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## TIME LAPSE AS SPACE FOR CONTACT: THE CHARACTER AND THE CITY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY* AND COLUM MCCANN'S *LET THE GREAT WORLD SPIN*

### Abstract

The paper deals with the motif of time lapse in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) – two novels belonging to different literary and cultural traditions, yet sharing one of their main themes: *the relationship between the hero and the city*. Accepting Elizabeth Grosz's term *interface* as best describing the relation between bodies and cities, the paper emphasises that both novels are largely based upon the body-city *interface* and aims to prove that they both have specific instances of *temporal* interruption, which serves as a *spatial* body-city interrelation. The focus is on two most illustrative scenes: the aeroplane scene in *Mrs Dalloway* and the tightrope-walking scene in *Let the Great World Spin*.

**Key words:** Virginia Woolf, Colum McCann, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Let the Great World Spin*, time lapse, *interface*, body, city.

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## 1. Introduction

*Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) could be described as two largely different novels. The former, written by the British modernist writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), is a stream-of-consciousness novel focusing on one day in the 1920s and mostly on one life – that of a married woman who constantly recalls and questions her past choices. The latter, an American contemporary novel written by the Irish writer Colum McCann (born 1965), presents several personal stories, mostly set in the 1970s and told over a few days, which are all connected but also dispartate in a certain way.

However, there is a characteristic typical of both of these fiction works, so conspicuous and significant that it seems to call for a close examination and comparison. What they have in common is one of their main themes and preoccupations: *the relationship between the body and the city* – London and New York City respectively.

In her essay “Bodies-Cities” (1992), Elizabeth Grosz views the *body* as a certain integration of physical and psychosocial sides of a human subject, that is, as a “sociocultural artifact” (Grosz 1992: 241). On the other hand, the *city* refers to all living and non-living, material and non-material, concrete and abstract elements of an urban entity (Grosz 1992: 244). According to Grosz, the relationship between the body and the city is “a two-way linkage that could be defined as an *interface*, perhaps even a *cobuilding*” (Grosz 1992: 248, author’s italics).

Accepting this view, we will emphasise in this paper that both these novels are largely based upon the *body-city interface*, while our main goal will be to prove that in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *Let the Great World Spin* there are instances of a certain time interruption, which serves as a most obvious and most complete contact between the character and the city. This *time lapse* or *a stoppage of movement through time*, in its individual manner in each case, creates a *space* or *spatial movement* in which a specific connection between the human body and the city occurs. Space, in this case, is understood in two different ways: as geographical/physical/literal and as personal/psychological/metaphorical.

When we think about time interruption, we may ask what it really means and in what way time can be interrupted, disturbed, halted in anyone’s life, even if fictional. However, things become clearer when we consider the difference between *objective time*, on the one hand, which

continues regardless of any individual experience or public events, and *subjective time*, on the other, which does not always obey the rules of the clock as we know it. It is then this subjective time that stops following objective time and “freezes” at certain points in these books.

## **2. ‘What are they looking at?’ said Mrs Dalloway to the maid who opened her door. (Woolf 1996: 33)**

*Mrs Dalloway* follows Mrs Clarissa Dalloway’s morning walk through London on a sunny June Wednesday in the 1920s, her later preparations for a party she is to host that same evening, and finally, the party itself. As a stream-of-consciousness novel, it presents the world (the city of London – its streets, parks, people, the social milieu, everyday life) through the eyes of individuals, that is, from subjective points of view. Mostly, this is the perspective of the main heroine – Clarissa, whose thoughts overwhelm her daily occupations. Still, there are frequent shifts from Clarissa’s consciousness to other characters’ minds and their own points of view, so that there is a network of subjective perspectives, most of which are told over several pages, repeated a number of times, and woven into one whole – Clarissa’s special, yet ordinary day. *Her* special, yet ordinary day, however, is simultaneously an ordinary *London* day, as she is Mrs Dalloway, the wife of Richard Dalloway, an influential London politician. Her main duty is socialising with the *crème* of Londoners. All her activities in London (at home or outside her house) create an *interface* between her body and the city – its streets, shops, Clarissa’s acquaintances, shopkeepers, nature, and so on. In addition, other people, whose minds we enter from time to time, are all directly or indirectly connected to Clarissa.

Roughly speaking, time and space in this novel take turns in an interesting and almost incredibly regular manner. David Daiches observes that, in this novel, “[w]e either stand still in time and move from character to character, or we stand still in space, remaining with one character and moving up and down in time with his consciousness” (Daiches 1945: 64). In other words, whenever the narration comes to a lapse in time – an interruption in the process of thinking that travels to the past and then goes back to the present, there is a movement in space, which allows for a change in the location of a point of view, that is, a change of the character thinking.

Agreeing to a certain extent with Daiches, we must add that deeper narrative functions of time and space in this novel, and thus also their overall relationship, could be understood as being somewhat more complicated than this. When we observe characters in *Mrs Dalloway*, standing still in space mostly indicates not only a movement through time, but also a movement through *personal, subjective* time, which ignores the *common, objective* flow of time. There are scenes in which something provokes a disturbance in the city life, so that what follows is a period of a few *objective moments* during which there is a *subjective timeout*. Several (objective) minutes or many minutes tick in the background, they come and pass, are spent and gone, yet for one person or a number of people nothing happens during this period – nothing in the sense of what should be done as part of everyday, common-sense routines. Their subjective clock has been started and a *subjective time lapse* initiated. They may walk, or wander, or run through their past or present, in the process of their thinking, of course, yet, objectively speaking, they do nothing. Still, this time lapse allows for a certain *spatial* body-city interaction, despite the superficial immobility of the characters and of the readers' attention.

Usually, it is Clarissa's thoughts that travel through time, during her city walk. Repeating Rachel Bowlby's words, Laura Marcus mentions "the *flâneuse*, the female version of the *flâneur*<sup>1</sup> (stroller)" (Marcus 2004: 63) as present in Virginia Woolf's works, especially in an essay in which the city walker sheds the identity known to others and becomes part of the city, being turned into "an enormous eye"<sup>2</sup> (Marcus 2004: 63). Clarissa, therefore, is a *flâneuse* whose identity (already mixed with the city's identity), flows into urban images, which then strongly influence her stream of thoughts. She goes back and forth through her memory, questioning her past and present, experiencing a mixture of feelings – positive and negative, happy and sad ones.

It is then Clarissa's stream of thoughts that mostly gets interrupted by the outside world as she walks, at the same time providing a space for an even closer and more immediate contact with London – both *physical* (she does not move but she is aware of her exact position in the city) and *psychological* (the outside world influences her mind, frequently recalling a memory).

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<sup>1</sup> Baudelaire's term (See Marcus 2004: 63-64).

<sup>2</sup> "An enormous eye" is Virginia Woolf's term (See Marcus 2004: 63).

However, there is a scene in which a more global temporal “freezing” occurs and a sequence of spatial shifts between different people, that is, their minds, takes place. This global time interruption could be termed a *group subjective time lapse*, as, despite the fact that it happens to a group of people, it is still the opposite of objective time. It is a scene with an aeroplane flying over London and advertising a kind of sweet by writing the word “toffee”<sup>3</sup> in the clear sky. This short flight, not more than several minutes long, we believe, causes a uniform reaction in the people below it. From the very moment they spot it, their bodies, as well as their current intentions, errands, everyday activities, life in its ordinary guise, seem to “freeze”, their heads and eyes remaining the only moving parts of them: “The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Everyone looked up” (Woolf 1996: 23). The people in the street stop their “horizontal” contact with the city – the one dictated by objective time and daily chronology, and begin their “vertical” communication with an urban event. This communication, literal in real space but also reimagined and recreated in the space of their minds, is imposed on them by a time lapse governed by subjective points of view oblivious to the clock heard in the background. At the same time, it is imposed on the readers as a spatial movement from one consciousness to another.

Repeating Virginia Woolf’s note that, by walking through the city, a man turns into “an enormous eye”, Laura Marcus says that “the ‘eye’ sees pure beauty, pure colour, receiving the sights of the modern city as works of art [...]” (Marcus 2004: 64). Similarly, the eyes of these Londoners absorb the scene in the sky. Although, when first heard and seen, the aeroplane is felt to be an ominous sign, reminiscent of the war that ended several years before, it soon turns into a benign art-oriented advertising aircraft: “All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, [...] and in this extraordinary silence, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times [...]” (Woolf 2004: 24).

In this skilful and pleasant act, there is nothing but beauty, regularity and spotlessness, which seem to overwhelm the whole world visible or known to the watchers’ eyes, that is to say, the entire city or, at least, its

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<sup>3</sup> Although critics and readers disagree on what the word (or phrase) written in the sky actually is.

best, most central, most urban part. In other words, the aeroplane can be said to represent the modern man, equipped with the latest inventions and ultra-creative ideas.

Still, the message it leaves behind by letting out white smoke is confusing. The advertising letters are more or less clearly seen depending on the position of each person, or their personal visual skills; therefore, each individual interpretation of the word is different:

A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps?

“Blaxo,” said Mrs. Coates in a strained, awe-stricken voice, gazing straight up. [...]

“Cremo,” murmured Mrs. Bletchley, like a sleepwalker. With his hat held out perfectly in his hand, Mr. Bowley gazed straight up. [...]

“It’s toffee,” murmured Mr. Bowley – [...]. (Woolf 2004: 23, 24)

Since almost nobody knows what this aeroplane advertises, the letters seem to find their way into people’s minds as a possible answer to the question of where the lost meaning of the post-war life is, what it is, or why and when it has been lost. They may ask themselves (or the skies) if this epitome of the modern man is in fact a “key”, and if so, what it really says. The way they understand the written word, therefore, is also dependent on their emotional state and degree of optimism. Unfortunately, in each individual case, the letters as read, although different, are almost always such that they do not form a meaningful word, or the right one to say the least. Even the man who deciphers the word as “toffee” does not seem content or familiar with his discovery. In addition, each letter disappears so fast, almost before the next letter has been fully shaped. The lost meaning of life, even before it has been newly found, disperses into pure nothingness again.

Seemingly paradoxical is the fact that this event happens at the very end of Mrs Dalloway’s morning errand; therefore, she does not entirely participate in this group subjective time lapse. Already near her house in Westminster, she might be aware of the noise the aeroplane makes, yet cannot see its letters or its intention at all. However, her very absence

from these shared, yet individual reactions is exactly what makes us think of *her* at this moment. We metaphorically connect Mrs Dalloway with the aeroplane, which can be said to highlight her personality or anticipate her behaviour. Freedom, artistic skill and style, and power to impress are the characteristics of both the aeroplane and Clarissa (her womanly dominance will be more obvious at her party). Clarissa's messages to herself, to her former suitor, who will visit her later that day, and to the readers, are as ambiguous as the aeroplane's message is. Moreover, just as she cannot see the letters the aircraft makes, she is not able to read herself. Clarissa has also left a train of letters, meanings, and combinations behind her, and, like those in the sky, hers also vanish uncaught. In truth, she cannot see the letters, perhaps not even the aeroplane, but she notices the walkers' stunned reactions to the sight. As if responding to their impolite stares at *her*, she pronounces the question upon entering her house: "What are they looking at?" At one of them, at London, at reality, at a sky show mirroring their own selves, we may reply.

**3. Get the tightrope walker up, [the judge] said again to his bridge.  
Now. (McCann 2009: 274)**

Similar to *Mrs Dalloway* in that subjective points of view have precedence over an objective perspective, *Let the Great World Spin* is more of a circle of personal stories than a network of them. Unlike *Mrs Dalloway*, in which the thoughts of most characters are repeated in random, usually unpredictable ways, taking up small passages from time to time, *Let the Great World Spin* unwinds several perspectives that *spin* towards one central event. Each point of view crucial for the novel as a whole is given a separate chapter, almost always of some length, and, despite presenting an individual experience, each is connected to other perspectives through shared time and space, which always revolve around the central event.

Time and space in this novel, just as in *Mrs Dalloway*, have important narrative roles, even though here the total amount of time spans more than one day. As Jonathan Mahler states, "[a]lways in the background are a time and a place – the waning days of Nixon and Vietnam, and New York in the 1970s" (Mahler 2009: 2). However, in the previous novel objective time ticks in the background throughout the book, that is, the hours of the day strike and die out, we forget them, and the narration as such never



turns back to any of these hours. In this novel, on the other hand, different characters, whose voices one after another are heard in a chosen sequence, lead the narration in such a direction that, sooner or later, it comes back in time to one umbrella situation, or their common connector: New York City, August 1974, a man walking in the sky.

The central event concerns a man walking on a tightrope between two newly built Twin Towers and happens on an August morning in 1974. As it happens, the day is a Wednesday, just like the day taking up the whole of *Mrs Dalloway*. As an unexpected, unusual and highly dangerous feat, especially due to being done at a great height, it causes a disturbance in New York and a reaction in New Yorkers. Some of the reactions come from people on the ground – the man’s immediate audience formed on the spot; other reactions come from the police, almost ridiculously helpless in their trying to thwart the intended walk from one tower to the other; others still are expressed by some people who are not in the streets, or do not even see the man. Whatever the reaction it provokes is, or wherever it occurs, this public event serves as an *interface* between the tightrope walker and New York – an interrelation in which this unusual *flâneur* seems to lose his identity and estrange his body to become part of his surroundings, while his (direct or indirect) urban audience seems to turn from a group of indistinguishable city dwellers into individuals who consider the man on the wire one of the city’s awe-inspiring rarities. Therefore, notably similar to the aeroplane in *Mrs Dalloway*, this tightrope walk disturbs an ordinary city morning and provokes an urban *group subjective time lapse*, which, admittedly, is here more elaborately interspersed with *individual subjective time lapses*. Again, everyday duties and habits stop and turn into out-of-ordinary thoughts, or simply thoughts as such. Just as they do in *Mrs Dalloway*, the *objective minutes* (still profitably used by many non-watchers) are mocked, declined and “frozen” from *subjective point(s) of view*, left to arrive unwanted and be gone unused and wasted. The “horizontal” relationship with the city stops and makes room for “vertical” communication – a literal as well as imaginary space within which New Yorkers stop walking, stop and look, stop to think. During this pause, we hear the overall, seemingly omniscient narration of this *interface*, yet the narrator seems to enter the minds of the watchers and reveal their individual reactions, turning the readers’ attention in space from one perspective to another:

Those who saw him hushed. [...] It was a silence that heard itself, awful and beautiful. Some thought at first it must have been a



trick of the light, something to do with the weather, an accident of shadowfall. Others figured it must be the perfect city joke – stand around and point upward, until people gathered, tilted their heads, nodded, affirmed, until all were staring upward at nothing at all [...] But the longer they watched, the surer they were. [...]

Up there, at the height of a hundred and ten stories, utterly still, a dark toy against the cloudy sky. (McCann 2009: 3)

The walker makes the watchers form an attitude to life – to the endangered life of the man above them, but also to life *per se*, since the time lapse the walker initiates introduces us both to their own lives and existence in general. The tense dilemma of whether he will fall or not, or whether he will do it on purpose if he does fall, takes up their current stream of thinking. This stream has previously been occupied by trivial, ordinary thinking, which, on a life importance scale, can be equalled to no thinking at all. Now, some of them want him to fall, probably led by an opinion that anyone who risks so much deserves to be punished, while those who are interrupted in their money-making business should at least be awarded with a film-like death. Others want him to stay on the wire, identifying with the man who, after all, as they may see it, risks his life so as to please the spectators. However, none of them seems to remain indifferent:

There was a dip before the laughter, a second before it sank in among the watchers, reverence for the man's irreverence, because secretly that's what so many of them felt – Do it, for chrissake! Do it! [...] while the others [...] felt viable now with disgust for the shouters: they wanted the man to save himself [...]

[...]

Don't do it! (McCann 2009: 6, 7)

The walk in the sky also interrupts a meeting of mothers whose sons were killed in the Vietnam War, at Claire Soderberg's home, Claire being the narrator at the same time. Their regular mo(u)rning, filled with tear-provoking memories of their sons, is for several moments disturbed and their consciousness focuses on the city event. They cannot see the walker from Claire's flat, yet, one of them, Marcia, retells her experience as a watcher of the spectacle (which is still going on outside), from before her arrival at Claire's: "It's a guy, says Marcia, on a tightrope. I mean, I didn't

know it right away [...], but what it is, there's a guy on a tightrope" (McCann 2009: 94). The report influences the mothers in an ambivalent way. On the one hand, it turns their thoughts from their dead sons to another topic – a situation that can assume the characteristics of an interesting, mind-relaxing show. On the other hand, the fact that it is all about a male person, presumably young, who is likely to die at any moment, and in whose vicinity there is a helicopter, makes Marcia think of her own dead son, who died in a helicopter accident. She shares this impression of hers with the other mothers and most likely makes all of them (Claire definitely) think of their own dead sons. In this manner, the report on a man walking in the sky augments and highlights their sadness. The helicopter trying to reason with the tightrope walker reminds Marcia of her son to such an extent that, almost hallucinating, she interprets the walker's stunt as her own son's visit to her. She cannot stay on the spot to see if he will fall, but not because or not *only* because she could not stand one more death. As she confesses to the other mothers, it is not the fall that frightens her. On the contrary, it is the man's stay on the wire or safe grounding that would break her heart. His staying alive would leave her disenchanted, as it would clearly and unequivocally tell her what she already knows but refuses to accept – that it is *not* her son but someone else.

Marcia's impression leaves Claire unsure what it really is that bothers her so much about the tightrope walker. She is doubtless angry with the stranger who, unsolicited, interrupts her morning gathering and certain that this anger is somehow connected to her own son Joshua, who died in Vietnam when four grenades hit a café in which he was sitting. However, for a period of time she cannot detect the reason for such feelings. Finally, after daydreaming for a while, she realises that what actually troubles her is the fact that, of all the possible ways of dying, the tightrope man has chosen such an unusual way – death by tightrope. By doing so, by ostentatiously demonstrating his original (wish for) dying, and by "[t]hrowing his life in everyone's face" (McCann 2009: 113), no matter whether he dies or not, or whether he wants to die or not, the man is "[m]aking her own son's [life] so cheap" (McCann 2009: 113). We do not hear the perspectives other than Marcia's and Claire's here, but we assume that the other mothers also remember their own children at this point. By "nodding slowly" to Marcia's account, they not only sympathise with Marcia, but empathise as well. Each of their sons died in a unique way, yet, as Claire suggests, all of them – women of different social status, habits, and points of view,

are united by a common problem – “[d]eath, [...] [t]he world’s oldest complaint” (McCann 2009: 107). Silently but empathetically adopting Marcia’s reaction as their own, the mothers suggest that, although Claire is the narrator, it is not only Claire whose “head [is] *spinning*” (McCann 2009: 82, italics added) endlessly towards the memory of her son, nor is it only their posh hostess who knows that “[s]o much more than photographs keep[s] the dead alive” (McCann 2009: 79).

Unlike the grieving mothers, a grieving father, Claire’s husband, Judge Solomon Soderberg, whose son’s death “pierced him” (McCann 2009: 236), “[does not] talk about the war [and] [s]ilence is his way out” (McCann 2009: 89). Taking a taxi to his workplace on the same August morning and being busy at work, the judge misses the tightrope man’s walk and is informed about it only afterwards. Yet, he seems to find a way to make up for it and be influenced by it in a postponed time lapse of his own.

As the walker gets arrested after his mission has been carried out successfully, he is about to appear in a court of law and be tried for his illegal behaviour. Judge Soderberg, tired of everyday city cases, wishes that the walker be appointed to him, realising that this is “[o]ne of those out-of-ordinary days that ma[kes] sense out of ordinary days” (McCann 2009: 247). He acknowledges how huge in its difference and originality this offence is in a long sequence of similar, boringly repeated cases. The judge’s ordinary thinking turns into an interpretation of the walker, which concludes that in this city without true monuments, that is, with no care for the past or even anything material to remind it of the past, he is “such a stroke of genius[,] [a] monument in himself. He [...] made himself into a statue, but a perfect New York one, a temporary one, up in the air, high above the city” (McCann 2009: 248). By almost identifying the man with a New York in which he would like to live, the judge shows his underlying anger at his society. He has reckoned the war “just, proper, right[,] [...] fought for the very ideals that [have been] under assault in his court every day” (McCann 2009: 263), and continuously blamed himself for somehow “instilling the battle mentality” (McCann 2009: 263) in his boy. Still, at times “he want[s] to agree with Claire that war [is] just an endless factory of death; it made other men rich, and their son [was] dispatched to open the gates, a rich boy himself” (McCann 2009: 263). In this sense, the society in which the judge lives and which he professionally represents seems to be borrowing its people’s sons never to return them, having used them

for its own personal wars. The walker's case, as another personal (though only *personally* fought) war, appeals so much to the judge that, after being appointed the walker's case among a number of other offences, he finally decides to make an illegal act himself – to juggle the cases around, so as to charge the walker with an offence lighter than regular:

It was obvious that the tightrope walker had never been arraigned before. The first timers were always dazed. They came in, huge-eyed, stunned by it all.

[...]

Soderberg made a split second of eye contact. Broke his own rule, but so what? The walker understood and half nodded. What could Soderberg do with him? How could he manipulate it? [...] He'd play it smart. Pull something unusual from the hat. [...] Who's on first? [The bridge] showed him the calendar and he skimmed down quickly over the cases, flicked a quick look at the sin bin, sighed. He didn't have to do them in order, he could juggle things around [...]. (McCann 2009: 265-266)

Later that day, the judge arrives home and retells the walker's case to his wife, informing her that, having decided to cooperate with the Port Authority, who want to use the walker's act to publicise Twin Towers, he charged the man "a penny per floor", that is to say, one dollar 10 pennies in all, the towers being 110 floors high. The second part of the walker's charge will be another tightrope performance. However, in addition to making it once again clear to us that the tightrope walker's offence has led the judge to ridicule the whole judicial system and cooperate with the offender, he also reveals that the highly unusual event in New York has the power to make him truly happy, in spite of his chronic desperation. Claire informs us earlier that, in addition to silence, "chatt[ing] [...] about his court cases, the insane litany of the city" (McCann 2009: 89) is for Solomon another "way out" of grief, and now this emotional vent seems to reach a level higher than usual. The way in which he tells all this in the evening, from the perspective of Gloria, Claire's new friend, is indicative of the fact that the time lapse is still going on in the judge's mind, now suspending not only his professional dissatisfaction, but his fatherly grief as well: "Solomon clapped his hands together: he was enjoying himself now" (McCann 2009: 318).

If we then go back in time to the very trial that day and focus on the judge's last words in his chapter: "[g]et the tightrope walker up", by

which he issues an order for the walker to be called out and tried for his offence, we could easily reinterpret them as the judge's wish for the man to be returned up there among the clouds, on the wire. He might want him to continue his role of an extraordinary offender who can come up with a historic event in the middle of New York's "everyday present" (McCann 2009: 248) and add some spice to the "mundanity" and "[b]eaurocratic babysitting" (McCann 2009: 253) of the judge's overestimated profession. In this way, the judge offers some significance to the blankness of his personal childless existence.

#### 4. Conclusion

Starting from Elizabeth Grosz's definition of the body-city relation as "an *interface*, perhaps even a cobuilding" (Grosz 1992: 248, author's italics), which presents bodies and cities as not only mutually interacting, but also as overlapping, co-creating and strongly influencing each other, we have stressed that *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf's modernist novel, and *Let the Great World Spin*, Colum McCann's contemporary novel, are both based on such a relation between the characters and the city. Also acknowledging that time and space play crucial roles in the narration of each book, our principal aim was to point out that in both novels there is a time lapse – a subjective halt in objective time, a sequence of "frozen" moments, which functions as a space for a perfectly close *interface* between the body and the city. In this *interface*, characters initiate a two-faceted spatial interaction with the city. They obviously communicate physically (often visually) with a city event, but the city spectacle also triggers a process of thinking, opening a psychological space. This stream of thinking allows them to try and penetrate the mind and/or meaning of the person/thing in focus. However, almost as a rule, they end up thinking about their own lives, problems, needs, losses, or life *per se*. In this way, the characters seem to communicate with themselves, their own past, present, or unknown future. In doing so, they finally suggest that their own selves, their past, present, and future, as well as living as such, are always inextricably linked to the city in which they live.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, a *group subjective time lapse* is provoked by an advertising aeroplane flying over London. The aeroplane scene disturbs the city's current routines (objective time) and directs the minds of the

watchers towards the sky, thus also revealing their own emotional state (subjective time). By failing to find the meaning in the letters that the aeroplane leaves behind, they convey the message that, unfortunately, their personal as well as group optimism in the post-war life is at a low level. Clarissa Dalloway, in spite of not being one of the spectators, can be linked to the aeroplane, as it metaphorically represents her by underlining her ambivalent feelings and anticipating her impressive appearance among people. By looking at the aeroplane, the watchers thus also observe her as one of London's symbols and as one of themselves at the same time.

The central event in *Let the Great World Spin*, a man's walk on a wire between New York Twin Towers, is what functions here as a *group subjective time lapse*, strikingly similar to the one in *Mrs Dalloway*. This act, carried out during one August morning in the 1970s, halts the city's ordinary activities and strongly influences its direct and indirect audience. The people on the ground stop performing their duties and forget about their jobs, leaving objective minutes on their own, and create a space for a group as well as individual subjective field of interaction with a city's highly unusual event. The walker causes ambivalent feelings in their minds, making two groups of spectators – those for and against his success. In this way, two points of view regarding life and social relations in general are revealed: selfish alienation and selfless identification. Here, however, this *group subjective time lapse* more easily turns into *individual subjective time lapses*, as the narration scans in more detail many (more or less) individual reactions to the man's walk. The tightrope walker, thus, has an impact on a group of mothers who mourn their sons killed in the Vietnam War, gathered at Mrs. Soderberg's home. The impact here is two-sided as well – the man shifts their thoughts from sadness to entertainment; however, it inevitably makes them associate the man with their dead, but in their minds continually reborn, sons. Judge Soderberg experiences a postponed time lapse, also initiated by (as he sees it) this extremely unusual and therefore enormously thrilling offence. Thinking about the walker, whose walk he has unfortunately missed, the judge has a space for a personal refreshment of his memory, filled with fatherly sadness and disappointment with his career. His excitement, aroused by the walker's (mis)deed, is so great that he finally decides to diminish the walker's sentence, making it virtually negligible. In doing so, he seems to envy, but simultaneously glorify and reward the man's ability to reach the sky, fight his own self-imposed battle, and eventually remain alive, curiously optimistic, and inevitably, though

inadvertently, innocent. In addition, such an interesting case makes the judge, at least for a while, enormously and truly happy.

*Mrs Dalloway* and *Let the Great World Spin*, therefore, are two novels connected not only by common themes and related narrative methods, but also by an unusual manner of presenting the body-city relation as one of their main subjects: time lapse as space for *interface*.

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