Space and Civic Imaginary in Theophrastus' *Characters*

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Abstract: Despite its apparent lack of explicit spatial semantics, Theophrastus' *Characters* can be read as a project of reassurance also in terms of space. Written in Athens during a period of strong experiences of invasion into the polis' spatial and socio-political organisation, the work's subtle project of formulating a civic imaginary *ex negativo* responds to these challenges by including a distinct spatial component. I argue that the *Characters* provides individuals engaging with this text with an opportunity for self-location by offering an inverted and plural – and thus both flexible and reassuring – narrative of social interaction spaces. This spatial narrative implements a web of social observation and evaluation by showing citizens scrutinizing and evaluating each other. In spatial terms, this accomplishes two things: First, the elegance with which the text expresses this programme subtly places the implied reader into a position of collectivist evaluative power that sanctions individual attempts to exercise control over segments of polis space, preserving it as a collective, civic space. Second, the text evokes polis space in an underspecified form and therein corresponds to the under-specified collectivism it develops *ex negativo*. In doing so, however, it also anchors its implicit normative regime by reproducing which spaces are populated by the web of observation.

Within the once extremely ample œuvre of Theophrastus of Eresos, pupil of Aristotle and his successor as head of the Peripatetic school at Athens, the *Characters* is remarkable for a number of reasons, the first and simplest being that they survive – unlike the bulk of his other work.[1] The text consists, at least today, of thirty relatively brief characterizations of deviant 'behavioural types', including, for example, the 'Toady', the 'Penny-Pincher', or the 'Man who has lost all sense'.[2] While the textual problems are unfortunately substantial, I shall here follow Markus Stein and James Diggle in considering both the abstract definition paragraphs and the moralising closing remarks appended to some of the sketches to be later additions. While I am aware of the fact that there were probably once more than 30 sketches, this fact alone does not, unfortunately, give us

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1   On Theophrastus himself and his context see Diggle 2004, 1–3 with further literature; Glucker 1998; Gottschalk 1998; Millett 2007. The essential biographical source is Diog. Laert. 5,36–57, re-edited by Sollenberger 1985. The philosopher's fragmentary works are accessible through the invaluable collection by Fortenbaugh et al. 1992/1993. The most important recent contributions to the historical study of the

Characters are Diggle 2004; Lane Fox 1996; Leppin 2002; Millett 2007; Schmitz 2014; Volt 2007; 2010.
2   'Behavioural types' is James Diggle's (2004, 4–5) precise translation of the work's probable ancient title Ἠθικοὶ χαρακτῆρες as attested by Diog. Laert. 5,47. His edition and commentary are used throughout, as are his nuanced designations of the types, for which see his commentary ad loc.

more text to work with, nor does it tell us much about genre and context.[3]

The second reason as to why the *Characters* is so remarkable lies in the apparent timelessness and accuracy of the social observation conducted within the work, as well as the humour generated from it.[4] Whereas the former is due to the under-specification of the scenes that renders them easily transposable and relatable, the latter is produced by the satirical engagement with transgressive behaviour, the exaggerated and agglomerative way the situations are described, and by the disconnect between the external focalisers' extremely individualist, even childish lack of self-observation and the narrator's (and thus reader's) extremely keen, scrutinising gaze.[5] All the sketches are accordingly alike in their structure, beginning with a definition clause (ὁ δὲ δεῖνα τοιοῦτός τις, οἷος κτλ.), followed by a varying number of short anecdotes or transgressive stories describing a situation that more or less aptly exemplifies the behavioural type.

In line with the key theme of this volume, my concern here is with the spatial semantics of the *Characters*, with the use they make of coordinates that can be mapped onto what we know of the physical ancient world. Rather than attempting to unravel explicit authorial use and semanticisation of spatial coordinates, which cannot really be traced in the *Characters*, my interest here is in the social world developed in this text and what part space plays within it. To explore this, I shall first canvas the spatial markers found in the *Characters* and sketch out the work's sociopolitical context, before discussing its semanticisation of socio-political space and closing with some thoughts on its potential performative impact.

1. Space in the *Characters*

A cursory read of the short work already reveals that spatial coordinates are not particularly prominent in the *Characters*. While the work's geographical horizon seems relatively broad – ranging from Malta and Thurioi in Italy to Rhodes and Kyzikos in Mysia, via Macedon, Delphi, and Sparta – one soon realises that both action and geographical horizon are firmly centred in Athens. Upon closer inspection these references to specific geographical locations soon appear merely as markers of Athens as the hub of a decidedly Hellenic interstate network, consisting mainly in commercial and religious activity tied to these locations.[6] In order to ground itself in Athens, however, the work blends general recognisability with very occasional specificity of location: Explicitly named

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3   Diggle 2004, 17; Stein 1992, esp. 283–285. On the genre see Ranocchia 2011.

4   This is a key theme of Lane Fox 1996, 128: 'Seventy generations later, we still know these people'. On the reception and further history of the genre in modernity see Smeed 1985, who shares the same observation of timelessness (e.g. p. 5).

5   On focalisation see Genette 1998, 218–219. Already Friedrich Schiller (2005, 8, 463) observed that satire potentially contrasts imperfect reality with implicit ideals, giving expression to discontent: 'In der Satire wird die Wirklichkeit als Mangel, dem Ideal als der höchsten Realität gegenüber gestellt. Es ist übrigens gar nicht nötig, daß das Letztere ausgesprochen werde, wenn

der Dichter es nur im Gemüt zu erwecken weiß; dies muß er aber schlechterdings, oder er wird gar nicht poetisch wirken. Die Wirklichkeit ist also hier ein notwendiges Objekt der Abneigung, aber, worauf hier alles ankömmt, diese Abneigung selbst muß wieder notwendig aus dem entgegenstehenden Ideale entspringen.'

6   These markers are further referenced in a small number of passages. Sicily, Sparta, Thurioi occur at Theophr. *Char*. 5,9, Delphi at 21,3, Byzantium, Kyzikos, and Rhodes at 5,8. It is interesting to note also the persistent Herodotean/Pseudo-Hippocratic dichotomy (on this and its variants and deconstruction see Thomas 2000, 75–101) constructed between Europe and Asia at 23,3.

architectural coordinates include the Erian gate near the Kerameikos, the odeion of Pericles, the Desmotērion, and Archias' fish-shop (location unknown).[7] Athens is thereby marked as the centre of the narrative world and is explicitly, but subtly identified as the work's spatial setting. The relative scarcity of concrete location markers is balanced out by a large number of underspecified 'settings' that are either explicitly referenced or implied by the action. Examples include the hair-dresser's, the gymnasium, street, assembly, and bathhouse, the symposium and the Piraeus, as well as the theatre, agora, law court, and country-side.[8] The sketch of the Illiberal Man (ἀνελεύθερος) may serve to illustrate this in a nutshell: He is first seen slinking away in the popular assembly, then makes a niggardly entrance at his daughter's wedding, carries his own vegetables home from the agora, and avoids his friends on the street.[9] In sum, all these little, generic spatial markers obviously paint a vivid picture of a vibrant urban setting – but are they more than simply, say, the sets of modern sitcoms: de-contextualised cardboard cut-outs of but marginal significance?

2. The context of the *Characters*: Athenian space in the late 4th century BCE

Before discussing the semantics attached to these spaces in the text, it is necessary to briefly recall the tensions surrounding polis space at the end of the 4th century BCE, especially at Athens, since this is a notoriously complex and thorny stretch of Greek history. The basic principle, of course, is that the space of a polis is controlled by the collective of the citizens, embodied in its institutions: the original and fundamental characteristic and prerogative of a citizen was possession of a part of polis land.[10] The right to own land in a city-state was a jealously guarded citizen privilege generally granted only as a high honour (ἔγκτησις) in exchange for great deeds and the institutionalised citizen collective likewise controlled who was allowed to be present in the city.[11]

After the Athenian-led coalition of Greek states was defeated in the Lamian War in 322 BCE, Antipater, Alexander's general of Europe, installed a garrison in the fortress Munychia in the Piraeus – the first event in a series of external interferences in civic space and even time that characterise the period of the text's creation.[12] The city's hegemony

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[7] Theophr. *Char.* 14,13; 3,3; 6,6; 4,13. One is tempted to add the sanctuary of Asklepios overfrequented by the Man of petty ambition (21,10), but it is less concrete than the other examples.

[8] Example scenes include the following; the street is too common a setting to list. Hair-dresser's: Theophr. *Char*. 9,9; gymnasium and palaestra: 5,7; 7,4; 27,6. 14; assembly: 4,2. 6; 7,6; 13,2; 21,11; 22,3; 26,2. 5; bathhouse: 4,12; 9,8; 19,6; 27,14; 30,8; symposium and sacrifices: 2,10; 5,5; 6,3; 7,7; 9,3; 10,3, 11; 12,11; 13,4; 17,2; 21,2. 7; 24,9; 30,2. 4. 16; 30,18; Piraeus: 23,2; theatre: 2,11; 7,7; 9,5; 11,3; 14,4; 22,2; 30,6; agora: 5,7; 6,9; 9,4; 11,4; 19,6; 21,8; 28,8; law court: 1,2; 5,3; 7,7; 11,6; 12,5; 14,3; 17,8; 29,2. 4–5; country-side: 14,11; 25; 27,10. Some of these individuals also have and entertain *xenoi* and act as ambassadors abroad: Theophr. *Char*.

5,4. 8; 9,5; 20,10; 23,9; 30,3. 7, marking the connectivity of the text's personnel.

[9] Theophr. *Char*. 22,3–4. 7. 9.

[10] Aristot. *Pol*. 2,1266b14–24; 7,1329b35–30a18.

[11] E.g. IG II² 360,19. On the law regarding polis land and allotment as the basic principle of citizenship see Harrison 1968, 124. 187–189. 199. 236–238; on the *klēros* see also Patterson 1998, 102–105.

[12] See on these experiences Habicht 1995, 51–52. 56–59. 62–69. 74–75, contrast also the self-determined and funded building policy of Lycurgus (pp. 34–37) with its much reduced scope under Demetrios of Phaleron (p. 68); Oliver 2007; Thonemann 2005. The vagaries of *tychē* are a dominant theme of the time, see for instance Polyb. 29,21,1–6, taken from Demetrios of Phaleron (FGrH 228 F39), and are in evidence

over its space began to be contended in a new way and the next 40 years saw various instalments of garrisons, its occupation by foreign troops and navies, a king (at least narratively) living in the Parthenon, and, most durable of all, a flood of portrait statues and honorary decrees for kings and their friends.[13] The latter in particular were made overtly manifest in civic space – and occasionally removed – by the will of the citizen collective, which can thus be adequately described as struggling to keep control not only over itself, but over its spatial embodiment, the architectural space of the polis itself.[14] In this context, the question thus becomes how the *Characters* engages with this contested civic imaginary, especially in spatial terms.

3. The semanticisation of space in the *Characters*

This period, in which the civic space of Athens is under particular pressure by individuals and objects representative of a fundamentally different – monarchical and individualist form – of world organisation, haphazardly integrated by means of contested social codes such as 'honour', now gave rise to a text that portrays deviant social behaviour, all exhibited by male adult citizens and neatly organised into categories.[15] How does this curious text fit into this socio-political discourse, how does it respond to it, and what part does space play in this response? The argument I would like to offer is that the

Characters provides individuals engaging with this text with an opportunity for self-location by offering an inverted and plural – and thus incredibly flexible – narrative of social interaction spaces, a spatial civic imaginary as it were. Given the strongly descriptive and often paratactic nature of the sketches, treating them as narratives may deserve a few words of justification. I consider it permissible for four reasons: 1) It is not implausible that they or their parts were actually told to a live audience, at least in some form.[16] 2) The primary interest here is in a sociological concept of narrative that treats texts and communication as contributing to a social story that allows for self-location; whether the sketches conform to narratological definitions of narrative (which they arguably do not) is thus of secondary importance.[17] 3) That being said, some sketches do indeed show internal narrative dynamics (such as internal development and climactic organisation) important in narratology.[18] 4) The sketches not only model a world, but also share a fundamental focus on boundary transgression, which can, in structuralist terms, be regarded a constitutive element of narrative.[19] While admittedly, the *Characters* defers the resolution of these transgressions beyond the scope of the text, this in turn reinforces the second point: the work has no standard end or beginning but commands its readers' (or listeners') empathy because it

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also in the Rumour Monger's sketch (Theophr. *Char*. 8,4–10).

[13] Attested e.g. by Diod. Sic. 20,45,1–46,4. 110,1–2; Plut. *Demetr*. 23,3.

[14] On the removal of statues see, e.g., Str. 9,1,20 (in part = Philochorus FGrH 228 T 3b).

[15] Honour as integrative code is visible in honorary decrees that aim to regularise and institutionalise the exchange with kings and their intermediaries. See recently Ma 2013, 49-63, on the 'politics of the accusative' in honorary inscriptions.

[16] Diggle 2004, 14–16 and Lane Fox 1996, 141 consider this plausible given his popularity and

lively lecture style as attested by Diog. Laert. 5,37; Plut. *Mor*. 78d; Ath. 1,21a–b.

[17] White 2008, 31. 186–187.

[18] E.g. Theophr. *Char*. 3, the Chatterbox, whose sketch immerses the reader in a breathless flow of inane trivia, or 7, the Talker, who similarly appears as a juggernaut of verbiage, 8,4–10, the Rumour Monger's tale, and especially 25, the Coward, whose sketch consists of two coherent little stories.

[19] Lotman 1972, 303–304. 311–329. On the narrative significance of boundaries, see also Fabrizi in this volume, 37 and *passim*.

pretends to blend seamlessly into their reality.

As a social story, this text then acquires additional significance from the context just outlined, as the control exercised by the citizen collective over polis space is socio-politically contested in a complex web of discourse full of shades of grey between oligarchy and democracy.[20] The first important aspect to investigate is hence the text's construction of polis space itself, visible in the pattern of spatial awareness apparent in the text, so in the spaces that are considered relevant fora of interaction and those that are not.

3.1. Society and self

The first crucial observation that follows from this interest is that the actions depicted in the *Characters* are exclusively performed by individual adult male actors, often acting as citizens in institutionally organised civic space. The text thus represents but a small slice of what a modern observer might consider relevant social action.[21] While settings inside the household do occur in a small number of passages, what one might, for now, call the 'public' sphere is by far the more prominent. In inversion, this means that the sphere of intra-familial interaction, the 'private' space of interaction between husband, wife, and children is marginalised, which results in a homo-social construction of what actions constitute the text's society: deviant behaviour exhibited beyond that seems largely irrelevant to the text and is apparently not classed as worthy of characterisation.[22] It stands to reason that this marginalisation is connected to the well-known Athenian discourse on the inviolability of the household, which considered the *oikos* the sole prerogative of the *kyrios* and its

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[20] Habicht 1995, 51–75; cf. the ideological disentanglement by Bayliss 2011, 124–128 and *passim*.

[21] The text's implicit standard is a 'democratically-minded' slave-owning citizen who enjoys some degree of leisure; actual labour occurs only as the negative preoccupation of the Man who has lost all sense (Theophr. *Char*. 6.4–5; noted by Millett 2007, 102). See generally Lane Fox 1996, 131 and *passim*; Leppin 2002; Schmitz 2014. The democracy – regime of notables debate opened by Schmitz is too complex to address here. I consider the text democratic given its constructing of an intensely self-policing citizen class. On the citizen in the Hellenistic period cf. Gehrke 2003, esp. 226–228. On the construction of the private-public dichotomy in Athenian society see fundamentally Cohen 1991, 70–97, who identifies the physical confines of the *oikos* as the core of the 'private' realm and anything outside it as 'public', but observes the great elasticity and relational fluidity of these concepts in discourse (76–77), unlike the fundamental work by Habermas' pivotal *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1968), esp. 12–13, who argued in favour of a static division between private and public spheres in the ancient polis. The cultural semantic fields associated with the opposing terms, developed by Bourdieu 1979, 50–65. 248–253, are well known: private – public; inside – outside; concealment – visibility; dark – light; secret – open; shame – honour; female – male (Cohen 1991, 80). One may be tempted to add individual – collective, but the construction of these poles is not as simply dichotomous, a complication that will be addressed below. The terms public and private are used in inverted commas to express that they function as aids to convey what is meant in conventional language but are not deemed adequate concepts to express the text. For a similar distinction between 'public' and 'private' spaces in ancient Rome, see Fabrizi in this volume.

[22] Volt 2007, 120. 131–133, does not share this observation. In my view, many of the passages he adduces as depicting the family sphere are in fact descriptions of social interaction among adult male citizens about said sphere and document the enmeshed nature of the *oikos* rather than an interest in the interior of the household itself. Millett 2007, 71–82 has a whole chapter on conduct 'at home', but – contrary to his chapter heading – considers it in a mainly spatial sense, without addressing the complexity focused on here.

members – at least in some situations – as components of his self.[23]

The *Characters* can therefore be read as responding to this inviolability discourse by focusing on interaction and interaction spaces wherein adult male citizens, to be imagined as *kyrioi*, interact with one another, although this interaction can also be an observation process – I will return to this dynamic below. The gap identified above, one of several blanks left largely unaddressed,[24] is most obviously manifested in the fact that the characters seem to have neither (living) fathers, nor male children of a more advanced age, nor does inheritance ever feature.[25] The generation conflict between father and son, a result of the necessity of splitting up the estate and/or passing *kyr(ie)ia* from generation to generation within a single household, thus has to vanish in the *Characters*' synchronic snapshots.[26] Mothers, women and wives, small children and daughters all occur on the side-lines, but are never focalised; when they do crop up, the focus is generally not on the intra-familial relationship but on their interaction with a third party, or on the perceptible suffering they are caused by the man's actions.[27]

The Illiberal Man (ἀνελεύθερος), for example, tries to cut costs at his daughter's wedding, keeps his children out of school on festival days, and has his wife make do with a hired servant girl. In all three scenes, the interest is in the manifestation of the primary actor's deviant behaviour in a web of (male) interactions subject to specific expectations, rather than in their intra-familial implications: the daughter's celebration is a *neighbourhood* event, the children are *visibly absent* from school, and the wife *can be seen* going out with a different maid every time.[28] Predominantly, the sphere of family interaction itself is thus conspicuously absent, an empty space on the side-lines of the *Characters*' narrative society: even the Talker (λάλος), no foreigner to invasive behaviour, stops at the liminal threshold of the house without further hounding the unfortunate man he has been talking to death.[29]

However, the *Characters* do not simply reflect a clear-cut normative ideal. Instead, the work offers the full normalised incoherence of Athenian lived reality, including the fact that Athenian conceptions of what we effortlessly call the 'public' and the 'private' sphere were anything but simply

[23] On the legal manifestation of this discourse about *kyrieia* see: Harrison 1968, 30–36. 70–78. 200–205. Cf. also MacDowell 1978, 84–86. Patterson 1998, 46 rightly notes that the *oikos* generally has a concrete spatial association. The word interfaces space and social imaginary.

[24] Other blank spaces include polis religion and female action.

[25] An actor's own father occurs only in an intradiegetic narrative about genetic disease at Theophr. *Char.* 19,2, and in the inevitable exception at 13,8, where the Overzealous Man (περίεργος) informs his father that his mother is already in bed; the *Characters* reflect here the complexity of the social discourse, allowing only approximate generalisation. As a rule, however, the oldest sons are ephebes, who occur at 7,5; 21,3; 27,3. 6. 13 (the one at 21,3 is marked by his hair being cut, possibly as part of the κουρεῶτις; on

this coming of age ritual at Athens see Garland 1990, 179–187). See also Millett 2007, 79.

[26] The inevitable exception being Theophr. *Char.* 17,7, but the conflict is located in a distant future. The conflict is visible for instance in comedy, the most prominent example being Bdelycleon and Philocleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps*. See Garland 1990, 154–157; Sutton 1993.

[27] Mothers occur at Theophr. *Char.* 6,6; 13,8; 19,8; 20,7, one left to starve, one insulted, two embarrassed. Daughters: 22,4; 30,19 (only in a marriage context). Children: 1,6; 5,5; 7,4. 8; 9,5; 14,10; 16,11A; 17,7; 20,5; 21,3; 27,3; 30,6. 14. Wives: 3,2; 10,6. 13; 16,11A; 18,4; 19,5; 21,11; 22,6. 10. Women: 11,2; 12,3; 13,10; 17,3; 27,9. 15; 28,3–4. Hetairai: 11,8; 17,7; 20,10; 27,9.

[28] Theophr. *Char.* 22,4. 6. 10.

[29] Theophr. *Char.* 7,6.

dichotomous.[30] About 15 of the over 200 micro-narratives do thematise interactions that could potentially be located inside the family without the direct involvement of other male actors, including, for example, the Offensive Man's (δυσχερὴς) custom of sleeping with his wife without washing, or the Country Bumpkin's (ἄγροικος) unseemly domestic activities.[31] The existence of these passages in itself documents the social tension that the normative hermeticism of the domestic sphere was under in practice. As David Cohen and Virginia Hunter have shown, the *oikos* was not a social – and of course physical – space that could be disconnected from the social network, not a space that could be kept blank to the eyes of others.[32] Slaves and day labourers, nurses and teachers, guests, friends and neighbours all opened the household, providing a flow of information about domestic affairs in the form of gossip.[33] The same problem is visible in the frequent assertion in forensic speeches that slaves can reveal secret information,[34] and is also made explicit in the *Characters* themselves when the Disagreeable Man's (ἀηδὴς) breach of order consists precisely in broaching sensitive familial subjects before an extended

household, shaming his mother in the process.[35] While the *Characters* thus seems to reinforce a specific construction of individual male agency, namely that of the individual male's control over his *oikos*, it also reflects the cracks in the normative discourse and thus the stable incoherence of social construction.[36] One crucial observation then is that this information is available only because it has escaped the *oikos*, marking a failure of individual male agency and control to enforce the correlation between physically delimited domestic space and the social interaction spaces mapped onto it.[37] The consequence of this failure is that the *Characters* seem to tentatively include this sphere in the proving ground that is the social life of the adult male citizen, complicating and blurring the boundary between the space of male interaction and familial interaction.

3.2 Distributed selves

A simple correlation between individual and collective, private and public can therefore not be upheld for the text's imaginary society, since it would be incompatible with the situational social complexity reflected in the text.[38] The individual actors present in the

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[30]   Cohen 1991, 70–97, maps out the situational complexities of the concepts. See also Patterson 1998, 180–225, on Menander, but contrast her reading of him as developing a 'primacy of the social' (p. 225) with Lape 2004, who has traced a household-focused regime of democratic ideology within Menander's work.

[31]   Theophr. *Char.* 4,9–11; 10,5–6. 13; 14,6. 9; 16,4. 7; 17,3; 18,4; 19,5 (ἀναπόνιπτος ἐν τοῖς στρώμασι μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ κοιμᾶσθαι [...]; 'unwashed he goes to bed with his wife under the bedclothes'); 20,2. 5. 7; 27,10; 30,11.

[32]   In-depth analysis in Cohen 1991, 84–97; Hunter 1994, here esp. 70–93. See also Nevett 1999, 174–175 and similarly Millett 2007, 73–81.

[33]   On the presence of nurses and teachers cf. Theophr. *Char.* 9,5; 16,11A; 20,5; 27,13. Theophr. *Char.* 14,9; 17,2; 18,2 shows household slaves going out without supervision, providing a link to the public sphere. Theophr. *Char.* 4,6; 17,2

reflect slaves acquiring intimate information. Pl. *Leg.* 5,738d–e assigns the same function to friends who link public and private. On the function of gossip see also Cohen 1991, 64–69.

[34]   E.g. Lys. 1,16. 18; Dem. 30,37; Lycurg. 1,29; Isae. 8,12.

[35]   Theophr. *Char.* 20,8.

[36]   On the stable incoherence of Athenian culture see Cohen 1991, 236–240.

[37]   Millett 2007, 58–68 mainly reads this process of information control in the context of social honour and shame.

[38]   See also Blok 2004 and Sourvinou-Inwood 1995/1996, who both identify a gendered 'doubling' of polis society, whereby Dem. 54,110–113 attests a conception of females as acting *in the polis*, especially in the context of embedded religion. Conceiving of individual religious action as overlapping networks (Eidinow 2007, 210–219. 228; 2011) serves to further contrast the discourse visible in the *Characters*. Note,

Characters seem to me thus to be most profitably conceptualised not as unique, self-reflected individuals in the modern psychological sense, but as composite meshes that also comprise what we would consider other actors and are configured by norm and communication.[39] This concept is known in psychology as the 'distributed self', i.e. the self as the fluctuating sum of its relations, and there is some ancient evidence that the *oikos* could in some contexts be understood as part of the – distributed – self of an individual.[40] The material in question is mainly 4th century BCE curse tablets, but such a notion is visible also in a passage of the *Characters* concerning the Superstitious Man (δεισιδαίμων), who goes to great pains to cleanse not only his own person but also his physical abode and his wife and children once he suspects *he* has been cursed, revealing a 'collective' conception of his self.[41] Possessions and family members

could thus be considered parts of the self of the individual under attack by the curse, since curses aim to harm them in just the same way as they do parts of the body and mental faculties, even hopes and dreams, documenting a fundamentally distributed conception of what constitutes an individual.[42] It therefore seems as though the individual could be situationally expanded and the resultant distributed self specifically targeted piece by piece, all in order to inhibit ('bind') the target's agency.

3.3 Civic space

If the individual thus appears more like a dynamic 'rubber band' than a static, monolithic entity, this has consequences for the spatial configuration of the society in question. As I noted earlier, the act of cataloguing deviant behaviour in itself implies the construction of a normative regime that implicitly constructs

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however, that the prytany decree Dow 1937, no. 36 (212/1 BCE) for instance explicitly differentiates the demos from women and children, marking out a clear situational distinction between political community and dependents in an official context.

[39] See Aristot. *Pol.* 1,1252a–b for the view that women and slaves, the *kyrios*' dependents within the *oikos*, are *naturally* secondary and that the deme consists solely of the patrilineal community. It is hardly a coincidence that Aristot. *Eth. Nic.* 1112b24–29 mentions mediated action only within the exclusively male sphere of *philoi*. While this discourse is obviously conflicted, the male prerogative and control is never really challenged, cf. Xen. *Oec.* 7; Plut. *Per.* 37,2–5; Aristot. *Ath. pol.* 26,4.

[40] For this concept see Wetherell – Maybin 1996, *passim*, esp. 221–223; in an ancient context cf. Collins 2008, 16–17. With ANT one might conceive of them as actants, the relationally defined parts of a compound translation, on which see Latour 2007, 76–108, esp. 95–96. In this constructionist perspective the self situationally expands and shrinks and should be thought of as a dynamic 'thread' tying together aspects of body, psyche, and environment in ever-changing configurations. In the Greek language a comparable complexity is visible in the word οὐσία, which means both property and being (see LSJ s.v. A

and II), but also in the connotations of *oikos* (Finley 1973, 18–19).

[41] Theophr. *Char.* 16,7. 10. 11A. On the Athenian practice of cursing in general see Eidinow 2007, 139–155. Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 11,933d–e ('Whosoever shall affect [with a *pharmakon*] any person so as to cause nonfatal damage either to the person himself or to his people, or damage his flocks or his hives either fatally or not […]'; ὃς ἂν φαρμακεύῃ τινὰ ἐπὶ βλάβῃ μὴ θανασίμῳ μήτε αὐτοῦ μήτε ἀνθρώπων ἐκείνου, βοσκημάτων δὲ ἢ σμηνῶν εἴτ' ἄλλη βλάβῃ εἴτ' οὖν θανασίμῳ […]), which likewise suggests that the people associated with an individual are part of him, as are his flocks and beehives.

[42] Cf. Eidinow 2007, 142–152. DTA 49. 50. 53. 56. 66 are some examples for the common act of binding tongue and spirit. Others (e.g. DTA 68. 74. 89. 97. 98) aim to confine members, faculties and economic activities. The longer curses DTA 55 and 68 also attest the binding of families and households. In general, the curse tablets seem to reflect a somewhat less economically potent stratum of society, since inn- and shopkeepers are common and the concerns are local. Their concern is with controlling the agency of others through disabling communication and faculties, as well as excluding the target from society (e.g. SGD 48).

not only what interactions are adequate or inadequate among male adult citizens of a certain status, but also where they are the one or the other, or even something in between. The main focus of the *Characters* lies precisely on observing interactions in multi-actor scenarios that are divergent when correlated with collectively held interaction expectations in that individuals are presented as asserting individual control over the social codes they wish to apply to a situation. In other words: the *Characters* implicitly reflects on a web of observation, evaluation, and judgement that falls into place once the individual male citizen is 'stretched' beyond the normative boundaries of the distributed self (i.e. normally – but not always – the walls of the *oikos* within which he is constructed as being in control) into a space where he encounters other such compound individuals.[43]

This web surrounds – and is embodied in – individual interaction between these 'exposed' individuals, spreads via meta-communication, such as gossip and mockery, and is encoded in their respective memories in the form of relational construction of identity or difference. But it is also subtly encoded in a spatial configuration: In the *Characters*, the implicit and explicit settings of agora, ecclesia, theatre, bathhouse, and gymnasium, but also of symposia and sanctuaries therefore emerge as fora of seeing and being seen, all of which have their own specific rules.[44] The Toady (κόλαξ) explicitly thematises this social process when he praises the object of his toadying by pointing to the onlookers' reaction to his superior social and physical grace, consisting in allegedly admiring stares and positive remarks.[45]

The most visible manifestations of this process are interactions that focus on physical appearance. A passage now assigned to the Obsequious Man (ἄρεσκος), but probably originally from another sketch, shows this with particular clarity, since the protagonist seems to reflect on the contextualised nature of his own relational perceptibility and accordingly positions himself in the most flattering contexts.[46] An interest in the quality and fit of footwear as well as in the cleanliness and quality of body and clothing pervades the work, especially as regards the visual hallmarks of the civilised and city-dwelling (ἀστεῖος) Athenian citizen, walking stick and cloak.[47] The attention paid to oil flasks

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[43] As we observed above, these encounters can be both 'real' or purely narrative, i.e. be effected via gossip. In systems theory, observation, i.e. differentiation and application of semantics, is the foundation of systems, and thus of social action (Luhmann 1984, 63. 406–411. 468). On the significance of observation see also Millett 2007, 71–72. This web is a social phenomenon that Thucydides (2,37,1–3) has Pericles deny in the funeral oration, stressing the freedom of individual conduct in Athens, which is also a freedom from ὑποψία, suspicious surveillance. Obviously this is an ideal a far cry from reality, designed to emphasize the ordering capacity of neutral law, strengthening collective cohesion in the process.

[44] E.g. Theophr. *Char.* 5,7; 7,7; 19,7. On the agora as a forum of interaction within the text see in detail Millett 2007, 93–98.

[45] Theophr. *Char.* 2,2. The crucial aspect of the Toady is succinctly observed by Diggle 2004, 181: 'The Κόλαξ confines his flattery to a single patron, whom he attends with deference bordering on the servile'. It is important to note that the definition paragraph of later date therefore offers a misleading definition, since the sketch never actually shows the Toady gaining any benefits from his behaviour.

[46] Theophr. *Char.* 5,7. On the textual problems of the Obsequious Man see Diggle 2004, 18.

[47] Examples of an interest in shoes are Theophr. *Char.* 2,3. 7; 4,4; 22,11. The prominence of cloaks (ἱμάτια) is visible in their frequent occurrence and the attention paid to their quality and cleanliness: Theophr. *Char.* 2,3–4; 4,7; 5,6; 18,6; 19,7; 21,8. 11; 22,8. 13; 26,4; 27,5; 30,10. The cloak is so crucial that taking it off marks the transformation of citizen into young man at 27,5. By contrast, walking sticks occur only

and oiling also reminds us that supple skin and a pleasant olfactory presence were also sensory hallmarks of well-to-do Athenian habitus in the public sphere.[48] The deviant behaviour of the Country-Bumpkin offers particularly clear examples: in the assembly he reeks of *kykeon*, insulting the senses of his neighbours, and his ill-fitting, rustic clothes and overly large shoes immediately identify him as an outsider to urban life.[49] Other obvious physical deviations range from the disgusting to the vain: skin diseases, body odour, rampant body hair, open wounds, and filth are sanctioned alongside excessive personal grooming, such as excessively white teeth, over-frequenting the hairdresser's, and ostentatiously clean and rich clothing.[50] This plainly visible level of extraneous appearance is significant because deviations in this

field have particularly large-scale consequences due to their primacy in the web of social observation and evaluation that feeds through the social space of the polis: The transgressive bodies of the *Characters* fall short of the regime of policing enmeshed in the space of the ἄστυ itself.

A second category is provided by behaviour that requires the short-term situational awareness of the audience to incur evaluation. The Toady again provides a fine example: in the theatre he snatches the cushion carried by his 'object's' attending slave and goes out of his way to place it on the man's seat himself.[51] This action is visible to those around and becomes socially legible due to the markers of external appearance and action that differentiate slave and wealthy citizen, but is also extremely short-lived.[52] Some

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once (Theophr. *Char.* 5,9), which may suggest that the norms governing walking sticks were of less significance. Beyond the *Characters,* funerary art is the main source for this particular self-image of the Athenian citizen. The consistently recurring image of the Athenian man as a cloaked, public figure on Attic funerary reliefs has led Johannes Bergemann (1997, 76–78. 127–130) to identify a 'Normierung des Politenideals bis ans Ende des 4. Jhs.' (p. 129). Millett (2007, 101–104) has analysed these incidents of splendour in personal attire as aspects of conspicuous consumption by reading them through the lens of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1912). However, conspicuous consumption is an analytical tool that is more difficult to wield than it might appear. Campbell 1995 has highlighted a number of issues with the idea that wasteful consumption of resources (such as time and money) in public results simply and inevitably in an estimation of 'pecuniary strength' and thus in 'envy' and 'emulation'. While most are pertinent only to sociologists, the *Characters* certainly warn also the historian against employing the concept in too simplistic a way, and Millett (2007, 103) accordingly criticises Veblen briefly for underestimating the control of emulation implemented by 'the dual function of etiquette [...], simultaneously promoting and circumscribing competition'. Put differently, the text draws out the web

of norms surrounding both conspicuousness and consumption, exposing the complexities of social construction that surround what Veblen considered a human 'instinct' (1912, 93–94).

[48] Theophr. *Char.* 4,3; 5,6. 9; 11,8; 16,5; 19,6; 24,11; 30,8.

[49] Theophr. *Char.* 4,2–5. 7. *Kykeon* is attested as a drink mainly in the context of the Eleusinian mysteries, cf. Hom. *H.* 2,205–210, and was evidently a beverage with a non-urban air, see Diggle 2004, ad loc. For a contrasting dichotomisation of *asteios* and *agroikos* that highlights the unattainable natural purity of the rustic during the Second Sophistic, cf. Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 553–554 with Goldhill 2009, 107.

[50] Disgusting features: Theophr. *Char.* 19,2–5. 6–7; 26,5; vanity: 5,6; 21,8. 11; 26,4.

[51] Theophr. *Char.* 2,11.

[52] In reality, visual differentiation could actually be difficult, although the lament of [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1,10 is undoubtedly polemically exaggerated. On the abstract normative level of the *Characters*, however, the citizen actors are marked by their leisure and thus should be distinguishable from slaves in behaviour, comportment, physical grooming (hair and beard), as well as attire, as is visible in the deviant nature of the scenes in which they act slavishly (e.g. Theophr. *Char.* 2,5. 8. 9 (cf. 22,7). 11; 4,4. 7. 10. 12; 6,4–5. 9; 18,8; 20,5; 27,13). While household slaves might of course be recognised individually, especially within a social network of

interactions are naturally more easily legible than others: while noticing that the Obsequious Man consistently hangs around the most frequented – and accordingly most prestigious – places requires long-term or distributed, memorised and communicated observation, the example of the Toady is instantaneous and not particularly conspicuous. The interactions attributed to the Late-Learner (ὀψιμαθής) and the Tactless Man (ἄκαιρος), on the other hand, are visibly distinct, contrasting strongly with their surroundings due to the temporal displacement of the interaction: the Late-Learner mingles with and acts like the young although he is old and the Tactless Man performs actions that are inappropriate due to their bad timing – all in settings like the gymnasium and the street.[53]

The final category comprises transgressive interactions that are almost exclusively verbal in nature, addressed to a smaller audience in face-to-face interaction and perceivable only by those actually listening. The Dissembler (εἴρων), Chatterbox (ἀδολέσχης), Talker (λάλος), and Rumour Monger (λογοποιός) all provide numerous examples of such behaviour: The Dissembler feigns ignorance and friendliness, the Chatterbox

talks incoherently and without paying heed to the situation, the Talker's loquaciousness causes social turmoil, and the Rumour Monger spreads lies – all in interaction situations that play out on the boundaries between the distributed selves of Athenian citizens.[54]

4. Unravelling the web

What can one make of this web of observation and evaluation? One road to understanding it more generally lies in taking a step back from the text. From this vantage-point it becomes clear that in narrating all these little scenes, the text is in fact placing the implied reader in a position of third-party observation that is intimately familiar to everyone as the fundamental social action, while also couching the adoption of this stance in subtle, satirical humour.[55] Through this extremely elegant narrative mechanism, the implied reader, himself intended as an elite citizen of varying normativity and transgression, is drawn into the text's narrative construction of this social web of observation and evaluation, which thereby becomes centred on the reader, placing him in a position of evaluative power the text does little to specify, but that is essentially *anti*-individualist, because the confrontation is with

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friends, public situations require normatively controlled markers. One can assume that there was a difference in shoe and garment quality, style, length, and number, in hair style and personal grooming, as well as manners and deportment. While most of these markers are readily apparent from the *Characters* alone, Aristot. *Pol.* 1,1254b21–36 may serve to highlight the normative difference in body and comportment (upright as opposed to bowed). The key point is that the expectation is that slaves are recognisable within the network of observation, which in itself reduces the social contingency of slave-holding. On the discourses concerning physiognomic determinism, differentiation between slaves and elite, as well as the construction of the legibility of slaves in every-day life see Wrenhaven 2011, 43–89, esp. 62–63, as well as 90–107 on their visual differentiation on Attic

funerary relief. Cf. also Schumacher 2001, 71–77, who similarly argues that it was difficult to distinguish slaves and free men by their clothing, the artistic response being an exaggeration of difference. Sociologically however, it is worth noting that Starbatty 2010, 118–119, argues for the Roman Empire that collective visual differentiation might in fact facilitate the creation of collective slave identity and thereby of agency, a process slave-owning societies would not wish to encourage.

53 Theophr. *Char.* 12; 27,4. 6.

54 Theophr. *Char.* 1,2. 4; 3,2–4; 7,2–7; 8.

55 On the implied and intended reader in reader-response criticism see e.g. Iser 1984, 50–67, esp. 62 on reader direction; on narratology cf. Genette 1998, 266–270. On observation see above n. 43.

individual deviance. The reader is thus made to occupy – or at least engage with – a position of collectivist evaluation, because the text qualifies what looks like a simple narrative of individualist control being exercised over segments of an inter-individual interaction space by branding the narrative as deviant: the introductory clauses betray the name of the game, as does the coolly underplayed humour.

The resulting sequence of humorous confrontations with abstract individuals that are familiar in their behavioural patterns – but of course never identical to the reader – thus reproduces a conception of civic space as subject to constant tension between individual and collective control, which is resolved through an experience of both identity and difference, of 'that-is-not-me-but-I-know-someone-like-it'.[56] By making these narrative experiences of transgressive behaviour, the implied reader (re)produces a collectivist monopoly of truth that is never positively spelled out and can thereby function beautifully in society, ensuring the collectivity of societal control in and through inversion.[57]

Space is crucial to this normalising efficacy of the text. While generally under-specified, it therein elegantly corresponds to the under-specification of the collectivism itself, but nevertheless anchors it by reproducing which spaces are normatively socially populated by the web of observation. Even within the text, individual action within these social spaces thus automatically associates behavioural

constraints, the efficacy of which is visible nicely when the Penny-Pincher is seen going shopping without buying anything, showing himself as participating in social activity despite being personally unwilling to actually spend any money.[58]

The *Characters* accordingly reproduces a specific construction of social space, focusing on *the* agora, *the* street, *the* ecclesia, *the* law court, *the* theatre, *the* bath house, *the* gymnasium, and *the* odeion (etc.) as abstract loci of encounters between well-to-do adult male citizens governed by collectively sanctioned norm.[59] Rather than being meaningless, exchangeable settings, they serve to anchor a collectivist regime of control by activating existing expectations in the audience's minds, while avoiding over-specification that would qualify, complicate, and weaken the text's narrative dynamic.

Accordingly, the text employs a number of strategies to stabilise these abstract spaces it constructs as the loci of collective control. First, non-participation in these spaces is occluded, made unthinkable: there is no ἰδιώτης in the *Characters* and even the Country Bumpkin participates in the collective spaces of socio-political life, including the ecclesia.[60] Second, the household itself can also become a relevant theatre of action in some scenarios of its complex construction, since the *Characters* allow for individual semantic control, but sanction both its absence in the *oikos* and the exercise of control in deviation from collective control: control

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[56] This reading experience, so charmingly expressed by Sir Richard Jebb in his Loeb edition, is noted also by Lane Fox 1996, 128–129 and Millett 2007, 42–43, though the latter's assessment is more differentiated.

[57] On unspoken, unreflected, and embodied generative grammars of behaviour as crucial to social meaning see Bourdieu 1979, 144–146. 189–190; for a summary see Krais – Gebauer 2002, e.g. 5–7 and *passim*.

[58] Theophr. *Char.* 10,12. Cf. Iser 1984, 74–75.

[59] On the actual physical maintenance of the agora by the collective as a space of social action see also the evidence of IG II² 380, esp. 26–28 (=Syll.³ 313), which documents the institutionalised upkeep of the roads and market square in the Piraeus for the year 320/19 BCE, contemporary with the text studied here.

[60] Theophr. *Char.* 4,3.

of the *oikos* by the *kyrios* is part of the project of spatial control implied in the text. Third, the civic spaces constructed are narratively warded against individual control in that intradiegetic, idiosyncratic semanticisations are humorously rejected.

The best example of such spatial enforcement is provided by the Oligarch (ὀλιγαρχικὸς) who wishes to withdraw from the public sphere to conduct political discussion, hampering the web of observation and withdrawing from the collectively surveyed socio-political network to construct his own. He thereby dismantles the spatial control regime in itself, seeking its dissolution by questioning its validity and moving society 'out of the agora', i.e. away from the policed boundary between distributed selves and into a specific self, namely his own.[61] Accordingly, the creation of fora by individuals is criticised when they exert semantic control over their valuation, i.e. locate them within space enveloped in their distributed self. The odeion-scene now assigned to the Obsequious Man is the most explicit example of such behaviour: personally owning an odeion is already somewhat suspicious, but publically emphasizing one's ownership is the pinnacle of deviation from the norm of equal, self-policing citizens operating in shared space.[62] Similarly the Rumour Monger's attempt at determining individually what the collective opinion, what the voice of the polis is, cannot stand.[63] And finally the famous Superstitious Man (δεισιδαίμων) idiosyncratically over-semanticises polis space in supernatural terms and even disregards the collective institutions of normative control implemented to counter this.[64] Constructing and controlling the fora of interaction within the social

space occupied by the wealthy, male citizen body thus appears as a crucial component of a subtle regime of societal control formulated in the text and appears as a feedback loop between the social construct and the discursive – and by extension physical – spaces it is tied to. The architecturally structured city combines with people's expectations to produce a socio-spatial web of interactive hubs, such as the agora, which simultaneously serve as hubs of normative control. These dynamic processes are simultaneously reinforced and facilitated by the built environment that manifests and reinforces the value cosmos in that it is the product of collective action.

5. Conclusions

We have seen that space, while not overtly central to the *Characters*, plays a significant role when the work is read as a project of civic imaginary: its under-specification corresponds to the *ex negativo* creation of a normative civic society, characterised by the equality and self-policing of the well-to-do around an implicit, unattainable normative core. Thinking back to the opening remarks on the work's context then, this project also has a tentative real-world dimension in that it has bearing on the contextual experience of readers or listeners engaging with the work and the discourses that produced it. Although it is impossible to know for certain whether this text was indeed ever performed and in what fashion, Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus paint a picture of Theophrastus as a lively, attractive lecturer and several scholars have considered it possible that the *Characters* were indeed a collection of humorous set

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[61] Theophr. *Char*. 26,2–3. 5–6. Such an instrumentalisation of the collective is also in evidence in the *Characters'* worst case scenario, the Man who has lost all sense (Theophr. *Char*. 6,7).

[62] Theophr. *Char.* 5,9–10.
[63] Theophr. *Char.* 8,7.
[64] Theophr. *Char.* 16,3–9.

pieces designed to make elite intellectuals laugh.[65]

Performance of this text or its constituent parts among the group of peripatetic students and other listeners would now result in the explicit activation of this inverted normative semanticisation of polis spaces within said spaces in a reflexive situation. The implicit construction of collective control *ex negativo* would thereby be mapped onto the physical reality of the city and become entangled with the listeners' lived experience via the abstract semanticisation of civic space the text produces in combination with the experience of both identity and difference noted above. In combination with the subtle humour and collective laughter it would certainly elicit in

performance,[66] this situation could accordingly have produced the collective situational naturalisation of the text's social construct. In that, the text appears as narratively contributing to the semi-conscious reproduction of a kind of generative grammar in Bourdieu's sense, since its norms remain purely implicit and allow for incoherence.[67] Such experiences may have contributed to combating the reality of the time with its struggle for collective control of civic space by subtly reasserting a very old discourse about collective elite control of civic space and sanctioning individual interference with it – the subtlety of the construct marking it out as under siege.[68]

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[65] Diog. Laert. 5,37–38; Ath. 1,21a–b (=Fortenbaugh et al. 1992/1993, fr. 12). E.g. Diggle 2004, 15–16; Lane Fox 1996, 141; Millett 2007, 28–30; Ranocchia 2011, 76.

[66] Lane Fox 1996, 139–141.

[67] Bourdieu 1979, 248–253.

[68] As does the Rumour Monger's explicit thematisation of these external pressures in the shape of Kassander and Polyperchon (Theophr. *Char*. 8,4–10).

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