ has become an important ‘location’ in critical theory because he stands at the intersection not only of class, gender and race relations, and also of art, mass production and commodification, but also of the masses, the city, and

modern product, for as Benjamin writes when discussing Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd," "the detective story develops out of the intensifying perception of 'the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life' in the early nineteenth century" and the flâneur/detective is blessed with the power of penetrating the urban maze to arrive at meaning, understanding and order (Brand 229). In "The Man of the Crowd," the narrator who regains his energy after an illness sits by the window of a coffee-house in London, and observes the passersby as if they were a text that can be read. As Dana Brand comments, "The narrator, as a *flâneur*, defines himself by his ability to read the city as a text" (223).

The urban text is composed not only of city streets but also of the crowd. The flâneur who deciphers urban images and visual textuality is like a detective who traces criminals concealing themselves in the city by discovering clues and reading the faces of the crowd. In "The Man of the Crowd," the sudden appearance of the old man who can not be identified interrupts the narrator's "flow of legible physiognomy" (Brand 221). The crowd, as Benjamin points out, serves as "the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors" (40). The crowd provides criminals with "a concealing environment" and challenges the narrator's ability to read the city (Brand 224). The absence of the old man's identity arouses the anxiety of the narrator and constitutes a "gap" that stimulates the narrator to fill the gap by pursuing the old man (223). Therefore, the role of the flâneur and that of the detective overlap in the narrator himself.

Poe's short stories proffer the archetypal traits of the classical detective and serve as the model later taken up by other writers, such as Arthur Conan Doyle

the experience of modernity" (229). Among many guises, I focus on the flâneur's role as a detective and his observation of the city in my thesis.

(McCracken 51).¹⁶ Detective novels, especially traditional ones, are related to the system of “modernity: the law” (59). The traditional detectives are able to solve the mystery and eradicate crime by their outstanding logic and rationality. Like in the Sherlock Holmes detective stories, eventually killers are discovered and punished, all evil power must be broken down, and the order of the society will be regained at last. Sherlock Holmes is “supremely rational” and good at “engag[ing] expertly with the modern institutions and structures that confront” him (59). The traditional detectives appear to be endowed with omnipotence and omniscience. Thus, for the detective as the subject who detects the city, cityspace is manageable and mappable.

The flâneur as a detective is also one of the roles played by the leading subjectivity in Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*, as he strolls through the postmodern spatiality of 1990s London and watches and observes the obfuscating cityspace. Despite his postmodern temporality, one of the key dimensions in Richard’s strolling subjectivity is still his inheritance of the high modernist flâneur/detective as he demonstrates keen confidence in his observing power at least in the earlier parts of the novel. The disorienting space of London Below and the re-cast space of London Above are explored by Richard, and as an explorer Richard initially plays both the role of the flâneur as well as the detective. Richard at first sees only the partial side of London, as tourists do, although he has been in London for three years. He used to think of London as huge and illegible when he first arrived in London, but after three years he supposes that he truly knows London and gradually takes the city for granted. Like the traditional detective, Richard supposes that he can see through the city. However,

¹⁶ Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is usually taken as the first modern detective story in which “[t]he detection process is described both as a form of logic and pleasure” (McCracken 51). However, in his “The Man of the Crowd,” the detection process is not so consistent throughout the whole story. As Ben Highmore claims, “About halfway through Poe’s story, legibility gives way to illegibility” (29). The former part of the story follows the trait of the modern detective story, for the narrator can discern the faces of the crowd, but the latter part of the story deviates from such a trait, for the narrator can not read the identity of the old man and thus loses his legible physiognomy.

he can not realize that his lucid view of the city and mastery of cityspace are imaginary until he meets Door.

Door in some ways resembles the old man in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd." Both are strangers in the city and go beyond the flâneur's legible physiognomy. Door, who opens a door to London Above and suddenly collapses to the sidewalk, is a mystery for Richard, for he can not read her face. When Richard puts a bandage on Door's cut, he wonders "how old she [is], and what she [looks] like under the grime, and why she [is] living on the streets and—" (*Neverwhere* 31). Richard can not discern Door's age, identity, and even the color of her eyes. As the novel describes, "They [Door's eyes] [are] not blue, or green, or brown, or gray; they [remind] him of fire opals: there [are] burning greens and blues, and even reds and yellows that [vanish] and [glint] as she [moves]" (39). Door's unrecognized appearance and background reinforce her strangeness. Like the old man, Door is "a gap in the urban text, a gap that threatens to unravel the narrator's sense of imaginative control over that which he has reduced to a text" (Brand 221). In order to "close this gap" and "restore the totality of his interpretive control," Richard pursues Door (221). Then, Richard helps Door to search for the killers and to discover the big brother behind the murder. By tracing the killers, Richard strolls through London Above/Below, so his role fits the flâneur and the detective as well.

III. Second Strolling: "Sometimes There Is Nothing You Can Do"¹⁷

¹⁷ "Sometimes there is nothing you can do," a sentence which describes Richard's inner feeling, appears four times in *Neverwhere*. As Jenifer D'Elia comments, "This lack of control on Richard's part runs throughout the novel" (36). It first appears when Richard insists that he should save Door's life, but his girlfriend warns him to leave Door alone (*Neverwhere* 25). Then, when Richard is asked to accept the trial to get the key, he feels the same way (234). The sentence appears the third time when Richard can not help but pass the labyrinth, together with the marquis and Hunter, to rescue Door from the killers (304). Lastly, it appears when Richard rethinks his life after his journey to the Underworld (363). The repetition of the sentence highlights Richard's feeling of helplessness and his lack of choices.

Yet it must also be noted that the postmodern spatiality of the 1990s still impacts strongly on Richard's subjectivity so that the modernist flâneur/detective is not the only role he plays. In *Neverwhere* London, from Richard's view, shifts from the modernist city to the postmodern one. In the modernist cityspace, the flâneur is confident of his ability to decipher urban codes and thus "walk[s] without fear" (Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin* 243). Benjamin's flâneur is in the modernist era, for his "geography of the city is indeed marked by an obsessive attempt to know the city in its entirety . . ." (Parsons 7). The modernist city, or the so-called concept city, is coherently built and created by man, so it can be perceived rationally and overwhelmingly. Because of this, man who walks in the city can own his panoramic view of the city. As Le Corbusier claims in his *The City of Tomorrow* which delineates the blueprint of the modernist city, "Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it" (11). While strolling the modernist city, the subject posing as the creator of the city feels secure, for he does not need to meander along the streets.

However, the stroller's subjectivity in the postmodern city is challenged, because he has to zigzag through the city. Different from the modernist city which "follows the scopic form of the telescopic panorama," the postmodern city presents the style of "the kaleidoscopic myriad" (Parsons 8). As I have argued in the previous chapter, London topography presented in *Neverwhere* is composed of diverse heterogeneous spaces. The views of London revealed through Richard's eyes tend to be kaleidoscopic rather than panoramic, because they keep changing. While confronting postmodern geographies, the flâneur is dwarfed not only by unfamiliar city streets but also by the unrecognizable crowd. In the postmodern cityspace, the

subject turns out to be a drifter in the city “who lacks an overview of the metropolitan whole, who is denied any panoramic or bird’s-eye perspective” (Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin* 244). The flâneur’s view of the city becomes limited, so he is “not a privileged spectator” but “granted only an ant’s-eye view” (244). This sense of the loss of control and direction echoes Anthony Vidler’s words when he discusses posturbanism: “Amidst the ruins of monuments no longer significant because deprived of their systematic status, and often of their corporeality, walking on the dust of inscriptions no longer decipherable because lacking so many words, whether carved in stone or shaped in neon, we cross nothing to go nowhere” (Vidler 185). “Going nowhere” portrays the sense of strolling in the postmodern city. Likewise, in *Neverwhere* the detective as the subject positioned in the postmodern surroundings can not have an overview of the city and therefore is shrunk by discordant layers of cityspace to Pygmy-like stature.

Fog and the labyrinth described in *Neverwhere* can be treated as a kind of trope to strengthen the aura of multilayered London spatiality in which the subject’s position is bewildered and challenged. Fog veils the true character of the city and blocks part of the stroller’s view, so the city is reduced to an illegible text. “The fog,” as Julian Wolfreys puts it, “is one figure of writing, of the city writing itself, tracing its contours otherwise, writing the city as that which cannot be written of directly” (*Trace* 158). On their way to the Black Friars, Door and her companions encounter London fog, described as a thick yellow fog which “taste[s] of ash, and soot, and the grime of a thousand urban years” and “[clings] to their lamps, muffling the light” (*Neverwhere* 227). The light of the lamp which is the medium of one’s vision to see things represents the subject’s rationality and judgment, so the fog weakens not only the light but also the subject’s reason in a symbolic sense.

Richard feels surprised that the fog still exists, for he thinks that the fog has disappeared since Clean Air Act was executed years ago; however, although the fog was expelled from London Above, it descended into the Underside. As Door says, “London Particulars. Thick yellow river fogs, mixed with coal-smoke and whatever rubbish was going into the air for the last five centuries. Hasn’t been one in the Upworld for, oh, forty years now. We get the ghosts of them down here. Mm. Not ghosts. More like echoes” (*Neverwhere* 228). The spectral description of the fog suggests that the fog, part of the remains of the city, serves as the reminder of the city’s past. Clean Air Act promoted by the government aimed to dispel fog as part of propaganda of progress. However, the presumed progress of the city appears to be superficial, because the Victorian fog, though invisible in London Above, keeps lingering underneath London. Therefore, the regression of the city is wrapped up by the ostensible urban improvement.

The labyrinth of the Underside embodies not only the urban environment in which the subject gets easily lost, but also the past which the subject has to face. So as to rescue Door in the Angel Islington’s habitation, Richard and the marquis have to pass the labyrinth which separates Islington’s abode from the outside world. The labyrinth presents Soja’s Thirdspace, “a remembrance-rethinking-recovery of spaces lost . . . or never sighted at all” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 81). As the novel depicts, the labyrinth is “an ever-changing place” and “each path divide[s] and circle[s] and double[s] back on itself” (*Neverwhere* 305). “To move in a labyrinth is a circling around in which one revisits the same places” (Gilloch, *Myth* 68). While walking the labyrinth for some period of time, Richard can not help but cry, “I think we’re lost. We’ve been through this way before” (*Neverwhere* 308). The circuitous and changeable route puzzles any strollers who try to pass the labyrinth.

As the marquis says, “The labyrinth is one of the oldest places in London Below” (*Neverwhere* 304). “It [the labyrinth] [is] built of lost fragments of London Above: alleys and roads and corridors and sewers that had fallen through the cracks over the millennia, and entered the world of the lost and the forgotten” (305). The labyrinth as a deserted place accumulates the past of London which the Upworlders seek to get rid of. As noted in the previous chapter, the Beast of London which inhabits the labyrinth represents part of London history, so Richard and his companions’ encounter with the Beast suggests the city strollers’ encounter with the past of the city. The relationship between the present and the past is more like a dialogue rather than a monologue. Borrowed from Wolfreys’s words, the yellow fog and the labyrinth highlight the “palimpsestic haunting” which represents “those traces in writing of the very condition of the city itself” (*Trace* 158). The past of the city does not disappear but is buried in London Below.

As the narrative progresses, however, *Neverwhere* tends to be more accurately an anti-detective novel. The anti-detectives are no longer the flawless detectives (Tani 52). In contrast with the classical detective who is omniscient and omnipotent, Richard as an anti-detective appears to lose control of the whole situation, and gets involved in the event. London depicted in the novel embodies “the fluctuating postmodern city” which “risks becoming a signless place of directionless nomads, as much a mazelike labyrinth of light as its Victorian predecessor was a labyrinth of fog and darkness” (Parsons 9). The Underground is so labyrinthine and perplexing that Richard loses his ability of map-reading. The centerless geography disorients Richard, so he cannot choose his direction and routes in London Below, like Alice in Wonderland.

While the structure of London Above is arborescent, the shape of London

Below is rhizomatic. The cityscape of London Above or people within it seek to form a kind of center and order, so it appears to be a tree shape. Borrowed from Deleuze's view, the characteristics of the tree are as follows: "there is a point of origin, seed or centre; it is a binary machine or principle of dichotomy, with its perpetually divided and reproduced branchings, its points of arborescence; it is an axis of rotation which organizes things in a circle, and the circles round the centre . . ." (Deleuze and Parnet 25). In order to facilitate the circulation of goods, people, and troops, the boulevards are established in the city (Bocock 438). The aim of the city concept is to establish a city with grandeur, center, and rationality (443). "[T]he very structures of social and mental daily life" of the city is deployed by "the urban map" (Parsons 1). In this way, it is easier for city dwellers to be controlled and disciplined. Thus, London Above seemingly can be mapped.

In *Neverwhere*, when Richard first arrives in London, the Tube map gives him a sense of order. As Nead claims, mapping is the necessary element of "the improver's city" and maps "[make] the modern city legible and comprehensible" (13). Mapping seems to have the privileged power to freeze "the passage of people and things, the loitering, walking and rushing of the streets, and transformed them into the abstract and orderly signs of cartography" (13). Routes of walkers are planned and predictable, and every district, building or street is named. When Richard describes his vision of London Above, he can mention many specific names, Crouch End, Chalk Farm, etc. However, when Richard strolls through London Below, only a few places can be named, and only vaguely, such as the bridge, the market, and so forth.

Richard treats London Above as "a world of safety and of sanity," so he believes in city order and rationality, without knowing evil power embedded underneath the city (*Neverwhere* 123). Because Richard gets used to the orderly side

of the city, when Mr. Vandemar and Mr. Croup, who intend to kill Door, break into his apartment, Richard warns them that he will call the police who represent the discipline and justice of the city (35).

By contrast, London Below consists of interlaced tunnels, drainage, and tubes, so its structure is rhizome-shaped. The interwoven tunnels of the Underground conform to Deleuze's discussion of the rhizomatic structure. The main features of a rhizome are summarized by Deleuze and Guattari as follows:

[U]nlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ($n + 1$). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 21)

In contrast with the tree structure which contains a center, the concept of a rhizome can be used to propose a rhizomatic space, an open space which resorts to multiplicity and lacks fixed points. The spatiality of the Underside is a rhizomatic space which resembles Soja's proposal of Thirdspace, because both spaces are fragmentary, non-binary, and out of joint. Like Thirdspace, the rhizomatic space cracks dualisms and proposes a third possibility, for in the structure of the rhizome "[t]here are multiplicities which constantly go beyond binary machines and do not let themselves be dichotomized" (Deleuze and Parnet 26).

As opposed to the order and rationality of London Above, London Below,

which lacks the center, is hardly mapped. The centerless spatiality of London Below reinforces the postmodern aura of the cityscape. Like an interlocking web, London Below is saturated with dimness, danger and disorientation. Because of this, strollers in London Below frequently lose hold of their ways while confronted with the labyrinthine, centerless, rhizomatic Underground. For instance, when Richard, together with Anaesthesia, plans to leave for the market, they need an experienced guide to direct them to cross the bridge to arrive in the market. When they cross the bridge, they see nothing but darkness, and Anaesthesia is taken as a kind of sacrifice by darkness.

The spatiality of the Underside is always fluid and centerless, like the structure of the rhizome in which “[t]here are centres everywhere” (Deleuze and Parnet 26). “Centres everywhere” imply “no center.” The sites in London Below drift from one space to another, never settled down. The most predominant example is the Floating Market, a huge market which is held “in a different place every time” and “moves around” (*Neverwhere* 92). The market floats from one place to another and is never anchored in any fixed location.

For Richard who gets used to the rules of the Upworld, the rhizomatic space is a shock. The only path to reach the market can serve as an example, because the path is not a fixed route, but a changeable one—that is, the path is different every time. When Richard is informed that the path to reach the market, the Knightsbridge, is dangerous, he asks Anaesthesia if there is another way to choose. However, she asserts that if they choose another path, they “can get to the place [the Floating Market] it’s in,” but “the market wouldn’t be there” (*Neverwhere* 100). Richard whose logic follows the Upworld feels bewildered and thus says, “But that’s ridiculous. I mean, something’s either there or it’s not. Isn’t it?” (100). The market impresses Richard a lot, and “the

speed at which it [is] being dismantled” impresses him even more (125). When Richard passes the market again after seeing an audition for a bodyguard, the number of the crowd decreases and the market almost vanishes, as if it never existed. The elusive character of the market characterizes London Below as disorganized, moving, and unstable spatiality.

Like Derrida’s play of the word *différance*, Gaiman plays with the names of the sites of London. In *Neverwhere* the names of location achieve the effects of deferring and differing, so Gaiman’s geography of the city has the flavor of *différance*. When Richard first encounters the names of sites of the Underworld, he uses his empirical sense to perceive the names. However, later he realizes that the sites of London Below sound “almost the same” as those of London Above, “but are not quite” like what he comprehends. Gaiman personifies the names of the stations which are empowered to have double figurations.

Station names in the novel become embedded with symbolic meanings so that they are both everyday names and also symbolic tropes. Earl’s Court is not only the name of the station as Richard assumes, but refers to a place where the earl lives. Earl’s Court contradicts its literal meaning, because far from hugeness and splendor it is “as if someone [took] a small medieval court and put it, as best they could, in one car of an Underground train” (*Neverwhere* 151). Like “a tiny empire of lost property,” the earl’s library is dirty, messy, and sluggish (162). Moreover, unlike the station which has a fixed site, Earl’s Court is in a car of a train, so it is movable. Earl’s Court differs from Richard’s previous understanding of the station and defers his grasp of the meaning of the place value.

The names of the sites of the Underworld are always puns. When the marquis points out Angel Station on the Tube map, it reminds Richard that Angel Station is “a

district filled with antique shops and places to eat” (*Neverwhere* 138). He is sure that “Islington’s tube stop was named after a pub, or a landmark” (138). However, Angel Station means more than that. The station named Angel is the place where the Angel Islington lives. Angel Station turns out to be endowed with multiple signifieds. Angel Station refers to not only a trendy district, but also an angel’s habitation. Richard gradually knows that the relationship between the signifier and the signified embodied in the urban text is not one-to-one, but one-to-many.

Similarly, the name Blackfriars as a signifier differs from Richard’s expectation of its signified. For Richard, Blackfriars is only the name of the station, but in London Below it is the name of the station and also refers to the Black Friars, a group of people who are custodians of a key. Moreover, Blackfriars signifies the key in both the denotative and connotative sense. In the literal sense Blackfriars means the key, for friars keep the key that can open the way to Heaven. On the symbolic level, Blackfriars represents a trial to all those who try to obtain the key. When Door and her companions intend to have the key, the Black Friars inform them that they can not get it until one of them, Richard, can pass the trial. The trial is set at Blackfriars station, not one that Richard often passes through in the Upworld, but one in which Richard has to discover the reality while encountering many phantoms. The key is also “the key to all reality,” and only those who can discern the reality in the trial are qualified to have the key (*Neverwhere* 341). Therefore, the name Blackfriars suggests the play of signifiers: initially as the station, then as friars, the key to Heaven, a trial, and the key to reality. The multifarious meanings embodied in Blackfriars show the features of differing and deffering.

The cityscape revealed in *Neverwhere* is in the act of becoming,¹⁸ because

¹⁸ Wolfreys applies Deleuze and Guattari’s theory to Iain Sinclair’s novels, and comments that London

“each of the sites of London becomes reiterated, even as it is mapped” (Wolfreys, *Materiality* 166). The names of the sites repeat themselves, but create different meanings in Gaiman’s novel; their meanings are meanwhile erased, constructed and traced. Because of this, “many double figurations” occur and such “a doubling” is “a rhizomic extension of material locations” (166). The indefinite signifieds, for strollers, make the city an illegible text.

Besides the geography, many figures in the novel smack of *différance*, for their names do not fit their characters and therefore the subject’s judgment on the urban text and pursuit of the truth is deferred. The indeterminate and changeable figures that the subject encounters highlight *Neverwhere* as an anti-detective novel. In postmodern detective novels, the criminals’ accomplices sometimes are also the detectives’ helpers. According to Wilhelm Emilsson, in anti-detective stories, “a crucial strategy for maintaining a sense of fruitful puzzlement is to blur the distinction between those who commit and those who solve crimes” (271). Such a technique is employed by Neil Gaiman in *Neverwhere*. What confuses Richard is not only the rhizome-like cityscape in the Underground, but also the demarcation between good and evil which is not clear-cut as Richard comprehends before.

The most elusive character is Hunter, for her role shifts several times throughout the novel. That is, her appearance contradicts her actions. As Hunter first appears in the novel, she “[wears] dappled leather clothes, and “[has] a knife at her belt”; however, her voice is described as “rich as cream and honey” (*Neverwhere* 101), and she is “the most beautiful woman that Richard [has] ever seen” (102). The descriptions of her female charms which discord with her profession as a hunter suggest the ambiguity of her role. When Richard first meets Hunter, he cannot

under Sinclair’s pen is full of rhizomic locations and becoming. See Wolfreys’s *Writing London: Materiality, Memory, Spectrality*, 161-93.

distinguish her accent and mistakes her for a prostitute, because she claims that she “[sells] personal physical services” by renting her body (108). Then, Hunter becomes Door’s bodyguard, but later she betrays Door at the critical moment, for she has been bribed with a spear, and thus helps Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar kidnap Door. Hunter turns out to be Door’s enemy, so Richard feels perplexed to define Hunter’s role. As Richard says, Hunter is “*a bodyguard who [turns] out to be a . . . whatever the opposite of a bodyguard is*” (307). Nevertheless, while she and Door’s companions (Richard and the marquis) meet the Beast thereafter, she fights against it, together with Richard, and even sacrifices her life. Hunter’s role shifts from the mistaken whore at the start, then Door’s bodyguard, later an accomplice of Door’s enemy, to a helper of Door’s companions. Richard’s failure to see through Hunter’s ambiguous character implies that appearances are not reliable.

The contradiction between the appearance and the reality is veiled by the surface, so the subject gets bewildered and fails to read people’s faces. Under her pseudo benevolence, Lamia harbors malicious intentions. She appears like a good-hearted woman who is willing to guide Richard and his companions to the place they want to go, but actually she purposes to seduce Richard and to dry his vitality. Another character, the Lady Serpentine, serves as a contrast. When Richard and Door first meet the Lady Serpentine, they associate her with the devil, so they are frightened. However, instead of killing them, the Lady Serpentine, who adopts Hunter, treats them as guests. Although her name, related to the serpent, suggests that she is evil, she is willing to help Door. In a sense, her name as a signifier of evil does not conform to her actions (as a signified).

The most obvious example should be the Angel Islington. His ambiguous attribute is implied by the androgynous description of his figure: “It [is] not a man; it

[is] not a woman. It [is] very beautiful” (*Neverwhere* 197). He is a hypocrite, because he is the chief instigator behind the whole murder event. On the surface Islington helps Door to investigate the murder, but actually he sets traps to force Door to open the door to Heaven for him. The role of the angel blurs the line between truth and untruth, and good and evil. Islington is a fallen angel, and his abode in London Below suggests his soul’s descent into a forsaken world. As the marquis says, “Lucifer used to be an angel” (303). Thus, the contradiction between things’ outside and inside deconstructs dual epistemologies.

In *Neverwhere*, a series of specious figures and events defer the final truth, so the subject has to deal with “the suspension of the solution” which features anti-detective novels (Tani 37). The alternate appearance of the key text and the prize text functions as the delay of the suspense.¹⁹ The key text is not the object of the quest, but the means to achieve the final goal. The signified of the signifier is “the prize text” which is the result of interpreting the key text.²⁰ While facing elusive signifieds as wrapped in Chinese boxes, the subject can not see through hidden meanings of the key text.

In the novel, the final prize is deferred by the signifiers. Richard, the marquis and Door act like detectives to find out who kills Door’s family (the final prize). At first Door thinks that there must be some clues (as the key text) in her home. Therefore, Door, together with the marquis, returns home and finds some messages her father leaves for her (the key text). Following the message, Door and Richard look

¹⁹ As Joel Black claims, “The detective uses the information supplied by the key text to achieve his final goal, which is to discover or recover a prized object that may well be *another* text. The detective’s success in finding the prize will depend on his prior ability to find and read the key text that specifies its whereabouts, and even its identity” (79).

²⁰ A key text “is not itself the ultimate object of the detective’s quest” (Black 79). The key text provides the information that the detective needs while obtaining the prize text. Therefore, whether the detective can succeed to discover the prize text or not depends on his or her ability to interpret the key text (79).

for the angel. The angel asks them to obtain the key from the Black Friars which might solve Door's problem. Thus, the key here seems to be a promising prize text. However, the key serves only as another key text, rather than the final prize, because thereafter the detectives realize that all of them are fooled by the Angel Islington, who has already changed the message that Door's father leaves. Originally Door's father warns Door not to find Islington, but Islington remakes the message in the opposite way. The texts are so labyrinthine that Richard as an anti-detective fails to recognize the ambiguous clues and unstable meanings in his spatial detection. The final truth is deferred by a succession of key texts. Therefore, the subject has to trace a series of signifiers, constituted as a signifying chain in which the meanings are differing and deferring.

IV. Third Strolling: Returning to Order after Negotiating Cityspace

The previous section discusses the disorganized side of urban spatiality presented in the novel and suggests the lost order of the city, in terms of complex geography and ambiguous figures. In the light of this, there is a great suggestion of dismantling dualisms (good/evil, past/present, etc.). However, at the end of the novel, evil power, represented by the Beast of London and the Angel Islington, is expelled from London, and Door intends to reunite the Underworld, so the order is implied to be regained after the subjects negotiate cityspace. Gaiman's arrangement of the regained order at the end of the novel is contradictory and subversive as well. On the one hand, the ending is contradictory, because the regained order which smacks of a modernistic view does not accord with the postmodern aura embodied in the entire novel. On the other hand, the ending is subversive, because the drive to return to orderly space promoted by females deconstructs male/female spatial dichotomy.

The ending of the novel seems a bit timid. The fragmentary, unstable, changeable, and disorderly images presented in *Neverwhere* seem to be curbed by the regained order. At the near end of the novel, evil power is expelled from London Below. The Beast of London, representing the embedded evil of London, is destroyed. After Door overcomes the Angel Islington by sending him and his conspirators to a Hell-like place, she plans to unite London Below under the will of her father. The final breakdown of evil power suggests that the order in London Below will be regained. That is, the center of the structure is to be reforged implicitly. In the end the good will overwhelm the evil, the city will turn out to be lucid, urban spatiality will become legible, and city strollers will have a panoramic view of the city. From this angle, the dichotomy between good and evil, order and chaos, or true and false still exists. Because of this, the ending reduces the novel's challenge to dualisms.

However as a whole *Neverwhere*, as indicated in the previous section, can be read as an anti-detective novel. The spatiality shown in the novel (Thirdspace, and the rhizome-shaped Underground), and the flâneur as the anti-detective all highlight the text's postmodern aura. While detecting and strolling the un/mappable London, the flâneur's initial understanding of the city as orderly is challenged.

Although from the above-mentioned view the drive to retrieve order weakens the anti-binary thinking inherent in the novel, the intrusion of female control of space in the process of regaining order deconstructs the rigid line between male/female spatial boundaries. From the traditional view, public space (such as streets or parks) belongs to men whereas women are confined to private space (such as houses).²¹ Females are warned that public space is dangerous for women, for they might

²¹ As Leslie Kanés Weisman comments, "Boys are raised in our society to be spatially dominant" and "are encouraged to be adventurous, to discover and explore their surroundings . . ." while "[g]irls are raised in our society to expect and accept spatial limitations" and "are taught to occupy but not to control space" (24).

encounter sexual harassment or rapists (Weisman 69). Because of this, such gendered cityspace leads to “[t]he spatialization of patriarchal power” (Soja, *Thirdspace*, 110). Women are isolated “from the workplace and public life in gadgeted homes and modern lifestyles that facilitated subservience to the male breadwinner and his cohorts” (110). Such a view of public/private space falls into the trap of dualisms.

In *Neverwhere*, it is women who overturn gendered space and retrieve order of London Below. Door and Hunter challenge male order and space, so their deployment of spatial order not only shows female resistance to patriarchy but also softens the strict line between male/female spaces. Hunter breaks the public-private dichotomy by fighting with men and beasts. In an audition for a bodyguard, Hunter is the only female among the applicants. Facing Varney, described as a “dangerous” guy, “a bully,” and “a sadist,” Hunter overcomes him easily by her amazing strength (*Neverwhere* 122).²² Hunter’s appearance and victory in such a violent arena suggests female intrusion of male public space. In addition, Hunter has fought against many beasts, including the great blind white alligator-king, the bear beneath Berlin, the black tiger in the undercity of Calcutta, and the Beast of London. Her feats of destroying beasts imply not only that the line between male/female sites is blurred but also that a woman can free herself from the spatial limitation imposed on women. Hunter’s triumph over the beasts beneath the city which represent urban evil, disorder, and confusion denotes her female power to regain order and to stalk the city without fear.

Door counters the assumption that space belongs to men, because she owns the power to control spaces. Her name, used as a pun by Gaiman, echoes her ability to

²² As Richard thinks of Hunter’s performance, “[I]t [has] been like watching Emma Peel, Bruce Lee, and a particularly vicious tornado, all rolled into one and sprinkled with a generous helping of a mongoose killing a king cobra. That [is] how she [has] moved. That [is] how she [has] fought” (*Neverwhere* 123).

open any doors, and suggestively to open different spaces as well. When Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar break into Richard's apartment where Door stays, Door hides herself temporarily in another space to avoid their killing. In the end, Door outwits the Angel Islington by sending him to another space outside London. To borrow from Soja's words again, these cases suggest that Door as a female stroller resists "[t]he spatialization of patriarchal power" (represented by male killers) (*Thirdspace* 110).

V. Conclusion

The perplexing and amorphous cityscape weakens the subject's rationality, judgement and discernment. The multi-faceted sides of London spatiality are displayed in *Neverwhere* through the palimpsestic writing of the city, the contrast between the two worlds, and the urban coded signifiers. While confronted with unmappable London Below, Richard is bewildered by rhizomatic routes and conflicting figures, like Hunter, Lamia, etc. Richard's view of the modernist city has to be remapped, for his view is not workable in the postmodern city. The more Richard negotiates with cityspace, the more he knows how to play with unstable meanings of urban sites.

By rambling between London Above and the underground, Richard encounters the heterogeneous spaces as well as the other. The other, the marginalized, plays an important role in Richard's reexamination of the city and his life. The ensuing chapter will discuss Richard's encounter with the other and seek to explore the reason why Richard intends to return to London Below in the finale of *Neverwhere*.