

“The Time is Out of Joint”: A Derridian Reading of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, originally titled *The Hours*, examines time as a critical force in shaping one’s life. In the fiction, time, like a guiding thread, weaves each character’s life, creating an ever growing, gigantic web that connects the conscious and unconscious, individual bodies and collective souls. More than sixty years after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Jacques Derrida, in his paper “The Time is Out of Joint” (1995b), also commented on the otherness-oriented nature of time, with specific regard to *Hamlet*. Time is, as the title of his paper suggests, “out of joint,” and it is this disjuncture of time that causes Hamlet’s madness. The present paper, therefore, attempts to examine how Woolf’s novel encapsulates Derrida’s idea of deconstruction with respect to time while discussing a new framework by integrating Derrida’s theory and reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*. We will first explore the madness of time, expressed by Woolf and Derrida, and then discuss how the

fragmentation of time renders man incapable of action. Finally, we will raise a possible solution arrived at by Woolf and Derrida: art-life theory as a positive *pharmakon* which can help us heal the wound of time and, more importantly, *learn to live* when time is *out of joint*. This paper will conclude by discussing how the continuum of the repetitive joint-disjoint-joint of time constitutes the impact of time on man.

Key Words: Virginia Woolf, Jacques Derrida, time, deconstruction

The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time.

Mrs. Dalloway (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 105)

The time is out of joint: Oh cursed spight,
That ever I was born to set it right.

Hamlet (Shakespeare, 2001: 243)

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, originally titled *The Hours*, examines time as a critical force in shaping one's life. In the fiction, time, like a guiding thread, weaves each character's life, creating an ever growing, gigantic web that connects the conscious and unconscious, the individual bodies and the collective souls. The above poetry, composed by the novel's character Septimus, suggests that, each moment, like words once spoken, dies with the passing of time, which is unstoppable and waits for no one. The poem also suggests that, even as time breaks away continuously, it leaves traces like shells or shavings to remind us of its richness. Although time has a life of its own, eventually individual souls all join the collective ode of time to eternity and immortality. Indeed, time is a topic that has fascinated thinkers and writers for centuries. More than sixty years after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Jacques Derrida, in his paper "The Time is Out of Joint" (1995b), also commented on the otherness-oriented nature of time in his reading of *Hamlet*.¹ Time is, as the title of his paper suggests, "out

¹ "The Time is Out of Joint" was originally a keynote speech that Derrida gave at the "Deconstruction is/in America" colloquium in New York University in 1993. This paper (1995b) was later included in *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, edited by Anselm Haverkamp. In this paper, Derrida examines time as a critical force in *Hamlet*, showing that time is mad

of joint,” and it is the disjuncture of time that causes Hamlet’s madness.

We must admit that reading Woolf in the context of postmodernism is not especially innovative. Noting that Woolf is “a precursor of postmodernism” and “a postmodern modernist,” critics have commented on her use of many of the distinguishing features of postmodern writing: self-conscious contradictions, discontinuities, and metafictional remarks (Benzel, 1994: 128-129; Harris, 1996: 89-90; Herbert, 1992: 13). In addition to a new style of writing, Woolf’s fiction also reflects a new way of perceiving the world. Moving beyond the postmodern aesthetic, Woolf focuses on consciousness in a search for individual transcendence. Realizing that transcendent unity is unattainable, Woolf theorizes an ontological view of “antitotalization” or “multiplicity” (Herbert, 1992: 11; Krouse, 1998: 295). Her stance against certainty, Hebert argues, is what “most distinguishes Woolf from Eliot and Joyce,” placing her “both inside and outside the power-knowledge configuration” (1992: 11). Such an epistemological position, in addition to her postmodern aesthetic, further marks her modernism as one that encapsulates postmodernism.

These discussions, however, mainly focus on Woolf’s later novels, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, by analyzing how both works exhibit the postmodern aesthetic and theories of Jameson, Hutcheon, and Lyotard. Not much work has been done in exploring Woolf’s early works in the postmodern vein or in examining exchanges between Woolf’s literary texts and philosophical texts in general. Henn was one of the first to discuss Woolf and Derrida side by side. Calling Woolf “a Derridean deconstructive writer,” Henn located the ways in which Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* speaks about the undecidability inherent in

and this madness causes disjointment and disruption. Derrida then uses his theory to demonstrate the unstable and limited nature of the verb “be,” and explains why the copula, is/in, is used in the title of the colloquium.

language as the same as that described by Derrida (1992: 68). Porritt is another critic linking Woolf with Derrida. According to Porritt, Woolf is remarkable in that, in *The Waves*, she not only critiques a traditional concept of the self far earlier than others employing the similar approach found in later philosophical works, but also surpasses Derrida's "decentered self" by suggesting that "the self is actually a plural phenomenon which uses multiple discourses or 'voices' to constitute meaning" (1992: 323).

A closer reading of Woolf's works surprisingly reveals that her sense of the fragmented self and her desire to connect the multiple selves already appears in her earlier work, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Therefore, to throw light on the connection between the modernist novelist and the poststructuralist philosopher, this paper first examines the madness of time as expressed by Woolf and Derrida. Then we will discuss how the fragmentation of time renders man incapable of action or decision-making. Finally, we will examine the solution arrived at by Woolf and Derrida: art as a positive *pharmakon* for healing in the novel. By integrating Derrida's theory and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, this paper will conclude by discussing a new framework dealing with how we can face the madness of time and seek the possibility of redemption in order to *learn to live* here and now.

I. The Madness of Time

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (Marx & Engels, 1975: 300)

To Derrida, time haunted by its otherness or specter, which is always out-of-joint and yet always to-come, is always mad. That is, time, being constitutively out-of-joint and mad, can never achieve its full and sensible present as totality. Moreover, this contamination of presence, and thus anachronism, by the specter is

at the very root of human subjectivity. Therefore, the specter of time becomes the very condition of possibility of any present. Such constitutive madness, Derrida notes, contributes to Hamlet's time being out of joint in two ways. First, the enormous discrepancy between his inner time and calendar time causes his amnesia and insanity; he could not remember, due to shock, the date of his father's murder. While calendar time continues, the trauma stops Hamlet's inner time. As a result, his sanity fails. Second, he is not sure if he can trust the words of a ghost, which reenters human time and appears before Hamlet. Thus, constantly haunted by the ghost, Hamlet is preoccupied by the violent past, unable to act. Hamlet is but one example of the crisis of the subject discussed by Derrida. In his analysis of the pathology of the subject, he observes that, while man's external time progresses as the clock ticks and strikes, man's "internal time" aimlessly detours and wanders. That is, the discrepancies between the two types of times are what constitute the madness of time that in turn causes the pathological problems of man.

Time, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is also haunted by its ghosts and thus "out of joint," entangled, confused and mad. In the novel, the hour is announced by several clocks: Big Ben, St. Margaret and the clock at Clarissa's home. What Clarissa hears from Big Ben is, "[f]irst a warning, musical, then the hour irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 5). The clocks, according to Harper, represent "an experiential sense of time, in which 'the moment' expands as it is filled with human *meaning*" (1982: 121). Further, the motif of time serves to "*define* [italics added] both individual characters and the larger reality in which they interact" (1982: 121).

Accordingly, like Hamlet, Clarissa's time is out of joint because her present subjectivity is always affected by her haunting memory—looking for the meaning of her life primarily in the irrevocable and irredeemable past. Her parents, her sister Sylvia, and her friends all appear as ghosts in her adult life—the ontology of these ghosts obviously cannot be ontologized by her rationality

or exorcism. Despite her success as a skilled hostess in London, Clarissa is arrested in her youth by melancholy. The hours relentlessly move on, but she remains the sixteen-year-old woman of her lost past. In truth, the specter of her lost past and unfulfilled desire haunt Clarissa according to the logic of hauntology (to be discussed), demanding that a debt be paid off. As a result, Clarissa suffers from schizophrenia-like time which both splits and structures her ontology, or Being-in-the-world, from time to time. To be more specific, the madness of time, in Clarissa, is constantly reflected through the juxtaposition of past and present in *Mrs. Dalloway*. "The subtly varying tense structure," notes Miller, "creates a pattern of double repetition in which three times keeping moving together and then apart. Narration in indirect discourse, for Woolf, is repetition as distancing and merging at once" (1982: 187).

Similarly, for Septimus, in his deepening madness, time is only a dead, dry and worthless seed which splits its husk. Like Clarissa, Septimus is always haunted by his past, his war experience and his dead friend Evans in particular. While Septimus composes "an immortal ode to Time," his internal time has long since stopped. His training as a soldier may have enabled him to absorb the shock of his friend Evan's death, but the repressed remorse left him numb, unable to feel. After he returns to London, his repressed feeling finds a way to return so the scene of Evan's death repeats itself many times before Septimus's eyes. Like Hamlet and Clarissa, Septimus is defined and bound by his past. He too looks for the meaning of life in his past—an infinite search for a time which is forever out of joint. The doubling of Clarissa and Septimus implies, Bloom argues, that "there is only a difference in degree, not in kind, between Clarissa's sensibility and the naked consciousness or 'madness' of Septimus" (1988: 4).

The stories of Hamlet, Clarissa, and Septimus may suggest special pathological cases from the madness of time due to specific reasons discussed above; however, at a deeper level, we see that otherness-oriented time is a universal inner structure of being that

haunts them. In Derrida's words, the appearance of the ghost unhinges time and that hauntology is "a *politics* of memory" (1993/1994: xix). That is, the outer experiential sense of time as a "present" to define both individual characters and the larger reality in which they interact is always subject to the inner experiential sense of time, the specter's time, an unfinished business or unfulfilled desire returned as "a *politics* of memory."

"Everything in fact begins in *Hamlet*," Derrida argues, "with the dead time of this 'dead hour,' at the moment when, in an already repetitive fashion, the specter arrives by returning" (1995b: 19).² With the arrival of the ghost, Derrida continues, the hour is "delivered to another time for which the timeclock and the calendar no longer are the law" (1995b: 19). The appearance of the ghost, and Hamlet's consequent knowledge of the murder, break down the progression of time, causing Hamlet's time to be "out of joint," entangled, confused and then mad. In other words, the encounter and menace of the ghost's time leads to the madness of Hamlet's time. This is actually an effect of what Derrida calls "hauntology":

² And yet, can we know precisely what the specter *is* or whether it is living or dead? Is it sensual or non-sensual? Is it spirit or body? Derrida says:

The specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the spectre. . . . One does not know [whether] it is living or if it is dead. Here is—or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing. (1994: 6)

That is, the specter is "a paradoxical incorporation" of body and spirit; it is neither *and* both at the same time, a phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. One cannot clearly see this "thing" (that is not a thing) in flesh and blood, precisely name it in language or completely know it in knowledge. It is invisible between its apparitions, when it visibly *re*-turns and *re*-appears.

To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. (1994: 161)

For Derrida, hauntology is the ghost's ontology which cannot be ontologized in the linear and progressive process between life and death or between the actual and the virtual. Hence, the logic of hauntology signifies the eternal return of singularity, the infinite trace of the present-absent specter. Haunting as iterability always leads to alteration through returning. As Derrida puts it:

[R]epetition and first time, but also repetition and the last time, since the singularity of any first time makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *Hauntology*. (1993/1994: 10)

II. Inability to Act in Time

To further explore a possible connection presented between Derrida's reading of *Hamlet* and our reading of Woolf, we need to shift back to the deconstructive nature of time in *Hamlet*. According to Derrida, Hamlet's time is disjointed because he cannot stop mourning; he does not know how to revenge on his uncle's crime. The shock waves of such an injustice, Derrida continues, no doubt affect the heart of Hamlet's question "to be or not to be" (1995b: 29). The cause of the inaction, with Derrida here affirming Nietzsche's interpretation of the play, is that Hamlet alone bears witness to "absolute disorder, the world out of joint, measurelessness, monstrosity [of evil]" (1995b: 34).³ In short, the

³ The following quotation is from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner* (1872/1967: 60). This passage is also quoted in Derrida's

world out of joint is an aggregate effect of the inner structural being of time, which in turn renders individuals powerless. The aggregate effect of this powerlessness in time is manifested in several ways: injustice in Hamlet's case, isolation in Clarissa's case, and the society's insensitivity in Septimus's case.

Having witnessed the worst political disorder, absolute injustice, Hamlet in madness can no longer act. In other words, he sees "too much," and nausea—in the Satrean sense of existential crisis—inhibits action. Worse, Hamlet thinks it ridiculous that he should be asked to set right of a world that is out of joint. According to Nietzsche, knowledge kills action: "True knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs [*sic*] any motive for action" (1872/1967: 60). Conscious of the terrible truth he has once seen, Hamlet sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence. He is *nauseated*, unable to act—caught between two huge rocks in time: "decision" and "indecision." The madness of time between decision and indecision attempts to convey the unease of infinite proximity, an anxiety which is inseparable from the insubstantiality of the difference between "jointed" and "disjointed" and between "to be" and "not to be." In this sense, above all it refers to time itself, as the forever irrecuperable interval within which the fear of fusion can be transformed into a desire for the separate *in* and *through* time. It is our argument that the

paper, "The Time is Out of Joint" (1995b: 36). In Nietzsche's interpretation of *Hamlet*, he compares the Danish prince to the Dionysian man:

[B]oth have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet. . . . Not reflection, no—true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs [*sic*] any motive for action, both in Hamlet and in the Dionysian man. (1872/1967: 60, original emphasis)

indecision resulting from Hamlet's deconstruction, the affirmation of the otherness (specters) of time, always already takes place in the sphere of decision; in the Levinasian sense, politics (which is the realm of the said) already contains the ethical saying as an unsaying. Hamlet's inability is intensified by his uncle Claudius's urge to cut short his mourning. Accordingly, his duty as a son to revenge his father's murder, coupled with his knowledge of the murder, creates an urgency or imminence that overwhelms and immobilizes him.

Pressed by imminence, many characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* also suffer from such an inability. According to Bloom, perhaps Woolf should have retained the novel's original title, *The Hours*. "To speak of measuring one's time by days or months," Bloom argues, "rather than years, has *urgency* [italics added], and this *urgency* [italics added] increases when the fiction of duration embraces only hours, as *Mrs. Dalloway* does" (1988: 2). Clarissa's sense of urgency is expressed by the novel's motif of time, which both "anticipates the hours as a promise of meaning and dreads them as an announcement of mortality" (Harper, 1982: 121). Clarissa contemplates her fear of time after thinking of the marks of time—signs of slicing, absorbing, stretching—on Lady Bruton's face. Her fear of approaching death is symbolized by daily entrance into the small attic bedroom, in which she sleeps alone on a virgin bed that grows narrower and narrower as time passes. In other words, Clarissa's preoccupation with the past, coupled with her sense of mortality, intensifies her feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. Thus, as she climbs up to her bedroom grave, her heart is laden with guilt and sadness: her failure as a wife and the frustration of unfulfilled homosexuality.

Septimus's sense of imminence, like that of Hamlet and Clarissa, also immobilizes him; worse, his wife's tearful complaints and the doctors' unsympathetic diagnosis both intensify this urgency as a state of fearsome haunting and further his guilt with regard to his inability. Septimus's traumatic war experience leaves him shell-shocked. Research of WWI veterans reported that "[m]en

who had managed to avoid a nervous breakdown during the war were collapsed badly [a few years later]" (Graves & Hodge, 1940: 27). Although an enquiry into "shell-shock" was submitted to the British Parliament in 1922, the result showed very little sympathy for such victims of the war, insisting that often "shell-shock" was rooted in cowardice or insubordination (Zwerdling, 1986: 30).

Society's insensitivity was substantiated by one other voice of time in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "[T]he clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counseled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion" (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 154). Here, the clock is the voice of destruction and repression, exemplified in the novel by the psychiatrist Sir Bradshaw. Dr. Bradshaw, according to DiBattista, is the "resolute champion" and "defender" of the social and moral order identified by Michel Foucault in his study of *Madness and Civilization* (as cited in DiBattista, 1988: 56). According to Foucault, institutions like the prison and the hospital—and the type of medicine Dr. Bradshaw practices—represent specific attempts at governing human behavior, and it is through this discipline of behavior, or, through widely accepted forms of organized behavior, that the real source of power is exercised. He says,

Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or 'anatomy' of power, a technology. (Foucault, 1975/1977: 215)

In short, Dr. Bradshaw's prescription of "Proportion" is a type of discipline that functions as an abstraction of the idea of power.

This kind of oppression, or disindividualization, in *Mrs. Dalloway*'s London is also noted by Tambling, who attributes the society's repression to its patriarchal, militaristic, and medicalized traditions. This dominance of medical discourse and the prescription of Proportion, Tambling argues, at best "defines

sexuality and codifies what a woman's response should be to a man" (1989: 151), while at worst, this type of "brutalizing and destructive sexual politics" is responsible for the prevalence of neurosis among the characters of fiction (1989: 148). Thus, man's inability to act is caused by both the constitutive lag between the calendar time and man's inner time, and the aggregate effect of such out-of-joint madness, which results in the society's injustice and individuals' sense of isolation. Both internal and external forces of time render man powerless and helpless because the subject cannot control such compulsive repetition of haunting. The sense of powerless and helpless is further internalized to cause melancholy, madness, and even self-destruction.

III. Healing through Art-life Politics

Although Derrida does not propose a direct means to cure the madness of time or the melancholy of man—for the idea of solution would be inconsistent to deconstructionists—he does conclude his paper on the madness of time by quoting three paragraphs from Nietzsche's discussion of art. In Nietzsche's interpretation of *Hamlet*, he notes, "[k]nowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion" (1872/1967: 60). Nietzsche, therefore, considers art as "a saving sorceress, expert at healing," for "she alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live" (1872/1967: 60). That is, it is art which enables Hamlet to act—representing the murder scene in a play in order to confirm his suspicion of Claudius's crime. The enactment of knowledge, the play directed by Hamlet in *Hamlet*, allows him to confront the horror and absurdity of truth, to bear the unbearable madness, and, more important, to survive the haunting past. In other words, the specter of justice always haunts the assured distinction between the present and the absent, between the living and the dead, between to be and not to be.

More often than his discussion of the association between ethics and art, Derrida uses the *aporia* of the gift giving to discuss justice and whether such a thing exists. Derrida, in “Passions: An Oblique Offering,” calls for an ethical, or art-life, response to our passions, or the unknown Other. This unknown Other, which Derrida borrows from Levinas’s “the face of the other,” includes disjointed time, which haunts humanity (1961/1969: 35-40). Derrida observes that in response to this Other, the human race has performed ritual and ceremony throughout history (1995a: 5-6). The limitation in life, the nature of ethical *différance* in particular, makes the offering oblique, for, in the economy of gift, one can never repay in full until death (1995a: 13).

Furthermore, Derrida argues that there is an irreducible hiatus between politics and ethics (1997/1999: 20-21). The irreducibility of this gap sets, and assures, the ethico-political economy of subjectivity in an inexhaustible motion (political invention) towards otherness as a possibility of justice (ethics), toward “the infinite beyond the totality” (Levinas, 1961/1969: 21-30). Since ethics begins by responding to the Other and yet there are no fixed rules for the actualization of (Levinasian) ethics, politics turns out to be the art of response in order to become an ethical answer to the urgent call of the Other in a particular context. Art in action, in this view, offers an oblique (and the only possible) access to ethics. That is, responding to the imminent ethical demand of the Other for Derrida becomes “the art of politics.” Simon Critchely rightly states:

The infinite ethical demand of deconstruction arises as a response to a singular context and calls forth the invention of a political decision. Politics itself can here be thought of as *the art of response to the singular demand of the other*, a demand that arises in a particular context—although the infinite demand cannot simply be reduced to its context—and calls for political invention, for creation. (1999: 276, original emphasis)

Accordingly, we may contend that Hamlet's decision to act in art (the play) is an affirmation of the otherness (specters) of time which offers him the possibility of *redemption* in insanity.⁴

Derrida, in affirming Levinas's ethical discourse on hospitality, also argues that the nature of our response to the Other should involve more than theorizing the face: "The word 'hospitality' here translates, brings to the fore, re-produces, the two words preceding it, 'attention' and 'welcome'" (1997/1999: 22). Thus, we would suggest that Clarissa's hospitality, a welcoming gift of art to her friends as well as the unknown Other, is not unlike the kind of response discussed by both Levinas and Derrida.

But, more important, the gift takes place in a moment, in an instant of madness in which we know the circle will close over soon, making its way into our economies. The gift has limitations because it annuls itself the instant it is given. Thus, Caputo notes, "the gift of undeconstructible justice, beyond the law, before the law, is located in the *Un-fug*, which keeps things sufficiently dis-lodged and open-ended as to give an opening to the singularity of the other" (1997: 123, original emphasis). Thus, as we find ourselves trapped in the gap of the disjointed time, our gift giving becomes an on-going process which enables us, even if temporarily, to face the disjointed time.

Art as a possible solution is more clearly presented by Woolf, because, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, art also heals in and through time. "If the nature of the artist is to transmute personal experience and feeling into a public act," Littleton notes, "Clarissa Dalloway is certainly an artist" (1995: 36). Likewise, Septimus is an artist, for, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, to achieve continuity and universality—that is,

⁴ As a matter of fact, without committing himself to the Nietzsche's viewpoint, Derrida himself nevertheless believes in the universality of "what Hamlet says," and "what *Hamlet*, the work, *does*" (1995b: 36). He argues that "The work [*Hamlet*] alone, but alone with us, in us, as us" (1995b: 36). In fact, does not Derrida himself in this paper use the art form of a play, *Hamlet*, to argue that the madness of time is both the "ruin" and the "chance" for man to survive (1995b: 37)?

to join time—two choices are available: Clarissa’s art in “building up” life and Septimus’s art in destroying it. Through their arts, both Clarissa and Septimus connect the fragmented pieces of their past to find meanings out of the “horror,” “madness,” or “absurdity” of existence in life.

Clarissa demonstrates her art through her parties. *Mrs. Dalloway*, Miller notes, seems to be based on an irreconcilable opposition between individuality and universality (1982: 183). Each person, like Hamlet, is alienated from the whole, their incompleteness causing discontinuity and a breakdown in internal time. Woolf is thus concerned with removal of boundaries through either death of communion with humanity. This is because, Porritt explains, Woolf’s notion of the self is “a plural phenomenon”—a “shared meaning” (1992: 323, 334). In other words, a self is not a unified, identifiable entity, but always exists in relationship with others. To find her “self” in such a universal soul, Clarissa would try to remove the boundaries by bringing people together. Her party allows people to temporarily forget about their disjointed selves. Like a great shade-giving tree and with a mothering presence, Clarissa enacts the pastoral scene so that her guests are able to experience wholeness and universality.

Comparing Clarissa’s party to a drama, Littleton comments that Clarissa’s party “distorts the forms of everyday life to reveal a truth she believes to be more profound and important. Her art is both false and true; it is life, but life transformed” (1995: 42). Littleton’s view is confirmed by Clarissa herself, “[e]very time she gave a party she had this feeling . . . that everyone was unreal in one way, much more real in another” (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 259). Her party, like Nietzsche’s “veils of illusion” (1872/1967: 60), is unreal but therapeutic because she resurrects the ghost of the serene and peaceful past, providing her guests not only with temporary relief from the repressed society, but also with the collective experience of “a special awareness of friendship and connection” and “a celebration of these aspects of humanity in common culture” (Littleton, 1995: 45). Through her art of being a

successful hostess, Clarissa's youth at Bourton is reenacted at her party, her lost time is symbolically joined, her fragmented life is restored, her inner and outer selves connected.

Although Clarissa "fixes" time for her guests, her healing is completed with a gift from an unknown young man. Reenacting his death in her mind, Clarissa witnesses Septimus's art—his public performance and attempt to communicate preservation of self, defiance of the medicalized society, his embrace of death. As she reenacts Septimus's death, her sins are somehow cleansed and she returns to her real self, "walking on the terrace at Bourton" (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 282). Her memory of the past enables her to appreciate happiness from the process of living; to find life, "with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank" (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 282). No longer haunted by her past, Clarissa's time gradually regains coherence. Significantly, as Clarissa contemplates the suicide of Septimus, the sound of Big Ben is heard for the last time. As Big Ben strikes the third time, Clarissa stops counting the hours. While she is thinking of Septimus's death, she is aware only that "[t]he clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 5). If the "leaden circles" are a reminder of mortality, Harper argues, the fact that they dissolve in the air may imply that a single human life and death never really ends, but is "absorbed instead into a larger, more timeless and universal form of life" (1982: 131). As Clarissa returns to her guests, her time is no longer out of joint. Her time and her soul are connected to the universal soul. Here, *Mrs. Dalloway* formally ends with the fulfillment of Clarissa's promise at the beginning: she has not only bought the flowers herself but has also given her party, her "gift" to her guests. Peter's final view of her—"[f]or there she was"—also makes her seem complete (Woolf, 1925/n.d.: 134).

Therefore, we believe the death of Septimus offers Clarissa a sense of urgency to connect the disjointed and indecisive time in her melancholy. The urgency of time that obstructs the horizon of peace and justice, though ever-unpresentable, cannot wait; "a just decision is always required *immediately*" (Derrida, 1992: 24). At

the instant of decision, according to Kierkegaard, there is madness and yet also an offer of the possibility of redemption for us. A just decision is taken only in a rending of formal time and in defiance of dialectics, in an “affirmatory suspension” (not an absence) of present knowledge. Through contemplating Septimus’s death in her disjointed time, Clarrisa finally finds the courage to confront the indecisiveness of time and also the possibility of her redemption to save her from endless melancholy.

IV. Septimus’s Poetry as Narrative Therapy

Septimus’s poetry, both a public protest and his gift to the world, releases himself from the haunting of a past. The streams of consciousness in Septimus show that, while he is alienated from the world, his mind is by no means idle. Far from unfeeling, he is in fact overwhelmed with sensory details: the singing of the birds, walking of the dead, waving of the trees. In her study of World War I trauma writing, Higonnet indicates that symptoms of wartime narratives, such as nonsequential memory, flashbacks, nightmares, or fragmented language, closely resemble certain features of the modernist experiment: decentering of the subject, montage, ellipses or gaps in narrative, and startling vivid images (2002: 102). Septimus’s war experience, especially the death of his comrade Evan, gives him direct and unique insight into the violence of not only the battlefield but the modern world.

This type of narrative strategy is reminiscent of Peter Brooks’s theory of literary narrative that seeks to “make an obsessive story from the past present and to assure its negotiability within the framework of ‘real life’—the outer narrative frame—and thus to work the patient’s ‘cure’” (1992: 226). In Septimus’s case, his war experience obsesses him; the traumatic events repeatedly, involuntarily pour into his consciousness. Such compulsion of the human mind to repeat traumatic events points to Freud’s theory about “repetition compulsion.” Indeed, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the

repetition manifests itself through Septimus's dreams, poems, and even hallucination, all enabling him to discharge the repressed war-time images and experience. His poems in particular allow him to negotiate the past "within the framework of real life" and work toward a "cure" (Brooks, 1992: 226).

In her study of narratives by World War I shell shock victims, Higonnet proposes that this kind of trauma writing is motivated by two kinds of "consciousness," or two kinds of "knowing"; the first knowing involves understanding the relationship between "an obstructed, specific consciousness of violence in its ungraspable details and a more philosophic knowledge about the causes and consequences of violence"; the second knowing involves the desire to "restore the self" and to "pass their knowledge on to their audience" (2002: 101). According to Higonnet, the two kinds of consciousness cannot be separated, but there is a movement from the first to the second that "enable[s] the telling by which the dark and obstructed first kind of knowing becomes possible" (2002: 101). In other words, through his narrative, Septimus finds a way to testify to the violence of war experience and, in the process, restore himself.

This type of restoration, however, requires one to balance on a thin rope, for Freud associates compulsive repetition with the concept of the "death-instinct." In contrast to the sexual-instinct, which ensures gratification, the death-instinct seeks to return to the quiet of non-existence, or, as Freud puts it in *The Ego and the Id*, to "re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life" (1923/1955b: 40). This concept allows Freud to theorize man's tendency toward destruction, sometimes even self-destruction. This is why, as Septimus recovers, he remains sensitive and fragile. Upon seeing the doctors, he takes his own life. In Clarissa's recollection, she sees that Septimus plunges holding his treasure. Indeed, refusing to surrender, Septimus returns to the state of non-existence, taking his treasure—his life and his poems—with him.

V. The Deconstructive Journey of Subjectivity

Integrating Derrida's theory of time and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* provides us with an insight into the hidden nature of the madness of time on man. We see that the haunting otherness of time not only disrupts one's subjectivity but its aggregate effect results in social problems that further intensifies the pressure imposed on the subjectivity. We also see art-life politics offers us as a possible solution to restore the disruption by creatively responding to the urgent call of the Other *here* and *now*. From the works of Derrida and Woolf, we observe this cycle of joint-disjoint-joint state of subjectivity that corresponds to what Derrida believes to be the "ruin" and the "chance," the "beginning" and the "end" of life (1995b: 37). The cycle is repetitive and the joint state reappears in a different way, so we may describe life as a non-linear and non-dialectical continuum of the exchange between the states of joint and out-of-joint in time—an eternal return of *différance*. That is, once restored, the otherness-oriented subjectivity will be disrupted again for some other reasons, and thus repeat the cycle of the madness of time in a different manner. That is why the deconstructive nature of time is always out of joint and yet always to come, to joint.

Derrida's deconstructive interrogation of time destabilizes and complicates the horizontal opposition and hierarchical difference between *presence* and *absence*, in order "to show the constitutive undecidability, radical incompleteness or untotalizability of textual, institutional, cultural, social and economic structures" (Critchley, 1999: 163). It mimics the oscillations of difference, the displacements of oppositional logic; it interrogates all foundations in a questioning that is neither foundationalist nor anti-foundationalist and puts into question the authority of the questioning-form itself. Thus deconstruction as double-movement interrogates our responsibility *before* (Clarissa's and Septimus's) memory (in the sense of both *prior-to* and *in-the-face-of*)—an

ahistorical interrogation of memory in all its forms and manifestations—and subjects this responsibility itself to interrogation. Such an endeavor involves the suspension of that which is known, customary—above all the suspension of subjectivity or morality itself (perhaps as Nietzschean transvaluation of all values)—which inevitably leads to anxiety and even madness in time.

Woolf, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, also engages in this kind of deconstructive interrogation. In the novel, Woolf examines Clarissa's and Septimus's fragmented memories and how these memories shape their lives. Each time, the ghostly image creates a feeling of *déjà vu*, or a production of Freud's uncanny. For Freud, such experience may derive from the revival of repressed infantile complexes such as the castration complex and "womb-phantasies," resulting in a failure to differentiate between psychic and material reality (1919/1955a: 249-250). The failure in turn leads to regression to magical thinking, often linked to the childhood of the individual, and induces the feeling of the uncanny. These recurrences of images are also a kind of Nietzschean "eternal return" of difference, which Derrida elaborates, "[t]he entire history of the concept of structure . . . must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center" (1967/1978: 279). Thus, the haunting of memory connects Clarissa and Septimus as they suspend what they know, in search of a subjectivity that is ahistorical.

Although such a deconstructive reading of the nature of memory may seem to lead the *re*-presentation of past into the domain of the ethico-politically undecidable, that two-fold *pharmakon* of/for life, it is actually up to us to correctly choose what in history to *remember* and what to *forget* according to the genuine needs of our lives, with a view to giving ourselves a useful and happy life in the context of *hereness* and *nowness*, the context of human action. Accordingly, what really matters is "how" we manage to live both "historically" and "unhistorically" at the same time in order to serve, (re)create, "engender" our own lives with

minimal conflict or contradiction. In *Specters of Marx*, if specters are figures of wounds demanding a cure, Derrida reminds us that one must learn to affirmatively cope with the haunting of the specters (the traumatic past for instance) in order “to learn to live” (1993/1994: xvii).

To cope with the madness of time, there is no absolute *cure* in psychoanalysis just as there is no absolute *truth* in philosophy—both have been knocked off their pedestals in the postmodern era. If so, what cannot be cured must be endured indeed. However, Nietzsche’s idea of history as art-life may provide us with a possible praxis here. Rejecting Socrates’ reason-oriented morality and philosophy, Nietzsche believes that art is the meaning of life and that life would be unbearable without art.⁵ It is clear that Nietzsche allocates the task of mediation to history, for “history is the antithesis of art” (1876/1999: 95) and life must be lived as a unity of form and content, i.e. with artistic style. That is, the only means by which history will be useful to life is as *a work of art*. It is in the building of this artistic monument that history functions as the link between great individuals from every epoch living as it were contemporaneously through a “spirit-dialogue” across the deserted (desert-like) intervals of time. “The goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars” (Nietzsche, 1876/1999: 111). This Nietzschean monument is the place where history is forced to “present” itself for judgment by the “ahistorical,” to offer up its body (corpus-corpse) as the conduit for a “spirit-dialogue”: this implies a performative and affirmative historicism at the point of action (art-life).

Integrating the Nietzschean art-life with the Levinasian/Derridean call for hospitality and giving, we would suggest that the giving of

⁵ Nietzsche believes that Socrates, who neglects the Dionysiac power of art (in, for example, music and Greek tragic drama) and upholds Apollonian rationalism and philosophical morality, stands behind our progress-oriented, mechanical and superficial modern science with its degrading of art-life.

art-life (art-in-action) as a way of healing to cope with the past, providing us with a positive *pharmakon* (remedy) for the madness of time, is an affirmation of the past as the fundamental condition for any meaningful movement (or moment) of self-creation.

After juxtaposing Virginia Woolf's with Derrida's respective trajectories of thinking on time and art, we discern that once a deconstructive cycle of subjectivity—the joint, the out of joint and the joint—concludes, this existential journey should not be understood as a linear time-bound signifying system, but as a metaphoric model that portrays the ineffable and more ethical life in the otherness of time and all its mysterious and manifold possibilities. It folds, *un*-folds, and *re*-folds differently in a non-identical, non-dialectical and non-chronological manner. This art-life model reminds us that postmodern perspective of de-centering subjectivity in its deconstructive nature cannot be anything but an *avenir*; always out of joint, and yet always *to-come* without the teleological and chronological guarantees. Moreover, it affirms the idea that the postmodernist poetic was already anticipated by the great modernists. Through Woolf's novel one finds hope in humanity in the giving of one's art-life: a self, though split by the madness of time, that attempts to connect between the inner and outer world, the past and the present, life and death, through the art-in-action Being. Our reading of Woolf and Derrida thus calls for a deconstructive insight and celebration of art that enables us to not only come to terms with the madness and melancholy of time but, more importantly, *to learn to live* in this joint-disjoint-joint journey of life.

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「時間是脫離連接的」——
伍爾芙《戴洛維夫人》中的德希達解構思想

陳慧琴、賴俊雄

摘 要

伍爾芙的《戴洛維夫人》，如其原名《時時刻刻》，探討時間如何透過書中人物及其生活，編織成一張連結意識及潛意識、個人身體及群體靈魂、縱貫時空的網。此小說出版六十年後，德希達在其論文〈時間是脫離連接的〉(1995b)，藉由閱讀莎翁的《哈姆雷特》，也討論他者導向時間的解構本質。德希達指出，時間的確是脫離連接的，而時間的不斷分割則是導致哈姆雷特發瘋的原因。本文嘗試以德希達的觀點來閱讀《戴洛維夫人》，以探討伍爾芙的小說如何孕懷著德希達的解構思想，並結合德希達理論及《戴洛維夫人》來架構一個時間的新概念。

關鍵詞：伍爾芙、德希達、時間、解構思想