

## The Presence of Place in Literature – with a Few Examples from Virginia Woolf

Henri Lefebvre has said that “any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about” (Lefebvre, 1974, 15). This is the horror – or the joy – that soon announces itself to any new student of place in literature: place emerges as, and *through*, a massive complexity of socio-cultural structures and relations, behaviour and practices, language and discourses. Added to that, it is a product of historical and natural forces as well as of bodily perception, emotions and the imagination. In other words, the question of place in literature has overwhelming ramifications. For this reason I will limit this article to touch only on one possible angle out of an endless range of approaches. I want to concentrate on the bodily experience of place in literature, or how place may be called forth in language and literature as a physical, sensory experience. Later, I will offer a few examples from Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). The reason why I choose this angle is that discourse analysis and concerns with socio-cultural meaning have dominated the reception of literature for so many years, always with a tendency to ignore, or even invalidate, physical dimensions of reality and the realm of the body. In response to this disproportion in the general reception of literature, I find it necessary in this article to stress the sensory reading of place rather than blending it forthright with other, e.g. discursive, approaches to place (such blending of approaches could develop along the lines of Lefebvre’s idea of the materialisation of social space and I will briefly point to this below). Moreover, to speak about the bodily experience and the physicality of place, in literature or in any other connection, is sometimes seen as a reactionary or essentialist stance. So let it be known from the start that I do not intend to suggest any disclosure of the essence of things, or a *genius-loci*. I am not interested in verisimilitude either, and my basic stance is that bodily perception is on the whole blended with imagination and encultured meanings. But any such blending also means that the ideational realm and cultural meanings *are* affected by preconceptual bodily experiences, and this is what I will be delving into: along the lines of thinkers like Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, I will look at “phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning without being meaning themselves” (Gumbrecht, 2004, 8).<sup>1</sup>

At one point Edward Casey expressed a quite common scepticism about the place of place in literature: Echoing the lessons of Lessing in 1766 that poetry is not at all like painting, he said that place is relegated to a minor issue in literature because literature engages in narrative rather than description. Whereas description is to engage in spatiality – shaping images of objects and phenomena – narrative engages in time: it deals with action and the succession of *when* rather

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<sup>1</sup> I subscribe to Gumbrecht’s understanding of *meaning* as a distinctly *conceptual* form of making sense of the world, or the kind of knowledge “that gives higher value to the meaning of phenomena than to their material presence”. It is the kind of analytical meaning that “never...emerge[s] without producing effects of distance” (Gumbrecht, 2004, 81, xiv, 137). Or the kind of functional or utilitarian meaning that we attribute to a thing, which is often based in economic or socio-cultural outlooks on the world. Above all, it is the kind of discursive meaning we are looking for when we *interpret* a text; the kind of meaning that reduces the world to a measure of readability or intelligibility, rendering everything knowable. However, like Gumbrecht, I see nothing wrong with meaning, I only want to show other fundamental ways in which we connect with the world that undoubtedly play into the way in which meaning is formed. What is at stake in this article is “an intelligence of the body”, in Lefebvre’s terms, that exists prior to the analysing mind, or “separating intellect”, that splits the self from our immediate bodily interaction or, we might even say, a complex *inter-being* with matter (Lefebvre, 1974, 174).

than questions of *where* (Casey, 2002, 163). The most celebrated slogan of literature is not *once upon a place*, but *once upon a time* and it seems to be all about what happens next. Or, in Casey's terms, literature does not have the quality of a visual image as pure display, or "sheer show" in itself (Casey, 2002, 164).

However, it is with good reason that Casey ultimately remains sceptical of this proposition, since in all literary texts there is both narration and description: there is narration in description, certainly, but there is also description in narration. We could also say that although the narrative element may be busy fixing the meaning of description, there is always more than the narrative can hold – description always spills over the sides of narration. Take the way landscapes, the climate and meteorological phenomena are often employed in the service of describing characters' states of mind – these are images of physical spaces subsumed in the narrative, yet they may also be visually or sensorily fascinating in themselves, standing out as spectacles of placeness, or evocations of particular, local place experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, in this article I am interested in particular situations in literature where spatiality, or placiality thickens: when action and plot and character and even discourse and meaning recede somewhat into the background. As Erich Auerbach says, when spatiality thickens in literature, the reader may be left to wander a bit and no longer concentrate on plot or action or crisis alone (Auerbach, 1942-45, 11). The situations that I am concerned with may exemplify moments in literature, or even a level in literature, that can be experienced as emptied of narrativity. A quite concrete illustration of this can be found in the modern novel that in itself often contests and rejects plot and narrative in its structure (and thus turns out to be more spatially, or platially orientated than we usually suppose: Bakhtin, for one, says that the primary principle in the chronotope in the modern novel is *time*, due to the now severed link with the crude physicality of the world and natural phenomena. In the modern novel, he says, the latter had "ceased to be a living participant in the events of life" (Bakhtin, 1937-8, 217)). In the second half of the previous century there was an ongoing debate on the spatiality versus the temporality of modern literature initiated by Joseph Frank's "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945) in which he attempted to discontinue the fixation on time in the reception of modern writing. This is a longer discussion that I intend to deal with elsewhere, while, for the time being, I will restrict myself to parts of this issue of spatiality in fiction as it was recently raised by two Danish scholars, Frederik Tygstrup and Karen-Margrethe Simonsen. In a joint article Tygstrup and Simonsen speak of what they call plateaus in modern literature. These are instances, they say, in which the setting is emancipated from its subservience to the narrative chain of plot and action – instances where setting, or space or place, come to stand out as "an autonomous field of aesthetic composition" (Tygstrup and Simonsen, 2004, 204).

Tygstrup and Simonsen compare these instances or situations with the still lives that we know from the art of painting where a composition of material objects are made to stand forth in

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<sup>2</sup> Here text-world theory also shows that the worlds of the text are not only built through description, or by names of objects and phenomena, locatives and other spatial forms of deixis. Action, or "function-advancing-propositions", as generated through verb-phrases rather than noun-phrases, also have a world-building effect (e.g. see Gavins, 2007, 58-63 and Lahey, 2006, 160).

space without any meaning or plot or narrative to help us with its decoding. Here is a pointing to spatial patterns of experience only, rather than temporal organisations of existence. Accordingly, these instances offer not situations of action, but of sensation, the argument goes, we enter a “purely aesthetic sphere” (Tygstrup and Simonsen, 2004, 207). In a separate article Tygstrup argues that these plateaus call for another approach than what our usual tools of analysis can offer: since description no longer functions solely in the service of narrative, we are faced with “a special mode of representation” or a simple showing of “sensual pieces of reality”, a “prose of ambience” that has “an *affective* impact on the reader” and defies analytical meaning (Tygstrup, 2004, 206, 213, 206, 226; 211).

In my view, the “special mode of representation” Tygstrup refers to is really a mode of *presentation*. And the alternative approach he asks for, which calls on the reader’s sensitivity to the simple spatial *thereness* of presentation, involves a mode of reading where the interpretation of meaning makes way for an affective or imaginary, but also a bodily and sensory experience of the work. Such a mode of reading seems to emerge from topo-poetic approaches to literature as they come across in various scholars like Casey, Heidegger, Bachelard, as well as in Deleuze and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.

A *topo-poetics*, unlike a *topo-interpretation*, may be briefly sketched as a *presence-based* approach to literature. In its revival of the placial experience in literature, or place and spatiality as some of the primary events in literature, it is primarily concerned with bringing back to our consciousness the material thingness of the world. It does so by noting how a work or a word is capable of producing a presence – much in the way Heidegger speaks of language as a bringing forth of objects, or a naming that can call things into appearance or into a sensory nearness or presence (e.g. see Heidegger, 1935, 41, 71; 1950, 196).<sup>3</sup> In a reading like this, when the bodily experience is the primary focus, language becomes an event capable of triggering an intensity of pre-linguistic, sensory experiences, which also means that the world in the literary work comes to stand forth as an event to be seen or heard or felt. It is that mode of reading Deleuze and Guattari refer to where art produces “not the resemblance but the pure sensation” of an object, when “the material [is] passing completely into the sensation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, 166-7, see also 164, 168, 182-3). It is about that moment when the “meaning-effects” of language are superseded by the “sense-effects” of language, in Deleuze’s terms (Deleuze, 1993, 138, see also 141). Since settings are mostly silent, and our bodily experience of both language and place are mostly silent and go unnoticed, a *topo-poetics* will have to be particularly sensitive to the silent calls in language of these states of sensation. Take for instance toponyms like *street* or *park* or *London* or the *Piccadilly* and note how they silently call forth spatial sensations in our minds when we hear them – before they enter any verbalised thread of meaning or narrative (place names especially are always evocative – or poetic – in their particularity, capable of triggering numerous intensive sense-effects).

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<sup>3</sup> This reading of Heidegger partially rests on Jeff Malpas’ approach to Heidegger and his reading of Heidegger’s idea of language as a production of presence (e.g. see Malpas, 6, 70, 204, 264, 266). Besides when Heidegger says a name presences a being he describes it in terms of phenomena that presences themselves also to our senses (e.g. see Heidegger, 1935, 71).

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* the place of London is mostly produced as a discursively ordered space. It is socio-culturally coded and gendered through characters' behaviour and actions and conversations and thoughts. Streams-of-consciousness hardly ever escape their social interconnections or the socio-cultural symbols of meaning that organise the place-world of the characters. In this way the lives of the characters have a disembodied quality in the sense that they seem quite independent of the bodily sensations of the place they are in: the reader seems always to be inside someone's *thoughts* and these thoughts always seem to be elsewhere than the characters' silent or invisible bodies, or else the characters' are more concerned with the encultured "meaning of phenomena" rather than with their "material presence" (Gumbrecht, 2004, xiv). This level of the novel offers itself to topo-intepretation: we may dissect the interpersonal relations and socio-cultural meanings that shape the characters' lives and actions and draw up a socio-cultural geography of how these meanings fill out, encode and structure the place the characters inhabit. This need not result in a disembodied geography. As Lefebvre has it, the "abstract truths" of social space materialise as physical reality as they are "imposed on the reality of the senses, of bodies, of wishes and desires" or "project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing the space itself" (Lefebvre, 1974, 139, 129). Yet such interpretations easily fill the book, and space, with but discursive meanings: they endow everything with a function of meaning, whether socio-cultural or psychological – in the end there is hardly any space left outside meaning. Or, we may say that place is reduced to a sociocultural construct, however materialised, and that the sensory experience of the physicality of place matters very little, if anything at all (to repeat: our relation to the "meaning of phenomena" is a primary concern rather than the experience of the "material presence" of phenomena). A good example of this is the common interpretation of the significance of Big Ben in the novel.

Big Ben strikes the hour of the day throughout the story. Many critics grant it the function of a social and temporal sign: they speak of Big Ben as an ordering of time that creates an abstract temporal coordination of the world as well as a temporal connection between all the characters. It also indicates a narrative progression of the day and it clearly suggests themes of ageing and lost chances in life. But at another, bodily level of reading, the sound of Big Ben is also just that: a *sound* which can be registered only physically by the senses. When stripped of its meanings and representations, all we have is the presence of a sound – which the reader may hear with the inner ear, but he or she will have to read with the body, will have to open towards the pure sense-effects of the word rather than its meaning-effects. And once you do this, you may also take a glance back at the analysis of Big Ben as a sign of time or social regulation and note how utterly silent that bell was when it served only the function of meaning. It is as if it mattered nothing in that mode of reading that it is indeed a sound. When the sound of the clock is registered only as a sound, it becomes a decisively spatial phenomenon and opens up the setting, the place of the novel towards a material and sensory dimension. And rather than creating only a temporal connection between characters, the sound now creates a concrete, spatial connection. The characters and their lives are suddenly immersed in the physicality of place: the sound of Big Ben vibrates through space – everyone and everything is enveloped in the sound or drawn into this now sonorous world, into this sound-space.

This is an example of what Casey, via Heidegger and Iamblichus, refers to as the in-gathering quality of place as one of the most vital properties or affordances of place, an in-gathering that is here caused by one of the physical properties of the place (e.g. see Casey, 1993, 74; 2002, 36-7; 1997, 355). Woolf helps this placial or in-gathering reading on the way by pointing to how the sound of Big Ben spreads “leaden circles” over the city before they mix “in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke” and finally dissolve and die “up there among the seagulls” (Woolf, 1925, 2, 41, 165, 82-3). You will find many other examples of basic elements of sound and smell, tactility and vision that physically fill up the place of Woolf’s novel in this way, or appropriates everything in a material way: The tactility of the weather is one example, everything is enveloped in the heat on this hot day in June, and shifting shades of sunlight fall on things in the book as clouds drift by across the sky. All these physical phenomena of place create what Paul Rodaway has called *sensuous geographies*: geographies of sound, touch, smell and vision (Rodaway, 1994).<sup>4</sup>

Rodaway notes the in-gathering power of the senses in this connection: especially taste, touch, smell and sound are sensations of closeness which create *participatory geographies*: they cause us to be transported into the being of a place as its properties enter our bodies through the senses in a rich, unfocused and unstructured way – like the boundaryless and structureless ambience of a sound which cannot be reduced to meaning (Rodaway, 1994, 26, 41-2, 54, 67, 96, 107).<sup>5</sup> In contrast the sense of the eye is far closer to our minds than our bodies: With our eyes we tend to look on things from a perspective outside the thing, cutting up the world into neat little parts. Hence the eye is often in the service of intelligibility and abstract categorisations (Rodaway, 1994, 116-23). Unfortunately we tend to read only with our eyes: we only picture scenes while forgetting the rest of the body, and we use the eye only to assist the structures of meaning – as in the phrase “do you *see* what I *mean*?” But, silently, the eye is also synaesthetically affected by the other senses, as when we sense warmth or coolness in a colour (see also Rodaway, 1994, 26). This is crucial in a topo poetic reading where our eyes move in on very close range. We move so close that we cannot tell the outline of a thing or place, which is when “space is not visual, or rather the eye itself has a haptic, nonoptical function”, as Deleuze and Guattari put it (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, 494). Consequently, as much as these sensuous geographies may result in a bodily immersion of the characters in the book, they also cause the reader to be drawn into the place of the story. It is through the participatory geographies of the senses that the phenomenal quality of a place in a literary work opens up to the reader, and comes to stand forth as a sensory presence rather than just a socio-cultural narrative. The place of the book becomes “*panperceptual*”, in Casey’s words,

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout his book Rodaway shifts between the terms “sensuous” and “sensory” and, so, “sensuous” is to be understood as a synonym of “sensory”.

<sup>5</sup> Yet of course we always do just that: we always reduce pure meaning-less sensation of phenomena, or translate it into meaning after the immediate sensory registration, often almost simultaneously – the sensation enters a narrative of what that sound at that moment meant for us, or it enters an already existing narrative of pain or promise or frustration – mostly we never even experience a sensation without its mediation through such pre-established codes, which is a point that also runs through Woolf’s novel: “Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind”, Peter thinks, and makes an experiment with the sky and the branches he can see as he deliberately “endows them with womanhood” (Woolf, 1925, 49). “Such are the visions”, he concludes, “which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth” (Woolf, 1925, 50).

appealing “to the full bodily sensorium” and in that way the book quite simply sweeps us in (Casey, 2002, 6, 29, 261).

I will offer one more example of such a sensory geography in Woolf’s novel. Characters are always dosing off in the book and every time they do so, the bodily sensation of spatiality re-emerges from the background into the foreground. When Peter is falling asleep on a bench in Regents Park, thoughts give way to the body, and vision gives way to a fading registration of sounds:

he closed his eyes.... A great brush swept smooth across his mind, sweeping across it moving branches, children’s voices, the shuffle of feet, and people passing, and humming traffic, rising and falling traffic. Down, down he sank (Woolf, 1925, 49).

Here space emerges *as* or *through* synaesthetic bodily sensations. And reading this, my body cannot help but *simulating* the soft, muffled dumbness that sounds take on when one is just about to fall asleep in the sun on a hot summer’s day (I do not even need Woolf’s indication of these sensations in the following sentence: Peter sank “into the plumes of feather of sleep...and was muffled over” (Woolf, 1925, 49).<sup>6</sup>

As I have said, the minds of the characters in Woolf’s novel are mostly elsewhere than their bodies, entirely engaged within the realm of meaning, preoccupied by thought or speculation or conversation. But at another level of this book of the mind and society, the body and the pre-conceptual, sensory experience of the material presence of place assumes an immense importance. Woolf carefully blends streams of bodily sensations into the characters’ streams of consciousness, just as the physical dimensions of place and emplacement are always present at a silent level of the novel, as with the sound of Big Ben, or as in the many spatial punctuations of Clarissa’s stream-of-thought as she moves through the city: “she thought, walking on”, “she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street”, “she thought, waiting to cross”, “she thought, stepping on to the pavement” (Woolf, 1925, 7). Here we catch glimpses of the body-subject that carries Clarissa through a habitual physical environment while she pays no or only very peripheral attention to it (the spatial interruptions may indicate minute breaks Clarissa’s stream-of-thought as much as they may be an omniscient narrator’s observation of a habitual bodily movement her conscious mind pays no attention to).<sup>7</sup> The term “body-subject” has been adopted from Merleau-Ponty by humanist geographers like David Seamon who argues that it is because the body-subject manages routine demands independently of conscious thought that we gain “freedom from...everyday paces and

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<sup>6</sup> I deliberately use the term “simulate” with reference to Jerome Feldman’s neural study of language. His research shows how mirror-neurons, whenever we perceive an action described in words, activate the same motor-control parts of the brain that are active when we carry out the action ourselves (Feldman, 2006, 68-70). Feldman deftly substitutes “imagine” with “simulation” to include this clear link between language, cognition and our bodily response system – there seems to be corporal and sensory simulation in all imagination (Feldman, 2006, 215-19).

<sup>7</sup> Here a spatial scholar like Joseph Frank continues the one-sided reading of stream of consciousness when he sees the “knitting together” of the world of the modern novel as happening in “the act of *thinking*” (Frank, 1945, 32). The act of bodily sensing plays an equally important role in the production of the novel’s world, although far less obvious and explicit.

environments”, or, to put it differently, it liberates space in our minds for abstract or place-irrelevant thought (Seamon, 1980, 156-7).<sup>8</sup> Yet, while there is hardly any consciousness intervening between environment and the movement of the body-subject, the body-subject is no less than the very foundation of our experience of place, he argues: Lived-space is “first of all grounded in the body”, in the ways in which “a place is experienced without deliberate and self-conscious reflection”: “Whatever the particular historical and cultural context, the bedrock of [a person’s] geographical experience is the prereflective bodily stratum of [that person’s] life” (Seamon, 1980, 153, 161, 162). This also seems to be of great significance in Woolf’s novel. Whereas the characters in the book are mostly preoccupied by abstract thoughts or thoughts that pertain to an elsewhere or another time and place – memories of the past especially<sup>9</sup> – they seem to be urging for a sense of presence, nonetheless, and this sense of presence seems always to depend on a return of the mind’s focus to the present material space as sensed by the body, in other words, a return to some kind of coincidence between the mind’s activity with that of the body-subject: “Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there – the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all other mornings, seeing the glass, seeing the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point” (Woolf, 1925, 31).

But there is more to the role of spatiality and bodily sensation in Woolf’s novel: they appear to brush against a deep existential space of human being-in-the-world. There are particular moments when Woolf causes the body to step out of its silent and invisible activity. These are moments when the physical effect of place stands out without being mediated, or re-ideationalised or re-cerebralised, by any apparent socio-cultural purpose or function of meaning, when the analytical social self is lost out of sight for a moment and physical phenomena stand out, unqualified by ideas or opinion, as if speaking to only to the body. At one time it is “*the body alone*” that “listens to the passing bee...the dog barking, far away barking” (Woolf, 1925, 33-4, emphasis added). At another time Clarissa Dalloway enters a park and is struck by the sudden interruption of her thoughts by “the silence; the mist; the hum”, before she starts qualifying the sensation of the phenomena she encounters with specific meaning (Woolf, 1925, 3). Or her consciousness fills with the spontaneous, unqualified emergence of things and objects in her field of vision, “the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink”, “salmon on an iceblock”, “gloves and shoes” (Woolf, 1925, 5, 8). It is crucial that these are all brief instances. When time is compressed to an instant, or the immediacy of a spontaneous appearance, spatiality emerges full force. Although not emptied of time (a moment belongs to the temporal world), these instants come to be emptied of social and historical organisations of existence while immediate spatial experience reaches a maximum of intensity.

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<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, this bodily emplacement appears to be prior to and a basic condition that plays into any emotional or imaginative emplacement, the latter being the kinds of emplacement that, for instance, Yi Fu Tuan (1974) and Bachelard (1964), are interested in. And, possibly, a *bodily emplacement* may very well go along with a psychological or conceptual sense of *displacement* or less stable sense of emplacement, which seems to be the case for a character like Clarissa Dalloway.

<sup>9</sup> The careful reader will find that throughout the novel these memories are themselves infused with spatiality and bodily sensation – as in Proust’s experience of how the body may have loyally preserved from the past whatever the mind may have forgotten, how the narrator’s body, through sense-recollections, seems to remember before the brain does (Proust, 1913, 12).

These are all moments of a heightened awareness of a spatial, bodily-being-in-place and may cause a character like Clarissa to experience a sensation of deep, physical emplacement in the phenomenal world (in spite of any meaning-based sense of displacement): “wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey blue morning air” or as when Clarissa suddenly pays attention to the deep foundation of her sensory familiarity with her home: how the depth and the common activities in the house emerge through sounds and smells that are so familiar that they ordinarily go unnoticed (Woolf, 1925, 2, 8, 24, 26-7).

But these brief moments also appear to be moments that tap into a radically different state-of-being that persists in relation to a larger geological scale within the most socialised or culturalised spaces: from a sense of personal bodily emplacement in one’s immediate and known surroundings they point to a radically other sense of a desocialised and deculturalised emplacement in the world as natural, dehumanised earth. All Clarissa’s social and cultural and historical and even biographical selves momentarily disappear and give way to a very material, even depersonalized, sensation of being in the world. Without narrative, without story, the character enters a present, bodily sense of being which points to nothing else than an immersion in the physicality of space: a human body in interaction with the natural, physical spontaneity of the world before any meaning is assigned. Or, to use one of Woolf’s own expressions from “The Mark on the Wall”, Clarissa’s socio-cultural and personal being dissolves as the impersonal body, the body alone, for a split second, makes a pure connection with the non-human biophysical world: the “impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours” (Woolf, 1917, 72).<sup>10</sup>

We could also say that time seems to re-enter a natural space here. The history of the time/ space relation “proceeds from nature to abstraction”, says Lefebvre, and with the modern age the time of natural space had retreated from social space, and as time had become unstuck from the physical or natural world, or “[l]ived time”, it was now measured only abstractly on clocks, “isolated and functionally specialized as this time itself” (Lefebvre, 1974, 95). But in this other state-of-being in the novel time reconnects with a natural space that persists, undomesticated in the city of London and in the bodies of its inhabitants. At this level, the novel’s abstract time, the time measured by the strokes of Big Ben, vanishes in the presence of a timeless time of the phenomena of sounds, smells, touches, light and colours when all of these speak to “the body alone”. And it is also a silent geographical time of the climate, wind, sky, clouds and the topographic site on which the city is built. This is a natural time in which the “tides in the body”, as Woolf calls it (Woolf, 1925, 99, 100), mutely respond to the planetary rotation of the day.<sup>11</sup> Within this mode the text

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<sup>10</sup> We might also speak of this “other state-of-being” in terms of Foucault’s heterotopias when he understands it as “those singular spaces to be found in some given social spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others” (Foucault in Rabinow, 1982, 20). But the heterotopia I find in Woolf is outside specific *function* and it is certainly not a “counter-space” (see Foucault, 1967, 24) as it counters nothing. More appropriately this other-state-of-being in place may be seen in terms of Lefebvre’s idea of the polyrhythms that fill out all places. To Lefebvre natural, biological rhythms - including the physiological rhythms of the body - and the imposed or incorporated rhythms of social time amount to a multiplicity of space-time relations that co-exist within a single location, or a single body (Lefebvre, 1992, e.g. see 39-45, 73-5, 81).

<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre’s historical analysis of time’s change “from nature to abstraction” appears to be in agreement with Bakhtin’s thesis of the increasing severance of time in modern life from the world’s “crude physicality” and “natural



itself performs a topopoetic, bodily reading of the world, and throws this reading back on the rest of the book where every single word may be re-invested with a bodily, sensory dimension – or at least it keeps pointing to the bodily relation to the material presence of space that is silently but perpetually at work while the characters’ minds are preoccupied with an elsewhere.

## Conclusion

In a geographical reading of Woolf’s novel the socio-cultural construction of space is what immediately leaps to the eye, but the text opens to more geographies than geographies of meaning. Once we start tracing the bodily geographies in *Mrs. Dalloway* it appears that all the socio-cultural constructions or experiences of place start flickering back and forth along with another, sensory experience of place that is not completely absorbed by the codes of social space – and, with the latter, we even get the sense of an undomesticated, natural geography amidst the modern city that effects radically other modes of being-in-a-place (although these are of course not to be understood as alternative modes of dwelling outside social space). Or, to put it another way: the occasional glimpses of bare physical experiences of the place, the moments of “the body alone”, disappear and reappear as a character shifts back and forth between different modes of being-in-a-place.

That is the genius of place that Woolf’s novel makes happen: the multiple place-worlds and modalities of experience that co-occur within a single place, or even within a single moment. Any study of the geography of socio-cultural meaning in *Mrs. Dalloway* will find the text reverberating with a pluralism of meaning, a heterotopos that is a heteroglossia, but once we delve into a sensory geography too, another dimension is added: we are no longer counting the number of meanings, we are no longer destabilising meaning with other meanings; here it is the sensory dimensions of words – the pure sense-effects that words may trigger – that cause the text to keep reverberating, to escape any singular meaning. The sensory dimension of the text cause the text to keep slipping out of our grasps of interpretation and definition altogether: that is what cultural and discourse analysis alone cannot communicate in our experience of a work like this – or in our experience of place in literature.

## Works Cited

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phenomena”, but, unlike Bakhtin, Lefebvre notes how natural space persists in social space in ways we do not usually notice: “every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics (site, climate, etc.)”, and, he continues, “natural (and hence physical and physiological) space does not get completely absorbed into religious and political space.... Thus natural objects – a particular mound of earth, tree or hill – continue to be perceived as part of their contexts in nature even as the surrounding social space fills up with objects and comes to be apprehended in accordance with the ‘objectality’ shared by natural objects on the one hand and by products on the other” (Lefebvre, 1974, 110, 164; see also his analysis of biological rhythms in space and time in 1992, e.g. 39-45, 73-5, 81). In this perspective, the urban setting of Woolf’s novel is brimming with natural space: sky, weather, shifting natural light, the rotation of the day, grass, trees and leaves, human bodies, wind, clouds, temperature, sounds in space, etc.

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