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PLACE, CHARACTER AND IDENTITY: URBAN SPACE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *NIGHT AND DAY*

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МЕСТО, ХАРАКТЕР И ЛИЧНОСТЬ: УРБАНИСТИЧЕСКОЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВО В РОМАНЕ ВИРДЖИНИИ ВУЛФ «НОЧЬ И ДЕНЬ»

Объект исследования данной статьи – модернистский роман Вирджинии Вулф «Ночь и день». В отличие от других произведений, роман никогда не становился пристальным объектом внимания критиков. Автор рассматривает литературную репрезентацию урбанистического пространства и городской жизни в их связи с местом, характером и личностью. Пространство рассматривается с семиотической точки зрения с использованием термина М. Бахтина «хронотоп». Место в романе семантизируется, несёт определённое значение и становится маркером личности.

Ключевые слова: *модернистский роман, урбанистическое пространство, культурная метафора, личность.*

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf's novel is set in London in the heady days of the Women's Suffrage – the story time comprises the months between October 1910 and spring 1911. In the foreground are issues of identity. Its narrative construction interlinks the categories of sex and gender, age, generation, family relationships, place, social background, education, profession/occupation, lifestyle, cultural interests, and political convictions.

The spatial grounding of identity is particularly prominent in the novel. Place is semanticized, becomes space, a bearer of meaning. It can therefore be read in linguistic terms. Particularly Mikhail Bakhtin's term of the chronotope is very meaningful here: a concept which describes the interaction of time and space in the literary representation of human experience. Woolf's identity construction of her characters is decisively conducted through place – urban space and city life are closely bound up with the concept of identity. Place is a significant factor of identity formation for the protagonists in physical, social, emotional and psychological terms. The interpersonal relationships between Katharine Hilbery, William Rodney, Mary Datchet, Ralph Denham, and Cassandra Otway keep shifting almost to the end of the novel. The drama of their initially unacknowledged or wrongly assessed emotions unfolds against the background of places carefully selected and narratively (re-)constructed by Woolf. Place and space in Woolf are markers of identity.

All in all the novel refers to more than fifty locations in the metropolis (London), its suburbs and vicinity, other cities such as Manchester, and the countryside. The focus here will be on the intersection of place, character and identity in the instrumentalization of different locations within London and the respective creation of urban space by Woolf.[i]

London: place, character and identity

The largest part of the action is set in London. The literary representation of the urban landscape is characterized by subtle differentiations expressed through the places the protagonists inhabit. The characters' identity formation is shaped by their physical surroundings. The various locations the characters live in, frequent or interact in with each other strongly determine their lives, influence their character formation and function as markers and signifiers of their identity.

The place acquiring the greatest importance is Cheyne Walk, home of the Hilberys, one of the most distinguished families of England. It is located in Chelsea, on the river Thames, close to the centres of commerce and politics in the city and the cultural facilities offered by it. Because it is surrounded by a fine neighbourhood but also by poorer streets it presents a kind of link between the social classes. The niceness, individuality and charm of the house are perceivable at once to newcomers and social outsiders such as Ralph Denham. Cheyne Walk symbolizes human achievement and civilization of which literature is an essential part. This is very fitting if one thinks of the fact that famous writers like Thomas Carlyle, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne lived in the same street. Cheyne Walk is a place of domestic comfort including modern conveniences such as electricity and telephone, and a well-ordered place helping its inhabitants to a well-regulated and refined life amid a quickly changing world at the beginning of the twentieth century. The auditory descriptions stress the pleasant contrast of the calm and peaceful place with the noisy city with which it communicates but from which it keeps a well-chosen distance as well. However, in the perceptions of the young generation across the social divide the remoteness, sophistication and refinement of Cheyne Walk are at times set off disadvantageously from the freedom and unpretentiousness of the streets of London (10, 11, 24, 533): Ralph is awkwardly aware of his social inferiority there, and Katharine feels oppressed by the atmosphere at times as well. Their responses mark the beginning mental departure of the young ones.

Urban space as created in Cheyne Walk combines function and aesthetics. The house epitomizes modern urbanity as expressed in the layout and interior design, the furniture and furnishings, meals and parties, and the refined ambience and atmosphere. The structure of the house is strategically laid out to help its inhabitants to enjoy life in the metropolis at its best in their individual ways. The rooms are located very conveniently. The relationship between place and character is dialectical: The rooms impact the

inhabitants' character and behaviour and, at the same time, the people inhabiting them give a special character to the rooms which exude their personalities. Both character and place are thus defining each other and individuality is both a marker of place and personal identity. Moreover, the house represents society at large and its rooms come to signify different compartments of and attitudes to life.

The drawing-room on the middle floor is the most significant urban space created within the house commanding a view of the river, trees, cabs and people. It is the most refined room to which Mrs Hilbery has a very emotional attachment. For Ralph the room's lights enhance its effect as a symbol of civilization in whose glory the identity of the people is dissolved. The description underlines the room's functions both as lighthouse and sanctuary in the "dark, flying wilderness of the world" (421). Against this backdrop Ralph sees Katharine as "the light itself" (422) whereas he feels "like one of those lost birds fascinated by the lighthouse and held to the glass by the splendour of the blaze" (422). The wording suggests the precarious, potentially (self-)destructive character of their relationship across the social boundaries and documents an important stage in the identity formation of the protagonists narratively associated with concrete domestic urban space. Furthermore, the room is a place of leisure time, private entertainment and discussions about literature and art, and, significantly, the centre of societal life as represented by the Hilbery family epitomizing Edwardian society. Matters of utmost significance happen in this place where the norms of society are watched over. For Mr and Mrs Hilbery those are still the revered standards of the Victorian age.

The smaller room opening out of the drawing-room is a "family shrine" of sorts that Katharine shows to visitors. The live museum stores the collective memory of a glorious past materialized in the relics of her grandfather, the poet Richard Alardyce. The narrative accentuates the almost sanctified character of that place (15). Katharine's difficult identity as daughter and granddaughter of a family whose traditions need to be continued is addressed by Ralph in these very fitting surroundings. The holiness of the room is yet increased by its intimate character – it is separated from the much larger and more representative drawing-room and at times serves as an inner stage.

Mr Hilbery's study, which is situated on the ground floor, is a very silent, subterranean place with a skylight. Its furnishings testify to the professional literary occupations of its inhabitant. From here Mr Hilbery governs life as the formal, financial and moral head of the family. Significantly the debate about the fortunes of the young people takes place in his study and is characterized by strict formality – Hilbery's last desperate resistance against the alarming new moral claims of the young generation. His attempt at keeping up the house rules and norms of moral conduct underpins the function of the house as a symbol of society. By contrast Mrs Hilbery's

study is described as the place of a charming, but queer person who is often likened to a child due to her irrational, unsystematic, unfocused thinking and behaviour, her confused, incoherent talk and her quick, impulsive movements. The past is of more importance to her than the present, old poets more than the contemporary ones, the world of poetry more than social reality (119–123). In other words, she lives in the glorious past of the family and relives it daily. Her study offers Turner-like vistas of the river. The place is "undisturbed by the sounds of the present moment" (120). Her daughter fancies it as "a deep pool of past time" (120). When she works there with her mother she has the impression that they are bathed in the light of sixty years ago. Katharine's interior monologue exemplifies Woolf's conception of a room as a space of frozen time. It establishes a nexus between place, personality, occupation, thoughts, atmosphere, employing the principle of the material signifying the mental.

> Rooms, of course, accumulate their suggestions, and any room in which one has been used to carry on any particular occupation gives off memories of moods, of ideas, of postures that have been seen in it; so that to attempt any different kind of work there is almost impossible (120).

The quote suggests Katherine's dissatisfaction with fulfilling her mother's mission, the writing of her grandfather's biography, an enterprise in the dimensions of George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke whose success seems to decide about the family's right to their privileged position. (Re-)claiming the past for the sake of securing the present thus appears as doubtful from the start. The past oppresses Katharine so much in that room that she fears that it does not leave her enough space for individual development and personal identity. When the maids later clean Mrs Hilbery's study during her absence Katharine has the impression that they brush away sixty years and undo her own work, reducing it to insignificance.

Katharine's room, the place of a practically minded person of great determination who has no taste, interest or talent for literature and is given to contemplation and self-control, is equipped rather minimalistically, but the atmosphere is charged with her maturity and unconventionality. The room combines functionality with unpretentious luxury. Instead of hymn-books Katharine keeps old schoolbooks and dictionaries there which help her to pursue her interests in mathematics (kept a secret), astronomy and Greek that transgress the standards of the typical curriculum for nineteenth-century middle-class women. Her volatile cousin Cassandra who lives in the country is impressed by the effect of personality, place, and atmosphere when she watches Katharine getting dressed before the looking-glass. Whereas Cassandra's perspective accentuates the correlation of micro- and macrocosm (room, house, city) through visual impressions here, Katherine later strongly perceives the same correlation through auditory perceptions.

Yet in contrast to Cassandra's romantic image of her cousin Katharine's self-image is emancipatory (in the moment when she has to face her parents' dissatisfaction with her unconventional decision about her engagement and marriage):

> [...] there were sounds of knocking and sweeping, which proved that living people were at work on the other side of the door, and the door, which could be thrown open in a second, was her only protection against the world. Bus she had somehow risen to be mistress in her own kingdom; assuming her sovereignty unconsciously (510).

Katharine's title as "the lawful occupant of the upper rooms" (509) indicates her superiority within the family. Mr. Hilbery's study as the bulwark of patriarchy on the ground-floor is thus symbolically juxtaposed to his daughter's room as a space of female emancipation at the top of the house. The fact that Ralph is sent upstairs to Katharine by Mrs Hilbery and that he "mounted as high as he could" (523) symbolically suggests that he tries to build up a new kind of gender relationship with the woman he loves, to respect her as she is, her trying unconventionality and independence of character.

The dining-room, which also impresses Ralph because of its light effects, is located downstairs as Mr Hilbery's study is. It is a public place of ceremony, ritual, refinement in literature and education, and cultivated eating associated with good conversation and entertainment.[ii] For the immature Cassandra a dinner-party not only provides exhilaration, but education because of the access it allows her to a fragment of reality through conversation with all kinds of people (a parallel to Woolf's own ways of self-education). Over and again Woolf accentuates the impact of people on the atmosphere of places: In William's presence, who cares about tradition, Katharine had felt a certain unreality in the proceedings of the evening, but as soon that she was alone with Ralph "she felt at once that a constraint had been taken from them both. She felt that they were alone at the bottom of the house, which rose, storey upon storey, upon the top of them" (448). In other words, she is aware once more of her social situatedness, but not in an oppressive sense any more: Instead of the power of the house (a synecdoche for family, tradition, and society) to dictate her course in life, the phrasing suggests her and Ralph's position as self-responsible individuals within society. For Mrs Hilbery the room connotes conventionality and self-assurance, but for Katharine it is the place where she eventually becomes inofficially engaged to Ralph and gives up her self-control confessing her love to him. In that sense she is now ready to break the *chains* that have kept her tied to her childhood home and to the burden of family tradition and social obligation so far (this association suggests itself even more if one spells the pronunciation of *Cheyne* just differently).

In contrast to the drawing- and the dining-rooms as areas of public domestic space the kitchen is fashioned into a place of privacy, intimacy, secrecy, thrill, close physical contact, unorthodoxy, subversion, and latent moral danger. It is a subterranean place with dim light allowing for secret entrances and exits and private and secret talk (e.g. about illegitimate affairs and children) and making it necessary to sit less formally, i.e. very close together.

Most of the other private locations in London are no compare to Cheyne Walk. The greatest social contrast is provided by the place Ralph Denham, a clerk in a solicitor's office and busy with supporting his middle class family, lives at – Highgate in the suburbs of London. The few parallels between his place and Katharine's are his room at the top of the house likewise indicating his superior position within the family, and the auditory hints to the other inhabitants of the house, i.e. his social situatedness (36). Otherwise Cheyne Walk and Highgate are juxtaposed in social terms: civilization, domestic comfort, order, regularity, refinedness, individuality and charm vs. dilapidation, disorder, anarchy, anonymity, cheapness, gloom, and misery. The dissatisfactory state of things fully reveals itself to Katherine when she is invited by Ralph on a Sunday. Significantly both meet each other's families over tea for the first time and strangely enough Mrs Denham momentarily mistakes Katharine for one of her own girls whereas Katherine is mistaken about Mrs Hilbery's identity. The social contrast is expressed through the use of domestic details as metonymies and synecdoches, the sheer descriptions of sights, colours, and noises: Ralph's habitual lonely dining, family tea in the dining instead of in the drawing-room, the incessant babble of voices, the blaze of *un*shaded lights, the plush curtains, the untidy table, a disorderly household, and awful conversation. Instead of esteeming Ralph's personality and achievements the more in the light of so unbecoming a social milieu Katharine decides that Ralph's family is "commonplace, unshapely, lacking in charm, and fitly expressed by the hideous nature of their furniture and decorations" (401). The meal destroys her illusion of a friendship across the social boundaries. But Woolf is a great artist in offering varied perspectives and dialectical thinking, demonstrating the outcome of great mental results from trivial material incidents: A moment later the atmosphere of mental gloom resulting from a cheerless meal is changed because of the arrival of Ralph's sister Joan. Katharine's attitude towards Ralph's family becomes sympathetic. She does not appear an intruder any more and "The large family seemed to her so warm and various that she forgot to censure them for their taste in pottery" (403).

Ralph's room is the place of someone who might entertain greater visions but has to make do. There is a look of meanness, shabbiness and cheerlessness about it, the most private note consisting in a large perch with a tame and decrepit rook. But when Ralph shows his room to Katharine the situation is no longer one of social antagonism. The place becomes the site of im-

portant insights into identity formation and construction: Ralph is pleased by Katharine's praise of his family and becomes aware of his own pride in and deep attachment to his family. The atmosphere of nightly London as seen from his window does not fail to impact both of them; a more sincere relationship ensues. Both correct their initially negative judgments of each other. In a similar way that Ralph had addressed the problem of a difficult filial identity determined by the weight of familial tradition in Cheyne Walk, Katharine addresses an affiliated problem in Ralph's place now – mistaken identity, the clash between image and self-image. Self-critically she describes herself as a matter-of-fact, prosaic, rather ordinary character, whereas Ralph, judging her in her Cheyne Walk surroundings, thinks her mysterious and romantic. She pleads for abandoning fiction and delusion as the source of all evil and loneliness, but Ralph insists on keeping them because there might be nothing else but what they imagine. The scene ends upon a note of compromise: Katharine and Ralph confirm their compact at the time of Katharine's delayed marriage to William and Ralph promises to develop a more realistic view of Katharine's identity.

Significantly enough Woolf constructs the concept of place in such a way that some places are furnished with contrasting associations: Highgate is also the place of Katharine's uncle John. In other words, some places have social double functions, which is quite in agreement with socio-historical changes in the urban landscape: In the nineteenth century Highgate used to be an area where the ruling classes kept their second homes. From the middle of the century to the end of the Edwardian period there was a constant movement from the centre to the periphery of London due to overpopulation of the city and aggravation of social problems. The modern age of transport, the arrival of the railway (first line City-Greenwich in 1836) and the tube (Metropolitan Line from Paddington to Farringdon Street 1863) both caused the problems of decreasing population and deterioration of the living conditions in the city centre, homelessness and uprooting, and simultaneously offered the means of escaping them by moving out of town. In the 1880s the situation got slightly better due to decisive changes in the urban landscape, a consistent extension of transport above and below ground, the beginning of the commuter age and the availability of cheap transport. This promoted the phenomenon of suburbia. The middle and upper classes moved out of town, but the compromise of living in green suburbs and having a job in the city became available also to the working and lower middle classes. Suburbia, though a changeable class-specific phenomenon (flight and pursuit), came to represent typical middle- class features [cf. Hertel 1997: 29, 30–32, 40–45].

Woolf's narrative subtly reflects these processes. Highgate at the time when Ralph lives there is not the healthy romantic residential quarter any longer of the time when his mother moved there, but a dilapidated and gloomy area. The lifestyle of the family, unconventional as it may appear by

the standards of Cheyne Walk, is characterized by isolation, provincialism, dullness and domesticity – but one in stark contrast to the refined domesticity of Cheyne Walk. The prospect of social rise seems to have vanished for Ralph or, more precisely, the way to achieve it is too long and requires too many efforts and sacrifices. All the promises of suburbia, the dream of a life 'in the country' close to he city, seem to have been inverted and Ralph has no illusions about this any longer.

By contrast the story of Highgate as the place of Katharine's uncle John, a lawyer, which is told to Katharine by her aunts Millicent and Celia, serves three functions: First, presenting Highgate as a place of rural charm points to its agreeable origins in the changing urban landscape. Second, fashioning it as a place of romantic love seems to offer some emotional support for Katharine's relationship with the socially inferior Ralph. But then the story is turned into a narrative of insufficient female ambition for one's husband, lacking male professional ambition, thwarted male career hopes in India and England. Thus it thirdly becomes a cautionary tale for Katharine to be wise in marrying the right man and supporting him by all means (158–161). The topic of lives ended in social degradation is further elaborated on through a rather marginal but significant narrative glimpse at the house of a general's widow in Cromwell Road. The impressions of that house in dreary South Kensington, "the preserve of officers' widows" (342), on Katharine are those of material insufficiency (the curtains!) and gloom (333–336, 342). Again Woolf indicates the context of social and topographical changes in the urban landscape – Kensington used to be a fashionable residential quarter of the money aristocracy in the nineteenth century [cf. Hertel 1997: 254].

The private place of Mary, first a friend of Ralph's and later of Katharine's, too, is off the Strand whose "bustling mix of classes and types, professions and commerce" and "sense of possibility" [Nord 1995: 248] also exhilarate Elizabeth Dalloway in *Mrs Dalloway*. The rooms display modest comfort; the enjoyable light provides a parallel with Cheyne Walk. Mary derives utmost physical and mental pleasures from this place. Eating one's breakfast alone in such surroundings is a synecdoche for her satisfaction with and thankfulness for her independent existence. The rooms signify a space that Mary is pleased to have literally and symbolically created for herself at the top of that house, perfectly expressing her personality, identity and mode of existence. From a country parsonage she made it to London. The city affords her a new and emancipatory lifestyle. Her self-made existence, her job and a 'room of her own,' are sources of satisfaction denied to Katharine so far, who appears as an alien not only in Mary's office or Ralph's family home, but also in Mary's private rooms. Ralph notices that the contrast between Mary's private place and her office work keeps her well-poised and satisfied. Her identity as shaped through work and privacy in adequately functionalized places is well-balanced. Additionally to her political commitment Mary takes pride in the fact that young people with ar-

tistic and/or political aspirations come from all over London to her place to discuss art or reform projects there. She does not mind the additional work but, instead, enjoys the contrast to her office routine and feels ennobled by this experience. This aspect leads to a further differentiation of the identity question, setting side by side the aspects of daily drudgery (unpaid or for money), the pursuit of other aspirations in one's spare time, the contrast between private and public worlds, professional and private lifestyles: Mary is a well-balanced woman also in the sense that she is able to rejoice both in the solitude of her rooms, e.g. darning stockings [iii], and in the multitude of meetings and discussions with many people. Her remarkable social double existence fascinates Ralph who finds the combination of books and stockings in her female identity odd at first. Additionally Mary pursues more political interests in her rooms or – like Ralph – works on manuscripts at night. The references to "her high, lonely room at the end of the drive" (379), the "lighted window near the top of the house" (386), the light from her window across the dark street as "a sign of triumph shining there for ever" (538) and the "illuminated blinds, an expression [...] both of something impersonal and serene in the spirit of the woman within, working out her plans far into the night – her plans for the good of the world that none of them was ever to know" (538) signify a space of female autonomy, agency, independence and non-conventionality, but also female self-sacrifice. Mary's place functions as an emotional fortress for herself, a temporary refuge for friends, and a regular crossroad for people with diverse backgrounds, opinions and aims in life, an exchange interlinking heterogeneous social experiences and practices. Her identity results from the union between place, person, private and professional occupation.

William Rodney, Katharine's fiancé, is a member of the oldest family in Devonshire. Like Ralph he is a clerk with literary ambitions, but unlike Ralph he 'resides' in style in a historical place close to the King's Bench Walk, a small court of high eighteenth-century houses. The descriptions evoke the London of Samuel Johnson. In public affairs often awkward and embarrassed William is fully at ease in his private refuge. Usually scrupulously well dressed, with a "touch of aristocratic opulence" (55) he likes to stride about it in a faded crimson dressing-gown and slippers and make his friends and guest feel comfortable through the modest luxury of meals and entertainment. Ralph feels at home at once there and Katharine cannot but notice the extreme shabby comfort of his place (the *un*curtained windows). The room is the place of a person who minds tradition and entertains many personal tastes, carefully guarded from the public. But it is also the place of a person with an inconsistent identity – loving, writing and speaking about literature, but not able to make a living from it and perhaps living in greater luxury than his financial means (which are left obscure) afford him: The place looks artistic, as if the home of an artist, but William only writes poetry and plays in his spare time. He enjoys the cultural facilities London has

to offer and could not live without them as he confesses to Ralph who cannot afford them on an equal scale [iv]. The talk between William and Ralph in William's place significantly touches upon the contrast between job and leisure time, public sphere and privacy, office routine and artistic/creative interests. Debates like these expand the identity discussion towards the determination of the protagonists by what they do professionally. Their work places are significant in this context, too.

Ralph's office is in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He has made some career over the past years but has arrived now at the point of professional and private dissatisfaction wanting to put his ambition as a writer and his wish for a life in the country into practice. Contrasting with the monotonous part of Lincoln's Inn Fields as a business site is its garden, which offers a short relief from office drudgery over lunch time with its trees and sparrows. It is in these rural surroundings that Ralph and Mary can address personal and emotional issues and plans for the future.

The Suffrage Office where Mary serves as an unpaid volunteer is located in Russell Square. Like Ralph's and Katharine's private rooms it is on the top floor indicating her exceptional achievement as a female professional. The history of the house has taken a similar development from private to professional: The old house originally owned by a great city merchant is now let out in slices to a number of societies. Once more Woolf thematizes the ambivalent results of structural changes in the urban landscape and social mobility: In the first third of the nineteenth century private houses were pulled down or converted into bank, insurance and business buildings and the population of the city dislocated and driven to the surrounding parts so that by the 1870s almost no locals were left [cf. Hertel 1997: 30, 31].

Visitors of Mary's office notice the noises of professionality – typewriters and formal voices. The *un*shaded electric light and the *un*curtained window emphasize the social contrast with Cheyne Walk as well as the professional character of the place. The social difference between the worlds of Katharine and Mary are tellingly brought out in these surroundings. Funnily enough Katharine's identity is mistaken on her first visit – Mary expects the printer. The curious incident suggests Katharine's potential role as a future professional confirmed later by her willingness to think about joining the new Society for the Education of Democracy. The atmosphere in the office appears utterly alien to her; the reader notes the clash of private and public worlds. Katharine looks strangely out of place because of her outward appearance, which betrays her social status. She seems to be from another world subversive of Mary's so that the latter instinctively seeks to impress Katharine with her own one. Katharine's difference communicates itself to the other office workers so that, asked about her membership in their society, she has to reveal her true identity as Alardyce's grand-daughter. There are two more mistaken identities in that scene: Ralph is also mistaken for

the printer, and Mary has to correct Katharine's impression that she runs the office. Again Woolf manages to offer different perspectives on the same phenomenon, professional lives of females. Shortly before, Mary's sense of professional importance had been accentuated: She feels

> [...] that she was the centre ganglion of a very fine network of nerves which fell over England, and one of these days, when she touched the heart of the system, would begin feeling and rushing together and emitting their splendid blaze of revolutionary fireworks – for some such metaphor represents what she felt about her work, [...] (85).

This is a view shared by Mr Clacton, the boss of the office, who regards the office and its workers as a telephone exchange for the exchange of ideas, as "the centre of an enormous system of wires, connecting us up with every district of the country" (273). During Katharine's visit now Mary's demonstration of her professional efficiency is set off against Katharine's reductive impression of office life as a dream characterized by its aloofness from normal life, its artificiality and unreality. She compares the people working there to "enchanted people in a bewitched tower" (98), with ""all the tools of the necromancer's craft at hand" (98), "concocting their drugs, and flinging their frail spiders' webs over the torrent of life which rushed down the streets outside" (99). Later Woolf offers another modification: Mary's professional self-concept shifts from temporary frustration back to renewed affirmation after private disappointment. She renounces private happiness as a wife and mother in favour of her profession (282, 283).

Mary's enjoyment of her professional status also finds expression in her eating habits. Lunch time is not spent in the office, but in a restaurant nearby, in self-gratification over substantial meals – like a labour aristocrat. Besides, she engages in cultural activities over lunch time. Her habits contrast decisively with those of her Puritan-minded colleague Mrs Seal, who enjoys the rural parts of the square (like Ralph in Lincoln's Inn Fields), eating her sandwiches beneath the plane-trees.

Russell Square also has a social double function. It used to be the former home of the Alardyces, Mrs Hilbery's parents. Mrs Hilbery's recollections of her childhood home connect the place with the still happy marriage of her parents and refined luxury (chandeliers! 107). This nostalgic vision is modified by Katharine who assigns them the status of a legend and raises more critical questions about the past and the family's identity. Again Woolf gives characters and places a historical and socio-cultural context which makes their identity more authentic: As in the case of Highgate, Russell Square has also seen its transformation. The narrative link between the two socially different sides of the square – the noble past contrasting with the current degradation – expands on the nature of office life as identity factor. Woolf offers three different attitudes towards the effect of office life on the character

and psyche of the people working there: Katharine (cf. above) reports its inhabitants as queer-looking and points out that even Mary appeared different in that atmosphere. This leads Mr Hilbery to reflect on the office atmosphere as "very bad for the soul" (105). Only Mrs Hilbery is delighted to hear that the clerks read poetry – there must be something nice about them. And it is she who counters her daughter's unfair and condescending remark that the clerks do not read literature as her family does with a more generous, humanistic view suggesting the outlet character of literary interests which ennoble the identity of the office workers in her eyes. Unfortunately the value of that statement is qualified by the fact that Mrs Hilbery's only other notion of office life derives from a chance view behind the counter of her bank – but this is in perfect agreement with her habit of favouring imagination to reality. It is noteworthy, however, that most of the office workers in the novel (Ralph, Mary, Mr Clacton, William) embrace contrasting interests; some of them aspire to artistic fame. The clerks and secretaries develop additional identities. Though the working rhythm with its drudgery and monotony almost deforms them they are no modern working robots. The only person who does not pursue literary or artistic interests though she has 'inherited' them by blood is Katharine, modelled on Virginia Woolf's sister Vanessa [Drabble/Stringer 1990: 623]. But she entertains contrasting interests as well (cf. above). City life as represented in Woolf's narrative can thus be said to provide more or less all protagonists with multiple or more complex identities. Katharine, William, and Mary fully participate in the city's cultural possibilities. Yet the different places the protagonists frequent, their vantage points of observation, variously determine their city experience and result in differing perceptions of the city.

Conclusion

Woolf's city novel demonstrates the importance of the narrative elements of place and space for the formation and construction of identity. Her text makes use of real, historical, lost, imaginary, metaphorical, and gendered spaces. Place occurs as a setting, a realistic milieu and concrete physical scenery, but its functions go beyond the mimetic and include the symbolic. Place has topographical, geographical, social, cultural, emotional, aesthetic, and psychological qualities. It is linked up with matters of personal, social, and national identity. Places and people form a space created by the writer to negotiate identity. Both space and identity are instable and shifting – space is "not an independent variable [...] but an intersubjective phenomenon" [Baumgarten 2006: 81, reference to Dickens]. The result of this complex identity construction is a narrative entanglement of multiple roles, perspectives and perceptions of space and identity.

Some of the literary representations may well be seen as grounded in the writer's biography and her connection with the Bloomsbury Group (e.g. the

familiarity with colonial civil servant careers; the clash between Victorianism and modernism due to her childhood spent in the nineteenth, and her adulthood spent in the twentieth century; the roles and duties of daughters; female self-education; the attempts of the young at autonomy; the opposition to Victorianism and attempts at promoting a modern culture of equal standing; professional ambitions; the attempt to control life and fiction; the commitment to female concerns; experiences with office work and societies; papers and meetings; political activism).

Because of the fact that in the mode of presentation place and character are irretrievably bound up with each other the locations get 'filled' with characteristic thoughts and behaviour. Place is thus fashioned into socio-cultural, psychological, and emotional space. It functions as a bearer of meaning, a cultural metaphor. Especially the metropolis bears ambivalent connotations. It is a space where to search for identity, individuality, freedom and emancipation, but also a place of overstimulation, insecurity, isolation, frustration, longing for emotional attachment and companionship, difficult integration. The urban space created by Woolf offers her characters occasions for struggle, character formation, self-discovery, self-making, self-fashioning, social positioning, and gender awareness. Furthermore, Woolf's urban vision is endowed with a modern (self-)consciousness. The experience of city life and urban space is presented as a problem of perception which bears on the problem of identity. Subjective, fragmentary and heterogeneous perceptions result in instable identities. The concept of identity emerging from the intersection of place, character, and identity in Woolf's creation of urban space is a non-essentialist, social constructivist one: Urban space and city life function as cultural metaphors connoting a multiple, complex, heterogeneous identity characterized by fragmentation, hybridity, in-betweenness, and instability.

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[i] For further exploration of the instrumentalization of the vicinity of London, Manchester, the English countryside, and more specialized aspects of urban space, city life and identity construction please see the forthcoming essay on "Urban Space, City Life and Identity Construction in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*: The Fusion of Material and Mental Landscapes."

[ii] The nexus between good eating and good thinking is elucidated by Woolf in more detail in her essay *A Room of One's Own*.

[iii] There are in fact more intertextual references to *Mrs Dalloway*, for example a Septimus among William Rodney's audience when he gives his paper in Mary's rooms, and references to Big Ben.

[iv] The provincial Richard Larch in Arnold Bennett's *A Man from the North* (1898) actually seems a crossbreed of single features of Ralph's and William's personalities and lifestyles: he is a clerk in the city with literary ambitions who has taken his quarters in noble Knightsbridge, but whose place looks mean and whose social integration remains peripheral – he is excluded from the cultural and societal attractions of the metropolis for financial reasons. In contrast to him, the artist exile George Edwin Cannon in Bennett's novel *The Roll Call* (1918) shares them and euphorically enjoys this sense of London's cultural and social omnipresence due to his being based in Chelsea [cf. Hertel 1997: 365–368].

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