



Crowd Psychology and the Heterotopic Imaginary in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*

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As nuanced as Freud's own investigations in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, *Mrs Dalloway* shows an awareness of the oscillation in group mentality between narcissistic desire and ethical self-transcendence. Taking its cue from the parameters set up in the early scenes, one of a conformist group, the other of a creative, self-determining one, this essay examines how the novel intimates the psychoanalytic Real as ontological ground to the work of mourning, empathy and ethics. Aiming to intertwine the worlds "seen by the sane and the insane side by side," Woolf imbues signification with a tragic identity. How suffering is sutured into the signifier can be productively investigated by conflating Foucault's conception of heterotopia with the Lacanian mirror. As the novel's creative apex, Mrs Dalloway's party resembles Foucault's "ship of the imagination," imbricating the Symbolic with ethical tropes of the Real.

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The modern crowd casts a wide net over early twentieth-century culture and becomes a major preoccupation within the new academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology as well as within avant-garde art and literature. Even if, after the rise of industry in Europe, the urban mass as such is not a new phenomenon, the scientific efforts of measuring the infrastructure of crowds – their emotional ties and political behavior – constitutes one of the marks of modernity. Especially, during the years leading up to and following the Great War, studies on the topic of psychosociology proliferated, exemplified by Gustave Le Bon's *The Psychology of Crowds* (1895), Gabriel

Tarde's *The Laws of Imitation* (1890), Wilfred Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1916) and William McDougall's *The Group Mind* (1920) – works that can be considered pre-Freudian in that they posit, what Nidesh Lawtoo calls, a “mimetic unconscious” in contrast to the psychoanalytic model of the sexualized psyche, operating via subjective desire and mechanisms of repression.¹

As Freud's own contribution to the interest in group mentality – *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922) – shows, psychoanalysis both builds upon and extends the contemporary accounts, problematizing the key factors such as “imitation,” “contagion,” “magnetism,” “hypnosis” and “suggestion.” In the manner of previous theorists, concerned with “discovering the psychological explanation of [the] mental change which is experienced by the individual in a group” (Freud 1955, 88), Freud proposes to analyze group ties from the perspective of psychoneurosis, as deriving from the *libido*, from the sexual energies binding one ego to another. Thus, Freud criticizes Trotter's concept of an irreducible “herd instinct” as accountable for crowd behavior, claiming that the real of the crowd is the narcissistic libido: what is primary, Freud states, is the “drive of self-preservation and the sexual drives” (119).

Published in English translation in 1922 by the International Psycho-Analytic Press, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* belongs to the same post-war cultural climate as the work under scrutiny in this article, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).² Although Woolf is not as openly invested in questions of group mentality and leadership as are other modernists such as Nietzsche, Conrad and Lawrence, her major novels, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*, show an intense engagement with questions of group formation and group consciousness, often associated with socio-political critique and speculation about the potential underpinnings of a good society. Woolf's intellectual milieu and wide interdisciplinary reading stimulated her observations of crowd behavior in urban settings. Her diary entries, for instance, respond to Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* and she comments on her husband's, Leonard Woolf's, review of it

¹ In recent years there has been considerable critical interest in the influences of pre-Freudian psychology upon modernist literature. Besides Nidesh Lawtoo's highly significant study, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (2013), of note is Judith Ryan's *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (1991). A general theoretical underpinning is to be found in René Girard's mimetic theory and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's work on mimesis, violence and politics.

² James Strachey translates Freud's “massenpsychologie” as “group psychology” whereas the standard dictionary translation of “massen” is “crowd.” Generally, in both translations from German and from French (“la foule”) and in the scholarship on crowd/group behaviour the terms are used in a comprehensive way to include gradations in size from the small group to the urban mass. I follow this comprehensive practice, basing it on Freud's dictum that “individual psychology is [. . .] at the same time social psychology as well” (1955, 69).

(D I: 80).³ The Woolfs' publishing house, The Hogarth Press, published Freud's works in English translation, and as Sanja Bahun has shown at least one of the novels, *Between the Acts*, assimilates directly Freud's views of crowd libido and of the ambivalent ego (Bahun 2014, 154-194). The literary scholarship has also long noted Woolf's innovative writing about collective consciousness, how borders between private and public are often blurred and how thought is experimented with as psychic flow and energetic, even telepathic, communication between minds. Contextualizing such fictional concerns, Allen McLaurin (1984) and more recently Michael Whitworth (2000) observe ties to the contemporary social sciences and then especially to the French school of writing known as "unanimism," with the novelist Jules Romains and his novel *Mort de Quelqu'un* as crucial influences. "Unanimism" refers to a spiritualized understanding of crowds as animated by shared intuitive energies, as being of "unanimous" mind rather than inchoate collection of selves (Whitworth 2000, 159). Revealingly building on Whitworth's observations, Kristy Martin's *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (2013) examines group cohesion in *Mrs Dalloway* from a vitalist perspective, showing sympathy to be both an effect of private feeling and of affective transcendence, "guided by pattern and a poetic momentum beyond the individual" (107). Narratologically attuned to the techniques of mental communication in *Mrs Dalloway*, Annalee Edmondson's "Narrativizing Characters in *Mrs Dalloway*" (2012) also explores the nature of empathy as a positively disruptive force, which challenges the binary split between self and other, staking an intersubjective ground to social experience.

Taking into account *Mrs Dalloway*'s affective subversions, my article aims to explore the novel's psychoanalytic interest in group formation and in the psychodynamics of empathetic bonding. Although not specifically Freudian, Woolf's avowed purpose to examine "the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side" (D 2: 207-8), "Mrs D seeing the truth. S. S. seeing the insane truth" (H 412),⁴ to reveal the interlockings of trauma and health, imply a deep perception of the operation of psychic registers and of a truth that lies beyond normative articulation. Especially, through the unanimous connection established between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, and at times embracing Peter Walsh, the novel prepares an inclusive psycho-social ontology that presupposes the immanence of suffering and loss. In the first

³ Leonard Woolf describes Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd* as "exceedingly original" in his review for *The New Statesman* (1916, 327). Significantly, Virginia Woolf's diary entry shows her ambivalent attitude toward crowd behaviour: first, she expresses distrust at Roger Fry's "gloomy view," influenced by "Trotter & the herd"; but then she continues to describe the "crowd swarming" in Charlotte Street: "& hearing women abuse each other & at the noise others come running with delight – all this sordidity made me think him rather likely to be right" (D I: 80).

⁴ The first reference is from a 1922 diary entry and the second one from the notebook drafts on *Mrs Dalloway*, originally titled *The Hours*, 1923-4.

place, *Mrs Dalloway* concentrates on this “want-to-be”⁵ by dramatizing the urban crowd and by conflating trauma and creative insight in the thought processes of the major protagonists. Then as the narrative progresses, the potential for a tragic, yet restorative, sociality is communicated through a version of Foucauldian heterotopia, what I will investigate as a flexible borderspace, which communicates new tropes of co-being. The culmination is Clarissa’s party, which this June day in 1923 is different from previous parties, because its plotting coincides with a developing self-transcendence and glimpses of the political promise of aesthetic spaces.

Relying on psychoanalytic theory, the following sections seek, via focus on textual detail, to enhance the novel’s contribution to that theory, especially in its nuanced perceptions of the psychodynamics, as well as the ethico-political potential, of the modern crowd.

Party thoughts

In his recent book, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (2013), Nidesh Lawtoo polemicizes against the psychoanalytic view of subjectivity and against, what he refers to as, “the repressive hypothesis,” nevertheless telescoping what is crucial in Freud’s account of crowd psychology, that its nature is ambivalent, with both pathological tendencies and ethical potential. Agreeing with Le Bon that “certain ideas and feelings [. . .] do not come into being, or do not transform themselves into acts except in the case of individuals forming a group” (Freud 1955, 73; qtd from Le Bon 29), Freud showcases how identification between egos in both disorganized, primary groups (such as strikers or revolutionaries) and artificial, institutional groups (such as the military and the church) can lead to emotional excess, even violent acts, but at the same time may trigger an affective commonality, a knowledge specific to the solidarity of strangers in a group (e.g. 83). Interestingly, the birth of the ego, via the identificatory drama of the Oedipus complex, underpins Freud’s analysis of group psychology, with emphasis on the psychic splitting that develops with the rupture of narcissistic wholeness and the social demands to displace the indiscriminate sexual drives onto paternal signifiers. Prohibitions during the socializing process create a distance within the psyche between the narcissistic ego and the desired objects, in the Oedipal scenario, a distance between, as Freud says, the “real ego” and an “ego ideal,” a figure of an other, identified with and introjected into the psychological apparatus. It is partly thus that emotional ambivalence arises: the process of identification and consequent adoption of an ego ideal is the ruling cause of repression as well as the projection outward of compassionate

⁵ Lacan’s term is “manque à être” and it plays on the paradox of identity and desire, a fundamental lack that underpins fullness. I will discuss this paradox at some length in the essay.

understanding and of love. As Freud states in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*: “A path leads from identification by way of imitation to empathy, that is, to the comprehension of the mechanism by means of which we are enabled do take up any attitude at all towards another mental life” (110).

Because of the fragile boundaries between ego and other, or, to state a dictum of psychoanalysis, because “individual psychology is [. . .] at the same time social psychology as well” (Freud 1955, 69), Freud is justified in examining the group mind through dualistic models, such as the relation between the melancholiac and the lost object, the lover and the loved one, the hypnotizer and the hypnotized, the leader and the follower. The last paradigm of leadership enables most group formations, and as the other, more private relations, betrays the libidinal base of institutions, the church and the army, for instance, operating via members’ narcissistic gratification in being loved equally by a strong leader. In such cases, excessive idealization threatens to overtake individuals’ ego ideals, to substitute the loved object for the censorship of conscience. When the ego “has preserved its earlier narcissistic self-complacency” (Freud 1955, 129), the distance from the ego ideal is minimal, providing fertile ground for more or less extreme hegemonic institutions, governing through ideological seduction, not through the consensus of enlightened subjects.

These observations about the porous boundary between individual and social psychology are relevant for the development in *Mrs Dalloway* of a group consciousness, informed simultaneously by the narcissistic subject and a self-transcendent realm beyond it. A kaleidoscopic work, situating post-war England and especially the cityscapes of London within networks of viewpoints, Woolf’s novel investigates the psychodynamics of the urban “lonely crowd,” often tracing hidden relations between isolated inner mindscapes, in order to expose, challenge and potentially transform the constitution of the group mind. The theme of isolation and commonality emerges directly from the beginning pages of *Mrs Dalloway* which depict multi-cultural London streets on a sunny June day in 1923, offering glimpses into the minds of diverse citizens – middle-aged bourgeois housewives, working-class mothers, shop-assistants, job-seekers, war veterans, immigrants, tramps and the homeless. As the main protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of a conservative member of parliament, runs errands in the environs of her Westminster home, the urban mass around her seems random and disparate until suddenly unified around the spectacle of a royal vehicle backfiring in the middle of Bond Street. Rumours of the event mysteriously electrify the crowd, and a kind of contagion is described, “passing invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud’s sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly” (Woolf 2000, 12). The grey car, intimating “a face of the greatest importance” (12) behind the window-blinds, a symbol of royal authority, through sheer ideological force interpellates the citizens so that they unite in front of Buckingham Palace in a show of loving deference and patriotic

zeal. The narrator's comments on the crowd's shared emotionality are telling: "now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide" (12). Authority seduces with the promise of religion to distribute equal love for all.

However negative this first portrayal of group formation in *Mrs Dalloway* is, suggesting the narcissistic psychology of the body politic, an iconic drama of modernity follows,⁶ which can be understood to permeate the novel as a whole, to highlight the oscillation between pathos and distance in crowd mentality, the ambiguous nature of its affective ties. As if lodged in an interzone, in a liminal space, between the real ego of the nation and a superior realm, natural, beautiful and as yet only half-human, the devotional crowd is abruptly distracted by a marvel in the skies: with everyone looking up at once, neglecting the royal vehicle, an aeroplane flies in and out of the clouds, with its white smoke, writing mysterious letters, beginning of words and expressions, which "moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky" (17), then emerged again in an empty, fresh space. Again, a group is formed, called upon to act together in purposeful unison. However, instead of effacing the singularity of members in libidinal interpellation, this formation enhances individual power as everyone engages in unique, yet interfacing, interpretations: Mrs Dempster resting on a bench in Regent Park, for instance, at the sight of the plane, is brought out of England to think of the sea and "foreign parts" (23) and Mr Bently at Greenwich, farming his land, sees "a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol [. . .] of man's soul" (24). Thus, these two extreme group formations drawn at the start of *Mrs Dalloway*, one immersed in the reality of post-war England, and the other transcending that reality, moving beyond primal needs to detached speculation – these two groups can be understood to function as the parameters of the novel, as it seeks, through the experiences of major protagonists, to configure an ontological ground for a compassionate society.

At first sight, on the concrete individual level, the suffering war veteran, Septimus Warren Smith, and the upper-middle-class lady, Clarissa Dalloway, seem to represent, on one hand, an indictment against the self-preserving nation, and, on the other hand, a compliance with its authorities and institutions. However, the stress in the narrative upon the uncanny resemblances between these two strangers in the London crowd, expresses the

⁶ Basing his discussion on Woolf's interest in science and familiarity with Einstein's theories, Tolliver Brown underscores the creative response of the skygazers: "The modern airplane stimulates a diversity of interpretations, each of which is unique to the individual" (Brown 2015, 27). Focusing on the airplane rather than the crowd, Gilliam Beer's earlier interpretation supports such a view: the skywriting functions as "an image of equalizing as opposed to hierarchy, of freedom and play" (Beer 1990, 275-76). My reading of the group scenes builds on previous criticism, but is more attuned to ambivalent patterns, the oscillation between narcissism and self-transcendence.

underlying project of challenging the group libido to acknowledge suffering as the premise for a just body politic. As I will continue to investigate, Clarissa and Septimus' experiences are depicted in terms of psychic registers which can be approached from a (Lacanian) psychoanalytic perspective. To a greater extent than other individuals in the narrative, the protagonists sense the immanence of the Real as the traumatic truth of subjectivity.⁷ The war veteran's post-traumatic suffering interfaces with the bourgeoisie lady's repressed anxieties and increasingly with her aesthetically illumined social thought as she probes the purpose and meaning of her parties.

A significant early scene concerned with Clarissa's thought processes illustrates particularly well the psycho-social thrust of the novel. The setting here is Clarissa Dalloway's attic bedroom at the top of her house, a retreat for her after a recent serious illness and at this particular moment "a place to put off [her] rich apparel" (26), to mourn an insult to her social pride, as she had not been invited along with her husband to Millicent Bruton's prestigious luncheons. A seemingly slight cause for sorrow, the incident nevertheless exposes Clarissa's dependence on the other's gaze for her sense of a solid identity. Identification with others' desires, with, in psychoanalytic parlance, ego ideals, constitutes Clarissa's self-knowledge, although this knowledge is increasingly inflected and topologized. A particularly revealing topos in this attic room scene is the mirror, which interrupts her musings, reflecting back a "pointed; dart-like; definite" image of herself, a *misrecognition* of self, as Lacan claims, "an illusion of autonomy" (Lacan 1977a, 6), overriding the real chaos of human interiority.⁸ What is revelatory, and as we shall see, empowering for Clarissa is her intimation of herself as other than the "one center, one diamond" in the mirror, as both the efficient Westminster housewife and someone "different": "never showing a sign of all the other sides of her – faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions" (32). Self-identity is staged here as split, as both solid and fragile. In a sense, Clarissa's consciousness of this psychic otherness sets her apart as more deeply empathetic than the figures of authority in the novel, Lady Bruton, Richard Dalloway, the Prime Minister, the medical doctors; as opposed to their ego-

⁷ Lacan's psychic registers interweave the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. As Tom Eyers has convincingly argued, the Real as radical contingency and resistance to signification preoccupies Lacan's entire oeuvre from the 1930s to the seminar on *The Sinthome* in 1975-6, that most consistently unravels the register's "simultaneous logic of formation and deformation" (Eyers 2012b, 57).

⁸ Lacan's seminal essay on the mirror stage (1949) stakes out the problematics of identification as the young child is lured by the coherent mirror image into assuming a unified "I," a *Gestalt* that "fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him" (Lacan 1977a, 2). For Lacan, the mirror stage experience crystallizes the "*function of méconnaissance* that characterizes the ego in all its structures" (6; Lacan's emphasis).

driven projects, her parties resemble works of art which lend meaning to the social in times of post-war crisis.⁹

Because of this psychoanalytic grasp of the mirror image, Clarissa Dalloway is capable of a more creative self-transcendence than other complex characters in the novel, especially Peter Walsh and Doris Kilman. Assessing Clarissa's former lover and the history teacher from the vantage point of the novel's standard of group behavior, the parameters set up in early scenes of types of psychic surrender, both exhibit minimal distance to ego ideals, Peter fantasizing about the consolations of romantic love and Miss Kilman adopting Christianity in states of narcissistic fulfillment. In fact, the complicity of these characters' mind-sets with the post-war national mood is variously expressed in the novel: even if, during the scenes of his London promenade, Peter Walsh appears his youthful critical self, "a Socialist," caring "not a straw" for the establishment, "what they said of him – the Dalloways, the Whitbreads, and their set" (43), his thoughts run along conventional lines and are portrayed as refrains to the national spectacles: the thudding sound of "boys in uniform, carrying guns" conducts his interior monologues, "drummed his thoughts, strict in step, up Whitehall, without his doing" (43). Not questioning the military ritual, which paradoxically both mourns and celebrates violence, the young generation in a spirit of "duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" delivering a wreath to a memorial of the First World War "Glorious Dead" (43), Peter Walsh senses in himself the "great renunciation" of soldiers (44). Tellingly, not responding critically to the challenge of an aggressive historical past, embodied in the "marble stare" of Nelson, Gordon and Havelock, Peter reverts to fond memories of his schoolboy worship of General Gordon: "Gordon standing lonely with one leg raised and his arms crossed – poor Gordon, he thought" (44). If Clarissa's ego ideal is inflected by intimations of psychic otherness, then Peter's ideals are unproblematic, interpellating him to condone, accept and worship.

Similarly, despite her unjust treatment by the English during the war and her thorough "knowledge of modern history" (106), Doris Kilman uncritically identifies with the Christian promise of transcendent love. A harassed outsider in London society because of her German heritage, Miss Kilman agonizes over her emotional and professional losses, in a moment of desperation succumbing to the "oceanic feelings" of religion: "Our Lord had come to her. She had seen the light" (105).¹⁰ Miss Kilman's emotional needs are partly assuaged through narcissistic identification with Christian ideals as in prayer she struggles "to aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself both of hatred and love" (113). Significantly, the suffering woman is depicted in a

⁹ Edmondson (2012) and Hite (2010) understand Clarissa Dalloway as the ethical center of the novel, but do not analyze the psychodynamics involved.

¹⁰ "Oceanic feeling" in connection to religion was suggested to Freud by his friend Romain Rolland. It is first and foremost a psychosomatic sensation of oneness, triggering nevertheless a spiritual attitude. See the first chapter of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930).

scene in Westminster Abbey which echoes Peter Walsh's imitative military march up Westminster in an unquestioning spirit of nationalism. Although Westminster Cathedral and the Abbey are described as the "habitation of God" in the midst of traffic and as a "sanctuary," the worshippers within behave like curious tourists, as "strollers" who gaze around at the statues, the famous waxworks and "shuffled past the tomb of the Unknown Warrior" (113).¹¹ As Doris Kilman, one of the scapegoats of war, suffers in Christian prayer in Westminster Abbey, that very institutional milieu is depicted as a static showroom, filled with "marble stares," which prevent full awareness of the trauma symbolized by the warrior's tomb in its midst.

Complicit with crowd mentality, easily swayed by authority and the "spirit of religion," Peter Walsh and Doris Kilman nevertheless are impressionable individuals, capable of detached speculation and self-critique.¹² Because of his genuine human interest in Clarissa, Peter is not only emotionally entangled with her, but seems, however hesitatingly, to sense an attraction to her as an alternative ego ideal. During heightened moments of insight, Peter delves beneath the normative attitudes, his previous condescending view of Clarissa as "a mere hostess" (64) with "her perfect manners" (52), to grasp her world-making capacity, her talents for both aesthetic design and political networking. Mentally noting that "a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit" (65) has grown on Clarissa, Peter immediately makes a distinction between Richard Dalloway's predictable politics and Mrs Dalloway's inventive strategies of assembly in democratic space:

She made her drawing-room a sort of meeting-place: she had genius for it. Over and over again he had seen her take some raw youth, twist him, turn him, wake him up; set him going. Infinite numbers of dull people conglomerated round her, of course. But odd unexpected people turned up; an artist sometimes; sometimes a writer; queer fish in that atmosphere. And behind it all was that network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people; running about with bunches of flowers, little presents. (65-6)

Although Peter further comments on the feminine and domestic nature of these activities – "all that interminable traffic that women of her sort keep up" (66) – he admiringly perceives the crossing of borders between private and public,

¹¹ The cathedral space staked out here is reminiscent of a contrast Woolf draws in one of her London essays, "This is the House of Commons," between "the days of the small separate statue" and the "splendid hall" of the "age of architecture" (Woolf 1975, 43), a contrast signifying, on one hand, static national history and, on the other hand, the future "house of commons," transsubjective and genuinely democratic (Woolf's 1930s London essays were published collectively as *The London Scene* by HarperCollins in 1975).

¹² At one point Walsh claims that "susceptibility to impressions had been his undoing" (60).

a production of new social space, placed in the home, but potentially a source for real political action among citizens in a post-war traumatized world.

Peter Walsh's penetrating insights interface with and support Clarissa's own developing thoughts about the nature of her parties. Increasingly, throughout this June day in 1923, there are indications that Clarissa Dalloway's deepening self-awareness becomes immersed in speculations about group formation, more specifically, about the infrastructure of the parties she is famous for hosting, and that she has held in her house for the duration of a long married life. If at the beginning of the novel, in front of Buckingham Palace, a play of the modern group mind was staged, with an almost utopian vision, on one hand, and the real of politics, on the other, then the party formations in Clarissa's home occupy a middle ground, a real space, produced socially, but at the same time exterior to the quotidian, festive and beautiful, with association to the freedom of the skies. In fact, an analogy can be drawn between the aeroplane threading in and out of the clouds, escaping the insistence of clock-time and the punctual ringing of Big Ben, and the party as a fluid spatio-temporal entity, an other space, both within and without social reality, familiar and unfamiliar, private and public. There can be no doubting the uncanny attractions of Clarissa's party: constant reminders of it echo throughout the narrative, the invitation to "remember my party. Remember my party," almost repeated as frequently as the more solemn reference to Big Ben striking the hour and the refrain "the leaden circles dissolved in the air" (e.g. 41). Thus, the strange topography of the party infiltrates urban reality, ruled by a strict temporality and normative conventions.

The potential of Clarissa's party as a vehicle for regenerating social relations can perhaps best be estimated via a configuration in urban studies called *heterotopia*, a coinage of Michel Foucault, first proposed in a lecture from 1967, titled, "Of Other Spaces." Of relevance for a study of the party formation in *Mrs Dalloway* is Foucault's delineation of *the mirror* as a site of the psychological experience of heterotopia, an experience which splits the viewing subject, but at the same time intimates utopian possibilities. Although Foucault is not specifically concerned here with psychoanalytic ontology, his description captures a process from narcissistic misrecognition to recognition of the self as other: "In the mirror," states Foucault, "I see myself there where I am not [. . .]. I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself" (Foucault 1984, 4). Significantly, the mirror stakes out a virtuality, an unreal space, an unearthly "utopia," and also paradoxically a real place, as it orients the viewer in his or her objective world. Indeed, the gaze from the mirror is from an absence, which must be traversed for, as Foucault states, "myself [. . .] to reconstitute myself there where I am" (4).

A similar process of heterotopic self-alienation occurs in *Mrs Dalloway*, culminating in Clarissa's sharpened understanding of, as she contemplates at one point, her party as "an offering," as her special "gift" (103). At first,

thinking vaguely in those terms, to counter her husband's and her former lover's condescending view of her as the "perfect hostess," shortly before opening her doors to the party, Clarissa is depicted within a mirroring context, where she reflects critically on narcissistic group ties – "love and religion,"¹³ she calls them – recognizing her own reflection in the face of an old woman, in the window of the opposite building. The insight can be described as heterotopic, because as Clarissa gazes upon the window, infinite possibilities come to mind, and in a deconstructive figuration, reminiscent of the earlier fluid sky-writing, the other's mysterious spatiality supercedes the interpellating relations of love and religion: oppressive emotional forces, love and religion neglect, what Clarissa thinks of as "the privacy of the soul" (107); "why creeds and prayers [. . .] when, thought Clarissa, that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant, whom she could see going from chest of drawers to dressing-table" (109). Genuine unsentimental empathy underpins her figuration: "here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?" (108).

Foucault's conception of heterotopia as first the subject's experience via the mirror of a split identity, of virtuality grounding actual space, can helpfully be seen to underpin Clarissa's epiphanic moment, its revisionary psycho-social ontology. Instead of the absolutism of romantic love and religion, eclipsing difference, the singular pluralism of rooms stakes out a dynamic arena, a flexible social milieu expectant of and welcoming to the other. Particularly revealing about Clarissa's vision is the admission of "mystery," of knowledge that is unknown, asignifying, in the sense that it is emergent, awaiting speech that acts on the world.¹⁴ Indeed, repeatedly trying to define the significance of her parties, defying Peter and Richard's critique of her as either snobbish or childish (102-3), Clarissa penetrates beneath the "superficial" and "fragmentary" judgments (103) to a profound sense of political relevance, of herself as an intermediary between individual lives and the collective:

Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater ; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt continuously the sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity: and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? (103)

As Clarissa also admits, her views of this act as "an offering [. . .] sounded horribly vague" (103). However, in pointing not only to the political role of a hostess, but also to her aesthetic practices – combining, creating – the

¹³ What facilitates her thoughts on these aspects of crowd mentality is the encounter with the love-struck Peter Walsh and the newly converted Doris Kilman on that particular June day.

¹⁴ I will continue to emphasize emergent knowledge in the next section.

ground is prepared for fuller, more engaging articulations in Mrs Dalloway of the heterotopic imaginary and of the concomitant production of new social space.

The real matrix of art

Discussing trauma in modernist art and in *Mrs Dalloway* in particular, Karen DeMeester notes that Woolf's formal experimentation, stream-of-consciousness technique and spatio-temporal disorientation, captures the essence of post-war neurosis, but fails to represent recovery: "Modernist literature defines the post-traumatic condition, but the task of giving individual and cultural meaning to suffering falls to later generations of artists" (DeMeester 1998, 652).¹⁵ Woolf's novel, however, I claim, in its avowed aim of interlacing "the world seen by the sane and the insane" (*D* 2: 207-8), in exploring *truth* from the interrelated perspectives of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, tests alternative ways of recovery through art works which are deeply immersed in private suffering and at the same time expressive of hopeful social change. In a sense, throughout the novel, the doubling of the protagonists' mentalities extends Clarissa's alienating mirror experiences, her growing heterotopic awareness: the virtual other space of the mirror triggers genuine empathy. Undermining narcissistic group ties, ways of normative relating, that in Clarissa's understanding underpin "love and religion" (107), the alternative group awareness of *Mrs Dalloway* emerges from the matrix of the (psychoanalytic) Real, from psychic absence which paradoxically orients being-in-the-world. Both Clarissa and Septimus are concerned with communicating this traumatic truth and both desire to socialize it, to signify it in the national consciousness: "the truth [. . .] was to be given whole . . . 'To whom' [Septimus] asked aloud" (57); "but to whom" shall Clarissa offer her imaginative assemblies (103). In his hallucinating reveries, Septimus hears voices that urge him to tell "[t]he supreme secret" to the Prime Minister, to the Cabinet (57). Also, Clarissa seems unconsciously driven to testify, to articulate the "privacy of the soul" in a public arena.

Exploring an alternative ontological ground for empathetic bonding, Woolf's novel produces an other space in the midst of normative reality, in order to infuse that reality with intimations of the Real. Accordingly, in this section, I aim to investigate more specifically the concern in *Mrs Dalloway* with transforming the real of the crowd, the narcissistic desire for self-enhancement through others, into the real of art as site of self-transcendence, in a border-crossing conception of the artwork as psycho-social practice.¹⁶ In

¹⁵ DeMeester's article includes a convincing analysis of Septimus as suffering from war neurosis, not psychosis.

¹⁶ I use "real" here in a rather porous sense as the ontological ground of practice. The Real refers more particularly to the psychic register as theorized by Lacan.

a sense, Woolf's declared strategy of presenting "the truth," filtered through the psychic registers of Clarissa and Septimus, underpins her strong statement of intent in a diary entry from 1923: "In this book [. . .] I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity, I want to criticize the social system, & and show it at work, at its most intense" (*D II*: 248). As Molly Hite succinctly points out, social critique here refers not solely to the narrator's harsh satire of patriarchal figures such as Sir William Bradshaw but more subtly to "critique in the post-Kantian sense, the exploration of the conditions and limits of a dominant framework of thinking and feeling" (Hite 2010, 263). It is important to stress that this subtle subversion takes place on the psycho-social level in the active interweavings, through the perspectives of two protagonists, of the Real and the Symbolic, of highlighting the imbrication of "the absent cause" of subjectivity with social identity in historical time. By focusing on the unanimous relation between the severe war trauma of the veteran Septimus Smith and the fragile psychology of Mrs Dalloway, who became "one of the most thorough-going sceptics [Peter] had ever met" (66) after, in particular, losing her sister in a senseless accident (she was killed by a falling tree) – via this doubling, Woolf's novel expresses a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity as a fading presence, as precariously anchored in Symbolic identity, undercut by an asignifying Real, that paradoxically constitutes signification. As Lacan illustrates in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977b), Aristotle's concepts of "automaton" and "tuché" can be appropriated by psychoanalysis to suggest both the automatic thrust of the signifying chain and its vulnerability as (missed) encounter with the Real (Lacan 1977b, 53-56). Further, Lacan insists on "the constitutive *absence* of the encounter with the Real, an absence we can read as an effect of the signifier's perpetual implication in laying the ground for the Real" (Eyers 2012a, 81). In other words, the specter of trauma is implicated in signification, both outside it and within.

Mrs Dalloway strives aesthetically to represent the paradox of identity as both present and absent, by first, as I have indicated, interlacing "the sane and the insane" and secondly, by spatializing such a paradox in social reality, in a version of heterotopia. In a hyperbolic manner, the war veteran Septimus Warren Smith displays the psychic shifts between a sense of non-identity and social anchoring. As several critics have observed, despite his mental derangement, Septimus experiences moments of lucidity, "speaking as he used to do" (121), according to Rezia, his wife, and admonishing himself that "[h]e must be cautious. He would not go mad" (120).¹⁷ Withdrawals from symbolic logic, from, as the young man states it, "the scientific explanation" (58; "one must be scientific above all, scientific" 122), entail terrifying sensations of dissolution, of metamorphosis into other phenomena, of fading into non-

¹⁷ Besides DeMeester (1998), Hite (2010) and Bradshaw (2000) argue for Septimus' intermittent sanity.

human substances. Forms of human perception and understanding dissolve: in Regents Park, a Skye terrier, snuffing at Septimus' trousers, fearfully turns into a man (58); a man in a grey suit (Peter Walsh) walking toward Rezia and Septimus in the park merges into Evans, the comrade killed in the war; in the heat of the day, one's own body melts, "is macerated until only the nerve fibers were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock" (58). Language and communication also lose conventional markers as suddenly during the Regent Park episode, Septimus becomes unmoored from his marriage, from the social tie, transcending to an ethereal realm where semantic logic is dismantled in surreal apprehension; instead of empirical, everyday truth, "the scientific explanation," voices "called forth [Septimus] in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning" (57). Having shed social identity, Septimus transects boundaries of knowledge and utters other truths, outside signification, yet insisting within it also as emergent articulation:

The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first, that trees are alive; next, there is no crime; next, love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever. (57)

It is loss of identity that induces this strange yet all-encompassing, deeply ethical vision of the interconnectedness of phenomena, of the flesh of the world, where life itself is celebrated through unselfish love, barring aggression and crime.¹⁸ Merging painfully, yet often ecstatically, with otherness, Septimus testifies to an originary connection, an empathetic grid, latent and unexplored within the symbolic realm.

The severity of the young man's war trauma prevents him from sifting the visions from the other side through everyday semantics, from combining and creating, the urges behind Mrs Dalloway's socializing (103). Significantly, the pre-war backstory reveals Septimus' poetic talents and love of literature, qualities that persist in his traumatized mental state. As a clerk working in a London real-estate firm, Septimus also passionately immerses himself in reading and writing, "devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilization*, and Bernard Shaw" (72). The need to express himself in writing, driven by the great artists and thinkers, by "the intoxication of language" (73), is made manifest in his post-traumatic state, when, for instance, just before the suicide, Lucrezia brings out bundles of her husband's papers, consisting of surreal diagrams, designs and maps, as well as strange writings, with glimpses

¹⁸ I use the expression "flesh of the world" in a phenomenological sense, drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "perceptual faith," the conviction of the body's immersion in the world. Even if that conviction becomes distorted in the Symbolic, in reflection and abstraction, it underlies human experience. See Merleau-Ponty's posthumously published manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964).

into both dissolution and splendor. Septimus' disturbing poetic visions seem to echo his deepened insight into art after the war, "his conversations with Shakespeare" (125), Dante and Aeschylus, poets who express a complicated beauty, insisting with messages of "loathing, hatred and despair" (75), latent within the lyrical surfaces. Literature, in Septimus' heightened understanding, transmits a paradoxical vision of humanity, as a mass of loathsome brutes and sublimated subjects, in other words, a vision of the fluid bounds between deformation and civilized form. What Septimus seems to intimate both in his own writings and in great poetry is the *sublime*, the way beauty is double-edged, expressive, in fact, of the fading human subject, of the absence at the heart of even the most exquisite form. In psychoanalytic terms, literature resonates with the (missed) encounter with the Real, subtly subversive of stability and certainty, yet inviting empowering identification with its tragic identity.

Thus, in *Mrs Dalloway*, during an episode at home just before his death, Septimus in a lucid state experiences again a loss of identity, a merger with otherness, but now sifted through the artistry of the Symbolic, leading not to terrifying dissolution but to transcendence of self in ethical connection: lying on the sitting-room sofa, bathed in the light and shadows of a sunny day, Septimus senses "universal love," a bonding with the phenomena of the world, with "the trees [that] dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air," with "the sound of water," and the voices of birds singing (118); even his hand, lying on the back of the sofa, radiates out into time and space, belonging to the flesh of the world, once when he was bathing in the sea, "floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard the dogs barking and barking far away" (118). It is telling that this immersive, ecstatic experience is sifted through lines from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, "Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more," and that solacing empathy is felt as nature "[breathes] through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning" (118-9).¹⁹ Striking also is the expression "hollowed hands," evoking Septimus' mortal hand, frail human limb, achieving meaning in the beautiful signifier.

Similarly, often suffering through the darkness of non-being, Clarissa Dalloway increasingly throughout the narrative transforms brutal fears into ethical sublimation. Like Septimus, Clarissa experiences fading subjectivity, how "an emptiness about the heart of life" (26), an absent cause, paradoxically both threatens and sustains symbolic logic. As I discussed earlier in the essay, the attic-room episode concerns the vanishing of Clarissa, how she both literally and metaphorically "disrobes" beside a narrow, coffin-like bed, "like a nun withdrawing" from the world, not in order to retrieve essentials but to confront her own fragmented identity, the incoherence which both threatens and sustains her self-presence: her face in the mirror is "pointed; dartlike; definite," but it is a manufactured image, "her self when some effort, some call

¹⁹ Note that this is a version of the line that also comforts Clarissa at various moments.

on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible” (32). However, unlike Septimus, who is only sporadically able to sift his dissolutions through the signifier, through the “scientific explanation,” Clarissa more consistently sublimates her sense of trauma into a logistics of “universal love,” merging with the other both ecstatically and relationally. Thus, a parallax scene to Septimus’ sublime moments, discussed above, occurs in the early stages of the novel: in an image which replicates the “flesh of the world” motif, Clarissa also perceives a cosmic kinship, a vital flow through all things, “the streets of London,” the old childhood home at Bourton, old friends like Peter Walsh, “people she had never met,” “the trees at home”; similar to Septimus’ frail body, Clarissa is carried on an empathetic grid, “laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist” (8). Again, foreshadowing Septimus’ moment of self-transcendence, Clarissa’s experience is encapsulated by the dirge from *Cymbeline*: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/Nor the furious winter’s rages”; in order to validate, what I want to call, this ethics of the Real – “Mrs D seeing the truth. S.S seeing the insane truth” – the novel socializes the insight, contextualizing it in post-traumatic 1920s London. Thinking instantly of the sufferings of her contemporaries, the “well of tears” (8). Mrs Dalloway sifts her perceptions from the other side through social reality, sustaining her precarious ethics within the realm of symbolic logic.

Profoundly aware of the paradoxes of identity, of lack as the condition of being, Clarissa and Septimus represent hidden truths the socio-political reality either ignores or represses, but that, as the many literary allusions of the novel testify to, animate aesthetic expression. Indeed, a poetic sensibility and love of literature connects the protagonists, Clarissa’s backstory also alluding to her extensive reading as a young woman, influenced even to a greater extent than her double by the radical reformist ideas of Plato, Shelley and William Morris as well as the agnosticism of Thomas Huxley and John Tyndall. The older Mrs Dalloway admonishes herself for lack of education (“could not think, write, even play the piano” 103) but her mature egalitarian views appear inflections of the youthful utopianism she shared with Sally Seton and Peter Walsh: “There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom [. . .] about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out” (28-9). The good friend Peter and Clarissa herself admire her “gift” (103), her “genius” (65) for assembly, how the hostess transforms the home into an alternative “house of commons,” in fact, experimenting with ideas, designing political thinking in an ethico-aesthetic fashion, practicing the maturing insight, shared with sublime artists, into the lack at the heart of human signification and the vital empathy that springs both painfully and joyfully from the tragic knowledge. A revealing detail, mulled over by Peter, potentially suggesting Clarissa and her husband’s different ideological (and

ontological) outlooks, is the latter's superficial assessment about the decadence of Shakespeare's sonnets: "Richard Dalloway got on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare's sonnets because it was like listening to keyholes (besides, the relationship was not one that he approved)" (64); the cavalier neglect of the sonnets' existential themes, of their tragic joy in beauty, youth, the body and love, speaks volumes about the "social system," Woolf's novel set out to criticize ("I want to criticize the social system, & show it at work, at its most intense" *D II*: 248), a system built on convention, order and control (Dr Bradshaw's "Proportion" and "Conversion"), blind to the ontological truth of art and therefore without empathy.

In exploring the psychological and philosophical modulations of Clarissa Dalloway's mind (and of her double's mind), Woolf focalizes the novel's political imagination, which in the historical context of post-war London, can be productively interpreted as the *heterotopic imaginary*, an aesthetic social practice, that emerges from a psychoanalytic ontology and that in its emergence "retunes the symbolic" (Pollock 2006, e.g. 23),²⁰ imbuing it with intersubjective values such as dignity, respect, self-reliance and empathy. In the first place, in the short piece, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1967; 1984), as well as in a later related radio talk (2004), Foucault underscores the imaginary force of heterotopias, referring to them as habitats of children at play – the "end of the garden [. . .] the Indian tent set up in the middle of the attic [. . .] the large bed of the parents" (quoted in De Caeter and Dehaene 2009, 95) – and troping the ocean liner as heterotopia *par excellence*, as the ultimate dream space, "the greatest reserve of the imagination" (9). Consequently, urban theorists as well as cultural and literary scholars have collated Foucault's brief and suggestive remarks with real "counter-spaces" in cities, historical and (post)-modern, and with metaphoric spaces in the arts and literature. In "The space of play" (2009), for instance, Lieven De Caeter and Michiel Dehaene find fault with Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) for offering a reductive understanding of the human predicament, excluding "thinking of art" from the life of thinking (*vita comtemplativa*), and thereby "largely disregarding art's ritualistic origins, its reflective bearings, and its proto-political dimension" (88). In contrast, De Caeter and Dehaene consider play as fundamental to the human condition and map its configurations in city life as "the third space" from the ancient Greek Hippodamus' plan for Milete to the modern theater and the club. The authors understand heterotopia as intermediary, third spaces, as border-zones, in fact, that contradict the normative public realm, on one hand, and the hidden domestic life of the private realm, on the other (95). In their outlining of "a

²⁰ The expression "retuning the symbolic" is culled from Griselda Pollock's introduction to Bracha L. Ettinger's *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006). Ettinger is an artist and a Lacanian psychoanalyst, who emphasizes the power of borderspaces to infiltrate and open up oppressive strictures in the (patriarchal) Symbolic.

general theory of heterotopia,” De Cauter and Dehaene propose that the third category of play breaches binaries such as “exclusive versus inclusive, kinship versus citizenship, hidden versus open, private property versus public domain” (91), opening onto a dialectical alternative, “other-spaces” that dynamically merge, as in a theater performance, the virtual and the real: “play begins, the virtual becomes real (and the real begins); when the play is over, the reverse happens and we return to so-called reality” (93). What is crucial about heterotopias is that a *remainder*, an excess, is spatialized, so that, as in the case of Greek tragic theater, an absence, suppressed in the normative, is channeled through dramatic conflict, often involving female protagonists, passive in the public sphere but mediating new knowledge on the stage in liason with a receptive audience. In this mediating work of heterotopia lies its imaginative “proto-political” power (89; 100).

In the light of De Cauter and Dehane’s theorizing, it is possible to understand *Mrs Dalloway* in its entirety as partly the product of heterotopic thinking about the human condition, exploring the hidden source of art (“thinking of art”) to mediate “other-spaces” as ontological ground for civic community, in both its private and public dimensions (“In this book [. . .] I want to give life & death, sanity and insanity, I want to criticize the social system, & show it at work at its most intense” (*D II*: 248)). As I showed in the previous section on “party thoughts,” the novel resonates with Clarissa Dalloway’s ruminations about the aim and purpose of the parties she regularly hosts, and Woolf’s own creative aims, as stated in the diaries, seem infused with Clarissa’s “transcendental theory” – “odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter – even trees, or barns” (129) – culminating in the assembly at the end, in the third space, that opens the hidden other to the ordinary experience of the collective.²¹ Before looking more closely at Mrs Dalloway’s party as a version of heterotopia and at its proto-political configuration, I want to examine more fully the psychoanalytic dimension of this other space, as it is predominately in the ontological Real that Woolf’s novel “criticize[s] the social system & shows it at work at its most intense.” As discussed above, although Foucault does not stress this, the ontological ground of heterotopia in the mirror is psychoanalytic, in that the precariousness of identity is staged, the sense of a unified self arrived at in a “mixed, joint experience” of “absolutely real” psycho-social space and “absolutely unreal” shadowland “that opens up behind the surface” (Foucault 1984, 4). Because this originary experience of

²¹ In the introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Mrs Dalloway* Anne E. Fernald highlights the party scene as the start and culmination of the novel’s creative process. Woolf is severally impatient to “go straight at the grand party” (Fernald 2015, lxxiii; D 2: 312). Note also Woolf’s further comment in the diary: “in my last lap of Mrs D. There I am now – at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, & climb slowly upstairs. It is to be a most complicated spirited solid piece, knitting together everything & ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa” (D 2: 312).

heterotopia involves splits, paradoxes, self-alienation and vertigo, the production of concomitant social spaces in both material reality and in the metaphoric dimensions of the arts eclipses identity politics, groupings along the lines of nation, ethnicity, gender and class, instead accommodating difference, enabling an ethics of the Real, resistant to, in Jean-Luc Nancy's phrase, the "immanent power" of cohesive groups.²² In Mrs Dalloway, Woolf's heterotopic mindset counteracts the "divide and rule" of identity politics, designing as the culmination of the novel an experimental borderspace, where psychoanalytic (or psychoanalytically inflected) ethics challenges conventional community ties. As Marco Cenzatti notes in "Heterotopias of difference," the non-essentiality of heterotopias, their paradoxical existence as concrete sites and unknowable residue, "make[s] explicit how fragmented, mobile and changing the production of space is" (Cenzatti 2008, 81). This deconstructive perspective pertains not least to artistic heterotopias which metaphorically imbricate social reality with its own excess.

The proto-political thrust of heterotopia in *Mrs Dalloway* resides in a mediation of the effects of the Real, grafted in nuanced form onto symbolic signification. In the beginning pages of the autobiographical "A Sketch of the Past" (1939-1940),²³ Woolf reflects on the nature of her writings, tracing their philosophical concern with discovering patterns behind the randomness of appearances (she calls the latter "the cotton wool" of the everyday or "non-being" Woolf 1985, 69-70) to traumatic experiences in childhood that revealed senseless hate, violence, dissolution and death. One memory scene depicts how a tomboyish fight with her brother Thoby is cut short through the shock of recognizing its cruel undercurrents:

Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me. I remember that feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness. I slunk off alone, feeling horribly depressed. (71)

Again, a second "exceptional moment" from childhood captures the effects of shock from hearing of a neighbour's suicide; Woolf is in a "trance of horror," being "dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair" (71). It is as if a natural catastrophe has shattered the innocent world of the child and even the garden at home is contaminated: "the next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It

²² Allan Pero sees Woolf's depiction of community in *Between the Acts* anticipating Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of "the singular plural" in *Being Singular Plural*: "What emerges is an idea of community that resists the blandishments of unity or sameness, but rests on the notion, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, of a "being with" (Pero 2015-2016, 23; Nancy 2000, 4).

²³ Together with other previously unpublished autobiographical writings, "A Sketch of the Past" was collected in the volume *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind (1976; 1985).

seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it" (71). The pain, violence, hate, cruelty and suffering associated with these moments seem inexplicable, yet pervasive and powerful. In psychoanalytic terms, these are traumatic experiences, effects of the Real, resisting understanding, but at the same time paradoxically sustaining signification and threatening its collapse.²⁴

Woolf's consequent meditation on the vocation of a writer can also be linked to a psychoanalytic perspective as ethical commitment, as mediation in the symbolic of "the shock-receiving capacity" (72), as a kind of networking in language, shaping formlessness in the manner of the great sublime writers, alluded to as productive influences in *Mrs Dalloway*. In the next final section I will examine further that novel's "art thinking" (in De Caeter and Dehaene's sense), first in the production of play space at the end of the novel and secondly in the issuing of, what I call, "heterotropes," tropes that connote the paradox of identity, and that in retuning the symbolic, subtly undermine group cohesion, based on power politics, narcissistic leaders and suppression of empathy.

Heterotroping the social

In recent decades, critics have been concerned with Woolf's spatial thinking, and Andrew Thacker, for instance, in *Moving through modernity* (1988) devotes a chapter to literary geography and the heterotopic underpinning of transport technologies in *Mrs Dalloway*.²⁵ Among many revealing analyses of the dialectic of urban space, Thacker points to the contrast between Peter Walsh's navigation in the patriarchal and imperial territories along Whitehall, which expresses a disoriented relation to the ideologies of gender and nation (Thacker 1988, 161-3), and Elizabeth Dalloway's ride on a top of an omnibus in Fleet street and the Strand, a liberating experience, supported by description of the bus as the (Foucauldian) ship of the imagination, as heterotopia *par excellence* (169-71). Along similar lines, in "Taxi! The Modern Taxicab as Feminist Heterotopia" (2014), Anne E. Fernald is interested in the other space of the modern cab, which stimulates the creative thinking of women, because it shelters them from the male gaze and enables them to swiftly wander among the evocative landscapes of modernity. As figured in the fiction of several modernist female writers, in particular in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, *Flush* and *The Years*, "the taxi is a type of heterotopia: a real place but one

²⁴ The Lacanian Real refers to inert materiality, an inhuman core to human psychology. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan makes a case for the originality of analytic ethical experience, emerging from trauma, and thus insisting on intersubjective values, cooperation, empathy and attention to singularity (e.g. 12-3).

²⁵ An important work here is Susan M. Squier's work on gendered metropolitan space in *Virginia Woolf and London* (1985).

which functions outside of and in critical relation to, the norms of the rest of the community” (Fernald 2014, 213). Like Thacker, Fernald highlights descriptive details of “motion,” “flow,” the streaming London streets, as if transformed to waterways to carry forward the heterotopic boats of vital minds.²⁶

At the end of *Mrs Dalloway*, even though the party space in the Dalloways’ home is not specifically referred to in nautical terms, it is associated with the tide of the London streets and configured as “the piers of a bridge,” destination for boat-like taxicabs carrying party-guests, “rushing round the corner” of Clarissa’s habitat, “drawn together” as if pulled by the natural flow of water (139). In fact, Peter’s observances during the evening stroll to Clarissa’s party through Bloomsbury toward Westminster confirm the heterotopic atmosphere of the London districts, the streets filled with young people in evening dress, appearing otherworldly, all with “the same rapture, flush[ing] their faces” (137). Again, natural imagery enhances the scene, the eerie June evening light, “yellow-blue,” transforming the habitual London environs, “the leaves in the square,” into the sea “foliage of a submerged city” (137). The metamorphosis of the cityscape into a waterland continues on Peter’s last leg of the journey: he senses that “everybody was going out,” and that “it seemed as if the whole of London were embarking in little boats moored to the bank, tossing on the waters, as if the whole place were floating off in carnival” (139). An enchanted city, latent within the everyday, seems to rise to the surface this warm June evening, collapsing the habitual distinctions between phenomena, inspiring Peter Walsh to think not only about the beautiful scenery but about the liberating social dynamics inherent within it as well: Peter suspects from the overheard “words of a girl, from a housemaid’s laughter – intangible things you couldn’t lay your hands on – that a shift in the whole pyramidal accumulation which in his youth had seemed immovable” (137).

Figured as “the piers of a bridge,” the Dalloways’ home belongs to this enchanted city, and the party episode can be said to philosophically foreground and explore the heterotopic dynamic latent within it. The connotation of “bridge” seems particularly apt as in party time the private home is transformed into a kind of theater space which dialectically crosses the habitual dichotomies between “exclusive versus inclusive, kinship versus citizenship, hidden versus open, private property versus public domain” (De Caeter and Dehaene 2008, 91). Like Peter Walsh, who expects to “have an experience” at the party, something out of the ordinary (“But what?” 138), the guests enter in shapes as otherworldly as that of the rapturous youth in the festive London streets. Play

²⁶ Fernald refers to Woolf’s essay from 1932 “Oxford Street Tide” to support her contention that “Woolf figures her attraction to thought as motion and flow in the consistent analogizing of London streets to water” (222).

turns ordinary reality into virtuality, which is experienced as real; “when the play is over, the reverse happens and we return to so-called reality” (De Caeter and Dehaene 2008, 93). In fact, in the role of a hostess (and a mediator), Clarissa Dalloway offers her own theory of this other space:

Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way and much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background; it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. (145)

The implication is that even if party guests are not literally attending an artistic performance, they can tap into an enriching experience, which potentially deepens their knowledge of themselves and others. In various unexpected encounters with old acquaintances, estranged family members, close friends rarely visited, complete strangers from various walks of life, individuals are challenged to converse, to speak, listen, speculate and interpret. Thus, for instance, Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, intimate friends in their youth, but leading separate lives for the better part of twenty years, engage in a revealing conversation, that sometimes resembles gossip, but also opens onto “things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort”: discussing Clarissa's personality with Sally, Peter confesses that his relations with his former lover have ruined his chances of happiness, “had spoiled his life” (163), a sentiment latent, not articulated, throughout the novel. Also, Sally goes deeper than usually, exchanging confidences about her loneliness and mistrust of people, despite her seemingly flourishing family life. Random as the friends' talk appears, they arrive at fresh, interesting insights about themselves and others: just before taking her leave, Sally has revised her negative opinion of Richard Dalloway, both by listening to Peter's generous remarks and by witnessing the mutual devotion between Elizabeth and her father; she could feel it “by the way Elizabeth went to her father” (164).

It is within the dialectics of this theatrical space that Woolf explores most fully the workings of empathy as an alternative social bond, rooted in psychoanalytically inflected ontology. The joyful occasion turns into tragedy when Clarissa hears about Septimus Smith's suicide from Lady Bradshaw, and her reactions to this are explored in terms which can be understood as paradigmatic for the “truths” the protagonists stand for, “the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side” (D 2: 207-8). I refer to the underpinnings of Clarissa's response here as *psychoanalytic* empathy, because it emerges from intimations of the Real, and derives from a realm of thought which “defines itself in different terms [from the rationalistic moral categories of Aristotle and Kant], in terms of traumas and their persistence” (Lacan 1992, 12-13). In fact, Clarissa, similar to Woolf's own experiences in the terrifying “moments

of being,” recounted in a “Sketch of the Past,” senses at first a paralyzing shock, “a feeling of hopeless sadness” (71), brought on by a dissolution of self and immediate identification with the trauma of suicide:

her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud, thud, in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? (156)

The defenceless empathy here is as painful as Woolf’s shock “of discovering that people hurt each other; that a man I had seen had killed himself,” and is almost as inarticulate as the fears of childhood, “the sledge-hammer force of the blow” (72), the “thud, thud, thud” of unendurable physical injury. However, as the question indicates – “why had he done it?” – Clarissa recuperates, gains distance and tries to understand, importantly without losing the first shocking intuitive insight.

What follows in the dramatization of Clarissa’s reaction in the solitary little room is a process of empowering *interpretation* which leads to a deeper understanding of self and other and finally to an affirmative vision that articulates a pattern, an empathetic bonding between phenomena of the world. In a review of Stefano Bolognini’s book *Psychoanalytic Empathy* (2004), Juan Tubert-Oklander makes an interesting comparison between the analytic encounter and reading texts, using Mauricio Beuchot’s concept of “analogical hermeneutics” to define the nature of the interpreter’s or perceiver’s empathy as “a balance between empathic acceptance and critical scrutiny” (Tubert-Oklander 2007, 55).²⁷ As opposed to the essentialist hermeneutics of “univocality” and the unlimited plurality of “equivocal” readings, “analogy” approaches the truth through reason and argument, aware of “many possible interpretations” but using critical judgment to winnow out the most coherent and abiding insight (55). Analogical hermeneutics is generated in psychoanalytic empathy because of its ontological criterion, “that is, the intuition of the existence that lies behind the text and its interpretation” (55). Thus, both identity and difference are at stake, a profound sense of the shared shocks of existence together with respect for the other’s unique response, a self-transcendent, disinterested view.

It is possible to follow Clarissa Dalloway’s interpretation of Septimus’ suffering as a crescendo of heightened discernment: at first, she viscerally shares his suicide and then, as Woolf the writer excelled in, relies on the powers of the mind to “through reason [. . .] provide an explanation” (Woolf 1985, 72). Increasingly perceiving the young man’s difference from herself, Clarissa

²⁷ Mauricio Beuchot is a Mexican philosopher. His work on hermeneutics has not been translated into English.

critically reflects on the social situation which prompted the tragic act and appraises his courageous decision to end his life. With slicing intelligence (“She sliced like a knife through everything” 7), Mrs Dalloway probes the relationship between the young veteran and the doctors, and even if she fictionalizes scenes in order to explain the power dynamic at work, the truth is arrived at: the mental images match precisely the narrator’s account of the encounter with Sir William Bradshaw in Harley Street, Septimus’ humiliation and the doctor’s patronizing cruelty; Clarissa also surmises Septimus’ attitude as presented to the reader during the hours before death, how it is the “obscurely evil” medical establishment that “make[s] life intolerable, men like that” (157) and how suicide in such a situation is not a desperate collapse but an act of defiance against oppression. The interpreter’s estimation accurately reflects the young man’s circumstances as he “flung himself vigorously, violently onto Mrs Filmer’s area railings” in order to escape Dr Holmes’ condescension and the fate of being incarcerated in one of Sir Bradshaw’s “homes.” There is integrity in the act, avows Clarissa, an affirmation of a principled life: in death, Septimus has preserved “a thing there was that mattered” (156).

Empathizing with the sufferer’s situation, Mrs Dalloway, who at first is appalled at the Bradshaws “talk[ing] of death at her party” (156), broadens her mind to the full impact of this death and to its connection with her own lifespan, to her sense of responsibility: “Somehow it was her disaster – her disgrace” (157). As in an earlier scene which evokes “the flesh of the world,” the creative and ethically committed pattern of Woolf the writer, “the well of tears” (8) is configured, the tragic core of human identity, latent within the festive summer evening: “It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress” (157). Assimilating “psychoanalytic empathy” into an encompassing horizon of social responsibility, Clarissa’s reactions to the suicide seem more intelligent, more likely to lead to improved care for suffering war veterans than the decision-making of politicians, counselled by, in Peter Walsh’s phrase, “the damnable humbug,” Sir William Bradshaw (164). Further strengthening the emergent vision of collective responsibility, born of both intuition and intelligence, of an ethics of the Real, natural imagery infuses the scene of Clarissa’s little room, harking back to the skywriting in the early pages of the novel, to the London crowd participating in creative acts of interpretation. Clarissa’s reflections culminate in a view of the sky, outside the window, a permanent, yet mobile and changeable, natural phenomenon, belonging to all citizens of London, traversed by an aeroplane, experienced by crowds and individuals, looming with its “mountainous white” clouds over the Strand and Elizabeth’s omnibus, “beckoning, signaling” in nuanced beauty to Septimus Smith, lying on a sofa in his sitting room (118). During this evening of Clarissa’s party, the sky is “solemn” and “dusky,” turning away its cheek in beauty” (158). In almost every instance, in Woolf’s novel, looking up at the sky

is a life-affirming act, promising something exquisite, new and good, and also functioning as a heterotrope, bridging nature and humanity, self and other, interior and exterior, matter and spirit.

This affirmative vision resonates in the novel's celebration of crowded urban life, as we have seen, in the early skywriting episode, in the ebb and flow of the Bloomsbury and Westminster streets, and not least in the depiction of Fleet Street, the context of Elizabeth Dalloway's explorations: evoking and defamiliarizing Romantic views of organic nature,²⁸ the raucous London street, "the blaring, rattling" uproar, seems reflected in the sky, in the fanciful architecture of the clouds, in otherworldly shapes and forms (they "had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world" (118) that nonetheless shadow the human realm, infusing urban reality with self-transcendent beauty. Significantly, in Elizabeth's view, the crowds here are genial and benevolent: she "liked the [. . .] sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good" (117). What is at stake in the image is the Woolfian empathetic grid, the pattern retrieved from and sustained by trauma. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the real of art-thinking emanates from heterotopia to social reality itself, potentially reordering it as an ethical collective by imbricating it with the sublime.

In a nuanced manner, *Mrs Dalloway* reveals the affinity between psychoanalytic theory and literary art. My essay has argued that Woolf's novel, just as intricately as Freud's investigations in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, modulates group awareness as oscillation between conformist bonding and creative empathy. The novel's heterotopic thinking, epitomized in the philosophy of party space, transvalues group dynamics, underscoring a politics of difference, rooted in the psychoanalytic Real.

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²⁸ The Romantic writers strove to integrate the human subject in the inhuman, but rarely celebrated the vitality of crowds.

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