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Reading the text as a city:

The architectural chronotope in two nineteenth-century novels

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Abstract

Noting the popular idea associated with the linguistic turn in cultural theory that the city can be read as a text this paper argues that this motif can be usefully inverted such that the text might be 'read as a city' – whether or not it has a specifically urban focus. This proposition is explored in relation to the contrasting plotting strategies of Elizabeth Gaskell in North and South (1848) and George Eliot in Middlemarch (1874). Space syntax theory is brought to Bakhtin's notion of the literary chronotope, a concept denoting the time-space contexts encoded in literary narratives, in order to develop the architectural dimension of what Raymond Williams called the 'knowable' community. An articulation of the 'architectural chronotope' in North and South and Middlemarch reveals clear differences in the images of the knowable community presented by the two texts. These are said to realize contrasting novelistic conceptions of the bourgeois city, both with resonances in space syntax theory.

Keywords

Space syntax, Bakhtin, chronotope, Middlemarch, North and South.

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1. Revisiting the milieu: from determination to ambiguity in fictional space

There is a long tradition of space syntax researchers engaging with literary subjects. Studies, notably by Hanson (1976, 2012) and Psarra (2009; 2013) implicate space syntax theory in a variety of ways in the temporal and spatial framing of literary productions (see also Peponis 1997; Kanecar 2001; 2005; Griffiths 2012; Lykourioi 2012). This body of work shows how a space syntax perspective can shed light not only on literature conceived as a 'social artifact' that can be approached in some sense architecturally, but also on the architectural nature of literary representation itself. As a non-discursive, specifically architectural theory of social morphology, space syntax finds in literary productions an opportunity to examine the relationship between architecture and meaning. This opportunity equally presents a challenge, however, since space syntax theory itself establishes the logical impossibility of achieving any neat mapping of architectural arrangements and their representation in language (Hillier and Hanson, 1984, p. 8). Noting the popular idea associated with the linguistic turn in cultural theory that the city can be read as a text this paper proposes how this motif might usefully be inverted such that the text is 'read as a city', a conceptual move with implications not only for the novelistic representation of time and space but also for representations of the city in space syntax research.

Hanson (1976) established the deployment of environmental description as the primary point of interest for space syntax theory in relation to literary productions. For Hanson such descriptions of milieu denote an articulation of social reality, which reveals the novels as social artifacts rather than autonomous entities existing solely in language. Focussing on the nineteenth-century novel her proposition is that novels limited in their accounts of historical and geographical milieus differ fundamentally from those featuring figuratively rich descriptions. Whereas the time-space suppression of the former (such as in Jane Austen) were said to express a tacit preference for the conservation of existing social relations, historically substantive descriptions (for example those of Thomas Hardy) were said to articulate dynamic, transformative social relations.

In an earlier reflection on Hanson's paper Griffiths (2012) I suggested that an exclusive focus on milieu leads to a marginalization of the alternative strategies an author might bring to articulate time-space organization, for example through the structuring of character movement and encounter, and the symbolic emphasis assigned to these in narrative terms. The paper notes the analysis of literary texts as social networks pioneered by the Stanford Literary Laboratory as one way in which the varied modalities of time-space organization in novels could be identified other than through their milieus. It argues that this approach complements developments in space syntax theory, in which the spatial logic of networks, conceptualized in performative terms as an affordance for movement and social encounter, increasingly balances the earlier emphasis on the social logic of spatial organization.

It is interesting to note, in this context, that Hanson and Hillier produced a working paper in 1982, which represented an advance on Hanson's position in the 1976 paper but which remains unpublished (Hanson and Hillier, 1982). Here Hanson's original argument was reworked through dialogue with the literary critic Raymond Williams' notion of the 'knowable community' (Williams, 1974). Williams' argument is that middle-class British novelists in the nineteenth century were faced with a major artistic challenge in representing populations from lower social echelons that were an increasingly *visible* part of an urbanizing society. Williams used the term 'the knowable community' to refer to those aspects of the wider social scene which the novelist recognized and sought to depict, at least in a minimal documentary sense (Williams, 1969).

Hanson and Hillier re-conceptualize Hanson's original argument to emphasize the increasing awareness among nineteenth-century novelists of ideas imported from natural science that drew attention to the question of 'fit' between a species and its environment. These theories provided the intellectual justification for environmental description as a literary strategy for articulating the existence of groups that were socially other in terms of their physical environments. Where such descriptions of milieu are absent this implies a social conservatism that endorses the 'normality' of the middle-class environment of the novelist and most of his or her readers. Indeed, Hanson and

Hillier note, the nature of middle-classness is to resist being defined in spatial terms, developing identities that are transpatial, i.e. independent of space. From this perspective the detailed description of environmental milieus is less about a substantive approach to historical subjects than a reductive strategy to represent the 'other' almost by proxy.

Hanson's concern with time-space representation in novels clearly speaks to the some of the most formative themes in space syntax scholarship – for example, one can see its influence in the critique of territorial spatial correspondence models of social identity in 'The Architecture of Community' (Hanson and Hillier, 1987). A discussion of the environmentally determinist epistemology that informed Balzac's highly figurative descriptions of social milieus also prefaces Hillier's intellectual genealogy of the architecturally determinist 'paradigm of the machine' in *Space is the Machine* (Hillier, 1996, p. 385-6). Hanson's subsequent return to literary subjects (Hanson, 2012) might therefore, reasonably be thought to anticipate new theoretical trajectories in space syntax research. Here Hanson argues that a syntactically-informed approach to the novels of Charles Dickens and Peter Ackroyd can help elucidate how the literary practices of these authors were inflected by their experience of London's built environment. Hanson's deliberately blurs the boundary between literary texts and mappable architectural domains. Her method of mapping literary representations onto urban locations suggests how qualities of presentiment, contrast and ambiguity evoked in the fictional spaces of the novel can be articulated through an approach that draws as much on her deep knowledge of London's morphological history (see Hanson 1989a; 1989b), as on a close reading of the texts themselves. The connotative possibilities Hanson identifies in London's urban spaces are presented in terms of the *uncertainties* inherent what she presents as 'thick spatial descriptions'. Uncertain because while such descriptions are complex and unstable they are not random. On the contrary, Hanson's work implies how the interpenetration of fictional *spaces* and morphological-historical *texts* might be articulated through a process of mapping.

Yet if it is possible to argue, by mapping sections of localized environmental description onto real urban locations, that fictional space and real space might be in some way ontologically and epistemologically conjoined in literary practice, this mapping also begs the question: 'might not city and text be coeval in a more generic sense?' Might we read the time-space framing of a literary narrative as being 'city-like', just as it is conventional to think of writing the city as a textual representation? This proposition has a particular implication for space syntax theory since it raises the issue of the ambiguity of time-space descriptions with regard to meaning to the level of generic function rather than restrict it to localized phenotypes.

2. The architectural chronotope of the bourgeois city

The form of the modern novel matured in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries making it contemporary with the rise of industrial society. While the moral agency of the middle class found its expression in the novel, its socio-economic agency was certainly located in the city. The point is not, however, to draw attention to the proliferation of urban novels in the nineteenth century so much as to propose that the structure of the novel evolved in city-like ways that could better express the constrained scope of individualistic agency. This question of agency formed a principal moral problematic in bourgeois society for which recognizable representations of the city as a knowable community offered an important source of resolution. Moretti (1998, p. 70) says of the modern European novel that '*what* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens' and that the *where* was largely determined by the birth pangs of nationalisms, empires, social classes and imperial cities in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, creating new imperatives for language.

The Russian literary theorist Bakhtin developed the term 'chronotope' to refer to those properties of a novel's narrative that encode a particular time-space framing. According to Beaton (2010) Bakhtin's intention was that the concept of the chronotope should not be limited to the analysis of the temporality of the text as an autonomous entity but that its significance extended into the relation of the text with the historical epoch in which it was written. The historically-realist chronotope therefore is said to represent an 'unrepeatable intersection of a fictional world with a given place and time in human history' (ibid, p. 75), what Borghart and De Dobbeleer (2010) refer to

as the 'documentary chronotope' of historical realism. According to Morson (2010, p. 93-4) the importance of unrepeatability in this chronotope assimilates Darwinian anti-essentialist thinking on the evolution of populations, thereby suggesting a critique of Hanson and Hillier's assumption that milieu-rich writing is necessarily environmentally determinist. On the contrary, Morson's emphasis is the contingency of events and the openness of time in the characteristic chronotope of the nineteenth-century novel – albeit within proscribed historical-geographical circumstances – a position more redolent of Hanson's later emphasis on the ambiguity of urban texts.

If cities are often represented in texts it is not surprising that textual metaphors are invoked to decode their materiality. The city, for example, is often described archaeologically as a 'palimpsest', neatly arranged in layers. Moretti (1998, p. 79) asks how 'we think about how novels read cities, how did they make them legible?' If, however, we bring a space syntax inflected understanding of the socio-spatial morphology of cities and communities to the literary text, the question can be turned around such that it is the *intelligibility* of the time-space framing of the chronotope rather than the legibility of the text as such that it is at issue. After Hillier (1996, p. 212-14) we might conceptualize this enquiry in terms of the 'virtual community' realized by the historically realistic or 'documentary' chronotope that aims to render a world that is recognizable to the reader (Beaton, 2010, p. 79). From the shared intelligibility of the chronotope, it is argued, arises the presentiment of what to expect on the next page without, however, being able to predict it in any detail.

Moretti (1998, p. 70) notes that 'Space is not 'outside' of narrative […] but an internal force, that shapes it from within.' However, his understanding of the *where* of the narrative is cast in traditional geographical terms. He puts dots and arrows on maps to highlight spatial patterns (for example of key locations in a the work of a novel or novelist). While these function well to illustrate his argument they point to the need for better temporal-spatial concepts with which to develop it further. Acknowledging this Moretti discusses the morphological (i.e. plot) structure of folk tales, noting how these assign particular functions of the narrative to particular spaces but equally stating that this archetypal formulation is inadequate to express the complex geographies of the modern novel (ibid*, p*. 70-73). Addressing this problem from another perspective Grossman (2013) has argued how accessibility to public transport systems including the mail coach and train gave rise to new narrative possibilities in Dickens' novels. In this respect Grossman represents an advance on Moretti in engaging directly with the *concept* of networks as possessing some kind of agency. The quotidian spaces of everyday life as distinct from particular systems of transport mobility, however, go rather under conceptualized in both studies.

Interestingly, Moretti (1998, p. 45) draws on Ernest Gellner's notion of language as taking place in a 'continuous logical space' in order to characterize society as a 'system of language-spaces' that are unstable at their boundaries. This bears a clear resemblance to Hillier and Leaman's (1973, p. 510) deployment of the idea of 'logical space', distinct from geographical 'real' space, as a relational domain in which both semantic and morphic arrangements are embedded. From this perspective we can make the case for a substantive *morphological* link between space, plot and language, between the time-space patterning of movement and encounter and narrative possibilities. Establishing the basis of this relation is crucial to realizing the implications of Hillier *et al*'s (1976, p. 180) argument that space is not a reflection of society but offers 'an alternative basis for encounter other than those dictated by the social structure'. Significantly, the urban street is offered as an example of a spatial site where 'profane mixing' of social categories might occur. The socially disruptive street is indeed an important aspect of the *architectural* chronotope of the realist novel. It is important to note, however, that the 'street' as a description in logical space does not necessarily map onto any pre-conceived images we may have of an actually materialized urban street. Rather it highlights the possible profanities of 'streetness' as a source of perturbation in the time-space organization of society and as a concurrent source of innovation in language. Similarly the city does not *necessarily* have to assume any particular material form. Rather, it articulates a particular way of being, seeing, performing and imagining constrained only by a need to be socially intelligible, that is to extend the 'raw material' of meaningfulness, its basic possibility, beyond the life and psychology of any individual.

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3. Time and space in two more nineteenth-century novels

The two novels that are the focus of this discussion are examples of the nineteenth-century chronotope of historical realism, a brief summary of both can be found in Table 1. *Middlemarch* (henceforth *MM*) by George Eliot was published in 1874 but looks back to the still largely rural world of c.1830 just before the extension of the franchise to the industrial towns and the urban middle class in 1832 (Eliot, 1994). By contrast Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (henceforth *NS*) was published earlier 1848, but is written in almost documentary mode about the conditions of industrial society at that time (Gaskell, 1986). Both novels are concerned to articulate in different ways the transformation of English society and the play of individual lives caught up in the sweep of historical forces. Both involve female protagonists, Margaret Hale (*NS*) and Dorothea Brooke *(MM)* whose moral purpose is tested in different ways by the challenges of circumstance that are unfolded in the narrative.

North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell was published in 1848. The novel is concerned with what was widely perceived in Britain of the 1840s as increasing social dislocation and antagonism between social classes as a consequence of industrialization and rapid urbanization. While these changes had brought unprecedented wealth to the new mercantile and manufacturing middle classes in northern industrial cities it also represented a weakening of customary social ties based on the older, primarily southern, aristocratic rural order. In the new factory towns many saw the interests of 'masters' and 'men' as irreconcilably opposed. In *North and South* Gaskell's concern was to show that this was not inevitably the case and that with moral courage and perseverance, epitomized by her heroine Margaret Hale, mutual understanding between the social classes and between the industrial north and aristocratic south could prevail. In the novel this essentially Christian and liberal reconciliation is enacted through the relationship of Margaret with the mill owner John Thornton and the relationship of both with the working class Higgins family.	***Middlemarch*** by George Eliot was published in 1874. The novel describes life in a small provincial town in England in an earlier part of the nineteenth-century (c. 1830) shortly before the Great Reform Act of 1832 extended the Parliamentary franchise to the urban middle class in the new industrial cities. In this respect the novel anticipates social change but this rarely directs the narrative even when it is made explicit. There is little scope in the novel for any kind of 'heroism' as conventionally defined. Eliot's purpose in presenting her diorama of an English community is to examine how lives and fates become intermingled. Rather than a single central narrative many contingent narratives are interpolated. These generally concern the consequences for Middlemarch society of the intrusion of the outside world. Only the relationship of the gentry-class Dorothea Brooke with the relatively impoverished and itinerant Will Ladislaw is genuinely transformative. Even here, however, there is little sense of resolution beyond Eliot's insistence on the imperceptible effects of 'unhistoric acts' on the passage social progress.

Table 1: *North and South* and *Middlemarch* in brief

Neither novel is straightforward in terms of narrative construction but both involve their female protagonists in complex relationships with 'new men' of the coming social order, John Thornton (*NS*) and Will Ladislaw *(MM)*. In both cases the eventual realization of these relationships in marriage depends on the ability of Margaret and Dorothea to critique the social codes to which they originally adhered, and to become sensitive to the value of alternative codes of which they may previously been unaware by dint of class identity or geographical location. Margaret Hale (*NS*) is the middle-class daughter of a clergyman father and mother from a wealthy London family. By nature a creature of England's southern home counties Margaret is forced by her father's change of profession to move to the city of Milton-Northern (based on Manchester) in the industrial north. Dorothea Brooke is the upper middle-class heiress among the rural gentry that gravitate around the small provincial town of Middlemarch in the English Midlands. Her first marriage, made very young to the landed clergyman and frustrated scholar Mr Casaubon who later dies, gives her heightened sensibility to the possibility of lives wasted through mischance and unhappiness. The temporal scope of both novels, in the range of two to three years, is also similar.

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Yet there are also striking differences between the two novels. *North and South* is a narrative sustained by the unifying presence of its heroine Margaret Hale through successive changes of geographical location. Margaret's odyssey, which is both corporeal and moral, takes her from Harley Street in London to the Hampshire village of Helstone, the northern seaside resort of Heston, the manufacturing town of Milton-Northern, where the majority of the novel is set, before returning briefly to Harley Street and Helstone, concluding eventually in Harley Street as a prelude, we imagine, to marriage to Mr Thornton and a final return to Milton Northern. Throughout this entire sequence of departure and return Margaret offers the sole narrative continuity. In general the novel's cast of characters is strongly defined geographically, allowing them to represent different aspects of English life: the metropolitan, the rural and the industrial. In very approximate terms then, geographical location provides an effective proxy for social networks. It follows that if this novel were re-written without Margaret Hale, the social network it portrays would fragment into groups of characters largely restricted to geographically discrete regions, thereby rendering its overarching narrative incoherent.

By contrast in *Middlemarch* Eliot presents her 'study of provincial life' as an historical diorama of a community closely knit by historically and geographically concentrated social relations that she refers to metaphorically as a 'web' (Eliot, 1994, p. 141). As a consequence the story of Dorothea and Will is only one, though the one which requires the fullest development, of many that comprises a narrative that draws to a close in a strangely abbreviated style (after some 800 pages), thereby implying no closure at all but rather a continuation of the diorama. The novel unfolds in the town houses, country estates and open spaces in and around Middlemarch. Yet it would hardly count as a country house novel in the manner of Jane Austen, not least because history explicitly intrudes on the narrative, particularly in the agitation for political reform. It is notable how those characters with origins or connections external to Middlemarch, particularly the manipulative reprobate John Raffles but also, Will Ladislaw (foreign blood), Tertius Lydgate (family from the north, educated in Paris), Nicholas Bulstrode (of uncertain London origins) and even Fred Vincy (local boy educated at Cambridge) supply many of the sources of perturbation to the town's social life. It is, nonetheless, a small world where everybody knows everyone else. In approximate terms the main cast of middle class and gentry protagonists are also free to move from everywhere to everywhere else, appearing in multiple locales. If the story Dorothea and Will were to be written out of the novel there would be no shortage of alternative narrative strands, for example the romance of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth or the troubled relationship of Lydgate and his wife Rosamond, that could take its place without significantly altering the overall plot structure.

Reflecting on the relationship of geography to social networks in the two novels it possible with syntactic concepts, to note that whereas *NS* is plotted in terms of the *movement* of Margaret Hale creating interfaces between diverse social groups in a variety of situations, *MM* is plotted in terms of the circulatory pattern of *occupation* productive of the background noise of social life that characterizes a face-to-face community (Hillier, 1996, p. 316). Whereas the former implies the symbolic significance of social encounters that are realized at least partially in public, we might expect that in the latter more significant social interaction typically occurs in the domestic interior. This difference in plotting is significant to understanding how the two novels serve particular images of Williams' knowable community. Whereas a community characterized by movement is typically realized transpatially (i.e. as spatially non-correspondent) as a larger-scale structure, a community characterized by occupation is spatially localized (i.e. spatially correspondent). Thus whereas we might expect the narrative of *NS* to integrate a range of different social groups, we might also expect *MM* to be more socially homogenous. In terms of articulating the knowable community the broad documentary ambition of Gaskell contrasts with Eliot's concern to explore the nuances and contradictions of tightly meshed social relationships in particular social situations. This concern perhaps dictates the narrower social range of *MM* as more being closely aligned with the world of the author's own experience. These systems of plot construction do not, of course, exhaust Gaskell and Eliot's ideas of community. On the contrary, they enable the realization of particular narrative and symbolic possibilities that can serve to subvert static characterizations of plot.

In *NS* Gaskell makes many positive references to Margaret Hale's adventurous nature and in particular to the physicality of her movements. Her liking to walk, even to 'tramp' in a most unlady like fashion (Gaskell, 1986, p. 48) advertises her vitality, and independence of mind and body. In Milton-Northern Margaret's walking brings her into unanticipated encounters with the urban working class, notably with Nicholas and Bessy Higgins, who are thus symbolically introduced into the knowable community of a novel concerned with middle-class strategies for overcoming social division. In *MM* Dorothea shares with Margaret a pronounced dislike of both mental and physical inaction but unlike Margaret she often finds herself confined by her gendered identity as a wife and member of the gentry class. Dorothea journeys out alone on foot or in her carriage from the surrounding estates whenever excuse or opportunity presents, yet her movement is, on the whole, less transformative in narrative terms than Margaret's. Will Ladislaw's movements provide a better contrast with Dorothea's. They comprise little more than a futile a mixture of walking and waiting for Dorothea to be released from the routines of a lady of a superior social class to himself and to whom he has limited access. Nevertheless his movement is symbolically significant as a source of latent upheaval. We are told that Will's character was of a kind with those who are 'continually creating collisions and nodes for themselves in dramas which nobody is prepared to act with them' (Eliot, 1994, p. 191). For example, the energy expended by Will in long walk out to the church at Lowick in the hope of encountering Dorothea feels like a positive *movement* that must produce change sooner or later. Although his purpose is frustrated Will's movement nonetheless anticipates a tipping point in the web of relations that defines the knowable community of Middlemarch.

Plot and movement combine to create narrative possibilities in *NS* and *MM* that are realized through the language of the novels. In *NS* Margaret sets off by herself for Mr Thornton's Mill having 'learnt by this time to thread her way through the irregular stream of human beings that flowed through the Milton Streets' (Gaskell, 1984, p. 226). On reaching the mill she stumbles into the scene of an imminent riot brought about by Mr Thornton's determination to break a strike by importing cheap Irish labour. Once in his house she demands that Mr Thornton go down and face the crowd of working men in person. Observing from an upper window how the angry crowd is likely to turn violent Margaret rushes downstairs herself with the intention of protecting him.

> […] she had lifted the great iron bar of the door with imperious force – had thrown the door open wide – and was there, in face of that angry sea of men, her eyes smiting them with flaming arrows of approach. The clogs were arrested in the hands that held them – the countenances, so fell not a moment before, now looked irresolute, and as if asking what this meant. (ibid, p. 233-4)

This moment of sublime multi-layered social transgression is not only gendered in its use of a female body to protect the male body but is also quite overtly sexual in exposing Margaret to the amassed male gaze (Dodsworth, 1986, p. 18-19). Margaret's will to movement has then the dual capacity to realize the novel's overarching theme of social reconciliation between classes but also transform this into something more contingent and altogether more dangerous, a motion towards that draws upon itself the unpredictability and animalistic nature of human passions. Unexpectedly, there is what might appear as an approximately equivalent moment in the very different world of Middlemarch when Dorothea's uncle, Mr Brooke presents himself to the townspeople as a Parliamentary candidate for the pro-social reform Whig party. Compelled to argue his political cause to a crowd of all classes in the town's market place Mr Brooke finds he is unable to cope with the organized mockery of his Tory opponents. An effigy of him that is pushed into the crowd appears to echo his words back at him. Shortly afterwards Brooke is forced leave the balcony from which he was speaking amidst derisory laughter and a hail of eggs.

In both examples particular locales, the private the mill yard (*NS*), the public market place *(MM)* are used to provide opportunities for middle- or upper-class protagonists to come face to face with the unknowable crowd in situations that frame the narrative. In the setting of Thornton's mill Margaret's desire to protect Thornton, which she sees simply as the duty of a Christian woman towards a man under threat, is open to crude misinterpretation. Similarly in *MM* the same liberal arguments Mr Brooke is able to present with patrician ease in the dining rooms of country houses signify a too-

casually assumed right to rule when uttered in the setting of the market place. In *NS* men who can be sympathized with as individuals in their houses become collectively subhuman in the act of rioting. In *MM* Brooke's failure gently presages a social change (the extension of the franchise) that has yet to come but which makes no room in public life for men like him. In *NS* the particularity of Margaret's exposure in the mill yard precipitates Gaskell into some of her most expressive use of language; in *MM* the market place is where the wider tides of history suddenly intrude most brutally on Mr Brooke – and no mediating female presence is offered here to shield him from them. The mill yard and the market place are then, sites through which Gaskell and Eliot are able express the limits of the knowable community.

'Movement', therefore, in the space syntax sense of producing interfaces between different spaces (Hillier, 1996, p.317), creates opportunities for representation in the chronotope of the historical novel by enabling uncertain boundaries between heterogeneous social groups to be breached. In this context the celebration of the street in urban scale space syntax research begs the question of its literary representation as a 'profane space' corrosive of established social categories. The narrative and symbolic significance of Margaret's movement in *NS* is reinforced by Gaskell's descriptions of streets, particularly in the northern towns but also in London. On first reaching the northern seaside town of Heston *en route* to Milton, Margaret notes how on the main street 'every thing looked more '"purposelike"' […] There were no smock-frocks, even among the country-folk; they retarded motion, and were apt to catch on machinery' (Gaskell, 1986, p. 95). In Milton itself Margaret and her father were 'whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses' *(*ibid, p. 96). The streets of Milton are scenes of almost perpetual motion and busyness, a virtual community where the working class are becoming visible. Yet streets are also, by their very nature liminal spaces. Margaret description of the 'great dead wall' that bounds Thornton's mill suggests it makes her uncomfortable (ibid, p. 226). Conversely, the opening of the front door of the Hale's Milton house directly onto the street makes her feel vulnerable when her fugitive brother Frederick is hiding within. When Margaret is seen by Thornton with a young man whom he does not know to be her brother in a field near a suburban railway station her moral probity is brought into question. Gaskell also uses the flow of her street scenes (as well as the untimely death of many protagonists) as a way of symbolizing the recurrent theme of time-space displacement in *NS*. For example when the Hales pass nearby the London home of Margaret's childhood *en route* to the north and then again, when she returns south to Helstone with the family friend Mr Bell, there is a strong sense of the familiar rhythms of life going on in the absence of the people who once participated in them, signifying an historical process in which change is revealed as much as concealed by continuity (ibid, p. 93, 472).

If the profanity of the street is ultimately an affirmative agency in *NS*, it is decidedly *other* to respectable Middlemarch society in the 1830s. There streets are associated mainly with an idea of London that was 'distrusted by the provincial mind'; for example Bulstrode's dishonourable past has an association with the same London thoroughfares that were also symbols of modernity (Eliot, 1984, p. 614). His past and that of Will Ladislaw is known to the itinerant rogue John Raffles who brings something of the urban netherworld with him to Middlemarch where he spreads malicious gossip that is picked up and circulated through the town's streets and taverns. In *MM* provincial streets are not yet the frictionless circulatory systems envisaged by Edwin Chadwick. On the contrary in the streets of the 'unsanitary' town of Houndsley Fred Vincy contracts typhoid fever. His doctor Lydgate has corresponding anatomical ambitions to identify the bodily 'thoroughfares' that are the 'first lurking place' of anguish, mania and crime (ibid, p.165). In these respects the profanity of the street is represented as potentially disruptive to established order of Middlemarch life. This potential is encapsulated in the retort of Dorothea's sister Celia to Dorothea following the latter's announcement of her intention to be remarried to Will Ladislaw – at the cost of forfeiting her deceased husband's estate – and to move to London: 'How can you always live in a street? And you will be so poor' (ibid, p. 821), Celia exclaims. This is perhaps as close as *MM* comes to a denouement when the possibility of social change in Middlemarch is realized concretely: marriage across classes at the expense of land and at the risk of being socially outcast (though nothing so dramatic in fact takes place). The symbol of this democratic transformation is the street but its historical reality, like the historical reality of London and the provincial manufacturing towns, remain consistently beyond the horizon of *MM*.

While the streets of London figure largely as imagined spaces in *MM*, it is Dorothea's reaction to the actual streets of Rome that precipitates arguably Eliot's most sustained use of figurative language in the novel. This occurs in the context of Dorothea's unhappy wedding journey to Rome as the wife of Mr Casaubon. It is the one passage in the novel in which principal characters are represented beyond the familiar environs of Middlemarch, a movement that allows for a dramatic contrast. Dorothea's unhappiness is exacerbated by her alienation from the city. She is morbidly perturbed by what she perceives as the 'stupendous fragmentariness of Rome'.

> […] the city of visible history, where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar (ibid, p.192).

The weight of history that Dorothea perceives in Rome to be bearing down incoherently on the present is too much for a psyche that is decidedly ahistorical and aheroic when compared, for example, with Margaret Hale's determination in *NS* to physically intervene between masters and men in the name of class reconciliation. In *MM* time and space are certainly not suppressed but the major events of national history remain peripheral to the social web within which the 'growing good of the world progresses partly through unhistoric acts' (ibid, p. 838). In Rome, one suspects, Dorothea's dreamlike experience of the city's fragmentariness was one in which the signifying pieces of Imperial and Papal history were not held in place by the sympathy she had expected from her husband in showing her around a city he knew well when she did not.

4. Conclusion

This paper has argued that Gaskell's *North and South* and Eliot's *Middlemarch* exploit the possibilities of the historically realistic or documentary chronotope to realize two very different imaginaries of the bourgeois city in nineteenth-century England. While Gaskell's novel proposes in heroic terms an inclusive, paternalistic, liberal and almost ideal, city, characterized by social understanding between social classes, Eliot's presents social change as a pervasive yet equally recessive undercurrent of the narrative, her characters managing it piecemeal as necessary and with a heightened sense of the ultimate uncertainty of events. In this respect it is interesting to note how both novels also present clear syntactic images. While that of *North and South* points to the economically optimized, socially heterogeneous and circulatory, essentially public, city of the streamlined movement economy, that of *Middlemarch* suggests a rather more static, conservative, bounded communality, a feudal relic, perhaps an example of the 'myth of historic spatiality' (Hillier and Netto, 2002, p.183). Yet in both cases such images can also be misleading. The contrasting modes of time-space organization at play in these novels can be usefully decoded chronotopically, not least in terms of the architecture of their knowable communities, to interrogate further not only the ethical and normative positions they articulate but also the large number of narrative possibilities to which they give rise.

At this point one is entitled to ask whether the argument has come full circle. Does the notion of the bourgeois city as an architectural chronotope, in other words, advance the proposition that the text can be read as a city or has it simply elucidated an alternative mode in which the city is written as a text? To the extent that the latter is true it serves to highlight the salient point that to draw an absolute distinction between city and text, material and meaning, analysis and representation is misleading. If the chronotope is a literary concept it is also one that has evolved city-like texts that articulate particular representational framings of time-space. If space syntax is a formal method for mapping non-discursive spatial descriptions of cities it requires textual as much as numeric or visual representation to make its point, and that inevitably raises the question of what sort of representations it makes – a question that requires an hermeneutical as much as an heuristic response. Of course, if the text of a novel can be read as a city it remains a text nonetheless and in that sense describes a fictional world. Similarly, if the city as a material agency can be written as a text it remains, nonetheless, a city – the totality of which will always escape any given representation - syntactic or semantic. Whether it is the formal, textual or explicitly literary representations of the city that are at issue, however, the argument is the same, namely, that an

architectural chronotope is being deployed. It is this sense that the text can be read as a city, while at the same time drawing attention to the need to deconstruct the normative frameworks through which cities are (inevitably) written into texts.

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