

## Theories of Space and the Nineteenth-Century Novel

Isobel Armstrong

I

I begin with what to me is still a surprising and mystifying experience. In a course on space and the nineteenth-century novel I asked a class of American graduate students to map or make a plan of the house and environs of Mansfield Park in Jane Austen's novel of that name. I was aiming to see how much spatial knowledge they retained from a text that introduces spatial description sparingly. There are no set pieces of spatial mapping or description in the novel; Mansfield Park the mansion is only designated as a 'modern-built' house, and we know that the perimeter of the park is five miles round, for instance.<sup>1</sup> Information is interpolated inconspicuously in the course of narration, as if the spaces traversed, from the great house to the parsonage, for example, have been so internalized by the characters that there is no need to trace them. We know about the plantation and the stables only when Sir Thomas inspects them after his return from Antigua. We know about Mansfield Wood only when Tom hastily introduces the topic of pheasant shooting to divert Sir Thomas's attention from the theatre on his sudden arrival from Antigua. Fanny's induction by Edmund into the interior spaces of Mansfield Park, from the attic stairs down to the breakfast room, is not repeated for the external spaces of the estate. What surprised me was that every student — there were twenty of them — produced virtually identical maps or picture-maps of Mansfield. They situated the house, the shrubberies, the rose garden, the parsonage, Mrs Norris's house, and the field where Edmund taught Mary to ride, in exactly the same way. Some students remembered more than others, including in their plan signposts to Sotherton, but the basic diagram did not vary. As time went on I ceased to be surprised when I repeated this exercise annually. This schematic exercise was in great contrast to the students' attempt to render the impressionistic poetic space of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. by John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 55.

first chapter of *The Mill on the Floss*, where every representation was wildly different.

But the question this exercise makes one ask is, how does the novelist, through the signifying power of language alone, enable a reader to *experience*, or feel that she experiences, the lived, immediate nature of three-dimensional space? How does the novelist produce a mimesis of the a priori of space? Though we are used to thinking of the novel in terms of consciousnesses, if we subtract the element of space from the nineteenth-century novel it would be hard to say what is left. Elaine Scarry has asked the same kind of question with regard to the sensory elements of the novel: how does the novelist invoke the vividness of sensory experience through the mediating power of the mere signifiers of language?<sup>2</sup> But sensuous experience explicitly invokes correlative sense data, whereas the lived experience of space, as scenes of the novel unfold, is not simply a matter of offering stage directions. The production of space in fiction is more embedded than this and less explicit.

The historical poetics of the chronotope, M. M. Bakhtin's term for narrative elements where time and space mutually intensify and become dynamic, is one approach to the problem. In the chronotope, history becomes visible as space, and the 'when' of the novel and the 'where' of the novel, as Franco Moretti elegantly puts it, come together in a unique convergence, one that could only occur at this juncture in the narrative and at this historical moment.<sup>3</sup> Making narrative space a priority would mean stressing that the 'where it happens' of narrative generates 'what happens' at least as much as the 'when' of temporality. But Bakhtin begins with time, and doesn't ask how language creates spatiality through the signifier: 'Time, as it were, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time.'<sup>4</sup>

This is a two-part discussion. I begin by suggesting how we imaginatively live space in fiction by turning to Kant, who is foundational. Because of this foundational status I repeat, though I modify, a discussion

---

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 84.

of Kant I have published earlier.<sup>5</sup> But though I rehearse an earlier argument, my emphasis is rather different. In returning to Kant's principles I am interested in how we are persuaded to imagine and feel space phenomenologically as much as in the abstract logic that grounds his axioms. In the second part of this article I discuss the suggestiveness and limitations of a number of theories of space: Bachelard, Lefebvre, Foucault, and Deleuze.

I begin with Kant's philosophical reading of space because it illuminates the category of space and its social meaning in the Victorian novel. Space, Kant wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is the form of external experience as time is the form of internal experience. So a novel need not simply evoke space, as it would a smell or taste or sight, as in the sight of gravy in the Christmas scene of *Great Expectations* (1861) — which has its later incarnation in the *boeuf en daube* in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) — a scene that resonates in the novel. Whenever Pip goes into an eating-house he is sickened by the sight of food stains, amalgamated and greasy as gravy is: a greasy hat disgusts him. But space in the novel cannot be so easily created as an aspect of sense data. The novel has to make space a constitutive element, to *produce* it so that we feel and imagine it. Narrative is of necessity made temporal through the very act of reading. To some extent the work of creating time in a novel is effected by the linearity of narrative. Not so with space. The simple recapitulation of items in space (dressers, chairs, fireplaces, as, for instance, the interior of *Wuthering Heights* (1848)) every time the same environment reappears in the narrative, so that repetition makes them take on representational force, is insufficient in itself to create spatial depths and relationships.

Space, Kant writes repeatedly, is the condition of the possibility of the perception of phenomena and not an empirical conception. That's what he means by *a priori*, of course, coming before. He argues, against those philosophers (Locke and Hume, for instance, in England, or/and Leibniz in Germany) who believed that space is grasped by aggregating a number of particulars and phenomena in the external world, and by deducing and constructing space from them, that this is a circular procedure: it can only be undertaken if space is presupposed in the first place. He makes four propositions that restate his fundamental premise, that space is the condition of perception and not the other way round. First,

---

<sup>5</sup> See Isobel Armstrong's 'Spaces of the Nineteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. by Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 575–97.

space is external, it is ‘outside me’, understood as relational, and there is the presupposition of space in all external perception, in which things are in different places.<sup>6</sup> The ‘representation of space must be presupposed’ in positing things side by side and in relation to one another, because without this it would not be possible to posit relations at all. Second, we cannot think space away. Though we can think of it as ‘empty of objects’, space itself doesn’t go away. Third, space is single. Though we may think in terms of a plurality of spaces, division, and partition, space is not put together from segmented units after these are grasped as divided. It begins as a totality, ‘essentially one’ and is grasped as such. This is what allows us to work out the logical relations of geometry, without recourse to empirical sense data. Finally, space is infinite, all its parts coexisting ad infinitum: it contains us, not us it. For Kant, to be enslaved by the empirical would mean that the mind would be incapable of generating new knowledge.

Furthermore, though space is an experience of an individual consciousness, and no certainty of what we see can be guaranteed or shared, this solipsism is paradoxically a social, collective experience. *Without* human consciousness space and the things in it would be meaningless. Making sense of space, the spatial self, is something human beings share irreducibly. And, though Kant does not write this explicitly, space is the structuring element of all social relationships, from the infant at the breast to the configuration of chairs in a salon or drawing room. (The chronotope of the salon was for Bakhtin one that dominated the nineteenth-century novel.) The first *Critique* was published in 1781, the period when the novel was entering its second great phase, and when a spatial and interspatial subject emerges within it. Though postmodern readings of space, from those of Gilles Deleuze to Michel Serres, have challenged Enlightenment accounts such as Kant’s, I will begin with describing ‘classical’ interspatial consciousness. Even when this interspatial relation is under strain, challenged, or interrupted, it never disappears. And what I want to stress in this article is that the interspatial subject is germane to the novel, that social relations are predicated on it.

To start with, then, the interspatial subject is my theme. But first, another step in Kant’s thought needs to be filled in. Kant added a further element to his spatial thought, the body. Indeed, he began with it in an essay of 1768 on orientation in space, following this up with two more es-

---

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 68.

says, in 1783 and 1786, published in between the first (1781) and second (1787) editions of the *Critique*.<sup>7</sup> Objects only take on directionality, he maintains, through their relation to the double-sided but unsymmetrical human body. Relatedness is not inherent in objects but is organized by the body alone. The pregiven corporeal ground of orientation in space depends on our physical bifurcation into ‘incongruent counterparts’: left- and right-handedness. This gives us the power to distinguish one side from another — left, right, up, down, front, back, over there, beyond, behind. Spatial differentiation and the intersecting vertical and horizontal planes of three-dimensional experience projected from the body follow from this crucial capacity to match and not match. It is this capacity that enables us to occupy a concrete, fully inhabited world, the world of place as well as space. Even in a dark room such orientation occurs. One need only to think of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) navigating her passage in the darkness of the flood and through the markers of bodily and mental memory to see how important the interspatial subject is. In the world of fiction this inhabited space shares the animation that Elaine Scarry attributes to visual experience and sense data in the novel. She describes strategies of writing that achieve this sensory belief. Her work has prompted me to think of parallel strategies for realizing space in the novel. But these must be different because with space we are dealing with the intangibles of breadth and depth.

The mentalism of Kant’s four principles helps us to understand the ways this mimesis of space can happen in abstract terms. But these principles are more fully understood when we supplement them with his notion that the orientating corporeal agency of the body is crucial. In this way *space* thickens, ‘takes on flesh’, as it were, and time becomes charged with meaning. I begin with the way the novel realizes Kant’s four founding principles, since they underlie the many imagined social spaces — houses, hovels, streets, alleyways, domestic rooms, ballrooms, shops, stairs, roads, fields, heath, marshes — of the nineteenth-century novel, and enable the novelist (and by extension the reader) to question how they come into being and what happens to the interspatial subject in them.

The mentalism of Kant’s reading of space, together with his understanding of corporeality, provides a conceptual infrastructure for reading

---

<sup>7</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 205–19. Kant’s three essays on orientation are: ‘Ultimate ground of the differentiation of regions of space’ (1768), ‘Prolegomena to any future metaphysics’ (1783), and ‘What does it mean to orientate oneself in thought?’ (1786).

the novel. But though he is a foundational theorist I do not wish to see him as the master theorist. There is much that is troubling in his axioms. The paradoxical shared isolation or *solipsism*, rather than a shared *understanding* of space, as the underlying social bond is an awkward proposition to hold. It is true that without human consciousness space and the things in it would be meaningless: but Kant posited that no human consciousness could know what another knows; a shared world is unknowable; indeed, the world itself is unknowable except through its representations. Thus, despite his emphasis on corporeality, human consciousness is a rather thin, etiolated entity.

Hegel, Kant's interlocutor, seized on this thinness. Though he agreed with Kant in dismissing the empirical account of space and its circularity, and shared, though in a very different way, his idealism, he refused to countenance an idealism that prevented us from actively mediating the world. He provides us with a fuller sense of the self than Kant, and an account of space that is not a *representation* but a material reality that is multi-perspectival. I rely here for the following argument on the work of Scott Jenkins, who has extensively explored Hegel's critique of Kant's concepts of space.<sup>8</sup>

Two aspects of Hegel's thought are useful for our purposes and for a reading of the nineteenth-century novel. Without denying the four axioms described above, both enable us to think of space in a way that extends the possibilities of the sensuous body in space. First, Hegel denied that space is subjective. We are not trapped in representations. To begin with, if we are confined to appearances, we cannot think in terms of infinitely generative knowledge. While Kant had stated that the empirical was a limit on cognition, Hegel argued that an account of representation was actually the limiting factor, because it confronts us with an unknowable world. On the contrary, space was a material experience, as Jenkins puts it: 'Space is not a mere form of intuition within us but something we confront in experience' (p. 340). Hegel arrived at this argument first by positing an immediate response to space by thinking of the phenomenology of 'Here'. 'The *Here pointed out*', he wrote, 'to which I hold fast, is similarly a *this Here* which, in fact, is *not this Here*, but a Before and Behind, an Above and Below, a Right and a Left.'<sup>9</sup> We may read space by delimit-

---

<sup>8</sup> Scott Jenkins, 'Hegel on Space: A Critique of Kant's Transcendental Philosophy', *Inquiry*, 53 (2010), 326–55.

<sup>9</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 64.

ing a point in it, orientating ourselves by thinking in terms of a 'Here'. But in order to do so we have to dissolve this specific 'Here' because we can only understand it relationally, in terms of other 'Heres', the 'befores' and 'behinds' that actually make our specific 'Here' possible. Hegel thus sophisticates Kant's reading of the body in space by saying that no region of space is self-sufficient. We experience space dynamically and by an active understanding of a plurality of 'Heres' that must be experienced and ordered as 'an articulated spatial whole' (Jenkins, p. 340). There are many perspectives on 'Here', as the complex of 'Heres' are never static.

The second important aspect of Hegel's reading of Kant for the nineteenth-century novel is that to match this dynamic reading of space we require a more ample sense of the self. Jenkins argues that Kant's view is 'that a subject is essentially only a formal "I", that is, a point of view on the world' (p. 328). The concept of space as a plurality of 'Heres' requires a subject that is immersed in space as Kant's solipsist figure is not. To avoid this ontological separation Hegel conceives of the self as immersed in thought and the energy of thought in a way that demands a 'spatio-temporal body' (Jenkins, p. 348). Self-conscious thought requires a constant dynamic act of self-externalization and return, an understanding of the not-self as object and a return to the self as subject. These reorientations are essentially spatial in nature (Hegel, pp. 47, 142).

To register Hegel's critique of Kant is not to displace the importance of Kant's four principles, but rather to supplement them with a richer sense of the subject in space than we find in Kant. Nineteenth-century fiction is concerned to present us with a phenomenologically 'full' sense of the 'I' and its consciousness, and I believe that Hegel provides a way of thinking about this fullness. Nor do I attempt to suture together two incompatible forms of thinking. Despite disagreement, both thinkers agree that space is not predicated on sense data. It is this foundational account of space that we need to explore in the nineteenth-century novel. How *does* the novel represent space?

Elaine Scarry shows how sensory awareness in the novel is cognitively intensified if an existing scene is overlaid with a transparent medium, which is then manipulated or removed. The scene takes on a paradoxical solidity when we are reminded that its sensory substantiveness has been made to disappear. In a like manner, I think, the way a novelist can *produce* space in language is by alternately negating and confirming the four principles that make spatial experience possible: take away the body, reintroduce it; empty space of objects, restore objects; obliterate partitioned space, reinstate division. All of these are procedures that can be re-

versed or combined with one another. We are prompted into intensified spatial imagining when the novelist signals a change in spatial relations. To show how this works in practice, I want first to explore two moments of hurtful spatial disorientation. Space is first put under erasure, an obliteration which is then followed by a kinaesthetic reinstatement of it that alters a character's understanding of space. Through passages in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Anthony Trollope's *The Prime Minister* (1876), I will suggest how Kant's first two principles are at work: his claim that space is relational because it is outside us, and his claim that we cannot *think* space away.

In chapter 10 of *North and South*, Thornton has been invited to tea at the Hales. A warm and aesthetic domestic space has been evoked as the group argue about the responsibilities of the great factory owners to their men, or hands. At his departure, Thornton shakes hands with the senior Hales, but when he approaches Margaret, the conventions of polite society in the south prevail, and, unprepared for this gesture, she fails to reciprocate. Here is the spatial choreography:

When Mr Thornton rose up to go away, after shaking hands with Mr and Mrs Hale, he made an advance to Margaret to wish her goodbye in a similar manner. It was the frank familiar custom of the place; but Margaret was not prepared for it. She simply bowed her farewell, although the instant she saw the hand, half put out, quickly drawn back, she was sorry she had not been aware of the intention. Mr Thornton, however, knew nothing of her sorrow, and, drawing himself up to his full height, walked off, muttering as he left the house — 'A more proud, disagreeable girl I never saw. Even her great beauty is blotted out of one's memory by her scornful ways.'<sup>10</sup>

Prior to the aborted handshake, working with his own conventions of sociality, Thornton has taken for granted the space between himself and Margaret, ready to traverse it: 'advanced' is a powerful spatial verb here, suggesting a confident forward movement, residually associated with a purposive martial advance. She has also taken that space for granted in a different way, that it will *not* be traversed. This small drama is intensified because a handshake invokes those 'incongruent counterparts' described by Kant, left-handedness and right-handedness, by which we navigate spatial relations. The hand, 'half put out, quickly drawn back', produces

---

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. by Patsy Stoneman (Ware: Wordsworth, 2002), p. 80.

an overdetermined incongruence that draws attention to the arrested gesture and the space between the two figures. Thornton and Margaret both orientate themselves through the body. The reader too, I think, orientates herself in this notional space. When the expected gesture is not made, the spatial depth between the two characters earlier established inconspicuously becomes suddenly, for both characters, charged, fraught, leaping into awareness. It becomes a *gap*. This existential gap becomes a social and class space, an affective space charged with rejection for Thornton and with regret by Margaret. The space ‘thickens’, becomes phenomenologically intense, because the hand is the marker of touch, here the marker of touch denied. It is a sexual space for Thornton, who has almost unconsciously watched Margaret’s arm as she repeatedly pushes a bracelet into place as it repeatedly falls: ‘There it goes again’, he thinks (p. 74). He has seen Mr Hale use his daughter’s fingers as sugar tongs, a playful gesture that nevertheless resonates with power relations, particularly when we remember that sugar was at issue in anti-slavery campaigns. It is a political space for the narrator. The narrative makes space the external, organizing form of relations, which we cannot think away, by first placing space under erasure or making it inconspicuous, and then by suddenly reintroducing its relational force. With wonderful subtlety, Gaskell introduces another spatial relation as Thornton leaves the house. He has to re-experience space with his body: ‘drawing himself up to his full height’, he ‘walked off’ into the open, away from the painful gap. The textual eye generally presupposes a reader who occupies a consciousness that is rendered stable through sharing the narrator’s perspective, implicitly sharing the left–right orientation of a frontal gaze wherever that eye is positioned and directed.

The second example of space under erasure and reinstated as the element we cannot think away comes from a moment in Trollope’s *The Prime Minister* (chapter 19). The Duke of Omnium, temporarily staying in his country house, which has been almost taken over by guests his wife has invited ostensibly to further his power, decides to take his usual walk. Brilliantly, Trollope puts space under erasure in the Duke’s own mind: an unobservant man, too absorbed in the cerebral to register spatial markers, he is normally physically impervious to the spaces of his house, which he takes for granted. Until, that is, he is surprised into awareness. First, the grandiloquence of his own house’s wasteful architecture strikes him. Then he perceives, with that absence of specificity that is habitual with him, ‘that men were at work about the place’, that ‘ground had been moved here, and grass laid down there, and a new gravel road’:

Then he perceived the tents, and descending the terrace and turning to the left towards the end of the house, he came upon a new conservatory. The exotics with which it was to be filled were at this moment being brought in on great barrows. He stood for a moment and looked, but said not a word to the men. They gazed at him but evidently did not know him. How should they know him, — him, who was so seldom there, and who when there never showed himself about the place? Then he went further afield from the house and came across more and more men. A great ha-ha fence had been made, enclosing on three sides a large flat and turfed parallelogram of ground, taken out of the park, and open at one end to the gardens, containing, as he thought, about an acre. ‘What are you doing this for?’ he said to one of the labourers. The man stared at him, and at first seemed hardly inclined to make him an answer. ‘It be for the quality to shoot their bows and arrows,’ he said at last, as he continued the easy task of patting with his spade the completed work. He evidently regarded the stranger as an intruder who was not entitled to ask questions, even if he were permitted to wander about the grounds.<sup>11</sup>

The Duke is shocked into spatial awareness and reintroduced to his estate by the wholly unexpected changes made to the terrain of his own property. A new conservatory has been erected unbeknown to him. He ‘came upon’ it as by accident. The estate has been encroached upon and carved up (‘taken out of the park’) without reference to him. Moreover, the ‘turfed parallelogram of ground’ is unintelligible to him. He is forced to engage with a hermeneutics of his own ancestral space — ‘What are you doing this for?’ He ‘came across more and more men’. The estate has been taken over by the workers, who are encamped upon it — ‘he perceived the tents’ for the first time. Trollope, master of the inconspicuous but telling verb, uses ‘perceives’, the verb of awakening and focusing sight, rather than ‘looks’, just as he uses ‘came upon’ rather than ‘arrived at’. The Duke’s normal imperviousness to his surroundings means that each new discrete spatial discovery becomes a surprise to him that requires him to make new relationships and calculations — ‘containing, as he thought, about an acre’. Gradually, he sees that he is not only alienated from his own property and the workers on it — ‘they gazed at him but evidently did not know him’ — he has ceded his *entitlement to space*. It is when he

---

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Prime Minister*, ed. by David Skilton (London: Penguin, 1994) p. 160.

sees that he has been alienated from his land that he is most aware of its spaces. As an ‘intruder who was not *entitled* to ask questions’, he experiences a reversal of ownership that means he cannot think away space. Rather, it presses upon him. Trollope shows that this is the space of class by inverting class relations, reconfiguring the Duke’s spaces. The space between the Duke and the workman is a *level* space. Forced to ask questions about his own land, the Duke may not be absolutely the slave in a master–slave relation, but he is certainly subservient to the workman.

Kant’s second two premises, that space is single however it can be divided, and that space is infinite (indeed it can be infinitely divided), also belong together. The novel of this era lives through charting divided and demarcated spaces, the new historical spaces generated by the new forms of work and pleasure created by industrial capitalism, and the new urban spaces it brought with it in particular — public gardens, parks, railways, suburbs, theatres, clubs, shops. But it goes further than registering these epiphenomena of capital. External *and* internal spaces can be divided and sectioned in the minutest ways. It is only when this occurs that we can live the space of the novel, and again the strategy is the same: to subject space to division and then to erase that division, or conversely, to introduce division where formerly division is not apparent.

In *Mansfield Park* (1814), in the absence of Sir Thomas Bertram, his children devastate the spaces of part of the house, newly partitioning the billiard room into a theatre, transforming their father’s private study into a green room, violating the space of work and play by opening up the study to the billiard room. The space of the pleasure principle (and erotic adventure) reconfigures the separate order of study and billiard room (one of the study doors is blocked off from the billiard room by a bookshelf prior to the play). Austen never offers a continuous account of these new spatial allocations: we learn of them intermittently, but the sum total of these repartitionings is enormous. Tom Bertram initiates the new divisions by insisting on a curtain (p. 145). This implies the construction of a proscenium arch. Yates immediately follows the logic of the arch with ‘only just a side wing or two run up, doors in flat, and three or four scenes to be let down’. From ‘the glance his father gave towards the ceiling and stucco of the [billiard] room’ at the climax of Sir Thomas’s discovery of the theatre, and the enquiry as to the disappearance of the billiard table, we deduce that this has occurred (p. 215). The *perspectives* of the room have been altered. A ‘scene painter had arrived from town’, we hear, in chapter 18 (p. 192). Does ‘town’ designate London? It seems so, from the manner in which he disrupts the life of the now dissatisfied maids and

servants, presumably with tales of the glamour of London. The ‘deal board’ thieved by Dick Jackson (chapter 15) suggests extravagant expenditure. The longest account of the transformation of space comes early in the plans, before even a play has been selected. We are intensely aware not only of upheaval but of new principles for organizing space:

‘It is the very room for a theatre, precisely the shape and length for it, and the doors at the farther end, communicating with each other as they may be made to do in five minutes, by merely moving the book-case in my father’s room, is the very thing we could have desired, if we had set down to wish for it. And my father’s room will be an excellent green-room. It seems to join the billiard room on purpose.’ (p. 147)

In less than a morning after his return Sir Thomas eradicates the new spaces that have wrecked his closed domestic order. The carpenter is set to ‘work in pulling down what had been so lately put up’ and he had ‘given the scene painter his dismissal’ (p. 223). He has apparently restored the old spatial order. But we know now that the Mansfield space can be partitioned and repartitioned according to different principles. Stable space, disrupted by partition and seemingly restored, now has a history of change that opens up different forms of social relation and pleasure that cannot be so easily annulled. The scene painter had ‘spoilt only the floor of one room’: the implication here is that the damage is permanent. In scene painting space is used to imitate space. There are intimations of complexity of which Sir Thomas is unaware. There remains a trace of the pleasure principle and its new perspectives ineradicably fused with the stain of paint on the floor, reminding us that space is infinitely divisible and in different ways.

The countermovement of the novelist, to introduce division where previously undifferentiated space occurs, is a strategy very deliberately used in *Dombey and Son* (1848), in the crisis of Carker’s flight through France after the collapse of his plans to elope with Edith. This is a cumulative representation, depending on panic-stricken repetition to evoke the endless road along which Carker’s horses are spurred:

It was a vision of long roads; that stretched away to an horizon, always receding and never gained [...]; again of long, long roads, dragging themselves out, up hill and down, to the treacherous horizon [...]. Of long roads temporarily left be-

hind [...]; of galloping away again, upon the long, long road [...]. Of long roads again.<sup>12</sup>

The passage of the flight is greatly extended and it is impossible to quote in full the virtuosic rendering of continuous motion, hectic speed and fevered psychic derangement. Dickens registers space impressionistically and paradoxically. For the empty spaces of road are filled with spatial markers, unevenly distributed along the route, subdividing the passing landscape. But the more the spatial division, the more monotonous and undifferentiated the journey seems to Carker. It is peculiarly modern space, empty meaningless space, to adapt Walter Benjamin's description of modern temporality, combined with the rapid evanescent optical mirage of distinct units of humanly made constructions that have lost all significance. A single paragraph suggests something of this spatial phantasmagoria, where some visual items stand out with preternatural distinctness, and some pass barely registered. The performative syntax of disconnection dominates. The paragraph is effectively one long endless predicate, continuously segmented, but which has no reason for ending except in repetition. We can deduce from this passage the spaces of a Catholic country, and a rural environment whose atrocity towards animals is strangely at odds with its scattered crosses, but the text, not Carker, registers them.

It was a vision of long roads; that stretched away to an horizon, always receding and never gained; of ill-paved towns, up hill and down, where faces came to dark doors and ill-glazed windows, and where rows of mud-bespattered cows and oxen were tied up for sale in the long narrow streets, butting and lowing, and receiving blows on their blunt heads from bludgeons that might have beaten them in; of bridges, crosses, churches, postyards, new horses being put in against their wills, and the horses of the last stage reeking, panting, and laying their ever-drooping heads together dolefully at stable doors; of little cemeteries with black crosses settled sideways in the graves, and withered wreaths upon them dropping away; again of long, long roads, dragging themselves out, up hill and down, to the treacherous horizon. (p. 817)

---

<sup>12</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. by Alan Horsman and Denis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 816.

## II

Kant provides us with the infrastructure, as it were, for reading the a priori category of space in nineteenth-century fiction. If realism means anything at this time, it might be constituted by the novelist's ability to conjure space in the way I have described, to make us feel that the space of the novel is commensurate with experience of it outside fiction. But while Kant provides us with the deep structure of space, he does not provide us with the conceptual equipment to think in terms of different taxonomies of space, different organizations of space, and the social forms they betoken. There are a number of empirical and imagined social spaces that Kantian thought does not address and was never intended to. For instance: the new regionalizations and zonings that created a new geography signifying rich, poor, middle-class, north and south; the familiar antitheses that we work with in this era: country–city, domestic space–industrial space, home–abroad; the ideological spaces that we construct: provincial–cosmopolitan space, national and colonial space. And then there are the invented regions — ‘Middlemarch’ (George Eliot), ‘Our Village’ (Miss Mitford), ‘Wessex’ (Thomas Hardy) — that map imaginary locations.

To conclude my paper, and to usher in this issue of *19* devoted to space, I write briefly of some theoretical accounts of space that can illuminate fiction. These accounts enable us to create different taxonomies of novelistic space. I persist in believing that the Kantian a priori underpins all novelistic space. However, psychological, cultural, and social manifestations of space, and the configurations that they themselves in turn produce, emerge in the novel. Theoretical work on space enables us to address, question and explore these spaces through the *categories* of spatial experience they develop, and thus to bring different perspectives to bear on fictional space. In what follows I am being deliberately eclectic. The theories I discuss are not always compatible with one another, and, like every theory, can be questioned. I am not suggesting that we match theoretical to fictional space, but that we use these theories as heuristic tools to bring out aspects of spatial experience that we would not otherwise see, or not, at least, see so clearly. I discuss the following two works in particular: Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958), and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1973).

### Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

This Heideggerian phenomenology of space asked us to *read* a room long before people had begun to think in this way. ‘Topoanalysis’ is what Bachelard called his poetics. He wrote about houses, containers, miniature and gigantesque objects, but his reading of the house is germane to spatial thinking. His lyrical poetics of the house reads this as a primal space, a ‘*vital space*’, in which consciousness and the body is fused with it as a physical container.<sup>13</sup> The house is a ‘privileged entity’ of ‘inside space’ (p. 3). Its interior space guarantees the space of interiority itself. The house is therefore a secretion of dreams, memory, reverie, a protected, oneiric space, as well as a material space. It generates images and protects the unconscious. ‘We should therefore have to say how we inhabit our vital space’, he writes,

in accord with all the dialectics of life, how we take root, day after day, in a ‘corner of the world’. For our house is our corner of the world [...]. It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. (p. 4)

The oneiric possibilities of the house are such that our birth house (or what we see as our birth house) is physically and psychically inscribed in us — we carry it around for life as part of the imaginary. Through the topography of cellars, attic, stairs, corridor, we amass an accumulation of dream material that is a perpetual resource. The dream house has a ‘primitiveness’ that belongs to rich and poor alike, ‘if they are willing to dream’ (p. 4).

Bachelard’s point is that this primal phenomenological space of dreams and images is the vital source of an image-making capacity that is *integrating*. Without ‘the utmost depths of reverie [*sic*]’ (p. 7) consciousness would be without an understanding of human nurture that secures us to the world, and the lack of a sense of nurture and protection leaves the self unable to deal with exposure to the world, without creative defences, without roots.

Bachelard has been accused of being a romantic, unable to see how his bourgeois ideology shapes his reading of space, and of being a Eurocentric unconscious of the colonial outside. However, we can extrapolate that he posits a deep need for a primordial home that is not simply the

---

<sup>13</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 4, emphasis mine.

space of infantilism. Also, we can read him against himself: this deep need *can* lead to ideological misprision. Desire and domestic space are often in ideological tension.

We can see desire and domestic space in conflict in George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*. Think of Maggie and Tom, tied to their primordial home by the strongest 'fibres', Eliot writes, 'of their hearts'.<sup>14</sup> These 'fibres' are the physiological nerves of the body and the associative threads of mental life. They can be imprisoning as well as connecting. Despite what we are told of the abuses of their childhoods, particularly in the case of Maggie, they cling to the vital spaces of the past, which are imprisoning. 'If the past is not to bind us [note the fibre and thread again] where can duty lie?' Maggie says, after her elopement, refusing to join Stephen, but also remaining in the environment that persecutes her (p. 531).

Yet Bachelard's primordial 'vital' space can also bring an understanding of those spaces in the novels of Dickens that seem, on first sight, sentimental essays in the evocation of home. The rooms in Jarndyce's Bleak House in the novel of that name (1853), 'with its light, and warmth, and comfort; with their hospitable jingle, at a distance, of preparations for dinner', might be passed over with embarrassment as examples of Dickens's inveterate sentimentality.<sup>15</sup> Yet, remembering that they are to house three orphans who have been deprived of home, they are surely offered to us as oneiric space, space with the potential for dreams and images, space that could generate a protective interiority. As Esther describes the 'delightfully irregular' rooms, they have, deliberately, no purchase on rational geometric structure (p. 77). In the long passage that describes them, they performatively become an endless passage from one room to another in which one space seems to generate another:

Up and down steps out of one room, where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, [...] little halls and passages, where you find still older cottage rooms in unexpected places [...]. Out of this room, you went down two steps [...]. Out of this you went up three steps [...]. Out of this room, you passed into a little gallery. (p. 78)

The rooms are interconnecting and yet enclosed, a dreamscape that imagines the self's prolific production of subjective space as ever-aggregating

---

<sup>14</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. by Tatiana M. Holway (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005), p. 79.

units. If they also have the potential for becoming a maze as well, then this suggests Dickens's understanding, *pace* Bachelard, of the simultaneously dangerous life of reverie. The negative aspect of this non-rational psychological space is its material parallel, the crazed maze of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case.

### Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

*The Production of Space* is a Marxist study of great richness and complexity. For Lefebvre, all space is socially made. I pull out two elements of his highly elaborate materialist theory, a theory welded with semiotics, and in which Lefebvre brings together 'reality, knowledge and social space'.<sup>16</sup> He is, he says, attempting to decipher 'spatial practice': 'The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space' (p. 38). The production of space is 'a precondition and result of social superstructures' (p. 85). The first important aspect of Lefebvre's taxonomy is his classification based on what he designates as 'Dominated', 'Appropriated', and 'Diverted' space (pp. 164–68). The second is his dual account of representations of space and representational spaces (pp. 38–39).

**Dominated Space** and its forms is what Lefebvre appears to be describing throughout his book. It is the abstract space of capital. It is authoritarian and makes use of a repressive, authoritarian symbolism (p. 49). It is the space of power, the space of the master's project, and it is a 'space transformed — and mediated — by technology' (p. 164). It disregards the landscape, both historically and geographically, of the spaces it occupies, and brutalizes it, producing an abstract, closed, sterilized space that is emptied out of meaning (p. 165). 'Its origins coincide with those of political power itself' (p. 164). Examples might be a Roman road, a multi-storey car park, an airport, the Berlin Wall, Israeli fortifications against Palestine.

Since this is the most straightforward of Lefebvre's categories, I will offer some examples before proceeding to the more difficult categories of appropriated and diverted space. In the novels already considered, dominated space is present in the social artefacts of power: the great houses of Mansfield Park, for example, and the Duke of Omnium's estate; one a forbidding space to Fanny, the other, with a road constructed on arches so

---

<sup>16</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 20.

that grand guests could drive ‘almost into the house’, a place of oppressive grandeur: ‘Of what use had been the portico, and the marbles, and the huge pile of stone [...]?’ (Trollope, p. 160). We see the hierarchical space of the Court of Chancery in *Bleak House*: the Lord Chancellor is ‘softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains’, while the ‘uninitiated’ are deterred from entry (p. 18). In *Dombey and Son*, the upheaval of rail works wrecks the urban landscape: ‘piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing’ (p. 68). A more ironic treatment of dominated space occurs in *The Mill on the Floss*, where Pivart’s irrigation schemes transform the landscape, bring the concept of water as a commodity into Tulliver’s atavistic world, and threaten the mill’s water supply. But the mill *still works* after Pivart carries out his plans, a deep irony. Capital is ruthlessly efficient. The Guest fortune, founded on technology, is to finance Stephen’s future career as an MP, and presumably does so when its plentiful water supply enables it to be converted to steam.

**Appropriated Space** is adapted from Marx’s understanding of the self’s work on the world — it is the space of limited *freedom within the capitalist project*. It is often a small area of aesthetic freedom within capital — Lefebvre points to the house owned by capital and the tenant’s freedom to decorate it. Lefebvre seems much less certain of this form of space, though it does seem as if this is a form rescued from or outside of the sites of oppression:

It may be said of a natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group [...]. Property in the sense of possession is at best a necessary precondition, and often merely an epiphenomenon, of ‘appropriative’ activity, the highest expression of which is the work of art. An appropriated space *resembles* a work of art, which is not to say that it is in any sense an *imitation* of art. Often such a space is a structure [...] but this is not always the case [...]. Examples of appropriated space abound, but it is not always easy to decide in what respect, how, or by whom they have been appropriated. (p. 164)

The advantage of remaining with this category is that it forges a space that circumvents oppression, however insecurely. It is a praxis of space opened up to groups and individuals which is often expressive, a group or a subject’s work on the world. It is an aesthetic that penetrates everyday life, an attempt to create a lifeworld that, at least temporarily, frees it-

self from dominated space. Ownership and property may be an element in appropriated space, but it is not the large-scale monopolistic and authoritarian ownership of capital. Lefebvre is careful to maintain that this is not an *individualist* space, even though the forms of sociality it reflects are not wholly clear to him. The forms of appropriated space in the novel are, however, fragile, and sometimes isolated. There is Fanny's appropriation of the schoolroom for her own purposes in *Mansfield Park*, the space of recycled objects, and William's picture of his ship, that is always invaded. There is the lonely Miss Tox's watering of her plants in *Dombey and Son*, and the community of men who gather round the space of archaic technology in the shelter of the obsolete ship's instruments — Sol, Captain Cuttle, and their pipe-smoking sociality. Perhaps more cheerily but still fragile, there is the aesthetic space of the Hales' living room in *North and South*, where plants and fruit, china and furniture, are a form of use value, and where they are arranged to wrest warmth and frugal elegance for collective family life against the soot and harshness of a factory city, the abstract space of capital.

**Diverted Space** is space wrenched from power by individuals and groups, almost always the dispossessed. It is the space made by the outsider and the outcast. Lefebvre sees this as possibly emancipatory or revolutionary, although not in all cases (pp. 167–68). Squatters today and the taking over of the streets and of buildings by student protesters would be an example. In the nineteenth-century novel it is not an optimistic space, but does expose the space of domination with ruthless clarity. Jo the crossing sweeper 'diverts' the space of each doorstep he rests on before being moved on in *Bleak House*. The Gypsies of *The Mill on the Floss*, subject to laws of exclusion, cling to the side of the lane. They do not camp on the common, as Maggie expects.

When Lefebvre speaks of the space of representation and representational space, he is thinking of two rival forms of spatial conceptualization that exist in a state of contradiction and always in tension with lived space. By representation he means the conceptualization of space by those with power or at least the means to disseminate them — technologists, planners, social engineers (pp. 38–39). They are often responsible for the empirical and humanly made conditions of environmental space — a kind of determinism of the environment. These are in conflict with the subjective forms (ideological if you like) *and* lived experience with which this same space is represented by individuals and groups. The space of representation and represented space work against one another. There is a struggle against the hegemonic norms of representation by the propo-

nents of lived representational space. The boundary dispute in *Bleak House* in which Lawrence Boythorn is engaged with the Dedlock estate is an acting out of these rival space positions. More complexly, Esther is always longing for an ideal space that will transcend the constraints of her material space. Think of the hubris and narrowness of the environment Maggie occupies and her *screen* memories of it as idyll. Boys kill cats for fun, hunt rats, labourers jeer at Maggie's search for the Gypsies. Representational space makes the 'narrowest leaway' against represented space (Lefebvre, p. 50).

The advantage of thinking through Lefebvre's arguments is that they refuse to let one 'read off' a set of parallels with the novel. He argues that '*social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves on one another*' (p. 86, emphasis in original). This provides an intricate agenda for analysing spatiality in the novel.

I have looked in some detail at Bachelard and Lefebvre, a phenomenologist and a materialist, because their work suggests heuristic strategies that search into the novel. There are other theorists to which I cannot do justice here: Michel Foucault's reading of 'Heterotopia', for example, or Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of 'striated' space.<sup>17</sup> Foucault reads heterotopia as the space deemed as *other* that creates one *as other* to it. His example is the mirror, but also the social phenomenon of the asylum. What joins these spaces together is that they are socially outside, deemed to be unmediated spaces, bracketed — and make the self feel outside as a corollary. But the great heterotopia of the nineteenth-century novel is colonial space. One can say confidently that there is *no* nineteenth-century novel without a colonial space, however inconspicuous: Antigua (*Mansfield Park*); Africa or 'Boriboola Gha', India, the West Indies (*Bleak House*); Australia, India (*Dombey and Son*); India, South America (*North and South*). These are ideologically fraught heterotopias. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator speaks of a familiar and cherished 'home scene', 'the mother tongue of the imagination' created by an English wood in May: 'what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms could ever' possess the same intensity as speed-

---

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias', in *Michel Foucault, Info*. <<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>> [accessed October 2013] (first publ. as 'Des espaces autres', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5 (1984), 46–49); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1988), pp. 490–97.

well and ground ivy? (p. 44). This territorial memory of a Bachelardian home scene is invaded by colonial space at the very moment of lyrical celebration.

Deleuze and Guattari's striated space is rhizomic, fractal space. Such spaces exemplify surfaces that organize continuous variation: 'fractals are aggregates whose number of dimensions is fractional rather than whole, or else whole but with continuous variation in a direction' (p. 537). This is discontinuous space, broken, and fractured, in contradistinction to smooth, continuous, hierarchical space. Smooth, continuous, hierarchical space is a prey to binaries, dialectics (the bane of Deleuze), whereas striated, discontinuous space is not. There is much to be sceptical about here. But this emphasis on the discontinuous serves to remind us that fictional space is not homogeneous. Novelistic spaces are heterogeneous, not just because we move from the riverside to the parlour, or from law court to London house, but because they make us sense them in physiologically and perceptually different and uneven ways. Consider the different spatial registers of *The Mill on the Floss*: the lyrical first chapter, the scene in the mill parlour following it, the scene in the Red Deeps, and Maggie's negotiation of the flood. *Bleak House* is just as discontinuous: the move from the polemical space of the law court to the dripping elegiac space of Lincolnshire; the move from Krook's shop to the fantasmatic space of Jarndyce's house.

I end with a paradox. Though the novel of the nineteenth century creates the Kantian coordinates of space through language, and is thus grounded in a common externality, the impossibility of thinking space away, and the infinitude of a plurality of spaces, novelistic space is not uniform. It is historical and ideological, but both between and within novels the spatio-temporal experience is always changing.