THE AESTHETICS OF SPACE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE, 1843–1907

Giles Whiteley
The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843–1907
Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture

Series Editor: Julian Wolfreys

Recent books in the series:

Rudyard Kipling's Fiction: Mapping Psychic Spaces
Lizzy Welby

The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons and Dawsen
Kostas Boyiopoulos

British India and Victorian Literary Culture
Maire ni Flathain

Anthony Trollope's Late Style: Victorian Liberalism and Literary Form
Frederik Van Dam

Dark Paradise: Pacific Islands in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination
Jenn Fuller

Jonathan Cranfield

The Lyric Poem and Aestheticism: Forms of Modernity
Marion Thain

Gender, Technology and the New Woman
Lena Wånggren

Self-Harm in New Woman Writing
Alexandra Gray

Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image
Lucy Ella Rose

Victorian Liberalism and Material Culture: Synergies of Thought and Place
Kevin A. Morrison

The Victorian Male Body
Joanne-Ella Parsons and Ruth Heholt

Nineteenth-Century Settler Emigration in British Literature and Art
Fariba Shaikh

The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism
Eleonora Sasso

The Late-Victorian Little Magazine
Koenraad Claeys

Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century
Matthew Ingleby and Mart P. M. Kerr

Dickens and Demolition: Literary Afterlives and Mid-Nineteenth-Century Urban Development
Joanna Hofer-Robinson

Artful Experiments: Ways of Knowing in Victorian Literature and Science
Philipp Erchinger

Victorian Poetry and the Poetics of the Literary Periodical
Caley Ehnes

The Victorian Actress in the Novel and on the Stage
Renata Roberts Müller

Dickens's Clowns: Charles Dickens, Joseph Grimaldi and the Pantomime of Life
Jonathan Buckmaster

Italian Politics and Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Culture
Patricia Cote

Cultural Encounters with the Arabian Nights in Nineteenth-Century Britain
Melissa Dickson

Novel Institutions: Anachronism, Irish Novels and Nineteenth-Century Realism
Mary L. Mullen

The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revivals: Romance, Decadence and Celtic Identity
Michael Shaw

Contested Liberalisms: Martineau, Dickens and the Victorian Press
Iain Crawford

Plotting Disability in the Nineteenth-Century Novel
Clare Walker Gore

The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843–1907
Giles Whiteley

Forthcoming volumes:

Her Father's Name: Gender, Theatricality and Spiritualism in Florence Marryat's Fiction
Tanitana Kontou

The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities
Patricia Pulham

Olive Schreiner and the Politics of Print Culture, 1883–1920
Clare Gill

Victorian Auto/Biography: Problems in Genre and Subject
Amber Regis

Gissing, Shakespeare and the Life of Writing
Thomas Ze

The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry
Reza Taheri-Kermani

Women's Mobility in Henry James
Anna Despotopoulou

Michael Field's Revisionary Poetics
Jill Ehnen

The Americanisation of W.T. Stead
Helena Goodwyn

Literary Illusions: Performance Magic and Victorian Literature
Christopher Pittard

The Ideas in Stories: Intellectual Content as Aesthetic Experience in Victorian Literature
Patrick Fessenbecker

Pastoral in Early-Victorian Fiction: Environment and Modernity
Mark Frost

Edmund Yates and Victorian Periodicals: Gossip, Celebrity, and Gendered Spaces
Kathryn Ledbetter

Literature, Architecture and Perversion: Building Sexual Culture in Europe, 1850–1930
Aina Marti

Oscar Wilde and the Radical Politics of the Fin de Siècle
Deaglán Ó Donghaile

Home and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Literary London
Lisa Robertson

Rereading Orphanhood: Texts, Inheritance, Kin
Diane Warren and Laura Peters

Plotting the News in the Victorian Novel
Jessica Valdez

Manufacturing Female Beauty in British Literature and Periodicals, 1850–1914
Michelle Smith

For a complete list of titles published visit the Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture web page at www.edinburghuniversitypress.com/series/ECVC

Also Available:
Victoriographies – A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Writing, 1790–1914, edited by Diane Piccitto and Patricia Pulham
ISSN: 2044-2416
www.eupjournals.com/vic
The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843–1907

Giles Whiteley

EDINBURGH
University Press
Edinburgh University Press is one of the leading university presses in the UK. We publish academic books and journals in our selected subject areas across the humanities and social sciences, combining cutting-edge scholarship with high editorial and production values to produce academic works of lasting importance. For more information visit our website: edinburghuniversitypress.com

© Giles Whiteley, 2020

Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road, 12(2f) Jackson’s Entry, Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Typeset in 11/13 Adobe Sabon by
IDSUK (DataConnection) Ltd, and
printed and bound in Great Britain.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4744 4372 2 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 4374 6 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 1 4744 4375 3 (epub)

The right of Giles Whiteley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, and the Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003 (SI No. 2498).
Contents

List of Illustrations vi
Series Editor’s Preface viii
Acknowledgements x
Abbreviations xii

Prologue: Joris-Karl Huysmans, or ‘After Dickens’ 1
Introduction: The Spatial Turn 20
1. John Ruskin: Towards a Theoretics of Space 52
2. Charles Dickens: After Realism 83
3. Walter Pater: Towards an Aesthetics of Space 123
4. Oscar Wilde: Cosmopolitan Space 165
5. Henry James: Modern Space 206
Conclusion: Unreal Cities – Towards Modernism 238

Works Cited 259
Index 281
Illustrations

i  XIVe arrondissement: Observatoire 3
ii  Ie arrondissement: Louvre 9
iii VIIIe arrondissement: Élysée 14
2.1 Bluegate Fields 89
2.2 Luke Fildes, ‘In the Court’ (1869) 92
2.3 Phil W. Smith, ‘St. George’s in the East from the London Docks’ (1923) 93
2.4 Gustave Doré, ‘Opium Smoking – The Lascar’s Room in “Edwin Drood”’ (1872) 97
2.5 Rochester Cathedral: tympanum 109
2.6 Rochester Cathedral: Great West Door 110
2.7 Gustave Doré, ‘Over London by Rail’ (1872) 116
3.1 Walter Pater’s Rooms, Brasenose College: Gothic window 123
3.2 Walter Pater’s Rooms, Brasenose College: view of the Radcliffe Camera 124
3.3 Walter Pater’s Rooms, Brasenose College: view of All Souls 124
3.4 Liguria 139
3.5 Ancient Rome 152
3.6 The Roman Forum 153
4.1 Hyde Park and Piccadilly 169
4.2 Marylebone 175
4.3 St Giles and Covent Garden 179
4.4 Soho 183
Illustrations vii

4.5 Chelsea 186
4.6 The Embankment 187
4.7 The East End 193
4.8 Grosvenor Square 200
Series Editor’s Preface

‘Victorian’ is a term, at once indicative of a strongly determined concept and an often notoriously vague notion, emptied of all meaningful content by the many journalistic misconceptions that persist about the inhabitants and cultures of the British Isles and Victoria’s Empire in the nineteenth century. As such, it has become a by-word for the assumption of various, often contradictory habits of thought, belief, behaviour and perceptions. Victorian studies and studies in nineteenth-century literature and culture have, from their institutional inception, questioned narrowness of presumption, pushed at the limits of the nominal definition, and sought to question the very grounds on which the unreflective perception of the so-called Victorian has been built; and so they continue to do. Victorian and nineteenth-century studies of literature and culture maintain a breadth and diversity of interest, of focus and inquiry, in an interrogative and intellectually open-minded and challenging manner, which are equal to the exploration and inquisitiveness of its subjects. Many of the questions asked by scholars and researchers of the innumerable productions of nineteenth-century society actively put into suspension the clichés and stereotypes of ‘Victorianism’, whether the approach has been sustained by historical, scientific, philosophical, empirical, ideological or theoretical concerns; indeed, it would be incorrect to assume that each of these approaches to the idea of the Victorian has been, or has remained, in the main exclusive, sealed off from the interests and engagements of other approaches. A vital interdisciplinarity has been pursued and embraced, for the most part, even as there has been contest and debate amongst Victorianists, pursued with as much fervour as the affirmative exploration between different disciplines and differing epistemologies put to work in the service of reading the nineteenth century.

Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture aims to take up both the debates and the inventive approaches and departures from convention that studies in the nineteenth century have witnessed for
the last half century at least. Aiming to maintain a ‘Victorian’ (in the most positive sense of that motif) spirit of inquiry, the series’ purpose is to continue and augment the cross-fertilisation of interdisciplinary approaches, and to offer, in addition, a number of timely and untimely revisions of Victorian literature, culture, history and identity. At the same time, the series will ask questions concerning what has been missed or improperly received, misread, or not read at all, in order to present a multi-faceted and heterogeneous kaleidoscope of representations. Drawing on the most provocative, thoughtful and original research, the series will seek to prod at the notion of the ‘Victorian’, and in so doing, principally through theoretically and epistemologically sophisticated close readings of the historicity of literature and culture in the nineteenth century, to offer the reader provocative insights into a world that is at once overly familiar, and irreducibly different, other and strange. Working from original sources, primary documents and recent interdisciplinary theoretical models, Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture seeks not simply to push at the boundaries of research in the nineteenth century, but also to inaugurate the persistent erasure and provisional, strategic redrawing of those borders.

Julian Wolfreys
Acknowledgements

I am thankful for the support, both financial and collegial, which I have received from a number of sources while writing this book. Many thanks to those colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of discussing ideas that have eventually found their way into the book. In particular, thanks to Beyza Björkman Nylén, Elisabet Dellming, Dennis Denisoff, Bo Ekelund, Stefano Evangelista, Gül Bilge Han, Stefan Helgesson, Richard Hibbitt, John Miller, Wendy Nakanishi, Irina Rasmussen, Margaret Stetz, Jeremy Tambling and Magnus Ullén. Jeremy’s influence, in particular, is palpable throughout this book even when not cited directly, a product of my seemingly endless rereading of his work on Dickens. Thanks also to my doctoral students Rayanne Eskandari and Jonathan Foster, and to the master’s students who took courses on realism and aestheticism at Stockholm University for the lively discussions.

I have had the pleasure of presenting elements of my research a number of times over the past few years. Particular thanks are due to Bethan Carney, Holly Furneaux and Ben Winyard for the invitation to present a paper at ‘Dickens and Fantasy’, Senate House, London, October 2017, and to Joe Bristow, Charlotte Ribeyrol, Dennis and Stefano for the invitation to present a paper at ‘Curiosity and Desire in fin-de-siècle Art and Literature’, Clark Library, UCLA, May 2018. Thanks also to Virginia Langum for the invitation to present a paper at Umeå University, January 2018. I am grateful to all those who listened to those papers, and a number of others presented at Stockholm University, and for the useful discussions provoked.

Financial support for both archival research trips and the reproduction of images has been provided by the Faculty of Humanities at Stockholm University. I thank them for their generosity. I would like to thank Tower Hamlets Local History Archive and the Victoria and Albert Museum for permission to include reproductions in this book. At Brasenose College, I would like to thank Georgina Edwards for arranging for my visit to Pater’s rooms.

At Edinburgh University Press, I would like to thank Julian Wolfreys, Michelle Houston, James Dale, Ersev Ersoy, Rebecca Mackensie, Adela Rauchova and Fiona Sewell. Jules’s keen interest in this project from the time of our first discussions, Michelle’s help guiding the process from beginning to end, and Fiona’s close attention to detail have been invaluable. Thanks also to the anonymous readers who have given insightful feedback on drafts of the book: needless to say, any remaining errors are my own.

Finally, a special word of thanks must go to my family, Cecilia, Samuel and Elias. Cecilia, in particular, has read drafts of the manuscript, and has taken a number of the photographs included in the book, as well as helping with the maps. This book is for her.

Luke Fildes’s ‘In the Court’ is reproduced by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum archives. Phil W. Smith’s ‘St. George’s in the East from the London Docks’ is reproduced by permission of the Tower Hamlets Local History archive. Gustave Doré’s ‘Opium Smoking – The Lascar’s Room in “Edwin Drood”’ and ‘Over London by Rail’ are reproduced from images made available by Gallica, the digital library of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Abbreviations


IH    Henry James, Italian Hours, ed. John Auchard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995)


Abbreviations


For ease of reference, I give citations by book/part, chapter and page number.


Citations from the Bible are of the King James Version. Definitions and etymologies are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

**A Note on Translations**

I have given citations of foreign-language literary works referring to the original and then the English translation, silently modifying wording of the translation as needed. Where I cite no English translations, as in the art criticism of Huysmans and Zola, translations are my own. In the case of secondary criticism originally in other languages, I have simply given the page number of English translations.
Chapter 9 of Joris-Karl Huysmans’s (1848–1907) À rebours [Against Nature] (1884) sees the aesthete protagonist des Esseintes overwhelmed by a fit of Baudelairean spleen. Attempting to ‘cool his brain with some of the solanaceae of literature [solanées de l’art]’, he turns to the work of Charles Dickens (1812–70), ‘so charmingly adapted for convalescents and invalids’ (AR 9.177; 109). Des Esseintes turns to literature for ‘effects’, opening Dickens in the hope of changing his mood. Art is productive and its effects bodily, convalescent, ‘effets hygiéniques’ (11.201; 132). To des Esseintes’s surprise, however, the novelist produces the ‘opposite effect’ to that expected, and he reacts against Dickens’s characters, with their ‘all-concealing draperies [vêtues jusqu’au cou]’:

By the virtue of the law of contrasts, he jumped from one extreme to the other, recalled scenes of full-blooded, earthy passion [des scènes vibrantes et corsées], and thought of common amorous practice such as the hybrid kiss, or the columbine kiss as ecclesiastical modesty calls it, where the tongue penetrates the lips [ils pénètrent entre les lèvres]. (9.177; 109)³

Dickens’s realism is accused of romanticism, his ‘chaste lovers’ and ‘puritanical heroines’ only partially hidden by the modesty of their clothing. Desire has been marginalised, masked like the bodies in euphemisms of ‘ecclesiastical modesty’. Dickens is accused of being fearful of penetration, whether sexual or into the heart of things.² Consequently, des Esseintes puts Dickens aside, and with him ‘all thoughts of straight-laced Albion [la bégueule Angleterre]’ (AR 9.177; 109). Cultures clash: French decadence is pitted against a prudish Britain, with Dickens’s name metonymic not only for London but for the nation itself.

This engagement with Dickens, seemingly an incidental flourish meant to take aim at conservative British culture, is more important
than might be initially suspected. It reminds us that Huysmans is writing ‘after Dickens’, and that later nineteenth-century literature is haunted by the spectre of Dickens’s work. In one sense, to write ‘after Dickens’ means after realism, and in this context, it should come as no surprise that À rebours is often regarded as the moment when Huysmans, who had hitherto been associated with and identified himself with naturalism, broke with Émile Zola (1840–1902) (Baldick 1955: 78–91; Laver 1954: 59–73; Livi 1972: 25–37). As Robert Baldick puts it, ‘no longer blinded by the Master’s dazzling descriptive talent’, Huysmans opened his ‘eyes [. . .] to the psychological poverty’ of Zola’s novels (1955: 79). In a similar move, this particular passage of À rebours characterises the idea of writing after Dickens as a reaction against his ressentiment: Huysmans charges Dickens with suffocating his subjects, constructing a reality sanitised from difference.3 Realism is accused of evading reality, so that Dickens’s novels become understood as a reaction against life. This seemingly incidental or marginal episode in chapter 9 of À rebours suggests a flaw in the realist project.

Given these stakes, it is hardly a surprise to discover that des Esseintes is unable to put Dickens aside for long. His spectre resurfaces in chapter 11, a return betraying a repetition compulsion, suggesting both the desire to work through the problem of realism and that we will never fully be able to write ‘after Dickens’. Again, the context is convalescence, but this time the encounter produces markedly different effects. Des Esseintes takes the train from his countryside retreat to Paris, dreaming of London:

The work of Dickens, which he had recently read in the hope of soothing his nerves, [. . .] slowly began to act upon him in an unexpected way, evoking visions of English life which he had contemplated for hours on end. Then, little by little, an idea insinuated itself into his mind – the idea of turning dream into reality, of travelling to England in the flesh as well as in the spirit, of checking the accuracy of his visions [de rêves vérifiés]; and this idea was allied with a longing to experience new sensations [éprouver des impressions] and thus afford some relief to a mind dizzy with hunger and drunk with fantasy. (AR 11.201–2; 132)

Des Esseintes does not have the idea of travelling to London; it is not his idea. Rather, the idea ‘insinuates’ itself into his thoughts; it comes from elsewhere, like a thought of the outside, la pensée du dehors (Foucault 2000b), experienced as an affect. A few years earlier, Walter Pater (1839–94), speaking of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75) in his Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873), had noted how
‘real passions’ could come to ‘insinuate’ themselves into the spectator through aesthetic reflection (SHR 134). In this ‘insinuation’, the subject remains unaware, lost in an aesthetic contemplation that operates simultaneously in two directions, producing the world as an aesthetic object and the contemplating subject as the work of art. Dream is turned into reality, valued only insofar as it affords the opportunity of verifying the accuracy of one’s impressions. It is art that gives meaning to the world, and like Pater, what des Esseintes desires is ‘to experience new sensations’ (AR 11.202; 132; compare SHR 189).

Writing after Dickens, Huysmans’s novel offers a snapshot of a late nineteenth-century ‘aesthetics of space’. In the pages which follow, Huysmans approaches one nineteenth-century city space through another one; writing after realism, he reads the city ‘after Dickens’, so Paris is approached through a literary London, creating an aesthetics of these spaces which refigure both alike. Take the weather: thinking of Dickens, we are told that ‘the abominably foggy and rainy’ climate had ‘fostered’ des Esseintes’s thoughts (AR 11.202; 132). The weather had been ‘atrocious for the past week’, creating a landscape of ‘sooty rivers’, ‘watery mist’ and ‘muddy puddles [fangeux des flaques]’ (AR 11.200; 130, 131), generically ‘Dickensian’ phrasing.⁴

Figure i XIVe arrondissement: Observatoire

1. Gare Montparnasse; 2. Boulevard d’Enfer, renamed 1887; 3. Barrière d’Enfer
These meteorological conditions reinforce ‘the memories of what [des Esseintes] had read’ (AR 11.202; 132). The text of Dickens, once put aside, returns, but otherwise. The tempestuous skies are ‘flots d’encre’ (11.200; 130), not so much a pathetic fallacy as a textual phenomenon, floods of Dickensian ink producing an aesthetics of this space proleptically.

Arriving in Paris at the Gare Montparnasse in the 14th arrondissement, built in 1840 and expanded in 1858, des Esseintes finds himself on the Boulevard d’Enfer (11.202; 133). This Road of Hell lay on the present site of Boulevard Raspail, renamed in 1887, three years after the publication of À rebours. It ran north–south through the 6th, 7th and 14th arrondissements; at the southern end lay the Barrière d’Enfer, the Gate of Hell, referred to by Victor Hugo in Les Misérables (1862) (1951: 5.1.18.1242; 1982: 384), located in Place d’Enfer, now Place Denfert-Rochereau. The connotations are obviously hellish, but the location also speaks to a revolutionary spirit that encoded the real Boulevard d’Enfer, where the infamous Maison de Port-Libre was located, housing prisoners before their execution during the Reign of Terror. The space recalls the trace of the political, of revolutionary space and of space as revolutionary, a phenomenon that we will meet throughout this book, consistently politicising the aesthetics of space.

From the Boulevard d’Enfer, des Esseintes hails a cab. He travels north over the Seine to Rue de Rivoli, one of Paris’s most significant commercial streets, benefitting from Haussmannisation in the 1850s. Windows, water and waste dominate the imagery. ‘The cab lumbered off, its wheels throwing up showers of shit [crotte], and ‘the roadway was nothing but swamp [marécage]’ (11.202; 133). The imagery suggests that the nineteenth-century cosmopolitan metropolis was founded on unstable ground, like a house built on sand (Matthew 7: 24–7). Such associations recall Venice, the city that prompted John Ruskin’s (1819–1900) important meditation on the aesthetic qualities of space, and which will prove important to the argument of this book. In Huysmans’s text, the city seems to be emerging from the swamp, suggesting perhaps Dickens’s London of Great Expectations (1860–1), where the chiasmus of ‘Mudbank, mist, swamp and work; work, swamp, mist and mudbank’ (2003e: 28.229) swamps the reader in the text. Dickens yokes ‘swamping’ to ‘work’ in both directions, suggesting capitalism as something which cannot be escaped and which drowns its subjects.

It is in the midst of this swampy Paris, so reminiscent of Dickens’s London, that des Esseintes watches the omnibuses sweeping past, and
sees how ‘women holding their umbrellas low and their skirts high flattened themselves against the shop windows to avoid being splashed’ (AR 11.202; 133). Viewed through des Esseintes’s eyes, this mundane street scene becomes a quintessential question of the aesthetic. It appears staged, choreographed, imaged in a kind of suspended moment, arresting the flow of time in a chronotope that petrifies it in the instant, a movement doubly impossible since the nineteenth-century city is precisely the domain of speed. Huysmans’s antithesis suggests an eroticism (the hitching up of the hem of the skirt) at the same time as foreclosing it (covering the exposed leg with the umbrella). Pressed against the window, the women become part of the display of the windows of the arcades, commodified objects on view, like works of art. They are subject to des Esseintes’s male gaze, performing the ballet of umbrella and skirt precisely since they know that they are always being watched (Lacan 1998b: 80–2). Des Esseintes himself is situated at a privileged remove from the street scene, watching the women from behind the glass of the cab, which ‘quickly streaked with trickles of water’ (AR 11.202; 133). Such a remove isolates the spectator from the scene outside, where life is performed, the city becoming an aesthetic spectacle. The incident, in which des Esseintes gazes at the scene from a detached distance, recalls the train journey he had taken from the countryside into Paris, described a few paragraphs earlier. There, des Esseintes had first begun to dream of London, and the windows afford a striking simile: ‘Through the rainswept windows the countryside fl ashing past looked blurred and dingy, as if he were seeing it through an aquarium full of murky water’ (11.201; 131). Such jarring juxtapositions already speak through an alienated language, defamiliarising reality, speaking to the Entfremdung of the observer.

Further remarkable similes attend des Esseintes’s cab journey. The noise of the rain sounds ‘like sacks of peas being emptied out over his head’ and ‘clots of mud spurted up from all the sides of the cab like sparks from a firework [feu d’artifice]’ (AR 11.202; 133). The French term carries the trace of the thematic of artifice and taken in context, Huysmans’s European readers may have recalled James McNeill Whistler’s (1834–1903) infamous painting of a muddy, murky fireworks display in Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket (1877). It was this work which Ruskin had attacked in letter 79 of Fors Clavigera (1871–84), leading Whistler to sue him for libel. The ensuing court case was an event with major significance for the direction of contemporary European art, to which Huysmans alludes in Certains (1889) (2006: 368). There, he speaks appreciatively of the Nocturne, making clear where his sympathies lie, describing
‘fireworks exploding with blood-stained streaks’ (2006: 369), exploring a violence in the text.

Huysmans was impressed by Whistler, seeing in his work something of a kindred spirit, and both the American painter and the movement of impressionism are key artistic inter-texts informing the tradition of writing the aesthetics of space. Huysmans had seen Whistler’s exhibitions at the Salons of 1882 and 1884, the year À rebours was published. In his review, he reserves particular praise for the Portrait of Lady Meux (1881), described as ‘phantasmic [fantomatique]’, at once a ‘realistic, intimate painting, but already treading into the beyond [l’au-delà] in a dream’ (2006: 368). It is this kind of conjunction, in which a discourse of realism begins to slide into something ‘aesthetic’, which this book investigates. In these passages, Huysmans images Whistler’s aesthetic as dream space, a topic which Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) discusses, alongside the phenomenon of intoxication, as an experience proper to the ‘spacetime’ of the nineteenth century (PW 389; K1,4). Commenting on the Portrait of Lady Meux, Huysmans makes a similar link, associating Whistler and ‘the visions of de Quincey, those leaky rivers [fuites de rivières], those fluid dreams [rêves fluides] born of opium’ (2006: 369), which comes unbidden to his mind. Huysmans suggests that art directs the subject ‘inevitably’, and in making the association with Thomas de Quincey’s (1785–1859) Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821), he links the dream space of the nineteenth-century city with opium, just as the late Dickens had in The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1869–70). Huysmans reads Whistler though de Quincey, and to the extent that these pages of À rebours, reading Paris through Dickens, recall this earlier appreciation of Whistler, both in terms of the aestheticisation of space, and at the lexical level of verbal echoes, the passage sees Huysmans read the text of Paris at once through three prior aesthetic prisms (Dickens, Whistler, de Quincey), all of which are simultaneously being called to reread each other.

For des Esseintes, ‘the appalling weather struck him as an instalment of English life paid to him on account in Paris’ (AR 11.203; 133), a fittingly economic lexicon. He images ‘a picture of London as an immense, sprawling, rain-drenched [pluvieux, colossal, immense] metropolis, stinking of soot and hot iron, smoking tirelessly in the fog’ (11.203; 133–4). From this panoramic view, obscured by the ubiquitous smoke and fog, but also impossible to take in precisely owing to its immensity – a city without limits, without measure, sublime and monstrous (Kant 2000: 131–4) – des Esseintes zooms in,
allowing Huysmans to gain spatial tension and a sense of depth. Des Esseintes ‘could see in imagination a line of dockyards stretching away into the distance, full of cranes, capstans, and bales of merchandise, and swarming [grouillant] with men’ (AR 11.203; 134). Huysmans’s writing is itself Dickensian, deploying rhyme, alliteration and isocolon (‘perte de vue, pleins de grues’). The zooming trajectory moves topographically according to distributions of size and power in the means of production and the products – from the machines and objects through to people, who are ‘swarming’, connoting a becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 270–1). We are situated on the ‘dark, slimy waters of an imaginary Thames, in the midst of a forest of masts [une futaie de mats]’ (AR 11.203; 134). This specific metaphor dates to the seventeenth century; it is a literary figure, produced through textual repetition, and occurs twice in reference to London in the works of Dickens: in The Old Curiosity Shop (1840–1) (2000a: 5.47) and in Martin Chuzzlewit (1842–4) (1999: 9.134). The forest gives height, but immediately gives way to an image of depth: des Esseintes sees the Metropolitan Railway, the first of its kind in the world, introduced to London in 1863. Or rather, the underground is felt rather than seen, and the trains ‘rumbled [roulaient] along, occasionally emitting ghastly screams [cris affreux] or vomiting floods of smoke’ (11.203; 134), personified, so that the underground figures as demonic, another kind of Boulevard d’Enfer, running just beneath the surface of things. Travelling on the underground with Leslie Stephens (1832–1904) in March 1869, Henry James (1843–1916) described it as ‘a marvellous phenomenon – ploughing along in a vast circle thro’ the bowels of London’ (LHF 1: 91), associating the earth with the body. In des Esseintes’s imaginary, it signifies the trauma, the wounding, which underwrites modernity. Fittingly, in this context, we find that, back on street level, the world is shrouded in ‘an eternal twilight [un éternel crépuscule]’, in language implying Charles Baudelaire (1821–67) more than Dickens. For Baudelaire, twilight constitutes ‘the witching hour [l’heure bizarre], the uncertain light’ which illuminates the modernity of the city (2006: 401). In this sense, Huysmans’s reading of Paris through Dickensian London is itself aesthetically informed by Baudelaire’s treatment of another version of Paris. No nineteenth-century metropolitan space is wholly discrete – other traces ‘insinuate’ themselves into any aesthetics of space.

In the dusk, des Esseintes sees ‘an endless stream of traffic [des flots de voitures]’ flowing ‘between two columns of earnest, silent Londoners [des colonnes de gens, silencieux, affairés], their eyes fixed ahead and elbows glued to their sides’ (AR 11.203; 134). Another
antithesis, the adjectives seem to have swapped their attendant nouns, so that the stream, an image of nature, describes the inanimate world, and the columns, an image of architecture and man-made order, describe the people. It is an analogy that Dickens had used in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9), where the crowd is comprised of ‘streams of people apparently without end’ (2003g: 32.390), with Dickens, in his turn, echoing the Romanticism of William Wordsworth (1770–1850), who sees an ‘endless stream of men, and moving things’ (7.157) in the London of *The Prelude* (1850). The trace of the prior text insists here (Lacan 2007a: 412–41), with the repetition a form of automatism, so that this passage sees Huysmans reading Dickens reading Wordsworth reading . . .

It is in this ellipsis, in this metonymy of texts, that we see precisely an aesthetics of space: in the literary tradition which this book begins to delineate, charting the ways in which mid-to-late nineteenth-century ‘aesthetic’ writers began to write space after realism and after Ruskin, the ‘real’ city is only ever engaged with as always already mediated through prior aesthetic representations. This intertextual fabric comprises the substance of a ‘representational space’ (*PS* 42), in the language of the philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901–91). But Huysmans’s aesthetics of space differs from the representational spaces of realism in particular insofar as it is always bound up with a certain ‘aesthetic effect’. Such effects are not the signifiers of ‘realism’, or of ‘reality’ as such, but rather signify to the reader that these literary spaces must be approached first and foremost in the spirit of art.

In speaking of aesthetic effects and of the aesthetics of space, it might seem easy to dismiss the politics of this kind of writing, in the sense in which figures such as Theodor Adorno (1903–69) have dismissed aestheticism. This would be reductive, however, for as this book will show, politics is an indispensable trace at work in the aesthetics of space. This political dimension is both present in the text and productive, put to work, by the authors, whether consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, here in *À rebours*, at a moment which we might least expect to discover the spectre of Karl Marx (1818–83), we find that Huysmans’s simile is Marxist in the most rigorous sense: what is at stake in the aestheticisation is in part precisely the alienation of man. In this ‘endless stream of traffic’ (*AR* 11.203; 134), the proletariat march on ‘silent’ and ‘work-like’, those columns which prop up the economic superstructures of the city, and Huysmans’s antithesis highlights the question of alienation, making what is ‘most unnatural, [. . .] most natural in being so’, as Dickens puts it in *Dombey and Son* (1848) (2002a: 47.700). The image is revealed
as resting on a logic which is ultimately economic, and ‘des Esseintes shuddered with delight \([\textit{frissonait délicieusement}]\) at feeling himself lost in this terrifying world of commerce, immersed in this isolating fog, involved in this incessant activity’ (AR 11.203; 134). The loss of the self here is a voiding of the subject in a moment at once erotic and thanatic, with the ‘endless stream of traffic’ foreshadowing in this sense the concluding lines of Franz Kafka’s (1883–1924) ‘Das Urteil’ [The Judgment] (1912). In Huysmans’s hands, the simile images London as the capitalist machine, a move as Deleuzian as Carlylean. What is at stake is the circulation of the city, a complex libidinal economy, a question of flows.

By this point, des Esseintes is somewhere near the Place du Carrousel in the 1st arrondissement, where the guillotine stood from 1792 to 1793. Seeing that it is dark, with the \(\textit{crépuscule}\) of Dickens’s London having seemingly magically produced its effects on the Parisian scene without anything having been explicitly registered in ‘reality’, des Esseintes notes that ‘the gas lamps were flickering in the fog, each surrounded by its dirty little halo’ (AR 11.203; 134). An almost oxymoronic conjunction of the spiritual and the sordid, the image is perhaps inspired by the ‘halo’ effect of a dirty London described in \textit{Barnaby Rudge} (1840–1) (2003c:
Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

The London fog is the quintessential Dickensian image of the metropolis, most readily conjuring up the cities mapped in *Bleak House* (1852–3) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5), and by the time that Huysmans wrote *À rebours*, it had become a way of seeing London, particularly influential on Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Looking through the window of the cab, des Esseintes can make out only one landmark, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel (AR 11.203–4; 134), built 1806–8 to commemorate the victories of Napoleon I (1769–1821). The Arc figures as both an imperial folly and a simulacrum, designed by Charles Percier (1764–1838) and Pierre François Léonard Fontaine (1762–1853) in imitation of the Arch of Constantine in Rome (AD 312).

The Arc images Paris as capital of the nineteenth century (SW 3: 32–49; Casanova 2004: 23–34), its ‘triumph’. As simulacrum, the Arc also recalls its own imitation, Marble Arch in London, begun in 1827 to a design by John Nash (1752–1835), before being completed in 1833 to a reduced scale by Edward Blore (1787–1879). In this sense, Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century, is the space to which London responds, so that to view London in the nineteenth century means simultaneously seeing the trace of Paris.

Finally arriving on Rue de Rivoli (AR 11.204; 135), des Esseintes is dropped off outside Librairie Galignani, established in 1801 and moving to its present site (no. 224) in 1851. He is going to buy a guidebook to help him navigate London: either *Baedeker’s* or *Murray’s*. Such a book will allow him to map the city, mediating his relationship with space. In Lefebvrian terms, approaching the city with *Baedeker’s* means that a concrete representation of space is allowed to produce a specific representational space (PS 38–9). In possessing such a text, des Esseintes seeks to avoid the fate of the ill-informed fin-de-siècle tourist, such as Lucy Honeychurch in E. M. Forster’s (1879–1970) *A Room with a View* (1908), who finds herself stranded ‘in Santa Croce with no Baedeker’ (1986: 2.17), unable to accurately identify the beautiful without it. In the window of Galignani’s, books are presented to the eye as delicacies,¹⁵ and tempted, des Esseintes enters. In the bookshop, he finds himself a foreigner at home, already a tourist, with women ‘unfolding maps and jabbering to each other in strange tongues [des langues inconnues]’ (AR 11.204; 135). The reference is biblical (Isaiah 28: 11; 1 Corinthians 14: 18; Acts 2: 4), the glossolalia here registering a fin-de-siècle cosmopolitanism, which also indicates a threat to the single, national subject: strange tongues make one a stranger at home, lost in one’s own language. He opens *Baedeker’s*, presumably the 1866 edition of *Londres*, and,
inspired by a discussion of London’s art galleries, begins to muse on pre-Raphaelite pictures he had seen at international exhibitions. He names John Everett Millais’s (1829–96) *The Eve of St Agnes* (1863), alongside the ‘weirdly coloured pictures’ by George Frederick Watts (1817–1904) (AR 11.207; 136), whose work Huysmans had seen the year before at an exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit, 8 Rue de Séze. Dreaming of travel, des Esseintes thinks about traveling to see art, and then compares this art with the work of other artists – Gustave Moreau (1826–98), Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Raphael (1483–1520) – in an endless proliferation of texts and their boundaries: one text, *Baedeker’s*, German but a book in French writing about England, sets off a metonymic slide of intertextual allusions (Romanticism, impressionism, pre-Raphaelitism, Renaissance art) which is only arrested by a shop assistant, ‘surprised to see a customer day-dreaming at the table’ (11.207; 136).

Des Esseintes returns to the cab, which is directed to the ‘Bodega’, a wine bar on the corner of Rue de Rivoli and Rue Castiglione, only 120 metres away. Passing the arcades on his right, des Esseintes notes how their ‘brightly lit windows looked like a gigantic night-light burning cheerfully in the pestilent fog’ (11.207; 136). The theme of the arcades is familiar today thanks to Benjamin’s important study of nineteenth-century Paris, *Das Passagen-Werk [The Arcades Project]* (1927–40), which sees these shopping streets as ‘the hollow mold from which the image of “modernity” was cast’ (*PW* 546; S1a,6). Arcades such as the Passage des Panoramas, located in the 2nd arrondissement between Boulevard Montmartre and Rue Saint-Marc and built in 1800, were covered walkways allowing people to stroll between shop fronts, protected from the weather, and they proliferated across nineteenth-century Paris. The arcades mobilise desire, linking an aesthetic gaze with commodity fetishism. They become ‘a world in miniature’ (*SW* 3: 32). Moreover, Huysmans’s image of ‘night-lights’ foregrounds the sense in which the arcades’ aesthetic ‘fascinated’ the public, ‘radiat[ing] through the Paris of the Empire like grottoes’ (*PW* 564; T1a,8).

Arriving at the Bodega, des Esseintes finds it popular, ‘packed to the doors’ with English people. A series of figures are introduced in turn, the descriptions generic rather than specific. He sees ‘pale, gangling clergymen’, then ‘laymen with bloated pork-butcher faces or bulldog muzzles’, a ‘tow-haired stick of a man’ using a microscope to read the paper in the corner of the room, and in front of him, ‘a sort of American naval officer, stout and stocky, swarthy and bottle-nosed, a cigar stuck in the hairy orifice of his mouth’ (AR 11.208–9; 137–8).
Already, such characters give themselves to des Esseintes as somewhat ‘Dickensian’ in spirit, as a kind of caricature. While generic, they somehow evoke the ‘pale, thin, cadaverous’ clergyman of Sketches by Boz (1833) (1995: 2.25), Mr Gridley of Bleak House, who is characterised as a bulldog (BH 29.405), and Sam Weller of The Pickwick Papers (1836), whose eyes double as ‘a pair o’ patent double million magnifyin’ gas microscopes of hextra power’ (2003k: 34.464). In the Bodega, des Esseintes finds himself gradually becoming ‘dulled by the monotonous chatter of these English people’, a comment both on the characters as cliché and on the unromantic musicality of English diction. He ‘drifted off into a daydream’ (AR 11.209; 138), since dream space is proper to the aesthetics of the nineteenth-century city. Now, des Esseintes ‘call[ed] to mind’ some specific figures: first, Mr Wickfield from David Copperfield (1849–50), ‘white hair and rich [enflamme] features’, then Mr Tulkinghorn, ‘phlegmatic, cunning, ruthless’ (AR 11.209; 138). Both are lawyers, the latter character murdered under a painting of Allegory in Bleak House (48.669), Dickens’s novel of the Law, where the labyrinthine case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce allegorises London (Tambling 2009: 139–63). As such, the figures suggest a subtle but all-encompassing panopticism operating simultaneously in three different spheres: firstly, in the ‘real’ space of the tavern; secondly, through Dickens’s texts and through the force of their ‘realism’, where their description also establishes a certain ideological approach to reality; and thirdly, in the way in which this disciplinarity structures des Esseintes’s own dreams. Now, he finds that these figures ‘stepped right out of [se détachaient de] his memory to take their place in the Bodega, complete with their mannerisms and gestures’ (AR 11.209; 138). They ‘detached’ themselves: what is at stake is a question of the production of an effect where the subject des Esseintes no longer directs the process. Art is performed, embodying itself in space, so that these figures take their place in a Bodega already populated by Dickensian characters. It is only insofar as des Esseintes considers the customers of the Bodega already to be ‘Dickensian’ that Dickens’s actual characters may step forth into these surroundings as though already at home.

Thinking of Dickens and ‘the London of the novelist’, des Esseintes considers it divided. On the one hand, London is the metaphorical home which is ‘well lighted, well heated, and well appointed’, populated by Little Dorrit, Dora Copperfield and Ruth from Martin Chuzzlewit: it is domestic, pure and innocent (AR 11.209; 138). For Huysmans, such characters embody the ‘discrete interiors’ of Dickens (2006: 243), as he puts it in an 1877 essay dealing with the American…
painter Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), at once suggesting their decorative function, and that the sphere of the domestic is proper to the ‘hygienic’ effects of Dickens’s realism. In À rebours, however, this domestic ideal is imaged as a ‘cosy ark’ ‘sailing snugly through a deluge of soot and mire’ (AR 11.209; 138). The biblical analogy tellingly evokes the antediluvian, if not prelapsarian, which immediately serves to undercut the idealism. Still, even he is not immune to the temptation to linger longer in ‘this London of the imagination’, ‘sett[ling] down comfortably’ in his thoughts (11.209; 138). Indeed, he is so lost in these fantasies that he mistakes ‘the dismal hootings of the tugs by the bridge behind the Tuileries’ (11.138; 209), the gardens located on the bank of the Seine to the south of the Bodega, for the sound of boats on the Thames. Huysmans is caught mapping London onto Paris, and both as dream space.

Des Esseintes’s stomach is turned by a glass of Amontillado (11.138; 209–10), another example of the bodily effects of art. The name of the sherry had reminded him of Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809–49) ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ (1846), a narrative of being buried alive, unheimlich in Freud’s sense (SE 17: 244), but additionally uncanny here. ‘The spine-chilling nightmare […] took hold of his imagination’, Huysmans writes, with des Esseintes again constructed as a passive subject of art. But ‘behind the kind, ordinary faces of the American and English customers in the Bodega’, des Esseintes ‘fancied he could detect atrocious, uncontrollable thoughts, dark and odious designs’ (AR 11.209–10; 138–9). The allusion figures for des Esseintes’s desire for entombment, of course, but there is something else at work: Huysmans reads Poe not only into real life (the Bodega’s actual customers), but simultaneously into Dickens. Poe’s gothic and its thanatic connotations are revealed to be swarming beneath the surface of his realism. Coming immediately after the heimlich, cosy image of an ark protecting Dickens’s feminine ideals from the dirty metropolis beyond, this incident reveals des Esseintes’s paranoia. Linking to the question of Dickens’s ressentiment, Huysmans contends that beneath the kindly exterior of these characters lurks another reality, ‘the crawling and glistening indestructible life’ (Žižek 2005: 114), siding with the death-drive (Todestrieb). Dickens is revealed to be at pains to evade the real through his ‘effets hygié- niques’, with his realism revealed here to be disciplinary and regula- tive, a question of biopolitics.

Leaving the Bodega, des Esseintes discovers himself again in the Dickensian weather, ‘swamped by the driving rain’ (AR 11.210; 139). It is now night, and he looks ‘along the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli,
drowned in shadow and submerged in moisture, and imagined that he was standing in the dismal tunnel beneath the Thames’ (11.210; 139). The image is one of drowning, less a fantasy of inter-uterine existence (SE 5: 399–401) than a thanatic wish to lose himself in the unconscious. The reference is to the Thames Tunnel, built by Marc Isambard Brunel (1769–1849) in 1825–43, connecting London’s north and south banks between Wapping and Rotherhithe, and a landmark that warranted its own entry in Baedeker’s Londres. A technological marvel of Victorian civil engineering, the tunnel went vastly over budget, a ‘monument to British stupidity and dogged obstinacy’, as one later American visitor put it (Kirwan 1870: 27). There, a sort of shanty bazaar lined the side of the pedestrian walkway, selling tourist tat, and attracting prostitutes, as well as calling ‘into existence a distinct class known as “Tunnel Thieves”’ (Kirwan 1870: 27). It is this space which Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) refers to in The Voyage Out (1915), where Rachel dreams of ‘walking through a tunnel under the Thames’, seeing ‘little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards, while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall’ (2009b: 386). For Woolf, the Thames Tunnel

Figure iii  VIIIe arrondissement: Élysée
1. Passage des Panoramas; 2. Gare Saint-Lazare; 3. Restaurant Austin, 24 Rue d’Amsterdam
becomes a nightmarish dream space. Huysmans’s analogy is even more remarkable: reading the Rue de Rivoli through the Thames Tunnel, he evokes at once an entire socio-politics, where Parisian commodity culture and \textit{haute couture} is founded on another, invisible economy of the lower classes that sustain it. Huysmans’s image draws the analogy between these subterranean stalls and the arcades where nineteenth-century fashion was defined.

But if \textit{À rebours} is on the one hand a ‘breviary’ of decadence, to use Arthur Symons’s (1865–1945) famous phrase (1919: 265), a \textit{Baedeker’s} to living the aesthetic life, it is also a document of the relative failure of this very same ideal. Unsurprisingly, then, we see that des Esseintes finds that he cannot live wholly in the mind, and with his imagination arrested by hunger, he directs his cab to a tavern in the Rue d’Amsterdam by the Gare Saint-Lazare (AR 11.210; 139). The location is significant: opened in 1837, it had featured in Claude Monet’s (1840–1926) series of paintings depicting the station, including \textit{Le Pont de l’Europe}, first exhibited at the Third Impressionist Exhibition of 1877 at a moment marking a break point in the artist’s career. Huysmans had noted as much in an essay of 1883, published the year before \textit{À rebours}. There, he comments on how Monet’s earlier impressionism amounted to little more than an ‘egg badly hatched from realism’ (2006: 271), but had developed recently a more visionary aesthetic of ‘swarming \textit{[fourmillantes]} colours’ and ‘reverberating things’ (2006: 272). Zola would proclaim \textit{Le Pont de l’Europe}, set at dawn, with the station lit ethereally by sunlight filtering through the steam of the trains, as the image of contemporaneity itself (‘Là est aujourd’hui la peinture’), emblematic of a new aesthetic modernity. ‘Our artists must find the poetry of the stations, as their predecessors found the poetry of forests and rivers’ (1981: 100), Zola writes. By placing Huysmans’s text in its cultural context, we see that des Esseintes’s journey towards the Gare Saint-Lazare may well have been understood by his readers as one into the heart of modernity, a modernity which was itself defined by a new kind of aesthetics of space.

Des Esseintes travels approximately two kilometres north to Restaurant Austin (no. 24), which, although unnamed here in Huysmans’s novel, had a long-standing reputation for English cuisine in the heart of Paris. In 1865, the Goncourt brothers, Edmond (1822–96) and Jules (1830–70), had praised the ‘sincere and honest roast beef’ served there, crowned by them the culinary equivalent of ‘the reign of Louis-Philippe’ (1956: 63). The building had also housed some famous literary tenants: Baudelaire took rooms
above the Austin and, before him, Théodore de Banville (1823–91) lived there until the 1848 Revolution. Later, Banville had arranged to meet the English poet and translator John Payne (1842–1916), friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82) and associated with pre-Raphaelitism, at Austin’s in June 1886, a meeting arranged by their mutual friend Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98) (Mallarmé 1969: 43). With this unfulfilled liaison dating to just two years after the publication of À rebours, it suggests that Austin’s was a meeting place for the English in Paris. Unsurprisingly in this context, we find that des Esseintes notes that the customers are English, ‘islanders’, and ones who are ‘insulaires’ (AR 11.210; 139). Watching two women eating (again, a question of the gaze), des Esseintes’s appetite is piqued, desire as desire of the other (Lacan 1998b: 235), and he feasts on oxtail soup, smoked haddock, that ‘honest’ roast beef which the Goncourts had recommended, blue Stilton and rhubarb tart, washing it all down with English ale (AR 11.211; 139). If À rebours is ‘the major work on an eating disorder ever written’, as Naomi Schor has argued (2001: 91), we see in this passage that it is only through aesthetic identification that des Esseintes rediscovers his appetite. Regardless, eating at Austin’s, in the heart of Paris, des Esseintes’s meal is stereotypically English, making his body already something of a tourist.

Recuperating from his gastronomic exertions, des Esseintes considers the previous occasion he had ventured abroad, to Holland, his mind perhaps jogged by the name of the street (Rue d’Amsterdam). Before leaving for that trip, he had also been inspired by art, with Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), another figure whom Huysmans speaks of as ‘fascinating’ his viewer (2006: 77), taking the role of Dickens. Des Esseintes had imagined ‘for his own private pleasure, ghettos [juiveries] swarming with splendid figures’, a visionary world of decadent carnival, of ‘never-ending festivity’ and ‘riotous joviality’ (AR 11.212; 141). The idea suggests a becoming-animal which is a becoming-intense (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 256–341) and a deterritorialisation of the self. It registers a thanatic desire in which the subject loses itself in the crowd, even if in the case of des Esseintes, as with Baudelaire’s flâneur, this is an operation which is always undertaken from the vantage point of the margins, and where the spectacle can be consumed from a distance in the comfort of one’s ‘private pleasure’. Des Esseintes finds that Amsterdam had ‘séduit [séduit] him’, but only a certain aesthetics of this space, so that the experience ‘proved a bitter disappointment’ (AR 11.212; 141). Reality fell short of his own aesthetic vision that ‘soared into a
dream world of false trails and impossible ambitions’ (11.212; 141). Des Esseintes realises, to use Pater’s description of another painter, Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), that he was ‘always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure’ (IP 79).

With the time for departure approaching, des Esseintes finds that ‘the food he had eaten was lying heavy on his stomach, and his whole body felt incapable of movement’ (AR 11.215; 142). But this incapacity is taken for an omen:

After all, what was the good of moving, when a fellow could travel so magnificently sitting in a chair? Wasn’t he already in London, whose scents, atmosphere, citizens, food, and even cutlery, were all about him? What could he expect to find over there, save fresh disillusions [désillusions] such as he had suffered in Holland? (11.215; 142–3)

Feeling an ‘immense aversion’ now to travel, des Esseintes determines to abort his journey and return home. Having already experienced London through Dickens, he concludes that it ‘would be madness to risk spoiling such unforgettable experiences by a clumsy change of locality’ (11.216; 143). He returns to Fontenay, ‘feeling all the physical weariness and moral fatigue of a man who has come home after a long and perilous journey’ (11.216; 143).

Notes

1. Robert Baldick gives ‘the tongue is brought into play’ for ‘ils pénètrent entre les lèvres’, but this obscures the force of the verb in Huysmans’s sentence.
2. The French ‘lèvres’ connotes both the lips and the labia.
3. In this sense, Huysmans’s response to Dickens, diagnosing realism as resséntiment, and the context of convalescence, recalls Nietzsche’s Also sprach Zarathustra (published in 1883, the year before À rebours), where Zarathustra recovers from a bout of nausea, produced by experiencing life as ‘identical’, and the abyssal thought of the eternal return of the same (2006: 173–9). On Nietzsche and resséntiment, see Deleuze 2006: 104–38.
4. Compare the ‘foggy sea’ of Our Mutual Friend (1997: 3.1.417), the mist of Great Expectations which obscures the far bank of the river in a ‘watery lead colour’ (2003e: 1.5.35), and finally the ‘slimy’ and ‘muddy’ swamps of Limehouse in Bleak House (BH 57.869).
5. For Huysmans’s nineteenth-century English readers such as Oscar Wilde, who claimed À rebours as a model for Dorian’s ‘poisonous’ yellow book
(DG 10.274; LOW 524), the name of the road may have had additional connotations. It recalls the Rue Saint-Thomas de l’Enfer which features in Thomas Carlyle’s (1795–1881) *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4), where Teufelsdröckh experiences his ‘Baphometic Fire-baptism’ (2008: 128) – in reality (but the force of this commonplace is exactly what the tradition of the aesthetics of space calls into question), Leith Walk in Edinburgh, where Carlyle experienced his own spiritual epiphany. Huysmans knew *Sartor Resartus*, praising Carlyle as ‘the historian who had the good faith to confess that, at bottom, there was no real history’ (2006: 284), and quoting Teufelsdröckh approvingly on ‘Symbols’: ‘SILENCE AND SECRECY. Altars might still be raised to them (were this an altar-building time) for universal worship’ (2008: 165).

6. The latter term also recalls the Eden of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, that ‘hideous swamp’ ‘choked with slime and matted growth’ (1999: 23.360), based on Dickens’s visit to Cairo, Illinois, described in *American Notes* (1842): ‘A dismal swamp, on which the half-built houses rot away’ (2003a: 2.4.190).

7. The idea of glass and the commodity has already been alluded to earlier in the chapter, when des Esseintes sits down ‘before a glass-fronted bookcase in which a collection of silk socks was displayed in the form of a fan’ (AR 11.200; 131) in contemplation of the most mundane of human vestures (socks) imitating a commodified aesthetic object (fan).

8. The idea of the *au-delà* will be pursued in a different context in Huysmans’s *Là-Bas* [*The Damned*] (1891), where the idea of a spiritual ‘beyond’ that might transcend the materialism of naturalism is linked to ‘the most extreme religious excesses’ of the occult and Satanism (1985: 1.40; 2001: 14). In linking the spiritual in the *au-delà* to aesthetic (and erotic) ‘excess’, Huysmans’s phrasing in both the essay on Whistler and *Là-Bas* anticipates Maurice Blanchot on the step (not) beyond (*le pas au-delà*) the pleasure principle (1992).


10. The image seems to have been first used by Michael Drayton in *The Battle of Agincourt* (1627) (1753: 21), and became regular currency during the eighteenth century, notably used by Tobias Smollett in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) (2009: 92) and by Thomas Pennant in his popular *Account of London* (1790: 281). Dickens will also use the image in *American Notes*, there in reference to New York (2003a: 1.5.89).

11. See in particular Baudelaire’s ‘Le Crépuscule du soir’ from ‘Tableaux Parisiens’.
12. For Adorno’s critique of Wilde, see 2004: 21, and for an influential development of the point, see Bürger 1984: 49–51.

13. Kafka’s short story concludes with Georg Bendemann committing suicide, letting himself drop from a bridge into the river below while ‘an absolutely unending stream of traffic [unendlicher Verkehr] flowed over the bridge’ (2009: 28), and where the German for traffic, Verkehr, is also the word for intercourse. Kafka read Huysmans’s À rebours with Max Brod in the early 1900s (Anderson 1992: 8).


15. Every object’s colour is attended by culinary adjectives: the books’ covers ‘butcher’s-blue or cabbage-green’; the cloth ‘dyed nut-brown, leek-green, lemon-yellow, or currant-red’ (AR 11.204; 135). The analogy will be reversed a few pages later when Huysmans’s narrator speaks of ‘hams as brown as old violins, lobsters the colour of red lead’ (AR 11.210; 139), so that, instead of inanimate objects being made attractive by association with food, food is unpalatable by association with inanimate objects. A focus on the culinary is common in Huysmans’s work during the period, with his previous novel, À vau-l’eau [Downstream] (1882), narrating the existential crisis of the clerk Jean Fontalin, suffering from ‘la monotonie de la nourriture’, an endless quest for a satisfactory meal in a satisfactory restaurant (1882: 3.93; 2005: 44). See Whiteley 2019.

16. The reference is to David Copperfield (2004: 15.230), particularly germane to des Esseintes’s situation, since Mr Wickfield’s ‘richness’ is the product of ‘port wine’ (16.234). Huysmans must have read Dickens in the original, his French terms differing from those in the popular Hachette translations, against which I have checked them.


18. This image of Dickens’s ‘cosy ark [arche tiède]’ (AR 11.209; 138) recalls ironically des Esseintes’s desire, expressed earlier in the novel, to retreat to his own ‘snugly heated ark [arche immobile et tiède]’ (AR 22; 72) away from the vulgar realities of the world. Such lexical echoes complicate Huysmans’s treatment of Dickens in this passage, and, by extension, his response to Dickens’s realism.


20. Perhaps Woolf’s own description of these ‘deformed women’ alludes somewhere to the Paris of Baudelaire and the ‘monstres disloqués’ of ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ (l. 5).
Introduction

The Spatial Turn

In des Esseintes’s aborted journey to Dickens’s London, Huysmans’s À rebours offers a snapshot of a burgeoning tradition of later nineteenth-century writing which develops the idea of an aesthetics of space. Building upon and responding critically to a certain ‘realist’ literary tradition, this aesthetics of space attempts to find new ways to speak about how space is experienced by the nineteenth-century subject, and how such experiences are always already ‘aesthetic’ ones. It focuses on the potential of ‘aesthetic effects’, ones which act on the body, and which alter how that body engages with the spaces which it navigates. What is at stake for this new tradition is not simply an aesthetic response to space, but an aesthetic approach to it; not simply an aesthetic appreciation of space, but an adopting of aesthetic intentions towards it. Moreover, in this tradition, space is approached through its prior aesthetic representations, so that any aesthetics of space constitutes an intricate textual sensorium. In such a tradition, the idea of ‘making sense of the text and experiencing it with one’s senses’ becomes blurred, as Kostas Boyiopoulos puts it in his study of fin-de-siècle Anglophone symbolist poetry (2015: 1). While this book is primarily interested in writers of prose rather than poetry, it maintains a similar interest in the sensuous and material aspects of the aesthetic. More specifically, it focuses not only on the way in which space affects the subject, but also on how this tradition represents these sensory experiences to the reader. Such an emphasis on the sensual makes these figures forerunners of the impressionist and modernist approaches to space. It is this tradition of the aesthetic literary treatment of space, one that passes from Ruskin, through Dickens, Pater, Wilde and James and on to modernism, which this book will begin to unpack, as a set of sketches towards a tradition.

After Realism

As we have seen, Huysmans is writing ‘after Dickens’ in À rebours, in an incident that plays around with various different ideas of
what to write after Dickens means. One of the most obvious ways to understand the idea is to take it as a challenge or response to realism. Of course, precisely whether or not Dickens himself was a ‘realist’ or would have understood his work in this light is a difficult question, but as George Gissing (1857–1903) argued, ‘had the word been in use’, Dickens ‘must necessarily have called himself a Realist’ (1898: 75). The term was actually only coined in English in 1853 (Villanueva 1997: 6), meaning many of Dickens’s most recognisably ‘realist’ works predated the designation. Nevertheless, and in spite of his criticism of the tendency of Victorian literature ‘to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like – to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum’ (Forster 1966: 2: 279), Dickens remains shackled to a model of verisimilitude which assumes the ontological priority of the thing. Even given the romantic, melodramatic aspects of his work, or the criticism of his realism on empiricist grounds by contemporaries such as George Henry Lewes (1817–78) and George Eliot (1819–80) (Bowen 2000: 16–19), it is clearly the case that the majority of Dickens’s novels possess, or at least aspire to, ‘formal realism’ in Ian Watt’s terms (2001: 32). The aim is to present a coherent and contextualised picture of a life or a number of lives, attentive to their everyday situation and grounded in a reality which is credible and true to empirical facts, but also one which edits that world judiciously, producing a version of reality that has been ‘artistically constructed’ (Villanueva 1997: 37). Hence, even when Dickens introduces elements which stretch this credibility, as in the infamous incident of Krook’s spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*, an allegorical death speaking to a corruption ‘inborn, inbred’ (*BH* 32.519), and a plot point which Lewes attacked, Dickens was at pains to justify such creative liberties. As he put it in the novel’s preface, ‘everything’ he wrote was ‘substantially true, and within the truth’ (*BH* 5).

For the majority of his career, Dickens’s formal realism had been allied with a sharp social commentary and also the desire to encourage political change. It marries an attempt to capture a representation of the effects of city life with an attempt to know the causes. His impact was immense, and as the nineteenth century progressed, London became ‘Dickensian’, both literally and literarily. But as Nicholas Freeman puts it, Dickens’s death in 1870 presented writers with a key decision: ‘writing in a culture in which Dickens’ works overshadowed their own, [...] would they decide to inhabit a “Dickensian” London, or would they instead seek new ways of representing [space] in fiction?’ (2007: 19). This Dickensian London had profoundly impacted the cultural imagination of his peers, and as Philip Collins has shown, ‘people were “doing” the city of Oliver
Twist (1837–9) before the 1840s (1983: 118; quoted Freeman 2007: 20). In different ways, all of the writers that this book deals with are writing ‘after Dickens’: Ruskin, who appreciated Dickens but was also suspicious of that sentimentalism which threatened to undermine his politics; Pater in his attempts to sidestep the spectre of the Dickensian city; Wilde in his outright rejection of both the novelist and ‘realism’; and James, a London-based novelist whose reading of New York is circumscribed throughout both by Dickens’s treatment of an earlier America and by the inevitable comparisons which must be drawn between the nineteenth-century European city and the early twentieth-century American one. Indeed, as we shall see, even the ‘late Dickens’ of The Mystery of Edwin Drood, who will primarily concern us in Chapter 2, may be seen to be writing ‘after Dickens’, in response to his own dominant and dominating image of city space.

Still, what exactly was the ‘Dickensian’ city to which all these authors responded? Or more specifically, how did the city that later authors wrote differ from that constructed by Dickens? Such questions are of importance to understanding the complex mediations through which nineteenth-century literary representations of space developed in the years between the death of Dickens and modernism. There are, of course, no simple answers to such questions, both on spatial and on stylistic grounds. The ways in which spaces are represented in literature are to a large measure dependent upon specific local, cultural and geographical questions, so that a different city from London may not simply be written ‘after Dickens’, but may instead be written ‘after Balzac’. In this sense, while the various different representations of space are necessarily in communication with one another, what it means to write nineteenth-century London is not the same as what it means to write nineteenth-century Paris, Venice or New York. Moreover, there were also a large number of different stylistic and philosophical ways in which authors went about tackling the problem of writing ‘after Dickens’. In his study of post-Dickensian literary London, Freeman usefully divides the writers he considers into three basic categories: empiricists, impressionists and symbolists. This book is primarily interested in writers who work within the latter two categories, and particularly in a certain tradition of literary ‘impressionism’ which, reacting against Ruskin, passes through Pater to Wilde and James. For their part, the empiricists maintained ‘a positivist belief that the city could be mapped and eventually understood by the process of painstaking investigation and analysis’ (Freeman 2007: 26), in a gesture which
builds on the politics of Dickens’s formal realism in the naturalism of writers such as Gissing. Such a naturalism constitutes what Darió Villanueva calls ‘genetic realism’, predicated on ‘the existence of a univocal reality which precedes the text’ that the writer attempts to transcribe (1997: 15). As Symons put it, Zola’s naturalism attempted to capture ‘the exact representation of everything that visibly existed, exactly as it existed’ (1919: 4). But while the naturalists ‘fulfil[ed] the invaluable service of placing real characters in precise settings’, the aesthetes came to consider it flawed, ‘condemned to repeat itself over and over, and endlessly to go over the same ground’ as Huysmans wrote in his 1903 preface to À rebours (AR 52; 205). By contrast to the empiricists, the impressionists were ‘less ambitious in conceding that, if the city could be known, then it could be so only fleetingly, and from a wholly subjective position’ (Freeman 2007: 26–7). The symbolists, such as Symons, on the other hand, ‘offered a more mystical response’ (Freeman 2007: 27), reading the city as a rebus or constellation, pregnant with transcendental meanings. In point of fact, all of the writers discussed in this book are precisely interested in the question of how best to represent reality, which is to say, in the problem of realism in literature. But regardless of these points of sympathetic convergence, it remains the case that, when read in the light of Dickens’s achievements, it would be easy to overlook or minimise the spaces of aesthetic literature as insubstantial, lacking in reality. Moreover, it would be easy to read such diaphaneity as politically vacuous, which is to say, to read its so-called ‘decadence’ as an ethical ‘problem’. The London of Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890/1) begins to look a little thin and threadbare when compared to the complex, lived, vibrant spaces of Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend, as though the city were nothing but an insubstantial pageant, scene dressing rather than a real space in which life is played out.

What then is the function of space in aesthetic literature? One potential answer lies in Julian Wolfreys’s critique of the fin-de-siècle gothic of Wilde. Wolfreys characterises the writing of the city in the second half of the nineteenth century as one in which space assumes a ‘function [...] as psychic context’. In comparison to Dickens’s socially engaged response to space, Wilde ‘tend[s] to employ stock images of the city’, ‘without necessarily allowing’ them to ‘transform’ his texts (Wolfreys 1998: 209n.). While much is provisional in Wolfreys’s phrasing, and he recognises the idea of writing “after Dickens” as an imprecise phrase which gestures towards aesthetic redirection’ rather than marking a definitive ‘epistemic shift’ (1998:}
209–10 n.), the implication is that London is primarily psycho-
geographical in Wilde’s writings. In dividing the city spaces of his
fictions along a west/east axis, Wilde seems to oversimplify his represen-
tation of reality, so that psychological states (rational/irrational,
conscious/unconscious, safe/dangerous) are mapped onto space,
superimposed onto geographical locations, which are then made to
symbolise these states. Such a schema reworks a long-standing rep-
resentation of space, evoking ‘the dichotomy between the shadows
and the light, between diabolical and the divine’, as Lefebvre puts it
(PS 242). In a similar vein, Linda Dryden has contextualised Wilde’s
writing alongside contemporary newspaper reporting of the Ripper
murders in 1888, which rested on establishing and mapping London
as double, ‘divided along its East/West axis’ (2003: 36). It is a tale of
two cities, as Franco Moretti puts it, not of Paris and London as the
two capitals of the nineteenth century, but of two separate Londons
for the poor, but the West End also and at the same time figured for
a conservative, stable and ordered world, against a thanatic, ‘laby-
rinthine’ East End of unconscious desires and pleasures. With this in
mind, Wolfreys rightly reminds us to be alert to the risk of conflating
‘the symptoms’ of the spaces revealed in aesthetic literature ‘with a
finitely knowable’ or ‘historical’ space (1998: 12). What is at stake,
at least in the case of Wilde, appears to be something akin to what
Lefebvre calls ‘a psychoanalysis of space’ (PS 99).

Of course, in reality, what is at stake is actually a certain way of
reading spaces. As Alex Murray argues in *Landscapes of Decadence*
(2016a), no space is by definition ‘decadent’, but decadence becomes
a way of reading it. Indeed, this kind of way of reading space is
not limited to the writers of aestheticism and decadence: in Thomas
Hardy’s (1840–1928) *The Woodlanders* (1886–7), for instance, the
Darwinian struggle for existence is linked to ‘the depraved crowds
of a city slum’, with the Wessex countryside clearly a landscape of
decadence, in which ‘the leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled,
the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk,
and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling’ (2009:
48). Likewise, one may recall Arthur Machen’s (1863–1947) spaces,
invested with gothic horror and a certain luxurious sense of degen-
eration. Such spaces become another version, a decadent one, of that
tradition of ‘dark’ Romanticism, where the sublime is a moment not
simply of registering a transcendental ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*),
to use the Heideggerean language, but of what Ruskin will call the
‘fall’ of ‘civilized’ values.
Still, Wolfram's argument regarding the psychoanalytic mapping of space in Wilde is germane to my argument in this book. While I argue that Wolfram overstates the case and underestimates the political significance of Wilde's London, my analysis of the nineteenth-century aesthetics of space is certainly informed by psychoanalytic ideas. As Lefebvre puts it, space can be at once 'replete with places which are holy or damned, [. . .] rich in fantasies or phantasmagorias' and 'rational, state-dominated and bureaucratic' (PS 231). As a narrative move, however, the first thing to note is that Wilde's London appears to hark back to the early Dickens. Writing 'after Dickens', the 'stock' imagery Wolfram alludes to is precisely 'Dickensian'. The west/east divide is something which the early Dickens uses as a plot point. As Moretti has shown, *Oliver Twist* may be read as a 'Newgate' novel, dividing the city latitudinally, 'where the metaphor of the labyrinth [. . .] returns time and again whenever the story approaches the dangerous classes of Fagin and company' (1998: 84). The same metaphor dominates Wilde's attempts to write London's slums, and we will have cause to discuss the figure of the 'labyrinth' in particular, and the use of 'stock' imagery in general, in more detail in the chapters that follow. But we should note from the outset that dividing the city into two neat parts is also bound to narrativity, a way of making sense of space that is also a way that produces a certain kind of narrative. As Moretti puts it, 'without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible' (1998: 100), and this specific narratological gesture reflects the new social realities that confronted the early nineteenth-century novelist. Faced with the difficulties in representing something so vast as the modern city, they sought to reduce the experience of chaos by remapping the city as a binary system (Moretti 1998: 107). Writing about London was a daunting prospect, with the city overwhelming, its population booming from around one million in 1800 to just under four and a half million by 1881, primarily because of immigration. London was a ‘great and monstrous thing’, as Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) puts it in *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–7) (1986: 208), so that any attempt to represent it becomes a sublime experience of something without limits, ‘formless’ or deformed (Kant 2000: 151). As Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) would later comment in his author's note to *The Secret Agent* (1907), set in the London of the late 1880s, the city ‘presented itself [as] a monstrous town more populous than some continents’ (2008b: 231).

The problem of representing such a 'monstrous' space relates to what Fredric Jameson famously calls an 'aesthetic of cognitive
mapping’ (1991: 51), his term for describing the pressing task for the subject when faced by the bewildering spatial logic of the postmodern city. Jameson’s idea builds on the insights of Kevin Lynch (1960), who argues that in the modern city, the subject is unable to map either their own position in space or the urban totality. This displacement, this inability to effectively map or localise the self in space, is precisely a mark of ‘alienation’, what Marx calls the subject’s estrangement (Entfremdung). While Jameson’s point refers to the postmodern experience, we see in the gesture towards binary simplification of the early nineteenth-century novelist a similar kind of operation. And as such, in adopting a similar kind of binarity, Wilde seems to return to this earlier, simplified response to the city. More specifically, it suggests that Wilde’s spaces are less ‘real’ than those of the later Dickens, who, from Nicholas Nickleby onwards, began to ‘settle’ the ‘third space in the middle’ of London (Moretti 1998: 117), which is to say, populate it with characters and gradually make those characters the motors of his plots. In this sense, Arthur Clennam of Our Mutual Friend represents both spatially and literally a class in the middle, caught between the banker’s speculations and the debtor’s prison. When compared to the remarkable mediatory achievements of Dickens’s last completed novel, Wilde’s psychological troping of London seems regressive and politically effete: not a ‘real’ treatment of space, but one which is reductive, uninterested in social mediation.

But at the same time, there is something more to the aesthetic approach to space, and particularly city spaces, than has hitherto been said. One of the problems lies in precisely what one understands the category of the ‘aesthetic’ to be and how one defines the relationship between nineteenth-century realist and aesthetic literature. To consider the point, let us return to the problem of writing ‘after Dickens’. Arguably, one of the principal strategic moves of aesthetic literature was to define itself against ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’, in terms of both matter and form (Byerly 1997: 184–95). In this sense, while Dorian Gray contains ‘a certain amount of intrusion of real life and its sordid aspects’, as Pater noted in his review of the novel, it also documents Wilde’s ‘emphatic’ protest ‘against so-called “realism”’ (Beckson 1998: 83, 84), the idea that realism was a ‘prison-house’ for the artist, as he put it in ‘The Decay of Lying’ (1891) (CR 88). The subject matter of realist literature, focusing on the ‘everyday’ and on a certain ‘bourgeois’ ideology and mentality, seems to be anathema to the project of aestheticism. As Huysmans put it, Zola’s naturalism ‘had no room – in theory at least – for exceptions’; ‘in the pretext of being true
to life’, the naturalists created characters ‘who came close as possible to the average person’ (AR 52; 205). Aestheticism, on the other hand, focused on the idea of the exceptional in life and art. Likewise, the formal focus on a language that may suitably represent such a reality seemed to differ markedly between aesthetic and realist literature, where an ornate and markedly ‘poetic’ prose style replies to a sparser descriptive one. These divisions are, as we have already pointed out, precarious, particularly given the ways in which British aesthetic and decadent literature acknowledged and welcomed the influence of the French Romanticism of Victor Hugo (1802–85) and Gustave Flaubert (1821–80), and the tradition developing out of them, passing through the Goncourt brothers, Théophile Gautier (1811–72), Baudelaire and Zola. In his influential study of realism, Mimesis (1946), Eric Auerbach (1892–1957) argues that French naturalism, in its focus on both the flowers of evil and style, already amounts almost to a kind of aestheticism (2003: 497–500). But regardless, the aesthetes certainly saw their project as philosophically differentiated from that of realism: the aim was not simply to represent life empirically, but to represent it aesthetically. In Pater’s famous shift from Matthew Arnold’s (1822–88) dictum that the aim of criticism should be ‘to see the object as in itself it really is’, towards a more phenomenological appreciation of the world, which would allow one ‘to know one’s impression as it really is’ (SHR xix), the aesthetes aimed to ‘treat life in the spirit of art’ (1910a: 62), as Pater puts it in ‘Wordsworth’ (1874).

From one point of view, Pater’s subtle reworking and rebuke of Arnold’s critical functionalism may also be read as a kind of riposte to realism. Arnold’s theory is ‘realist’ in its belief both that there is an empirical reality behind any work of art which it aims to represent, and that the critic should judiciously sort the cultural wheat from the chaff, evaluating good and bad, in what one might call a ‘project of enlightenment’ (his formal realism). As such, and while there is much that separates Arnold from Dickens in terms of their politics, the critical ‘insight’ Arnold espouses is markedly Dickensian in spirit. The politics of Dickens’s realism is most famously imaged in that moment in Dombey and Son when the narrator asks for ‘a good spirit who would take the house-tops off, with a [. . .] potent and benignant hand’ (2002a: 47.702). As Raymond Williams (1921–88) argues, this ‘potent’ hand is that of ‘the novelist; it is Dickens seeing himself’ (1973: 157), and its benign vision is allied with what Ruskin calls theoria, moral insight. It is this idea of theoria, which Ruskin differentiates from aesthesis, sensuous vision, in the second volume of Modern Painters (1846), which underwrites the analysis of this
book. We will trace this tension in Ruskin’s work as it relates to the ways in which space is represented, both as manifested in his later works, such as *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3), and in the writers that followed him, those who, either implicitly or explicitly, offered replies to this way of reading space.

Seeing through the housetops means seeing into the heart of real-life conflicts and conditions. And as Peter Brooks puts it, the ‘gesture’ of removing the housetops ‘also suggests how centrally realist literature is attached to the visual, to looking at things, registering their presence in the world through sight’ (2005: 3). Realism is all about the details, and about registering them visually. The realist novel, from the time of those early forerunners such as Defoe that fascinated Watt, to the nineteenth-century masters such as Stendahl (1783–1842), Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) and Flaubert in France, and Dickens and Eliot in Britain, is concerned with how different kinds of spaces are inhabited. It recognises that lives are played out in space, and seeks to illuminate these spaces, be they the domestic interior or the wider cityscape, focusing on both the people that populate them and the things, the ‘cultural bric-à-brac and decorative allusion’, that mark what Fredric Jameson calls ‘the bourgeois cultural revolution’ (1986: 379, 373) through which the modern subject came to define themselves and their lives. These trinkets have fascinated in particular Roland Barthes (1915–80), who used their presence to develop his influential theory of the ‘reality effect’. For Barthes, realism is characterised by the incidental, the superfluous, ‘a kind of narrative luxury, lavish to the point of offering many “futile” details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information’ (1989: 141). Focusing on the barometer in the first of Flaubert’s *Trois Contes* (1877), Barthes argues that such ‘insignificant notation[s]’ (1989: 142) do not serve to further the plot, but respond to what he calls ‘the tyrannical constraints of [...] aesthetic verisimilitude’ (1989: 144), a kind of “realistic” imperative [...], as if the referent’s exactitude [...] governed and alone justified its description’ (1989: 146). This ‘referential illusion’ produces a new kind of textual effect which is itself ‘precisely realism’: ‘the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, [which] becomes the very signifier of realism’ (1989: 148). For Barthes, realism is less a literary philosophy than an effect, a simulacrum to stand in for ‘reality’.

Building on Barthes’s argument, we might argue that later nineteenth-century literature takes such reality effects to an extreme: in the tradition of writing charted in this book, as opposed to the realist tradition of a Balzac or a Flaubert which concerns Barthes, we find
that these kinds of circumstantial and superfluous details produce less an effect of ‘reality’ than one which might be primarily considered ‘aesthetic’. For instance, Huysmans’s description of the window of Galignani’s is not a ‘realistic’ one but, in its aestheticisation of space, an invitation to the reader to approach space in the spirit of art. And it is important to note that while Barthes is particularly interested in the extraneous objects or things that populate the realist novel, the idea of ‘reality effects’ can be broadened to include anything that gives such a sense of reality, including, for instance, street names and similar spatial markers. Likewise, aesthetic effects are anything that connote a bodily sensation of beauty. Take the brief moment in Dorian Gray when Lord Henry is at Hyde Park’s Speakers’ Corner, listening to a preacher, and comments that ‘London is very rich in curious effects’ (DG 19.350). The present book is interested in the ways in which these kinds of ‘aesthetic effect’ are bound up with the ways in which space is perceived and represented in nineteenth-century writing. Mallarmé’s comments on his attempt to develop a symbolist style may stand as a description of the ways in which the Anglophone aesthetes, writing after Dickens and realism, sought to ‘invent a language’ that came ‘from a very new poetics, [...] best define[d] in these words: Paint not the thing, but the effect that it produces’ (1959: 137).

Barthes’s argument is important, but must be challenged precisely on political grounds, for in his version of realism, it is as though the text were suspended in a kind of ideological vacuum. As Jameson has shown, the ‘reality effect’ of realism cannot be entirely divorced from a certain social realist tradition, even while it puts this tradition into question (1986: 373–83). The same is true of those ‘aesthetic effects’ charted in this book. Indeed, and in contrast to some of the more extreme statements with respect to the autonomy of art of figures such as Pater and especially Wilde, as well as some of the more privative critical interpretations of their works, this book argues that aestheticism cannot be divorced from the social and political world in which it was developed and conceived. Following Pater’s lead in Marius the Epicurean (1885), it considers aestheticism as an engaged philosophy, guided by the ‘maxim of Life as the end of life’ (ME 1: 2.8.142). While both writers clearly believed that art should not be trammelled by ‘moral’ import, a point indeed crucial to Pater’s reply to Ruskin’s discussion of theoria and aesthesis, and while neither would have admitted that the beauty of art was determined, or should be limited, by social or ideological questions, both were keenly aware of the political contexts that underwrote the production
of art and which allowed it to be appreciated. Likewise, aesthetic writers were also aware of the political forces that produce those spaces they sought to read aesthetically. As Kristen Ross puts it, ‘space, as a social fact, as a social factor and as an instance of society, is always political’ (2008: 9).

Reading Space: Theoretical Considerations

Based on the belief that ‘aesthetic effects’ always already carry the traces of the society in which they were conceived and the politics which informed them, the theoretical framework underwriting this study is indebted to a certain dialectical materialist tradition of the criticism of space. It situates itself within the critical discourse surrounding the writing and reading of the city in nineteenth-century literature and asks a simple question: how did British writers associated with the aesthetic movement respond to space? In order to answer this question, this book builds on work by Freeman (2007) and Murray (2016a), the former limiting his discussion to literary representations of a single city, London, but broadening it to consider authors who were not part of the aesthetic movement, the latter discussing a wider variety of different spatial ‘landscapes’. The present study differs from both in the ways in which it sees the writers contributing to the tradition under consideration as writing not simply ‘after Dickens’, but also, and as importantly, ‘after Ruskin’. Like Wolfreys, I use the idea of writing after Dickens and Ruskin strategically, as useful ways of indicating a shift in perspective, rather than considering the terms as designating an epistemic shift. The tradition of the aesthetics of space mapped in this book does not constitute a radical break with earlier traditions of writing space, be they those of the Enlightenment realists, the Romantics, or the crowning achievements of nineteenth-century French, British or Russian realism. I am well aware that all of these earlier movements show an interest in representing reality aesthetically, and all to some degree register an aesthetics of space. As we shall see, the tradition of the aesthetics of space capitalises productively on these debts, just as modernism owes its own debts to aestheticism.

Jameson has discussed the ‘spatial turn’, in which critics have come to consider questions of spatiality central to understanding the movement of ‘modernity’. In a famous lecture from 1967 on ‘Des espaces autres’ [Different Spaces], Michel Foucault (1926–84) argues that if ‘the great obsession of the nineteenth century was history: themes of
development and arrest, themes of crisis and cycle, themes of accumulation of the past, a great overload of dead people’, the twentieth century was ‘the age of space’ (2000a: 175).\(^8\) Jameson argues, however, that the nineteenth century was itself also an age of space: the period of the Enlightenment had witnessed the emergence of ‘a new form of space’, that of Alltag, ‘daily life’ (1986: 374), which the realist novel itself played a part in producing. As Ross writes in her study of the emergence of ‘social space’ in the Communes of nineteenth-century Paris, ‘everyday life is born in nineteenth-century Europe’ (2008: 9). Building on Ross’s work, but shifting the focus from poets such as Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91) to consider European ‘aesthetic’ writers more broadly, we might equally well suggest that the later nineteenth century, reacting against the realist novel, responded to the emergence of another related but distinct kind of spatiality: one which resisted precisely bourgeois, ‘democratic’ ideology in focusing on the momentary experience of the exceptional. What is key is the ‘impressionistic’ moment whereby space is appreciated by the subject not solely ‘in itself’, but through recognising those ‘impressions’ as they themselves are (SHR xix). Such an emphasis precisely divides aesthesis from theoria in Ruskinian terms (CW 11: 62). Indeed, the tradition of the aesthetics of space only becomes possible at this precise historical moment in the second half of the nineteenth century, and if the tension between theoria and aesthesis predates Ruskin and nineteenth-century realism, Modern Painters provided the critical resources for those who followed, allowing them to conceptualise these two different ways of approaching space. As such, the tradition of the aesthetics of space was precipitated by concurrent developments in nineteenth-century aesthetic theory and the socio-material conditions of modern space (and particularly metropolitan space, given that this kind of space was the dominant product of, and produced, this modernity), as a synthetic response to the conditions of a new kind of ‘reality’.

Broadly speaking, the critical heritage dealing with literary representations of space can be divided into two distinct, though often interrelated discourses: critical realist and post-industrial (Tambling 2001: 2–3). The critical realist tradition begins, in earnest, during the middle of the nineteenth century with Friedrich Engels (1820–95) in The Condition of the Working Class in England (1844). This approach stretches through to twentieth-century criticism, most obviously in important works such as Raymond Williams’s The Country and the City (1973): its focus is on capitalism, industry and questions of class. Dickens’s journalism might be argued to constitute an early
part of this tradition, and his realism, as well as that of works such as Elizabeth Gaskell’s (1810–65) *Mary Barton* (1848), an aesthetic response to it. In French realism, it reaches its high point in Balzac’s multivolume project *La Comédie humaine*, a history of Paris from the Restoration and July Monarchy, as Engels noted in a famous 1888 letter to the radical Margaret Harkness (1854–1923). Responding to her novel *City Girl* (1887), he added: ‘Realism [. . .] implies, besides the truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances’ (Marx and Engels 2001: 166).

The post-industrial tradition, on the other hand, focuses less on the question of class struggle than on the psychic toll of modern space. Such a tradition is often said to begin with Georg Simmel’s (1858–1919) important essay on *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* [*The Metropolis and Mental Life*] (1903), but we can see traces of it already in Ruskin in a work such as ‘Fiction, Fair and Foul’ (1880). This tradition includes Benjamin’s *Das Passagen-Werk* and T. J. Clark’s *The Painting of Modern Life* (1984), but also takes in the work of postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) on the ‘hyperreal’ (2004). As such, the post-industrial tradition is also deeply interested in the aesthetics of how such spaces have been read. Unsurprisingly, then, my analysis of the tradition of the aesthetics of space finds itself closer to the post-industrialist discourse than to the critical realist one. While the spaces discussed in this book are primarily ‘real’ ones, rooted in real lived experiences of certain nineteenth-century spaces, they are also literary constructs which differ necessarily from their models, so that when we speak of a ‘real’ London or Paris during the course of this book, the quotation marks already indicate a putting-into-question of the status of the ‘real’ that critical realism would baulk at. For such a tradition, the ‘real’ city is knowable through its social construction, and it is the task of criticism to map this city. But in charting the way in which the city is treated as a work of art, the aesthetics of space is less interested in the question of the represented than in the representation, the ways in which the experience of space is created as an aesthetic object. This study, in other words, is interested in the artist as painter of modern life, and if the tradition of the aesthetics of space in Anglophone literary traditions originates with writers all too aware of their status as writing after Dickens and after Ruskin, it is also built upon an awareness of Baudelaire. Indeed, Baudelaire’s essay on ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’ [*The Painter of Modern Life*] (1863), focusing on the figure of the *flâneur*, the alienated observer of the crowd, has already been used as a model for reading the aesthetics of Parisian space by
Benjamin, but the British version of this aesthetics of space, linking writers such as Pater, Wilde and James, has not been fully mapped. This book is partly a response to this gap in the critical heritage.

The primary theoretical fulcrum of my analysis combines insights derived from Lefebvre and Benjamin, alongside others gleaned from psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. Sitting somewhere between the critical realist and post-industrial traditions, Lefebvre’s basic argument is that space is not something that was simply ‘there’, but has instead been produced across time (PS 36–7). Moreover, space is produced by, and produces, social relations, so that, as David Harvey puts it, ‘space and the political organization of space express social relationships but also react back upon them’ (1973: 306). According to Lefebvre, history has witnessed the production of a series of different modes of spatiality, from natural or ‘absolute’ space, through the ‘secular’ space of the Middles Ages and the early modern period, to the ‘abstract’ space of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lefebvre coins three distinct concepts to help understand the different ways in which any space may be produced and used: spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. The literary works which are the subject of this study produce representational spaces, space as ‘lived through its associated images and symbols’. This is ‘space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects’ (PS 39). We have already seen one such operation of ‘overlaying’ in the ways in which the early realist novel seeks to reduce the chaotic reality of the experience of space by dividing the city in half. But of course, the very fact that we are discussing a number of different representational spaces implies limits. As Lefebvre writes, considering de Quincey and Baudelaire, Hugo and Comte de Lautréamont (1846–70), ‘the problem is that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about’ (PS 15). Nevertheless, an aesthetic representation of space is to a degree mappable, both geographically onto a ‘real’ space, and socio-politically, and representational spaces are not blind to the forces that produce them. The text(ure) of this space is the dialectical precipitate of what Lefebvre calls a certain set of spatial practices, ‘space as it is perceived [perçu]’, which is to say, engaged with on a daily basis, as well as certain representations of space. The latter is ‘conceptualised [conçu] space’ which identifies ‘what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived’, not least the dominant mode of production which produces it (PS 38; 48). Indeed, representations of space are often allied with state power. Such a
representation of space is the theme of Jorge Luis Borges’s (1899–1986) parable ‘On Exactitude and Science’ (1946), which tells of an ancient map ‘whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it’ (2004: 181). Mapping space, knowing its contours and limitations, produces knowledge but also exercises power, an imperial operation captured in the famous map of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899). Dramatising the ways in which ‘many blank spaces on the earth’ became filled in with ‘farcical names’ (2008a: 130) in the years following the initial Scramble for Africa (1881), the continent becomes ‘a place of darkness’ (2008a: 108).

These three key terms – spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces – will recur throughout the analyses of this book, helping to show the ways in which representational spaces relate to the other ways in which space is produced. But if the aesthetics of space treats space in the spirit of art, it produces less a realist mapping than a representational space. ‘Representational space is alive’, Lefebvre remarks, and literary texts may ‘speak’ to the reader. They have ‘an affective kernel or centre’ and ‘embrace [. . .] the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations’ (PS 42). Affective and passionate, engaging with space implicates the body (PS 40), and as we shall see, this question of the body is one that divides Ruskin from those such as Pater who follow him.

In implicating the body, one of the effects of modern space is that ‘it unleashes desire’ (PS 97). Here Lefebvre’s analysis can usefully be placed in dialogue with that of Benjamin. Left unfinished at Benjamin’s death, Das Passagen-Werk collected a series of fragments on nineteenth-century life and the city, primarily focusing on Paris and its arcades. It centres on a reading of Baudelaire as an allegorist of the modern city, building on Benjamin’s earlier work on baroque tragedy in Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels [The Origin of German Tragic Drama] (1928). In that work, dealing with the emergence of allegorical drama during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), Benjamin argues that allegory is the mode of writing that responds to historical trauma, etymologically a wound which cannot heal (Greek: τραῦμα). In such historical periods, allegory becomes the way in which writers can register a sense of a temporality that is unzeitgemässe or untimely. Whereas symbolism implies a direct and supposedly ‘natural’ relationship between signifier and signified, allegory, insofar as it is always metonymic, is catachrestic (Greek: ἀλληγορία, ‘speaking otherwise’), registering a breakdown in the stable semiotic economy, a point at which meaning is fractured or broken. Benjamin argues that the nineteenth century registers another, different moment of trauma: that of modernity.
In his Exposé of 1935, Benjamin reads Baudelaire’s ‘Le Cygne’ from *Les Fleurs du mal [The Flowers of Evil] (1857)* as symptomatic of nineteenth-century Paris. The poem’s persona is seen walking the streets, noting how ‘the old Paris is gone’ (l. 7) following the renovations undertaken by Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–91). In response to a ballooning population that had doubled since 1815, much of old Paris was demolished under Haussmann’s direction between 1853 and 1870, with new boulevards cut and widened. Haussmann’s vision was a quintessential representation of space in Lefebvrian terms, which sought to make abstract space more ‘visible’, using modern communication routes to ‘rationalise’ space, exercising power. It ushered in a ‘revolution of representation’ (Ferguson 1997: 115–51). But as Benjamin argues, the result was that Haussmann ‘estrange[d] the Parisians from their city’; they no longer felt at home, starting ‘to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis’ (*SW* 3: 42). This is the kind of *unheimlichkeit* that Marx linked to alienation and identified as the quintessential experience of ‘modernity’. In ‘Le Cygne’, this alienation produces melancholia, and figures Paris as ruin:

> Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood
> Nothing has budged! New palaces, blocks, scaffoldings,
> Old neighbourhoods, are allegorical for me,
> And my dear memories are heavier than stone. (ll. 29–32)

In linking allegory and melancholia, Benjamin’s argument builds on Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who differentiates melancholia from mourning, insofar as in the former, the object of cathexis is lost, so that the state cannot be ‘worked through’ (*SE* 14: 243–58). For Benjamin, the metonymy characteristic of allegory marks its melancholia, registering precisely the trauma of the lost object. Commenting on ‘Le Cygne’, Benjamin argues that ‘the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur’ (*SW* 3: 39), a point that links his engagement with Baudelaire to Dickens, another flâneur (Hollington 1981). Benjamin had read *Old Curiosity Shop* in October 1930, discussing it with Adorno, who sees in Dickens’s novels ‘a fragment of the dispersed baroque that maintains a strange ghostly presence in the nineteenth century’ (1992: 171). We will see the ghostly traces of this ‘dispersed baroque’ recur in the tradition of the aesthetics of space.

For Lefebvre, Romanticism may be understood as ‘the transitional moment that separated abstract spatiality from a more unmediated
perception’ (PS 290), and it is in this context that we can perhaps best understand one of the most famous allegorical responses to the modern city of British literature. In much-discussed passages of book seven of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth records having heard as a child of how ‘next-door neighbours’ in London lived as ‘Strangers, and knowing not each other’s names’ (7.117–88). Arriving in London for the first time, Wordsworth imagines viewing the city from a distance (7.249–53) in a kind of ‘theoretical’ gaze, in the sense in which Ruskin uses the term *theoria* – one which extrapolates from the chaotic reality, perceived from the vantage point of a kind of ideal subject, overseeing the whole and presenting the ‘truth of space’. Yet modern space resists such a theoretical gaze, as Wordsworth makes clear: looking over the city from above, London is figured through a metonymy of the monumental, including both Wren’s Monument, built in 1677 to commemorate the 1666 Fire of London, and ‘Bedlam’, Bethlem Hospital, noting its statues of ‘Melancholy’ and ‘Raving Madness’ (1676), designed by Caius Gabriel Cibber (1630–1700). Even monumental London is hard to read: Wren’s Monument suggests the city’s resistance to destruction or erasure, monumental space figuring the trace of an imperial will to power (PS 143), while Bedlam’s statues read London otherwise, suggesting a resistance to being encompassed or known, the city figuring a site of madness and a space that makes its subject mad. From this elevated vantage point, Wordsworth then finds himself thrust down, in a zooming movement which we have already seen at work in Huysmans. This zooming movement registers not simply the movement of the eye, but a sense of alienation, so that it becomes hard, if not impossible, for the subject to know their place. Wordsworth finds himself ‘amidst the hurry of crowds’, his senses assaulted by ‘colours, lights and forms, the Babel din / The endless stream of men, and moving things’ (7.157–8), another image repeated in Huysmans. Such a visceral experience risks escaping the eye, which is to say, risks escaping a ‘theoretical’ comprehension in Ruskinian terms. The only one seemingly unmoved by the experience is the blind beggar who, precisely in his blindness, with ‘his fixed face and sightless eyes’ (7.622) becomes an ‘emblem’ or allegorical figure (7.619). Unsure where to focus, Wordsworth’s vision is assailed by:

Face after face - the string of dazzling wares,
Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,
And all the tradesman’s honours overhead:
Here, fronts of houses, like a title-page
With letters huge inscribed from top to toe;
Stationed above the door like guardian saints,
There, allegoric shapes, female or male,
Or physiognomies of real men. (7.174–80)

The metonymies of faces and names, the inscrutable primacy of signs and symbols that resist a direct reading, suggest that the city itself produces ‘allegoric shapes’ and can only be read as an allegorical text (Tambling 2009: 21). Wordsworth’s experience of the crowd is one of trauma, and thus compares to Benjamin writing on Baudelaire. But what differentiates Wordsworth from Baudelaire, and from the British aesthetic writers that are the subject of this book, who are all influenced by both poets to various degrees, is precisely Wordsworth’s resistance to this experience. As we shall see, the idea of allegory, of the figure of the flâneur, of the modern city as traumatising and its spaces as ruined, recur throughout this book, but in the tradition of the aesthetics of space, Ruskinian theoria is supplanted by aesthesis as the dominant mode of reading the city. In contrast to Wordsworth, writers such as Wilde and James are fascinated by the pleasure of the gaze and of the experience of the loss of the self in an aesthetics of space.

For Benjamin, reading the ‘modern’ city allegorically means reading it as a ‘dream world’, so that its space become a kind of ‘phantasmagoria’ (SW 3: 40). This is Marx’s term for the commodity fetish, which ‘congeal[s] labour-time’ (1990: 130), petrifying time in the thing. In Das Passagen-Werk, Benjamin associates ‘dreamtime’ with ‘spacetime’ (PW 389; K1,4), the latter term (Zeitraum) linking space and time dialectically, in a manner which echoes both the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), for whom Ereignis marks the spatial and temporal unity of Being and beings, and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895–1975) concept of the chronotope. For Bakhtin, the chronotope refers to ‘the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships’ in which ‘time [. . .] thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history’ (Bakhtin 1981: 84). The aesthetics of space is precisely such a chronotope, making time visible in space and space in time, the beautiful moment or instant crystallised as an image that encapsulates space-time. But as ‘dreamtime’, Benjamin’s idea also connotes the sense in which desire can be invested in space, akin to the process which psychoanalysis calls cathexis. For Baudelaire, ‘le Cygne’, a ghostly swan which is also a sign (its homophone, ‘le signe’), and which he sees haunting Paris, is precisely the trace of desire in space.
Another way in which we can understand how desire is invested in space is through the work of the philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–92). In *L’anti-Œdipe* (1972) and *Mille plateaux* [*A Thousand Plateaus*] (1980), they build upon Marx’s argument in *Das Kapital* (1867) regarding the two circuits of production: C-M-C, in which commodities are exchanged for money and then traded for other commodities, and M-C-M, in which money is transformed into commodities and then back into money again. For Marx, M-C-M is precisely ‘the general formula of capital’ (1990: 257), since this circuit involves investment and speculation: the same commodity is bought not with a view to its use value, but precisely on the basis of its exchange value – it is bought only to be sold on again. Money is put into circulation, invested with a view to return. Deleuze and Guattari rework Marx’s idea alongside a theory of desire informed by psychoanalysis into the triad of territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, and link it to the distinction they draw between two types of space: ‘smooth’ and ‘striated’ (2004b: 536–7). Space is ‘originally’ smooth, they argue, corresponding broadly to what Lefebvre calls absolute space (*PS* 234). For Deleuze and Guattari, space is not bounded, and it is only with the advent of humanity that space became subdivided into regions. They call this the process of ‘striating’ space, linked to the birth of agriculture, when the nomadic tribes settled down, becoming sedentary. For Deleuze and Guattari, this act of settling space territorialises it, dividing it up, leading to the idea of private property, and thus, by extension, capitalism (2004b: 473–4). Deterritorialisation is the process through which these territories change hands (historically, through acts of war), the boundaries redrawn, after which space is reterritorialised in new formations. This process is akin to the circuits that Marx identified as the motors driving capitalist accumulation, and which Lefebvre sees as driving the production of new kinds of spatiality, beginning in the Middle Ages (*PS* 262–3). But Deleuze and Guattari also note that capitalism creates new possibilities for this process of deterritorialisation. In this sense, Freud was perspicacious in adopting the ‘economic’ model for his early understanding of psychic process, suggesting that the subject invests desire in the same way as capitalism does. Capital is virtual money, no longer linked to a real-world referent (such as the gold standard), but which has been deterritorialised, referring only to itself. It relies for its existence on economic circuits and flows, so that capitalism has as its goal a kind of limitless deterritorialisation, an endless process of the investment of desire in which speculation reproduces itself in an
ever-increasing process. And as Lefebvre argues, the ‘abstract’ space of the nineteenth century is precisely engaged in this kind of deterritorialisation, linking ‘the various flows involved: flows of energy and labour, of commodities and capital’ (PS 347). In this sense, the production of space is linked to capitalism in its modern form, as the production of abstract spaces.

What is at stake in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is a kind of ‘libidinal economy’, and recent work on the fin de siècle has shown the productive ways in which these kinds of ideas can help us read the circuits of desire which characterise the literature of the nineteenth century. More specifically, the idea of deterritorialisation is a useful one in understanding both the ways in which space was produced during the period, and how this production of space was bound to capitalism. As we shall see, one example of the phenomenon in the nineteenth century may be seen in the railway, which deterritorialises space in two related fashions. Firstly, railways literally ripped up existing spaces, a process memorably captured in Dombey and Son, where Dickens describes the demolition of Camden Town for the construction of the London and Birmingham railway, 1833–7, as a ‘great earthquake’ that ‘rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre’ (2002a: 6.78). But secondly, the railways also deterritorialise the space between those metropolitan centres that they connected. By linking these centres directly, those waysides in the countryside that used to be intrinsic to any journey between them become bypassed. Dickens’s ‘drowsy’ Cloisterham of The Mystery of Edwin Drood is precisely such a marginalised space during the period of the novel. Space is now reterritorialised into a new form, whereby entire older communities become redundant and fall into ruin.

Towards a Tradition of an Aesthetics of Space

This book works towards establishing the idea that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the development of a tradition of writing an aesthetics of space. Like Ellen Eve Frank’s work on ‘literary architecture’ (1979), including chapters on Ruskin, Pater and James, I use the word ‘tradition’ in the etymological sense, suggesting a mindset which was handed down through the writers under consideration, rather than implying that these writers consciously considered themselves a ‘movement’. The book understands ‘space’ in broad terms to include the idea of extension, the idea of specific spaces such as the countryside or the city, and the idea of architecture
and mapping as producing certain spaces. It differs in emphasis from those previous studies upon which it builds in three important ways: firstly, insofar as its analysis is not limited to a single city; secondly, in the focus it places upon ‘aesthetic effects’ and how prior representations of space, and the political histories of these spaces, are bound up in the aesthetics of space; and thirdly, and most crucially, in the emphasis it places upon Ruskin’s distinction between theoria and aesthesis in understanding this tradition of British writing.

As we have seen, the aesthetics of the space of Huysmans’s Paris implies Dickens’s London. This point is important: in the context of the tradition of the aesthetics of space which this book addresses, no space is wholly discrete, so that other traces ‘insinuate’ themselves into any aesthetics of space. Ruskin’s Venice and Pater’s Rome imply London, Wilde’s London implies Paris, and James’s New York implies at once Venice, London and Paris. In this sense, this is not a study of the aesthetic production of a specific space. Rather, it looks at how nineteenth-century writers began to develop an idea of an aesthetics of space more broadly. Indeed, a number of previous studies have examined the ways in which most of the writers that this book discusses treat the city, and a number of readings of individual cities during the periods have been previously undertaken. I build on this previous research, but seek to map a different kind of tradition, one which considers the extent to which the aesthetic representations of these individual spaces by these individual writers find themselves in dialogue with one another, and particularly with the aesthetic theory of Ruskin and with the post-realist awareness of writing ‘after Dickens’. The present study aims to begin to sketch this narrative of the aesthetics of space, working towards delineating some of the contours of this tradition, in which what is of significance is the way in which writers approach space. In other words, while the historical conditions of these spaces are key to their specific aesthetic effects, what links them is not geographical but temperamental: an awareness of, but also a certain resistance to, the ‘theoretical’ gaze of the realist project.

These kinds of responses are ones grounded in the bodily experience of these spaces, registering the sensory impressions that affect the process of appreciation. As Moretti puts it, building on the geography of Claudio Cerreti, what is at stake ‘is not just “extension” [. . .] but “intension” too: “the quality of a given space”’ (2004: 96). But ‘intensive’ spaces are also clearly intertextual, in the sense that any aesthetic appreciation of a space is one which is mediated through prior aesthetic representations. With reference to the bodily nature
of this experience, this book builds upon Wolfreys’s insights regarding the ways in which Dickens marks a new form of writing the city, which, in its focus on the visual and aural, constitutes a kind of ‘phenomenology of the urban’ (2012: 7), anticipating less the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) than that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61). And if I agree with Moretti that ‘space acts upon style’ (1998: 43), I take the point somewhat differently from him, insofar as I am interested in the ways in which literary style seeks to represent or imitate the experience of a given space. Consider, briefly, Nicholas Nickleby’s famous second entry into London:

They rattled on through the noisy, bustling, crowded street of London, now displaying long double rows of brightly-burning lamps, dotted here and there with the chemists’ glaring lights, and illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that streamed from the windows of the shops, where sparkling jewellery, silks and velvets of the richest colours, the most inviting delicacies, and most sumptuous articles of luxurious ornament, succeeded each other in rich and glittering profusion. Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass, like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult. (2003g: 32.390–1)

The passage is built out of only two sentences, the length of which, piling subordinate clause upon clause, gives a tangible density to the picture. But this density comes at a price, anticipating Wordsworth insofar as the sensory bounty simultaneously registers the overloading of the senses. The coach passes ‘quickly-changing and ever-varying objects’, a phrase which must be understood doubly, both as the world in process and as a comment on fashion in the city. London here is figured through its shops, foreign and opulent, with the city cosmopolitan, populated by ‘emporiums of splendid dresses’ and its ‘tempting stores of everything’, a phrase only partly hyperbolic. For Dickens, there is no want of ‘objects in the crowd itself to give new point and purpose to the shifting scene’; it produces a plenitude which resists the attempts of the realist novelist to capture a stable image of the city, slipping past the controlled and controlling gaze. Nowhere in the nineteenth century other than the metropolis could one experience as much as swiftly, could one’s eye alight on so much which gives itself to be read otherwise. The city is simultaneously conjunction and disjunction, as mirrored in Dickens’s syntax: only in London can one find that ‘life and death went hand in hand; wealth
and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together’. Dickens breaks the paragraph, interjecting simply, ‘But it was London’ (2003g: 32.391), offering all the explanation that may be possible.

The tradition of the aesthetics of space is further defined by the ways in which, writing after realism, it recognises that any experience of space is one which is mediated both by that space’s prior aesthetic representations, and by representations of other spaces which inform the subject’s response to it. Passages such as the one from *Nicholas Nickleby* offered a stylistic model for writing nineteenth-century space, one which all of the writers dealt with in this book, coming after Dickens, internalised to some degree. Moreover, such passages are precisely the kinds of aesthetic traces that underwrite the ways in which later writers, including the late Dickens, come to appreciate these kinds of spaces. Of course, the idea that a writer’s approach to space may be inflected by the trace of prior textual representations is not itself a new phenomenon, but the sense in which space is necessarily read by these writers as a kind of intertextual phenomenon is important: the point is that the tradition of the aesthetics of space recognises that there is no *theoria* without *aesthesis*.

This focus on the textual materiality of the aesthetics of space builds on more recent work on Dickens. Jeremy Tambling argues that Dickens’s prose style constitutes a kind of ‘poetry of the city’ in which he silently cites others and autocites himself, a process that makes his language, ‘in spite of its familiarity, strange’ (2015: 6). For our purposes, what is at stake is precisely the sense in which a space comes to be appreciated ‘for the first time’ (ED 23.261) only when mediated through the words or images of another. It makes the experience of the aesthetics of space not only representative of a chronotope but also anachronistic (Tambling 2010: 14–15), with the later experience read through the earlier one, and where one space may be read through another. It means that Ruskin reads Venice through Lord Byron (1788–1824), Pater reads Amiens through Ruskin, Wilde reads London through Dickens, and so forth. Indeed, reading a space through prior aesthetic traces – traces of the text which mark the history of the space and imply ‘spacetime’ – is precisely a question of investment and desire. It marks the sense in which the space is always already inscribed by fantasy. Wolfreys, in a reading informed by Jacques Derrida’s (1930–2004) deconstruction, develops the idea of ‘architexture’ to refer to the ways in which the trace of the text always inflects any given approach to a space, and associates it with the spatiality of the nineteenth-century city. For Wolfreys, Dickens’s
‘language registers the endlessly signifying processes of iterability and *différance* which is the city, and which mark the city as being structured like the unconscious (or like a language)’ (1998: 149). Wolfreys’s point, however, does not simply speak for the city: all spaces may be said to be inscribed by *différance*, and more broadly, as Lefebvre argues, the interrelationship between the spaces of the town and countryside ‘constitute a *texture*’ (*PS* 235). But insofar as such spaces are ‘structured like the unconscious’, Wolfreys’s phrasing also invokes the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan (1901–81) (1998a: 48), whose insights regarding the idea of the ‘insistence’ of the letter would become important to Tambling’s later analysis of Dickens. Indeed, ‘insistence’ will also prove significant in the analyses of this book, helping us understand why later writers recycle ‘stock’ imagery, and explain the ways in which the tradition of the aesthetics of space mobilises repetition, on both the thematic and stylistic level, in order to imply both an awareness of coming ‘late’ and the idea of the death-drive.15

Most significantly, it is a combined sense of writing after Dickens and Ruskin that creates the nineteenth-century British tradition of the aesthetics of space. Stuart Eagles (2011) has considered the idea of coming ‘after Ruskin’, but his focus is primarily political and social rather than aesthetic. For the purposes of this study, ‘after Ruskin’ implies in particular an awareness of his distinction between *theoria* and *aesthesis*, drawn in *Modern Painters*. This distinction is between two ways of looking at art, and by extension, space, ones which Ruskin then sees at work in landscape painting, and particularly in Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), but which in its turn informs his own reading of space in *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskin associates the moral insight of *theoria* with Christianity; as Peter Fuller puts it, his ‘system depended upon the idea that nature was in some sense a garden made by God, for man’ (1988: 5). For this reason we find that Ruskin promotes *theoria* at the expense of a simple ‘bodily’, sensory engagement with space, *aesthesis*. As previously noted, *theoria* may be allied with the realist project in its desire to see beyond the surface, linking *Modern Painters* to Dickens’s realism of seeing through the housetops, but this comparison is also to oversimplify both Ruskin and realism. As Jameson has recently argued, realism is a complex phenomenon, and may be understood as antimodal. The genre’s pretence towards representing reality, Jameson argues, is founded on an ‘irrevocable antagonism’ (2013: 11). On the one hand, there is ‘the narrative impulse’, which gives structure, order, sequence and causality, bound to chronological time (15–26);
on the other, ‘affect, or the body’s present’ (27–44). The latter is registered in the urban phenomenology of Dickens, but also in the sense in which such a present eludes presence, standing apart from chronological time, another anachronism, as in the phenomenology of the intensive aesthetic ‘instant’ of Pater. Jameson’s insights are useful, and if the success of formal realism lies precisely in the juxtaposition of these antinomies, an aesthetics of space shifts the balance firmly towards affect as the primary way in which space is represented.

Of course, neither Ruskin nor Dickens would have been wholly comfortable with the comparison I am making between theoria and the ‘realist’ gaze. In a famous letter to Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), written from Venice and reflecting on Dickens’s death, 9 June 1870, Ruskin sought to differentiate himself from the novelist on political grounds:

Dickens was a pure modernist – a leader of the steam-whistle party par excellence – and he had no understanding of any power of antiquity except a sort of jackdaw sentiment for cathedral towers. [. . .] His hero is essentially the ironmaster; in spite of Hard Times, he has advanced by his influence every principle that makes them harder - the love of excitement, in all classes, and the fury of business competition. (CW 37: 7)

Ruskin’s understanding of the term ‘modernist’ here is primarily political rather than literary, suggesting someone favouring progress over tradition. Nevertheless, in spite of such points of disagreement, Ruskin’s appreciation of Dickens’s writing never waned, and as Charles Swann puts it, ‘Ruskin speaks so perceptively of Dickens because he writes from the deep recognition that comes from shared community of concern and vision’ (1986: 81). Indeed, to a certain extent it is this very novel, Hard Times (1854), which Ruskin praised elsewhere as ‘in several respects’ Dickens’s ‘greatest’ (CW 17: 31), which perhaps best illustrates the sense in which the aesthetics of Dickens’s own representations of space were bound up with his ‘theoretical’ gaze. Notwithstanding his own propensity towards aesthesis and flâneurie (Hollington 1981), the ways in which he wrote the northern industrial fictional town of Coketown may serve as a point of reference for showing how his earlier works of realism produced a different kind of aesthetic of space from the ones which will primarily concern us in the chapters that follow:

It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like
one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.

[. . .]
You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. [. . .] All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M’Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn’t state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (2003f: 1.5.27–8)

The various forms of repetition (anaphoras, chiasmuses, epistrophes, epizeuxes, symploches) accentuate the sense in which Coketown was machinic, crafted by mechanical reproduction. In turning man into a machine, modernity eviscerates spiritual life, with Dickens’s passage recalling that famous chapter on ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, published two years earlier, and Ruskin’s critique of the ways in which modern industrial society devalued the individual soul, in passages that also critique utilitarianism and ‘the modern English fact-hunter’ (CW 10: 221). Indeed, insofar as ‘the jail might have been the infirmary’ and ‘the infirmary might have been the jail’, Dickens’s chiasmus is Foucauldian, linking two of those spaces that served to discipline those who were unable or unwilling to work. Moreover, in linking both to the ‘town-hall’ he suggests that the political superstructure was not simply criminal or sick, but sought to situate itself outside of the circuits of labour while simultaneously feeding off them, vampirically – like capitalism for Marx (1990: 342) or the Law in Bleak House (BH 60.924). In reading the city as a visible record of both the conditions and relations of production in Marx’s terms, as Engels would also do in his reading of the conditions of the English working classes, Dickens’s gaze is ‘theoretical’, and finds no beauty in such a space.

To see beauty in such spaces requires a different mode of vision, the sort which Ruskin marvelled at in Turner. More specifically, it requires a mode of seeing which is aesthetic rather than theoretical.
It is this way of reading spaces, and the tension between the theoretical and aesthetic impulses, that link the different writers discussed in this book. My selection of writers is, I hope, somewhat logical, although as always, the grounds for any selection requires some justification. The figures chosen trace the ways in which Ruskin’s distinction between *theoria* and *aesthesis* is developed, first in the late Dickens, and then by Pater, Wilde and James, who are all, to greater or lesser degrees, associated with aestheticism. The conclusion briefly considers the ways in which the tradition of the aesthetics of space came to be developed in modernism, focusing on Virginia Woolf, James Joyce (1882–1941) and Marcel Proust (1871–1922). This kind of modernism, in drawing on the ‘impressionism’ of the tradition of the aesthetics of space which preceded it, is characterised by an awareness that ‘all that is solid melt into air’, the title of Marshall Berman’s affirmative take on the modern city (1988). Berman is quoting Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* (2002: 223), referring to the ways in which modernity is defined by a series of revolutions in the means of production which reconstructed both social relations and the spaces which they produced. But my conclusion also looks forward to the role played by representative spaces in such a process, which register aesthetic dream spaces, and the tension this implies between the unproductive consumption of space (in pleasure or *jouissance*) (PS 353), and what Lefebvre calls the ‘productive consumption of space’ (PS 359), which produces surplus value, here also implying new ways of consuming representative spaces, shorn of the ‘realist’ impulse.

Nevertheless, my selection of authors begs two questions: firstly, the question of nationality. As I have argued, while a French tradition of an aesthetics of space grounded in a response to Baudelaire has been previously studied, the British version of this tradition has yet to be fully traced. Of course, Baudelaire is important to the British tradition under consideration (Clements 1985), although this differentiates itself by the ways in which it also responds to Ruskin and Dickens. If my prologue dealt with Huysmans, it did so less as part of the French tradition than as a writer who was positioning himself ‘after Dickens’ and in focusing on a text which was widely read by the British aesthetes; the same is true for my reading, in the conclusion, of Proust, who features in his capacity as a respondent to the British tradition of the aesthetics of space. Likewise, this book reads James as a part of this tradition, both in the sense in which he is clearly responding to Ruskin, Dickens and aestheticism, and insofar as he was, in practice, a European writer, if one whose American
heritage led him to write particularly insightfully about transatlantic relationships. With the exception of a year spent living on Paris’s rive gauche, and two trips back to America, one of which concerns us in this book, James lived in London for close to half a century from 1869 until his death in 1916. As he wrote to Norton, 17 November 1878, if not wholly Anglicanised, ‘I am thoroughly Londonized’ (LHJ 2: 197). It is in the capacity of a British-based author writing back about America that I read him as part of this tradition of the aesthetics of space.

The second question that the selection begs is that of gender. In focusing on a tradition that links Ruskin with the late Dickens and with Pater, Wilde and James, and with the notable exception of Woolf, are the aesthetics of space and the aesthetic consumption of space to be taken to be intrinsically patriarchal? On the one hand, space was gendered in the nineteenth century: public space was the male preserve, private domestic space the female, something that Ruskin and James were particularly attuned to and an idea we have already seen Huysmans play on in his critique of Dickens. Of course, such binaries of active/passive, consumer of space/object of the gaze, flâneur walking the crowd/domestic angel of the house are eminently deconstructable, and important work on the forgotten female aesthetes has shown such dichotomies represent an oversimplification of the actual contours of nineteenth-century literary history.17 In view of this important body of criticism, this book might equally well have focused a chapter on the figure of Octavia Hill (1838–1912), one of Ruskin’s friends, whose ideas of creating ‘aesthetic’ spaces for the poor were important factors in broadening the doctrine of aestheticism socially. Likewise, the book could have included a chapter on the writings of Vernon Lee (1856–1935), whose responses to Venice are clearly deeply informed by both Ruskin’s own reading of the city and the distinctions between aesthesis and theoria.18 Better yet, a chapter might have focused on Lee’s lover, Clementina ‘Kit’ Anstruther-Thomson (1857–1921), who was not only attuned to, but actively theorised, the ways in which the body was affected by the sensuous experiences of different kinds of spaces. Pioneering the idea of an ‘experimental aesthetics’, informed by psychological theories of Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–87), Anstruther-Thomson, who ‘had always been a great reader of Ruskin’ (1924: 27), wrote a series of notes in which she discussed the power of architecture to affect the body of the spectator (1924: 185–206). This having been said, I have not chosen to focus on figures such as Lee or Anstruther-Thomson, both on the grounds of length, and because the writers that I do
discuss are all intentionally canonical. In linking these figures in a new fashion, what this book seeks to establish is the existence of this relatively understudied dimension to their works, all informed to a greater or lesser extent by Ruskin’s distinctions between *theoria* and *aesthesis*, and by a reaction against the project of ‘realism’.

The starting point is Ruskin, both chronologically and thematically. The first chapter reads carefully both his discussions of the idea of the ‘truth of space’ and his distinction between *theoria* and *aesthesis* as developed in the first and second volumes of *Modern Painters*. The argument is that this distinction fundamentally underwrites Ruskin’s attempts to write Venetian space in *The Stones of Venice*, published a few years later. The second volume of *The Stones*, entitled *The Sea Stories*, which focuses on the moment of Venice’s historical pomp and on the Ducal Palace as the visible symbol of this power, is read as an exercise in a ‘theoretical’ reading of space. But throughout *The Stones*, and especially in the concluding paragraphs of *The Sea Stories* and the final volume, *The Fall*, it becomes clear that Ruskin is unable to maintain this ‘theoretical’ gaze: it is consistently undercut by a more ‘aesthetic’ appreciation, revelling in a sensuousness which inflects his appreciation of these spaces.

Chapter 2 deals with the late Dickens, focusing on his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The chapter argues both that this novel is engaged with Ruskin’s writings on the Gothic, and that it represents the occasion for a ‘late’ meditation on the part of Dickens with respect to both his own prior works and realism (the ‘late Dickens’ writing ‘after Dickens’, as it were). If realism, in seeking to see through the housetops, is allied to Ruskin’s idea of *theoria*, then *Edwin Drood* instead develops an aesthetics of space. It does so, first and foremost, through opposing the Ruskinian spaces of the fictional cathedral city of Cloisterham to the ‘dream space’ of London’s East End. But it does so only insofar as it shows that Cloisterham itself is resistant to the ‘theoretical’ gaze of a Ruskin, and shows the sense in which this ancient cathedral city and the capital of modern London are locked in a dialectical, chiasmic structure, doppelgängers of one another.

Chapter 3 considers Pater’s response to Ruskin on the Gothic in his imaginary portraits, and his attack on his concept of *theoria* and its distinction from *aesthesis* developed in *Marius the Epicurean*. Showing Pater’s subtle attempts to pull these concepts out of Ruskin’s Christological interpretation and resituate them within their classical context, the chapter then turns to consider various aesthetic spaces in Pater’s works. It focuses on Pater’s sensitive descriptions of the ways
in which the spaces of the childhood home, the morgue and the cemetery are particularly hospitable to the aesthetic gaze, before reading Pater’s reply to realism and Ruskin in the course of his appreciation of the spaces of the Rome of the Antonines in *Marius*.

Chapters 4 and 5 turn to Wilde and James respectively. Replying to those readings of his work that suggest that Wilde is a ‘stock’ imagist, who uses space as a psychological code or an ‘aesthetic’ backdrop, empty of historical context, this chapter shows in detail the ways in which his aesthetics of space, while offering another reply to Dickens, can only be properly understood as a politically ‘engaged’ one. In this chapter, in particular, my method of closely situated analysis draws inspiration from the ‘geocriticism’ of Bertrand Westphal (2011). Chapter 5 considers James’s reply to Ruskin on the ‘picturesque’ in *The American Scene* (1907). Developing an ‘impressionistic’ aesthetics of space which is clearly rooted in a response to Pater, this travelogue sees James struggling with how best to read his homeland, and particularly New York. Throughout, the desire to pass moral judgement and gain a vantage point that might allow a ‘theoretical’ comprehension of the whole of the American scene – one which proves impossible precisely owing to the nature of modern American space, which is both too vast and traumatic – conflicts with an aesthetic pleasure which James cannot help but enjoy.

In discussing these less widely discussed points of comparison between these five canonical writers, this book hopes to illuminate an important tradition of nineteenth-century British writing that has received less critical attention. While this book is obviously limited in terms of what it can do, it seeks to work towards establishing this idea of a tradition of the aesthetics of space, both in the hope that others may find fruitful its readings of individual works, spaces, or the idea of a tradition of the aesthetics of space more generally, or insofar as they may assist in reading other writers or spaces which I have not had the time to address in the pages that follow.

**Notes**

1. My treatment of realism here and throughout this book is strategic, and I am aware that it is partial, tending to conflate formal and genetic realism, and adopting a view of realism as allied with panopticism. But then again, as Villanueva points out, misquoting George Moore’s (1852–1933) *Confessions of a Young Man* (1886/8), it is difficult to speak of realism in general terms and not risk hyperbole (1997: 1). But
I say my treatment of realism is strategic, insofar as it was this partial image of realism against which aesthetes such as Wilde reacted. For a useful selection of nineteenth-century documents representing some of the definitional battle-lines of realism, see Becker 1963. More broadly, beyond Villanueva’s excellent work, see the essays collected in Beaumont 2007 for a far more thorough overview of literary realism than it is possible to provide here.

2. For other critical approaches to fin-de-siècle London which read space psycho-textually, see Beckson 1992 and Mighall 2003.

3. Lefebvre’s own response to psychoanalysis has been criticised: see Pile 1996: 145–72.


5. I am thinking here in particular of Pater’s idea of a ‘poetic’, decadent prose, developed in the chapter ‘Euphuism’ in Marius the Epicurean, and a few years afterwards in his essay on ‘Style’. On this, see Dowling 1986: 104–74, and for an initial consideration of the significance of the idea to Wilde, see Whiteley 2017b.

6. The Kantian philosophical underpinnings of the so-called ‘project of enlightenment’, linked to the broader European cultural movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have been influentially discussed, from diverse political perspectives, by figures such as Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas.

7. I quote The Picture of Dorian Gray from the 1891 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

8. On Foucault’s contribution to spatial theory, see Soja 2010: 16–21.


11. Lefebvre too considers war the catalyst for the production of space in Western Europe: ‘the space of history, of accumulation, of investment’ (PS 277).

12. On Deleuze and urban space, see the essays collected by Frichot, Gabrielson and Metzger 2016. For a brilliant synthetic reading of Baudelaire through Deleuze, see Holland 1993.

13. See the essays collected by Ford, Keates and Pulham 2015, although barring a few passing discussions in the course of pursuing other topics, these essays do not focus on the question of space.

15. I discuss the idea of Dickens being ‘late’ in more detail in Chapter 2, as well as the ‘lateness’ of Ruskin, Pater and James in Chapters 1, 3 and 5 respectively.

16. I am thinking here of Foucault’s idea that the ‘enlightened’ gaze figured madness as the ‘absence of work’ in *Folie et Déraison* [Madness and Civilization, later translated as History of Madness] (2009 [1961]: 541–9), and his readings of the disciplinary gazes of both the clinic and prison in *Naissance de la clinique* [The Birth of the Clinic] (2003 [1963]) and *Surveiller et punir* [Discipline and Punish] (1991 [1975]).


18. On Lee’s Venice, see Maxwell 2010.