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Heterotopia, Ritual, Egregor – The Structural Formula for Mass Manipulation

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This article develops a new structural theory of mass manipulation in the media, based on the combination of three concepts: heterotopia, ritual and egregor. Starting from Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, it shows that these spatial othernesses are not only special cultural forms, but are also deliberately used to shape the psychological disposition of collective forms of consciousness. The formula 'heterotopia + ritual = egregor' forms the theoretical framework. Heterotopias are systematically differentiated here for the first time into corrective (Apollonian) and de-individualising (Dionysian) types. Their architectural coding follows spatial structures – linear, rectangular, circular – with specific psychopolitical effects. In the analysis of ritual dynamics as amplifiers and catalysts of collective recoding, the egregor is reconstructed as an emergent group consciousness. Finally, the model is placed in the context of digital modernity: in a borderless world without stable orientation, newly defined spaces for rituality are needed to counteract fragmentation. The text thus contributes to the systematic theory of symbolically coded mass dynamics in postmodern space.

Keywords: *Heterotopia, Ritual, Egregor, Mass Manipulation, Liquid Modernity*

In earlier work, I have dealt extensively with Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia – the spatial "otherness" that arises within cultures to reflect, reverse or question normative structures. Originally formulated as a spatial theory of cultural difference, heterotopia helped explain theatres, prisons, cemeteries and other extraordinary institutions as zones of normative deviation. Yet in light of recent global spectacles of media culture, the concept invites a new interpretation: not merely as spatial anomaly, but as a structural mechanism for affective mass alignment. Events like the synchronised opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympic Games – where flags, fire, music and emotion merged in a choreographed symbolic unity – raise the question: Are heterotopias the architectures through which media orchestrate collective states of consciousness? Based on this question, I propose a new theoretical framework as a structural formula for mass manipulation: heterotopia + ritual = egregor. This paper introduces a psychological-spatial typology of heterotopias, defines ritual as transformative symbolic repetition, and describes the egregor as the collective mind-state that emerges from their interplay. The resulting formula, I argue, reveals a powerful symbolic logic behind contemporary mass persuasion – a logic that operates through spatial staging, ritual synchronisation, and affective resonance without explicit discourse. In an era where shared meaning is increasingly fragile, and aesthetic coherence often overrides critical reflection, this structural interplay becomes a key tool in the architecture of media-driven influence.

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From Spectacle to Theory

What makes us feel empathy for a flag, for music, for light? Why do mass media spectacles, with their collective fascination for symbols, institutionalised space, and choreographed emotion, exert such powerful effects on human consciousness? Michel Foucault, a pioneer of postmodern theory, made a lasting contribution to cultural thought with his idea of heterotopia – spatial "otherworlds" that function as control zones for social perception. [1] This essay builds on his insight and extends it toward media analysis: Can Foucault's concept of the otherworld also be understood as a powerful structural principle of mass manipulation in the media?

Foucault's concept of heterotopia opens up a fascinating possibility: to define places not only as physical locations, but also as categories of order. In his words, heterotopias are *"real places…which are formed in the very founding of society… and…effectively enacted utopias in which the real sites…are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."*[2] In contrast to utopia, which has never existed and is often used only as a thought experiment or escapism, a heterotopia is a real space that can be entered, marvelled at, filled with life and played with – and is. The significance of heterotopias in the design of urban architectures and institutions, as well as their echoes in literature and cultural philosophy, is widely recognised today. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter understand Foucault's otherworld in relation to today's cities as *"a heuristic concept to understand spatial practices that do not follow the dominant logic of public space, yet reveal its ideological and aesthetic structures."*[3] However, if we also understand the otherworld as a place where events are staged according to a plan and with the aim of achieving a consciousness-shaping effect, the structural formula emerges: *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor.'* All three components of this new structural formula are discussed below.

Rethinking Heterotopia

Foucault defines three structural criteria for heterotopias: they are culturally immanent (there is no culture without otherworlds, there is no otherworld without a cultural context), they are dynamic (otherworlds change over time – often their change is also an indicator of epochal cultural breaks) and they deal intensively with norms.[4] However, the other worlds described by Foucault are significant precisely because of their relationship to normativity, i.e. to the implicit or explicit set of norms of mainstream society. By experiencing other worlds, the average society can be read normatively in a vivid way, in two respects, depending on the type of other world. Foucault describes how heterotopias reinforce norms on the one hand, but on the other hand can also critically reflect on them and possibly even suspend them for a short time.

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[1]Foucault, M. (1986/1967), p.24
[2]Ibid.
[3]Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (2008), p.3
[4]See Foucault, M. (1986/1967), p.24

Let us look at the examples Foucault himself cites: *"rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, etc. [...], fairs or vacation villages, [...], cemeteries, hammams, prisons, brothels."*[5] We find an open catalogue that depicts an astonishing juxtaposition of spaces of order with completely different relationships to normativity – some reinforcing norms, others reflecting on or suspending them. Although Foucault also classified his concept of heterotopia in terms of time, i.e. he spoke of temporary heterotopias that are *"[...] accumulating time, like museums and libraries"*,[6] he did not provide an ontological-functional classification, even though this is even more meaningful for spaces of order than the time component.[7] I would like to attempt this classification of being and intention for the first time in the following by distinguishing between *corrective* and *de-individualising* heterotopias. Otherworlds, which according to Foucault's definition are inherent in culture, dynamic and normative, can ontologically be distinguished by their orientation: either corrective, reinforcing norms, or de-individualising, suspending and transgressing them. Since, as Aurélie Charles notes, in every culture, the human self is identified with conformity to norms, as they *"define who we are and how we are perceived"*[8], corrective and de-individualising heterotopias allow different experiences of identity.

Ontology of Heterotopias

Foucault (1967)	*Dorchain (2025)*
culturally immanent	
dynamic	
normative	
	corrective
	de-individualising

Corrective heterotopias are all institutions of a permanent or temporary nature that are oriented towards the norms of mainstream society and reinforce them, e.g. in the case of deviation: prisons, military academies, psychiatric hospitals, barracks and the like. *De-individualising* heterotopias, on the other hand, are institutions of a permanent or temporary nature that enable the norms of mainstream society to be critically examined, rejected or temporarily suspended, such as the theatre, the brothel, the hammam, the fairground and the like. In the dichotomous scheme of corrective and de-individualising heterotopias, the cemetery, which Foucault saw as a heterotopia allowing for the regulation of access (an inclusive and exclusive mechanism),[9] plays a special role. At first glance, it seems like the prime example of a de-individualising heterotopia, since the ego is permanently dissolved here, but one characteristic of these places is the implicit or explicit confirmation of order, which offers a corrective aspect: until late modernity, for example, suicides were not buried in Christian cemeteries.

[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Ibid., p. 26
[8]Charles, A. (2012), p.38
[9]Ibid.

While the cemetery already exemplifies the semantic complexity of heterotopic sites by combining corrective and de-individualising aspects, the deeper logic of their normative orientation becomes more intelligible when viewed through a philosophical framework. A compelling foundation for this typological distinction is found in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), where he introduces the aesthetic polarity of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian, in Nietzsche's terms, stands for *"clarity, individuation and separation,"* whereas the Dionysian denotes *"excessive unity, dissolution of subjectivity."* [10] When transposed into the spatial-symbolic register of heterotopia, this polarity offers a profound ontological lens: heterotopias can be understood as either *Apollonian-corrective*, reinforcing normative structures through order, discipline and containment, or *Dionysian-de-individualising*, dissolving those structures in favour of transgressive, ecstatic, and affectively unbounded experiences. Corrective heterotopias work through the spatial enforcement of ideals – be they moral, social or epistemic – while de-individualising heterotopias defer or reverse these norms in order to allow for affective excess, temporary liberation, or ritualised subversion. The contrast between these modalities also invites a set of questions: How do these forms of heterotopia differ in their normative teleology, their architectural language, and their affective mechanisms? What symbolic role do they play in modern societies' attempts to regulate, ritualise, or release the self? Moreover, positioning media environments and large-scale aesthetic productions within this typological scheme offers new insights into their performative role: these productions do not merely reflect cultural norms but often enact them, subtly shaping public consciousness. Understanding this mechanism can significantly sharpen our awareness of the symbolic logic and emotional choreography that drive mass-mediated influence.

Architecture of the otherworld

A comparison of the physical elements of *corrective* and *de-individualising heterotopias* further reveals that their architectural design often mirrors their normative intention. However, there is no clear assignment of temporal stability. Corrective heterotopias can be permanent – such as a barracks – but also temporary, such as drill exercises at a military academy or a pilgrimage or procession. De-individualising heterotopias can be permanent, such as theatre buildings, or temporary, such as mystery plays, ritual circles or dance circles. Since temporality does not align consistently with the heterotopic dichotomy, ontological structure becomes the decisive foundation – and from it, *intentional* orientation follows. Drawing on Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, one may interpret corrective heterotopias as ego-structuring and order-imposing (Apollonian), whereas de-individualising ones dissolve boundaries of the self and invite collective affect (Dionysian).[11] Corrective heterotopias aim to educate visitors towards a social, intellectual, religious or generally normative ideal – either through the practice of symbolically conveyed normativity or through isolating punishment for deviating from it, temporarily or permanently. Thus, there is

[10]Nietzsche, F. (1993/1872), pp.5-6
[11]Ibid.

a fundamental shared normative purpose between all corrective heterotopias that isolate visitors from normative society, whether temporarily due to their age or stage of development, e.g. school until a certain age is reached, temporarily due to results, e.g. prisons and psychiatric institutions until an improvement in the normative state is achieved, or ontologically permanent, e.g. nursing homes until death.

It is therefore logical that all corrective heterotopias tend to follow a similar structural scheme – typically a linear, rectilinear one. Architectural axes, frontal alignments, and sequential corridors function as spatial metaphors of control, hierarchy, and directionality. This architectural language materialises disciplinary intention in built form. As Frank Lloyd Wright observed, *"form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union"*[12] – a maxim that finds architectural realisation in structures designed for the internalisation of normative behaviour. Compare, for example, the monumental architecture of Plato's Academy, the Louvre in Paris, the West Point Military Academy in New York or the Stasi headquarters in Berlin, and you will see everywhere a dominance of rectangular shapes, straight lines and corridors.[13]

In contrast to this is the architecture of de-individualised space, which is circular in design: the ancient theatre of Epidaurus or the Globe Theatre in London, the Pantheon in Rome or the circular architecture of the Apple Park campus in Cupertino.[14] Circular structures create integration, rotation and synchronisation, often with a community-building or boundary-breaking function, creating a focus on a centre or dissolution into a common field.

Phenomenology of Heterotopias

	Linear (axial)	*Circular (centred)*
Corrective	Prison, school, barracks	Panopticon, therapy circle
De-individualising	Procession, ritual path	Theatre, dance circle, festival
Hybrid	Gothic cathedral, Mardi Gras, sacred building, circus tent	

While corrective and de-individualising heterotopias are structurally and functionally distinct, their manifestations in real-world contexts are not always strictly separable. Hybrid forms often emerge: spaces in which normative reinforcement and ego-dissolution intersect in complex symbolic constellations. A compelling example of such hybridity is found in the Gothic cathedral as a Gesamtkunstwerk. Its architecture stages a spatial narrative: the worshipper moves from the shadowed westwork – an elongated, axial corridor – toward the luminous apse in the east, which forms a circle or half-circle. This progression not only reinforces a theological ideal but also invites an affective transformation at the altar, where individual subjectivity is temporarily suspended in devotional immersion. As Philippe Plagnieux notes, the cathedral interior *"symbolised the obstacles and twists of the journey toward*

[12]Wright, F.L. (1954), p.34
[13]See Shekawat, K.R. & Duarte, J.P. (2017), pp.395-411
[14]See Pedersen, P.B. (2020), p.45-62

salvation,"[15] thus uniting corrective orientation with de-individualising experience in a single spatial dramaturgy.

Further examples of hybrid heterotopias can be found in cultural rituals where spatial setting and symbolic performance temporarily converge. Unlike institutional sites such as the Gothic cathedral, in which space and ritual are permanently co-constitutive, events like Mardi Gras represent a fleeting coincidence of location and performative excess – a temporal heterotopic fusion that blurs the boundary between corrective order and de-individualising transgression. Although the carnival procession follows a linear, city-bound trajectory that suggests order and sequence, its symbolic and affective structure (manifested through costuming, satire, rhythmic repetition, and collective ecstasy) disrupts normative constraints. As William Jankowiak notes, it is *"a ritualized reversal of everyday norms,"*[16] highlighting its transformative potential. The tension between spatial form and social function renders this event a hybrid heterotopia of considerable symbolic force—one in which corrective structure and de-individualising release converge, inviting a more nuanced interpretation of heterotopic design and intention.

In contrast, there are also de-individualising heterotopias that serve not to dissolve norms but to correct them: for example, morning circles in educational contexts or therapeutic sitting circles – often within corrective heterotopias such as psychiatric institutions and schools. Significantly, in his *Panopticon* (1791), Jeremy Bentham described his circular design as *"a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example,"*[17] arguing that this structure could be equally applied to prisons, schools, hospitals, and asylums – thus extending the logic of corrective heterotopia via spatially embodied surveillance. Foucault himself revisited this concept in his reflections on the surveillance society in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), describing circular architecture as a prerequisite for visibility and control, where individuals are exposed to constant observation and effectively disciplined by the omnipresent gaze of power of the few.[18] However, as I have argued in my reflections on what I term reciprocal surveillance, postmodernity – building on and transcending Bentham's and Foucault's models – has evolved into a technologically mediated system in which surveillance is no longer a privilege: all watch all.[19]

In summary: Heterotopias are real, culturally embedded spaces that reflect, challenge, or temporarily suspend societal norms. They exist in two main forms: *corrective* heterotopias, which reinforce normative ideals through spatial discipline and symbolic order (e.g., prisons, schools), and *de-individualising* heterotopias, which dissolve identity and suspend norms through symbolic immersion and circular structure (e.g., theatres, festivals).

1. Both types of heterotopias (corrective/de-individualising) can be either temporary or permanent.

[15]Plagnieux, G. (2003), p.45
[16]Jankowiak, W.R. (2004), p.275
[17]See Bentham, J. (1995/1791), p.43
[18]Foucault, M. (1977), p. 200
[19]Dorchain (2012), p. 355

2. Corrective heterotopias tend to follow linear, axial structures; de-individualising ones are often circular or centripetal.
3. Hybrid and inverted forms occur, where function and form do not align.

Ritual and Symbolic Repetition

The architectural framing of heterotopia prepares the ground for its symbolic intensification: what space alone cannot enforce, ritual completes – through repetition, rhythm, and affective binding. Heterotopia – whether corrective, de-individualising or hybrid – represents the space for events that are rituals and produce a sense of obligation. Walter Burkert described rituals as *"basic communicative acts … up to the complex religious performances"* and as *"grounded in very basic… demonstrative communication."*[20] This already reveals the structural similarity to mass suggestive phenomena, as a ritual is communicative and has a symbolic content that can be read subconsciously, in a figurative sense. But a ritual has an even deeper meaning, which Mircea Eliade defines as reactualisation of myth. Eliade contends that *"myth and ritual…are symbols of the sacred…[and] the manifestation of the sacred is narrated in myth and re-enacted in ritual."* [21] However, rituals are by no means limited to religious, esoteric or occult contexts in the narrow sense, but can also occur in the profane sphere. This permeability of ritual events to religious and everyday contexts stems from the fact that the *myths* underlying and legitimising them are also permeable, as I have noted in my remarks on modern sacrifice.[22]

What makes this continuity particularly significant in the present is the mediatisation of ritual: modern media do not merely transmit ritual forms – they actively produce them. In formats ranging from televised ceremonies and political broadcasts to viral social media performances, the symbolic structure of ritual persists: repetition, rhythm, collective witnessing, and emotional synchronisation. This transfer of ritual into media contexts underscores the ongoing relevance of Burkert's and Eliade's definitions, even in thoroughly secularised arenas.

Crucially, these media rituals divide along the same symbolic boundary developed here: they can be corrective or de-individualising. Corrective media rituals include uniformly scripted news formats, presidential New Year's addresses, sermons, or orchestrated ethical appeals like *#MeToo* or *#JeSuisCharlie*. As Nick Couldry observes in *Media Rituals* (2003), *"news formats themselves constitute a ritual space through which symbolic power is enacted."*[23] By contrast, de-individualising rituals dominate the affective architecture of entertainment: music competitions, dance formats, or reality TV shows that suspend social roles, dissolve fixed identities, and stage ecstatic departures from normativity. These rituals do not reinforce order – they rupture it, if only temporarily. Rituals, whether in their original cultic-sacred sense or in their profane and often mass-media sense, have everywhere the effect that Victor Turner

[20]Burkert, W. (1979), pp. 10-11
[21]Eliade, M. (1959), p.13
[22]Dorchain (2012), p. 349
[23]Couldry, N. (2003), p.1

attributes to them: *"ritual is transformative."*[24] However, corrective rituals – often, but not always, located in corrective heterotopias – transform towards an ideal self that represents a social ideal, while de-individualising rituals allow an often longed-for distance from it.

In summary: *A ritual is a structured, symbolically charged act performed repetitively in a socially or emotionally significant context. It serves to synchronise perception and emotion, creating a shared experiential framework that can amplify meaning, foster identity, and modulate group dynamics – whether in sacred or profane settings.*

Egregor and Mass Manipulation

A ritual in the normative space of a heterotopia is not merely a communicative symbolic act – it aims at a third thing that transcends it, the creation of a collective field of consciousness. This phenomenon is also known as egregor, from the Greek ἐγρήγορᾰ (egrḗgora), which means 'to awaken'. The creation of an egregore is mostly known in sacred contexts and refers to the desired dynamics and form of a group consciousness, such as that which arises during a shared ritual act. In this sense, Mark Sedgwick deals with the egregore and defines it as follows: *"a group mind, formed by the common intentions and activities of a particular esoteric group."*[25] While this definition emphasizes esotericism, the concept can be extended to profane contexts: if rituals can exist outside religious domains, then so too can egregores. In fact, as I explained in my research on the violence of the sacred, a society of publicity and publication can make egregores more visible than ever before, as the exclusivity of the heterotopias that enable them and the rituals that take place within them is breaking down at an accelerating pace.[26]

Michael Leiris, in *The Sacred in Everyday Life*, helps to further illuminate this transition from the sacred to the profane by asking: *"What, for me, is the sacred? […] What objects, places, or occasions awake in me that mixture of fear and attachment, that ambiguous attitude caused by the approach of something simultaneously attractive and dangerous, prestigious and outcast— that combination of respect, desire, and terror that we take as the psychological sign of the sacred?"*[27] This ambivalent structure of the sacred (affective, symbolic, pre-reflective) lies at the heart of what constitutes an egregor, even outside traditional religious settings.

The ritual of singing the national anthem before a football match, for instance, constitutes a profane ritual capable of generating an egregor: a heightened national consciousness that fosters pride and belonging, yet may also produce antagonistic ingroup-outgroup dynamics, particularly in emotionally charged spectator contexts. Such examples reveal the fundamental ambivalence of egregores, which can discipline and unify through symbolic coherence – or, conversely, unleash affective overflow and collective excess. They operate in the liminal space between corrective

[24]Turner, V. (1969), p.94
[25]Sedgwick, M. (2007), p.28
[26]Dorchain (2012), pp.310-311
[27]Leiris, M. (2017/1938), p.24

cohesion and de-individualising dissolution – always via synchronised perception, repeated enactment, and shared symbolic charge.

In summary: *The egregor is the collective consciousness that emerges from ritualised interaction within heterotopic space – it reflects the emotional cohesion of a group, whether norm-conforming or transgressive, and reveals the affective force behind symbolic mass phenomena.*

Synopia: The Symbolic Overall Form

Heterotopias function as event-spaces for both normative reinforcement and de-individualising dissolution, providing the spatial stage for rituals whose symbolic intensity may culminate in the emergence of egregores—whether in sacred contexts or within the mundane routines of everyday life. The structural formula presented above, *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor'*, culminates in what I term *synopia*. This refers to the symbolic overall form in which space, ritual action and collective effect merge into an orchestrated structure of meaning. Synopia is not merely a place, not merely an event, but the aesthetic coding of effectiveness itself – in a collective medium that is read, felt, but rarely reflected upon.

a) Synopia: Space (heterotopia) + action (ritual) = effect (egregor)
b) Media spaces are structurally organised in a synopical manner (e.g. political show formats, mass events)
c) Synopia is a form of aesthetic control of the present

Synopia constitutes a *synoptic structure*, in which space (*heterotopia*), symbolic action (*ritual*), and collective resonance (*egregor*) converge into a unified semiotic system.

My term *synoptic* emphasises that these components are not isolated phenomena but operate together as a total form – an orchestrated perceptual unit that shapes collective meaning through simultaneity and coherence. In corrective processes, the synoptic structure stabilises normative frameworks through spatial discipline, repeated enactment, and emotionally charged consensus. In contrast, de-individualising processes use the same formula to dissolve identities and detach participants from normative constraints – but still within a synoptically guided aesthetic, making even subversion subject to structural design. In both cases, whether affirming norms or suspending them, the synoptic structure becomes a tool of psychological steering: a silent architecture of mass manipulation operating beneath the threshold of critical awareness.

The Need for Synoptic Orientation

In his groundbreaking work *Propaganda* (1928), Edward Bernays – pioneer of public relations and nephew of Sigmund Freud – argued that modern democracies function through *"the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and*

opinions of the masses."[28] This process, which he famously termed *the manufacturing of consent*, shifts the foundation of democratic legitimacy from informed civic engagement to strategic perception management. Rather than appealing to reasoned argument, persuasion in this context is achieved through the mobilisation of symbols, the repetition of rituals, and the careful orchestration of emotionally charged imagery. These elements bypass critical reflection and instead target the affective and subconscious layers of collective experience, thereby shaping public opinion through aesthetic and emotional resonance rather than through evidence-based reasoning. While Bernays emphasises that the objective of propaganda is to bypass critical judgement – drawing structural parallels between product advertising and political agitation – Susan Buck-Morss situates this dynamic within the affective and normative logic of contemporary media: *"Mass culture manipulates collective desire by aestheticising the political and ritualising the commodity."*[29]

Within the theoretical framework developed here, heterotopias serve as the spatial and symbolic infrastructure of such influence: they offer the architectural setting in which rituals can unfold that not only reflect collective states of consciousness, but actively generate them. The structural formula *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor'* encapsulates the mechanism by which spatial design and symbolic action generate collective mental states. The *egregor* that arises from this interplay is not merely expressive, it becomes a vehicle of pre-reflective consensus, a shared sentiment that precedes conscious judgment. Yet this consensus bears an epistemic risk. As Zygmunt Bauman observed, liquid modernity is marked by disorientation and a yearning for meaning: *"In a liquid modern life there are no permanent bonds and any that we take up for a time must be tied loosely so that they can be untied again… when circumstances change – as they surely will…"* [30] In such a volatile context, the pull of ritualised spaces becomes difficult to resist precisely because they fulfil a deep psychological and cultural need: the desire for orientation, cohesion, and momentary certainty in a world of constant flux. This affective immediacy, however, tends to obscure critical reflection and creates the illusion of clarity where none exists. Therefore, the foundational ideals of Enlightenment thought must be reconsidered with renewed urgency: from a Kantian perspective, genuine consent is not merely a matter of outward conformity, but an expression of autonomous will shaped through critical reflection and rational deliberation, for *"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity… [and] the motto of enlightenment is: have the courage to use your own understanding!"*[31] It cannot be orchestrated through aesthetic suggestion or engineered by symbolic spatial regimes that remain opaque to those affected by them. In this light, the egregor — as a collectively generated field of perception and emotion — poses a serious epistemic challenge: it simulates consensus through affective alignment rather than reasoned agreement. Authentic consent, however, presupposes transparency, cognitive accessibility, and the freedom to accept or reject propositions on the basis of reason. When collective will is formed through immersive environments that bypass critical

[28]Bernays, E. (1928), p. 9
[29]Buck-Morss, S. (1989), p.147
[30]Baumann, Z. (2003), p.2
[31]Kant, I. (1996/1784), p. 11

faculties – as is often the case with contemporary heterotopias – the Enlightenment ideal of rational autonomy is not realized, but subverted.

What Foucault could not foresee is the *mobility* of heterotopias and the rituals and egregores associated with them. The aspect of mobility goes beyond the dynamics that, alongside cultural immanence and normativity, is one of the three constitutive aspects of other worlds – today, anyone can carry their own heterotopia in their pocket thanks to media technology. Virtual worlds, which have long since hybridised with what Foucault still called *"real places"*[32] in the physical sense, offer a new possibility as tireless producers of rituals and, consequently, as egregore machines. As Tom Boellstorff observes his anthropological study of virtual culture, *"Virtual worlds do not merely simulate social life; they become laboratories of the social imagination, where new rituals emerge."*[33] The question of whether such rituals are genuinely new or merely structural updates of pre-existing forms is secondary to a more crucial insight: digital spaces increasingly shape consciousness by embedding ritualised symbolic action into everyday life. Within the framework developed here, virtual worlds function as mobile, digitised heterotopias – capable of generating rituals and producing egregores on a global scale, synchronising affect and perception across physical and temporal boundaries.

As this analysis has shown, heterotopias are not neutral containers but normatively encoded architectures of perception. The rituals staged within them do not merely express collective will – they construct it by aligning affect, narrative, and spatial symbolism into an immersive perceptual environment. This convergence gives rise to the *egregor*, a pre-reflective field of shared meaning and emotional resonance, emerging from the interplay of space (*heterotopia*) and symbolic repetition (*ritual*). Depending on their configuration, such heterotopic structures can function in a *corrective* mode, reinforcing normative ideals through spatial discipline and symbolic affirmation, or in a *de-individualising* mode, dissolving identities and loosening social bonds through ecstatic, subversive excess. In both cases, the *synoptic* configuration influences not only what becomes visible, but how it is collectively internalised and consented to – often undermining critical discernment as digital infrastructures intensify and propagate its effects. In an age of media superabundance and performative transparency, the real challenge is no longer to unveil the concealed, but to interpret the oversaturated. The formula *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor'* thus names more than a structural logic – it exposes a cultural mechanism through which mass perception is synchronised, affectively steered, and rendered resistant to critique.

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