VIRGINIA WOOLF AND LITERARY OBJECTS: DESCRIPTION, PHILOSOPHY, AND AFFECT



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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a philosophical and affective history of the subject-object encounter in Virginia Woolf's writings, examining how she negotiates the relationship of the (writing) subject to objects. It extends recent literary materialism(s) that emphasise how thoughts and subjects are entangled with things. The desire for such intimacy emerges in pertinent trends in Woolf's intellectual milieu – the late-Victorian and Edwardian approach to objects as signifiers of personality, continental theories of empathy, and the continuing allure of Romantic unity between self and world. However, Woolf is ambivalent about subject-object intimacy because objects tacitly inculcate a doctrine of the "real" by reifying social forms; furthermore, many traditions of subject-object intimacy cloak a radical subjectivism that threatens the object *qua* object by defining the object as a private sense-impression. Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, powerfully summarised how eighteenth-century empiricism's emphasis on psycho-sensory privacy led to a rejection of mind-independent objects that, in turn, ultimately attenuates language, time and intersubjectivity. I argue that empiricism's lonely worlds of experience *and* subject-object intimacy both raise the problem of radical subjectivism. Skilfully negotiating this dilemma, Woolf replaces subject-object intimacy with impersonality, suggesting that the ontological autonomy of objects is necessary to intellectual freedom, acknowledgement of otherness, and the alleviation of human loneliness. Distance and difference between subjects and objects becomes the ground of Woolf's ethics, as shared attention to objects becomes a synecdoche for a shareable world. Subjectification and art itself are reformulated in terms of a non-appropriative "pointing towards" that recentres and demythologises the artist's role by gesturing at the limits of description.

This study uncovers complex dialogues with contemporary authors, theorists, and philosophers and illuminates the significance of objects to larger modernist preoccupations.

Furthermore, it foregrounds the difficult relationship between materiality, language, and representation, contributing towards a theoretical reappraisal of objects in fiction.

ABBREVIATIONS

AROO	Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*
BA	Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*
"BB"	Virginia Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown"
"CF"	Virginia Woolf, "Character in Fiction"
D	Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*
E	Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*
HET	Leslie Stephen, *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*
MD	Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*
"MF"	Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction"
CSF	Virginia Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*
MOB	Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*
ND	Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*
O	Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*
SE	Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*
TG	Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*
TL	Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
TWD	Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* Draft
W	Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*
"WM?"	Leslie Stephen, "What is Materialism?"
WV	Leonard Woolf, *The Wise Virgins*
VO	Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*
Y	Virginia Woolf, *The Years*

Introduction

From the Fork to the Flower

In a deleted section of Virginia Woolf's penultimate novel, *The Years* (1937), Eleanor sits in a heavily ornamented, middle-class restaurant and looks at a 'silver vase,' a 'pink lamp with its fringe of beads,' and an 'orchid,' 'lying among the metal knives and forks on the coarse table-cloth':

> That's an odd assembly of objects, she thought, dully observing the shapes and positions of the things on the table; though they were knife, fork and flower, they had for a moment lost their identity. Black marks on a white ground they seemed to be for a moment; a pattern; something fixed. If there were a pattern, she mused, what would it be? If accidentally scattered objects, were yet in order? If to a mind outside her mind they meant something? as to a painter they meant something? If there were a world beyond this world … but the thought slipped.
>
> … How would it be […] if this fork, this knife, this flower and my hand – she laid it on the table – were thought together by one mind, so that what seemed accidental – vegetable, animal, metal – were in fact all one? […] it seemed to her that the conception she had half grasped now ran between the different things; as if she could live from the fork to the flower – from the flower – she put out her hand and touched it – to the spoon. Adventurously, boldly … yes boldy [*sic*], adventurously, since we know so little … (*Y* Appendix 461-462)

This passage belongs to a long string of moments in Woolf's fiction where objects provoke extraordinary attention, soliciting aesthetic, existential, and social questions. Estranged from their ordinary "identities," these objects are at once legible – '[b]lack marks on a white ground' resemble text on a page – and illegible, "slipping" from thought. Although it is part of daily praxis to move easily from flower to spoon, taking tangibility, solidity, and functionality for granted, Eleanor's sense of wonder implies that somehow, at some point, it has become difficult to live in the interstices between self and object. Such living is posed as aspirational, resonating with the 'new world' imagined in the 1917 section of *The Years*, where Eleanor hopes that we shall 'live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave' (*Y*282). It also recalls the famous image of unity in "A Sketch of the Past" (written c.1939-1940) where Woolf explains her

'philosophy:' 'we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art … we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself' (*MOB*81). The dynamic of intimacy and distance, of "from" and "to," in *The Years*' table-scape constitutes the story of relation, the complicated melding of humans, art, and objects.

This thesis explores the mysterious traffic between objects and subjects, demonstrating how modernist thought cleaves to objects, how certain affects cluster around objects, and how aesthetic theories are fundamentally involved in the furniture of fiction. Through an in-depth study of Woolf's fictional and non-fictional oeuvre, it contributes towards an understanding of modernism as 'an inquiry into the fate of the object world, an account of how objects produce subjects, and an effort to encounter or effect a kind of thingness' (Brown "Materialities" 282; see also Mao 1998). In four chapters, I trace Woolf's interest in the object *qua* object – something that exists at a remove from both social structures and the somatic body. I hope to prove that this initial gap between subjects and objects is essential to the model of intersubjectivity proposed in Woolf's work, and to her understanding of the artist's work.

For more than two decades, a rich body of scholarship has defined itself by the effort to take the objects of fiction, in Elaine Freedgood's terms, 'seriously' (1). Gone are the days when Roland Barthes described objects as the 'neutral prosaic excipient which swathes the precious symbolic substance,' the inert or 'insignificant' backdrop to narrative (*Rustle* 144, 142). Douglas Mao's *Solid Objects* (1998), Freedgood's *Ideas in Things* (2006) and Bill Brown's *A Sense of Things* (2003) all query whether the literary object is doomed 'never to be itself but always, always to represent something else' (Brown *Sense of Things* 82). These texts are essential to the object-oriented turn in literary criticism, which encompasses "new materialisms," "post-humanisms," and "thing theory." As Brown explains in his seminal article, "Thing Theory" (2001), these lines of enquiry are born of exhaustion with 'swirling accounts of the subject' and the abstractions of

theory, denoting a desire to 'unabashedly begin with things,' with the collisions, concussions, and entanglements with materiality that constitute what it is to be a subject in the first place (1,2). As Derek Ryan (2013), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.2020), and Paul Sheehan (2002) have observed, the decentralisation of the privileged subject and affirmation of objects' agency and expressivity links object-oriented criticism with post-humanism. According to Bjørnar Olsen's *In Defense of Things* (2010), it is necessary to examine the 'intrinsic *material* significance of things and the qualities they possess beyond human cognition, representation, and embodiment' (9, original emphasis) – an 'independence from and resistance to us' that Jane Bennett has called 'thing-power' (18). Reacting against the tendency to "dissolve" the 'riddle' of objects – as Roland Barthes writes, reducing them to 'easy surfaces' (*Critical Essays* 3-4) – object-oriented criticism often aims to lend depth, volume, 'an interiority and, thus, something like the structure of subjectivity' to objects (Brown *Sense of Things* 7-8). Hence, many studies deliberately invoke the "life" of objects, reconceptualising the formerly 'alienated, accursed part of the subject … shamed, obscene, passive' (Baudrillard 111) to an agential object in its own right.

My analysis is undertaken in the same spirit as these studies. Although it is not a "social life of things," nor a material culture study, my understanding of social dynamics and the individual subject aligns with the new materialist belief that human structures are the *outcome* of object-relations. I explore the subject-object encounter by attending to its metaphysical moment, to basic questions about existence that provide the foundation for larger aesthetic, semantic, and social enquiries. As Stephen White explains, '[o]ntological commitments' are 'entangled with questions of identity and history, with how we articulate the meaning of our lives, both individually and collectively' (4). I argue that the way early-twentieth-century thinkers articulate the ontological dimensions of materiality lends crucial insights into how modern subjects are articulated, calibrated, and modulated by the social field.

Nevertheless, the artificial infusion of meaning and human identity into concrete things concerned many modernists, leading to a renewed interest in the object *qua* object, something that "slips" away from language, and the perceptual apparatus (Woolf *Y* Appendix 461). In *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), Fredric Jameson argues that the 'irreconcilable divorce' between objects and their intelligibility, 'between meaning and existence,' is 'a fundamental feature of modernity, particularly in literature, whose verbal existence necessarily inclines it to idealism.' (37). In examining why the thing itself (in addition to the socialised object, a vehicle of human concerns and fantasies) comes to be a crucial point of reference for Woolf, I do not imagine that I can, as Steven Connor writes, 'secede from the party of the first person and cross over to the side of things' ("Thinking Things" 1). Objects necessarily exist in relationship with subjects and so the object "for me" is, in a direct sense, the only kind of object I have. However, an important part of my argument is that the notion of an object that exists "in itself" is essential to the notion of an object "for *us*." Maintaining the existence of things themselves has little to do with epistemological prowess or fantasies of immaculate spectatorship and unmediated access. Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, written in the modernist *annus mirabilis*, 1922, puts it well:

> Look: the trees exist; the houses
> That we live in still stand. We alone
> Fly past all things, as fugitive as the wind.
> And all things conspire to keep silent about us, half
> Out of shame, perhaps, half as unutterable hope. (13)

As we will see, Woolf's work also resounds with recurrent pleas to "look: it exists." She suggests that objects not only offer permanence to a 'fugitive' subject, but also that the 'unutterable hope' of intersubjectivity rests upon such simple recognitions of the mind-independent, obdurately silent object.

Consequently, any reservations that I have about new materialism and thing theory derive from their tendency to occasionally equivocate about the object's status as a non-identical Other that repels or challenges the meanings we try to secure to it. Sometimes, critics imply that an object is only valuable insofar as it illumines human concerns, or directs its agency towards us, as if 'things [need to be] smuggled over the border into the land of the living' in order to merit our 'filial or non-dominative interest' – a point advanced in Steven Connor's "Thinking Things" (3) and Terry Eagleton's *Materialism* (2016). For instance, a contributor to the seminal volume, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (ed. Coole and Frost 2010), Rey Chow asks for 'a revamped materialism defined primarily as signification and subject-in-process' (226). If materialism is defined this way, we risk the complete dissolution of the object, traditionally understood as something *other* than subject, something recalcitrant that 'resists recruitment to concepts' and language (Connor 3). As Eagleton argues, this would be 'materiality without substance, as fluid and protean as the post-structuralist notion of textuality' (Eagleton ibid.11). While Chow's redefinition seeks to broach the 'divorce' between objects and meaning that Jameson registers (*Antinomies* 37) – countering the 'ideology' wherein 'obsessive reference to the "concrete" […] is always brandished like a weapon against meaning' (Barthes *Rustle* 146) – it implies a disdain for objects that do *not* lend themselves to signification. As John Plotz notes, the best of new materialist work 'reflect[s] on failures of meaning, or on the slippages that occur between the intended [cultural] meaning and the actually embodied substance' (110). The 'unviolated integrity' of the object in its own right (Mao 11) makes these slippages possible and is an abiding emphasis in Woolf's work.

Similarly, this thesis agrees with much of Bill Brown's work, particularly *A Sense of Things*' critique of the 'effort to penetrate [things], to see through them, and to find … within an object … the subject' (12). However, his article "Thing Theory" and later work*, Other Things* (2015), are concerned with precisely this project. In the new idiom coined in "Thing Theory," the object

remains "mere," while 'the thing really names […] a particular subject-object relation' (4). "Thingness" denotes the latent animacy, quasi-subjectivity, or fluidity that, for Brown, enables objects to "mean." "Objects" refer to legible, usable, inert entities while "things" are 'audacious' limit cases, 'a recognizable yet illegible remainder' (ibid.5) that, ironically, become "thingly" because they offer up a 'humanoid outline' (*Other Things* 9). Most problematically, Brown suggests that we imagine things 'as the amorphousness out of which objects are *materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject*, the anterior physicality of the physical world emerging, perhaps, as an after-effect of the mutual constitution of subject and object' ("Thing Theory" 5, emphasis added). I argue that Woolf is particularly concerned to challenge such variants of George Berkeley's *esse est percipi* (the belief that perception constitutes things; concreteness is an 'after-effect' of the subject). Of course, she understood that 'any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain,' but the brain is also stimulated by objects that refuse, or complicate, this mixing, that denote 'another world' ("Solid Objects" *CSF*104-105). Repeatedly, she imagines a world that exists without the perceiving subject, bereft of the 'humanoid outline' (Brown *Other Things* 9).

I do not adhere to Brown's object/thing distinction because it does not hold in Woolf's vocabulary, but also because she was less interested in the subjectification of objects (for Brown, a "thingification") than in subjectification *through* objects – in Michel Serres' words, the 'constitution of the subject by the object, in dizzying semi-cycles endlessly renewed, leading all the way back to the beginning' (209, qtd. in Connor 5). In other words, it is not surprising that we find ourselves in our possessions; as we will see in chapter one, this was a bedrock of Edwardian fiction and interior design. A more interesting question, implied in Serres' argument and much of new materialist criticism, is how much we possess our own bodies, thoughts, affects, and sensations, how we lay claim to them when their origins are so inscrutably "not

mine"? As Diane Coole and Samantha Frost write in the introduction to *New Materialisms* (2010), 'subjectivities, discourses, ethics, and identities' are constructed by, coextensive with, and embedded in, material objects (25). How does Woolf reckon with our constitutional responsiveness to objects, especially when it verges on a dangerous passivity akin to automatism? What does she make of 'the nonhuman determinant of language,' which Paul Sheehan has identified as a peculiarly modernist concern (10)? Most importantly, how might the author convey the dissolution, entanglement, and reclarification of subjects and objects? How can she share intimate feelings and sensations while navigating and re-appropriating narrative codes? These questions emerge out of an interest in objects, but they are equally apropos to re-assessments of modernism's critique of personality like Anthony Cuda's *The Passions of Modernism* (2010) and Rochelle Rives' *Modernist Impersonalities* (2012). They also resonate with Michael Levenson's *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* (1991), which 'follow[s] the diverse fortunes of individuality in modern English fiction: its changing verbal aspect, its historical limits and symbolic resources, its […] cultural displacement and psychological self-estrangement, its uneasy accommodation of mind and body, its retreat from the world and its longing for community' (xi). In this thesis, I want to illumine how the fate of the object is the fate of the subject. The two questions, "'What am I?'" and "'What is this?'" (Woolf *TL*107) are intrinsically combined in Woolf's thought, stimulating her unique perspective on impersonality, loneliness, and community.

Since I am concerned with deconstructing the idea of an "autonomous" modernist subjectivity, I am more conservative about attributing subjectivity to objects than, say, vital materialists or critics participating in the recent rehabilitation of panpsychism and animism.[1] In chapter two, which focuses on subject/object sympathy, I reflect on my hesitancy about the

[1] See, for instance, *Cosmologies of the Anthropocene* (Vetlesen 2019), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. Bruntrup et. al 2016), *For Love of Matter: A Contemporary Panpsychism* (Mathews 2003)

panpsychist 'encounter,' defined by Freya Mathews as 'communicative engagement with a responsive world that invites us to assume an attitude of eros' (10). While Woolf explores the autonomous affective lives of objects, she is keenly aware that objects are often the vessel, the symbol, or scapegoat for human feelings. Thus, my interpretation of the animistic elements in Woolf's thought is modest, sensitive to the caveats introduced in Peter Schwenger's *Tears of Things* (2006) and W.J. Mitchell's *What do Pictures Want?* (2005). Both texts examine the 'incorrigible' tendency to think of objects as "alive" (Mitchell 54), asking what it would mean to think about objects as capable of melancholy or desire and why we persist in these speculative metaphors. They argue that our conception of the "lively," but somehow "secret," "distant," or "private," object reveals more about the subject than the object. Schwenger writes that 'a consciousness that is only conscious of itself' and its own creations 'is an empty cycle,' whereas an object conceived as 'outside' and *other* than consciousness reveals that consciousness is an ambiguous, contingent, and 'riven' construct (6-8). For objects to be 'coordinates' for our being in the world, that is, for them to meaningfully structure selfhood, we must reckon with 'a separation from the object and a consequent sense of loss' (10, 9). Similarly, Mitchell takes up Wilhelm Worringer's critique of empathy (discussed in chapter 2), to show how empathy is based on a 'dyadic,' but unequal, relationship in which the spectator is 'endlessly talking to compensate for the [object's] silence …[for] the refusal of speech, narrative, figuration, and legibility' (230). Having rejected empathy, Mitchell turns to '[i]ntimacy,' a term that 'implies collectivity, a circle of acknowledgement and recognition' (ibid.). For Mitchell, the value of the 'vitalist analogy' is that it reconceptualises the object from a thing that 'comes alive in our perceptual/verbal/conceptual play' to a 'thing that is always already addressing us,' placing obligations on us (49). This shifts the focus from the subject's interpretative authority to how subjectivity is formed through relations to objects, relations that must be acknowledged. Schwenger's emphasis on distance and Mitchell's emphasis on address suggests that subject-object dialogue has to be recognised as a difficult dialogue between *two*, not as subjective

ventriloquism enlivening a passive object. Consequently, for panpsychism to have any radical import it must be based on the object's alterity – its possible 'indifference' (Woolf "On Being Ill" *SE*106) – and not upon our determination to be at home in a loving world.

Thanks to the avenues opened by texts like Alex Zwerdling's *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (1986), criticism has revised the early view that Woolf was a neurotic, immured, elitist and now examines her responsiveness to the historical moment. I contribute to this project by recovering ideas of the object that were current in Woolf's milieu or inherited from close sources; this approach best illumines how fully Woolf participated in her context, faithful to her own recognition that 'one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions' (*MOB*81). Especially in chapters one and three, I hope to dismantle what Charlotte Jones has recently described as 'modernist mythologies of parthenogenesis' (135), participating in the effort to accentuate the continuities between modernist thought and that of its predecessors, inclusively mapping the development of multiple, interlocking, and diverging trends in literary history.[2] While Woolf had a tendency to 'snub and scarify' her literary antecedents and contemporaries ("How it Strikes" *SE*27), this thesis foregrounds her ongoing conversations with eighteenth-century aesthetics and philosophy (specifically, Romanticism and empiricism), eminent Victorians (Walter Pater and Vernon Lee), Edwardian authors (Arnold Bennett), seemingly distant contemporaries (Henri Bergson, Theodor Lipps, and T.E. Hulme), friends (Roger Fry and T.S. Eliot), and family (Leslie Stephen and Leonard Woolf). Some of these conversations were explicit – for instance, Woolf's infamous quarrel with Arnold Bennett – but others are subtler, or require re-appraisal – for example, Woolf's complex relationship with her father. Each chapter draws out a salient theme in Woolf's treatment of objects and traces its

[2] Works that complicate overly coherent, or limited models of "modernism," include *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* (Ardis 2002), *The Modern Movement* (Baldick 2004), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (eds., Marcus and Nicholls 2005), *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (ed., Caserio 2009), *Freewomen and Supermen: Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism* (Fernihough 2014), *Late Victorian into Modern* (ed., Marcus et al.2016), as well as the journal, *English Literature in Transition: 1880-1920*.

connections to wider literary and philosophical preoccupations, producing an intellectual (micro) history of objects. I focus on links that can be substantiated by biographical evidence or textual comparison, while showing how recurring concerns are centralised, (re)distributed, and dispersed across a wide network. Although the object emerges at the centre of important debates around aesthetics, philosophy, psychology, and social life, it is not a homogenous, tightly-knit "movement" that I describe here. Rather, I am working in what Bruno Latour calls 'the painful and costly longhand of […] associations,' trying to 'catch up' with 'often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands' (11-12). As Michael Whitworth has written, the sheer volume of minute, subtle references in Woolf's work make for an 'exasperated and exhausted annotator' ("Contradictory Woolf" 16), but they also support Leslie Stephen's claim that every text 'points unmistakably to the workings of influences too manifold and potent to be embodied in any single personality' (*HET*2). A writer is but an 'interpreter' of the affective, conceptual, and physical forces that stir the historical moment (ibid.).

Philosophies of the object are central to my analysis, which contributes to the renewed interest in 'the philosophical roots of Woolf's modernism' (Ryan 6), particularly Derek Ryan's *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory* (2013), a chapter in Cairns Craig's *Associationism and the Literary Imagination* (2007), as well as earlier, seminal pieces like Ann Banfield's *The Phantom Table* (2000), Gillian Beer's *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (1996) and Mark Hussey's *The Singing of the Real World* (1986). I argue that the most important philosophical legacy Woolf had to negotiate was also a filial legacy: her father's account of eighteenth-century philosophical empiricism. While Craig claims that 'to understand the emergence of modernism […] we have to restore to its proper place the dominant intellectual context of both early and late nineteenth-century British culture – an empiricist philosophy' (6), overall, the impact of eighteenth-century empiricism on twentieth-century fiction has been construed as minor. In *The Rhetoric of Empiricism*

(1993), Jules Law observes that empiricism has a reputation for naïve common sense and the transparent equivalence of word and referent, seeming to 'preclud[e] any genuinely critical thinking about the mediating roles of history and culture' (1). To paraphrase Ian Watt's observation about realism (which some scholars, like Catherine Belsey [1980], conflate with empiricism), empiricism may *appear* 'flat-footed,' but it quickly becomes 'fly-blown' (148). Counter-balancing Craig's positive account of empiricism's impact on twentieth-century theories of mind, I argue that empiricism's attack on the object *qua* object radically destabilised language, time, and intersubjectivity, dismantling all but the most arbitrary alignment of things and words, self and object, self and other.

While one strand of empiricism purposed to restore 'the commerce between *Mind* and *Things*' (Bacon 3), George Berkeley and David Hume pugnaciously asserted that the object (and indeed, the subject) has no independent, continuous existence outside the mind. It is simply a whirling flux of private sensations, stabilised only by custom or, in Berkeley's case, heavenly intervention. As early as 1865, David Masson noticed that empiricism revokes 'any substantiality at all,' delimiting existence to 'an illusive series of phantasms flitting in a vague nothingness of Time and Space' (32). Leslie Stephen elaborated on this situation in his *magnum opus*, *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1875), which serves as a touchstone for chapter three of this thesis. As Anthony Nuttall's *A Common Sky* (1974) demonstrates (without reference to Woolf), the consequences of empiricism reverberated throughout Romanticism and on into modernism which, I argue in chapter four, reckons with the affective fall-out of this tradition. Although many modernists seem to revel in the subjectivist contingency posited by empiricism, we must note another, less complacently egoistic and more anxious feeling – the object has been taken away, has lost its public availability and substantiality. This feeling of object-nostalgia undergirds many of Woolf's texts. Henry James succinctly summarises the modern predicament when he writes, '[t]ake away […] the object of knowledge (or thing known) as our logicians do

when they resolve it into the sensations of the subject (or person knowing) and you a fortiori take away the subject: for the subject in existence is logically constituted only by the object for which and to which and by which he lives' (*Society* 287).

By explicating philosophy's impact on Woolf's writing, I want to demonstrate that it is not up to the writer to infuse objects with a metaphysical dimension – as if we tacked complex theories onto things that simply don't merit it, or as if the abstract, generalisable, and conceptual do not "properly" or organically belong to objects. Although objects are not reducible to, or even necessarily coeval with, ideas, the physical structure of objects suggests a philosophy, a temporal, spatial, sensual, and cultural logic. As Leslie Stephen wrote, our interactions with objects and our 'language' for describing them 'implies the unconscious absorption of a philosophy … We are metaphysicians in the cradle, and distinguish object and subject by methods instilled in us by our nurses' (*Science* 106). To take a philosophical approach to the object is a matter of taking up a pre-existing affordance, only to find that it was not we who put it there. Just as Steven Connor argues that 'thinking can only ever be done through the things that draw, drain and detain our thinking' (3), I suggest that objects both propose themselves as philosophical questions and give us the raw materials of philosophy. Further, detailed explication of a philosophy's heritage helps us to pinpoint its aesthetic, social, and ethical correlates – its "livability" and "speakability." I want to show that the existential dilemmas aroused by objects are not separate or abstracted from normal life. We "live" the instability of our relationships with objects and, in living them, we see that these contradictions were always already there, if only as an intermittently recognised, unruly background to our everyday speech and experience. In this way, my work echoes Stanley Cavell, who persuasively shows that we are 'habitually' "'forced,'" "'driven,'" or thrown onto philosophical questions (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 48); however extreme or eccentric, they are the 'natural experience of a creature complicated or burdened enough to possess language at all,' or bodies at all, or praxis at all (*Claim of Reason* 140). In exploring how

Woolf tries to 'be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy' (*TL*164), my work also aligns with the re-evaluation of modernism and the ordinary conducted by Lorraine Sim (2010), Liesl Olson (2009), and Bryony Randall (2007).

Just as language implies a philosophy, it is embedded in materiality. Woolf's prose not only charts the 'movement of thought, feeling, and bodily sensations,' as Patricia Laurence explains (13), but also endeavours to show fidelity to objects. The twin imperative described in her early essay, "Modern Fiction" (1921) – embrace or create (*SE*10) – balances the need for a new semiotics with the recognition that language deforms the objects it seeks to embrace. Resonating with Dora Zhang's work on the 'stylistic signature of modernism' – 'an encounter with the limits of description' (53) – this thesis demonstrates that Woolf often teeters towards a 'zone of silence' ("Sickert" *E*6:39) that might entail the writer's obsolescence. Like Douglas Mao's *Solid Objects*, this thesis sounds the 'note of vital hesitation' (11) in Woolf's understanding of authorship, identifying specific ways that objects affect the writing process. In the first chapter on clutter, I focus on Woolf's use of repetition and the detail, drawing out the tensions between a capricious language of associative jouissance and a more austere verbal economy that seeks to capture an entire affective and biographical complex in one phrase or word. Particularly in *Orlando* (1928), Woolf moves between defiant superfluity, fantastic, ironic, tri-colonnated passages, and a cipher language that is as baffling as it is tantalising. In chapter two, I explore how Woolf pictures the novelist's susceptibility to those 'other than human forces [that] are always at work on us' (*MOB*146). This responsiveness can be a liability, generating linguistic and mental automatism, so Woolf develops an 'alien and critical' language, calling for impersonal attention to things themselves (*AROO*73). In chapter three, I show how Woolf takes a sensationalist, subjectivist idiom to its furthest extreme, realising that language must accommodate the impersonal and the unperceived if it is not to devolve into stutters and

speechlessness. Contrasting the varying logics behind deixis, I explore her preference for a minimal language that gradates towards ostension – "there it is". The value of ostension is probed in chapter four, which also examines Woolf's evolving stance on the obligations of the artist.

While remaining sensitive to patterns of growth, alteration, and change, I have chosen to adopt a thematic rather than chronological approach to Woolf's work. As Alice Wood (2013) and Anna Snaith (2000) explain, Woolf's texts are 'porous objects, absorbing their social and cultural surroundings during production' (Wood 20), but we must be careful of teleological readings. Woolf cyclically returned to specific images and phrases, 'recall[ing], interrogat[ing], and unsettl[ing]' earlier moments in her oeuvre (Oxindine 33). She was a meticulous editor, and it is illuminating to see how her work is continuously "rewriting" itself. Often, I compare earlier drafts with published versions, exploring the process of textual composition as well as the text's appearance in the public arena. These variants elucidate the driving concerns behind some controversial passages and illuminate a text's multi-layered plane of possibilities.

Finally, a word about terminology. I give a gloss of my key words in each chapter, but some potentially conspicuous pairings may be "empathy"/"sympathy" (chapter 2), "empiricism"/"idealism" (chapter 3) and "loneliness"/"solitude" (chapter 4). It is important to distinguish between cognate terms but our search for clarity sometimes leads us to prematurely clean distinctions, so that familial connexions become construed as oppositional. This is particularly true of "empathy," which, as John Jervis has noted, often accrues all the "'good'" aspects of sympathy, so that "sympathy" becomes too closely associated with prim, Victorian charity (10). Recently, "loneliness" has met the same fate, becoming the dark, pathological double of benign solitude (see, for instance, David Vincent's *History of Solitude* [2020]). Similarly, empiricism's substantive links to idealism are often obscured by the fact that, paradoxically,

empiricism served as the basis for the modern scientific method as well as for radical, world-consuming scepticism, for diligent study of the world around us as well as for stunning solipsism. In each of these cases, I have chosen to explore how terms intersect and bleed into each other, focusing on 'context and the unfolding of the connections and implications of the discourse in which the term or terms are embedded' (Jervis 10). At each stage of my argument, I have focused on following terminological tensions through their historical and theoretical trajectories rather than on stabilising the idiom.

As an exception to this rule, I prefer the term "affect" to "emotion" or "feeling" even though Woolf does not use this word. As Brian Massumi explains, "affect" designates a pre-personal or 'asignifying intensity' ("Autonomy" 102) that circulates between bodies '(with body taken in its broadest sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies)' ("Notes" xvi). It includes our unconscious, instinctive, embodied, 'vibratory motion[s], [and] resona[nce]' with the environment, while bracketing higher level cognition and ideational judgements (86). Conversely, Massumi defines "emotion" as 'subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal … owned and recognized' ("Autonomy" 88). "Affect" is more appropriate to my discussion because it aligns with the way Woolf pictures subjectification, her account of impersonality, her re-evaluation of the sensory apparatus, her relative disinterest in epistemological closure, and her understanding of communal feelings. The affect/emotion distinction has also proved valuable to modernist scholars like Justus Nieland, who argues the modern feelings are 'often *already* conceived of as nonidentitarian,' public, depersonalised, or pre-personalised (19, original emphasis); to Charles Altieri, who suggests that modernist distrusted 'emotions' because they were associated with 'individual egos' (*Particulars of Rapture* 50); as well as to Julie Taylor's edited collection, *Modernism and Affect* (2018). I adopt the term "affect" because these works have efficaciously dredged the term from the depths of subjectivity and individualism and used it to describe feelings that are

between bodies and not just *in* bodies. I discuss how objects stimulate certain affects, namely, feelings of wonder and inadequacy (in chapter 1), sympathy and vulnerability (in chapter 2), loneliness and connection (in chapters 3 and 4). My discussion of object-affects in Woolf's writings contributes to our understanding of the modernist 'affective gamut' (Taylor 1), affirming Jonathan Flatley's claim that 'behind the extraordinary level of aesthetic experimentation that we sometimes call "modernism" we can see the desire to find a way to map out and get a grasp on the new affective terrain of modernity' (4).

As influential contributions to modernist self-fashioning, Woolf's early essays – "Modern Fiction" ([1919] 1921), "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924), and "Character in Fiction" (1924) – are often cited to define modernism as a shift away from the ponderous object-matter of Victorian and Edwardian fiction towards the vagaries of consciousness.[3] Consequently, I begin by deconstructing the antagonism between character and things implied in her critique of Edwardian "materialism." Through a comparative reading of the objects in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and Arnold Bennett's *Hilda Lessways* (1911), I identify surprising differences *and* continuities that trouble the claim of "aesthetic rupture" upon which so many traditional definitions of modernism depend, while probing modern anxieties of influence. Exploring Woolf's complex use of clutter – obtrusive catalogues and tableaux that do little to illumine biography or propel plot – I argue that she challenges the subject/object intimacy that characterises Edwardian fiction. She substitutes the trope of "reading objects" with a model of vibratory attention

[3] The *Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction* (2005) situates the Edwardian period as 1900-1914, although Samuel Hynes' *Edwardian Turn of Mind* (2011) and Jonathan Rose's *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (1986) discover an earlier origin in the 1890s. Although criticism seeks to specify a distinct Edwardian cultural landscape – see, for instance, *A Reader's Guide to Edwardian Literature* (Trodd, 1991), *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-English Novel* (ed. Caserio 2009), "Edwardian Art and its Legacies" (*Visual Culture in Britain* Vol.14, Issue 1, 2013, edited by Stephenson), *Beyond the Garden Party* (ed. Shaw 2017) and *Beyond the Victorian/Modernist Divide* (Gillard-Estrada & Besnault-Levita 2018) – Andrew Stephenson notes that the period often becomes 'a kind of shorthand for an extended late-late Victorianism, a flash Edwardian epilogue to the long nineteenth-century' (1). This is expressed in Alfred Orage's observation (1910), 'King Edward was spiritually the mere executor of Queen Victoria. The impulse of her epoch flowed over as it were and merged in his reign' (qtd. in Martin 129).

(recently discussed by Claudia Tobin [2020]), one that is less interested in symbolic association than in the allure of simple *thereness*.

In chapter 2, I examine how continental theories of subject/object sympathy, a psychological and philosophical tradition developed by Theodor Lipps and Henri Bergson, travelled to the Anglophone sphere through the works of Vernon Lee and T.E. Hulme. Paradoxically, Vernon Lee's account of our constitutional entanglement with the material world was mixed with an unnerving scepticism about the object's existence (a position she shared with Walter Pater). I delineate how Woolf broaches the essentially passive and responsive model of selfhood that other sympathy theorists were quick to evade, tarrying with its ramifications for the artist and for society. Although Woolf, like other modernists, desired to 'wrest an image of autonomous subjectivity from [the] intractable communal norms' articulated in objects (Levenson *Individuality* xii), she lingered with the pleasures and perils of our intimate relationship with objects. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she blends a recognition of the material bases for subjectification with an ethic of impersonal attention, implicitly challenging the egoistic tendencies of subject/object sympathy.

Chapter 3 traces the problem of material objects scepticism (a blanket term for doubt about objects' existence) backwards through Leslie Stephen to eighteenth-century empiricism, particularly the works of George Berkeley and David Hume. Complementing Ann Banfield's work on Bertrand Russell's influence on Woolf (2000), I argue that Stephen offered his daughter a peculiarly poignant, personal window onto eighteenth-century philosophy. Empiricism was notable, not only for dismantling the independent existence of the object world, but for producing an understanding of the *body* as deeply idiosyncratic. After empiricism, sensations do not constitute the commonality of the publicly available world – you feel heat like I feel heat – but are the bedrock of unassailable privacy. Through Stephen, Woolf realised that the rejection

of the thing itself ultimately tends to attenuate language, time, and interpersonal relations. The unoccupied rooms of *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) are Woolf's most sustained response to her father and to eighteenth-century empiricism, reinstating the mind-independent object as a mediator of community.

Chapter 4 provides the widest overview of Woolf's oeuvre, arguing that psycho-sensory privacy can be an artistic resource but also a liability, giving rise to a deep sense of loneliness that is inextricably linked to things. Loneliness is the affective heartland of most of Woolf's fictions, but it also spurred her to imagine egalitarian models of modern community. This chapter probes Woolf's equivocations about community, and her growing anxiety about the artist's role, especially evident in *The Years* and *Between the Acts* (1941), works written in the shadow of the Second World War. However, scenes of shared attention to an object become an integral part of Woolf's communitarian thought, as the object triangulates two competing perspectives without completely diminishing their specificity. The act of shared attention restrains the artist's activity, which Woolf often equated with epistemological violence or voracious subjectivity. The shareable object takes on a special function, not only suggesting permanence, but also the non-normative publicity of the material world, which forms a basis for our solidarity with other people. Accepting another's invitation to look at an object becomes a recognition of the Other, showing how the alterity of the physical world is also the substance of ethical sociability.

Chapter 1

'bells and buttons innumerable': The Aesthetics of Clutter

After visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1918, Virginia Woolf planned 'to write a novel entirely about carpets, old silver, cut glass and furniture;' '[t]he desire to describe becomes almost a torment' (*L2*:284). While no novel in Woolf's oeuvre 'entirely' conforms to this object-oriented plan, her work is filled with tables, bowls, mirrors, cabinets, wardrobes, ornaments, and epergnes, sometimes singled out for a moment of rapt attention but more often jumbled together in 'tedious' catalogues (*O*65). For instance, in plotting *Orlando* (1928), Woolf gleefully envisioned how '[e]verything is to be tumbled in pall mall [*sic*]' (*D*3:131) and long passages are devoted to 'the matter of furnishing with rosewood chairs and cedar-wood cabinets, with silver basins, china bowls, and Persian carpets … mirrors of solid silver and chairs of the same metal (for which he had an inordinate passion)' (*O*64). The parenthetical qualification, 'inordinate,' haunts Orlando's efforts to 'apostrophize his house and his race' by way of furniture – '[c]ould' or should 'one mention furniture in a peroration?' (ibid.) In his dual role as writer and amateur decorator, Orlando is skewered on the fine point between enthusiasm and discrimination, 'capricious fancy' and 'genuine style' (Fry *Vision* 45), that Woolf records in her less tongue-in-cheek biography of Roger Fry (1940). Orlando's interiors mark the tension between editorial rigour and the 'extreme and extravagant' images and metaphors that 'twined and twisted in his mind' (*O*24). Although Orlando comes to recognise that the 'cardinal labour of composition […] is excision' (*O*44), the 'inordinate passion' that compels him to furnish his house to the brim illuminates a salient but over-looked trend in Woolf's writing – a material and linguistic elaboration that privileges the superfluous and gratuitous, the accidental and haphazard, through an abundance of details that defy symbolic interpretation. This chapter explores this aesthetic through the concept of clutter, a concept that implicitly directed the course of Woolf scholarship and underpinned modernism's oppositional self-fashioning.

Woolf might be the most prominent author to have deployed clutter as one of the chief tropes of the "Great Divide" between modernists and their Victorian and Edwardian predecessors. In three seminal essays – "Modern Fiction" ([1919] 1921), "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924), and "Character in Fiction" (1924) – she castigated the Edwardian triumvirate, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H.G. Wells, as "materialists."[1] Woolf dubs the Edwardians materialists 'because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body:' a 'great clod of clay […] has got itself mixed up with the purity of his [H.G. Wells'] inspiration' ("MF" *SE*7). She conjures an opposition between "pure" lyric prose and earthy physicalism that, as Dan Tiffany explains in *Toy Medium* (2000), taps an 'entrenched' Western assumption: literature and 'materialism are antithetical modes of knowledge, having produced two disparate – and perhaps incommensurable – cultures' (12). Woolf's apparent dualism is problematic, particularly since many twentieth-century thinkers sought to bridge such stultifying impasses, reconceptualising body/mind oppositions and challenging "inert" views of matter (Dempsey 2009). Galsworthy himself claimed that the 'body and soul are one … regrettable is any term suggestive of divorce between them' (*Castles* 21). Nevertheless, Woolf invokes an idea of materialism as crude physical determinism, reiterating Leslie Stephen's concerns in "What is Materialism?" (1893). In this article, Stephen notes that materialism is an equivocal, ill-defined concept but gains detractors because it seems to threaten free will, reducing all mental and emotional life to 'a set of vibrating atoms:' materialism presents a passive view of 'the mind' 'as a phantom looking on' (132). Creative freedom and freedom from assumptions about reality are core tenets of Woolf's essays on modern fiction. She asks, 'is life like this?' ("MF" *SE*9), proposing that both character and the author be emancipated from literary conventions:

[1] Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy were also criticised by Henry James ("The New Novel" 1915), Edwin Muir (*We Moderns* 1918) and D.H. Lawrence (*Scrutinies* 1928).

> … if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (ibid.)

This manifesto constitutes Woolf's most famous debut in ongoing debates about modern fiction. Implying that material details are 'alien and external' to the depiction of character and "life," Woolf seems to banish 'bells and buttons innumerable' ("MF" *SE*7) from novelistic practice. Certainly, she was not the only modernist to feel that the relationship between literature and its furniture needed to be rethought. An excellent comparison can be found in Willa Cather's "The Novel Démeublé" (1922). Just as Woolf targeted the Edwardian "materialists," Cather targets Honoré de Balzac and the French realist school that, as Samuel Hynes (1968), Robert Squillace (1997), and Charlotte Jones (2021) agree, had been an early source of inspiration for Bennett. Cather denounces the privilege Balzac gives 'to material accessories,' writing that '[w]e have had too much of the interior decorator' (5). Both Woolf and Cather suggest that 'the Russians' handle their object accessories more skilfully: Anton Chekov's objects are suffused with 'his vision' (Woolf "MF" *SE*11) and Leo Tolstoy successfully "synthesises" 'the moving, haunting interiors of those old Moscow houses' with 'the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves' (Cather 5). Importantly, Bennett also gradually moved away from the realism of his French influences and increasingly privileged the Russian style. Like Cather, Bennett distinguishes between continental styles in *The Author's Craft* (1913), suggesting that the French realistic recording of objects is inferior to the Russian depiction of symbolically suggestive objects, 'hasty, amorphous,' and atmospheric (18-19). Although Bennett, Cather, and Woolf all contemplated shifts in literary tradition in terms of shifting the furniture of fiction, Woolf and Cather's recommendations are far more radical. "Character in Fiction" ends with 'the sound of

breaking and falling, crashing and destruction' (51), while Cather writes, '[h]ow wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window […] and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre,' for literature 'is killed by tasteless amplitude' (6).

Although Woolf intended to 'reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place' from 'the ruins and splinters of [the Edwardians'] tumbled mansion' ("BB" *SE*35), her denunciation of the 'fabric of things' ("CF" *SE*49) earned her a reputation as the classic exemplar of modernism's alleged antipathy towards objects. The finer nuances of this discussion are lost as Bennett is conceived as 'an old-fashioned realist happily setting down a clutter of superficial facts' (Squillace 21) and Woolf is seen as a stringent, spring-cleaning spiritualist. For instance, in 1934, Wyndham Lewis pictured Woolf as an 'orthodox idealist, tremulously squar[ing] up to the big beefy brute, Bennett, plainly the very embodiment of commonplace *matter*' (*Men Without Art* 161, original emphasis). Despite the rich body of recent scholarship on Woolf and the external world, Lewis' caricature still holds some currency. As Michael North recognises, Woolf is 'usually considered the most inward of all British writers' (81), utilising those 'strategies of inwardness' that Fredric Jameson attributes to modernism as a whole (*Fables* 2). David Bradshaw offers a representative assessment of "Modern Fiction" as demonstrating commitment to 'fugitive and imponderable inwardness' (xv). Its critique of materialism produced a widespread tendency to define modernism as an effort to transmute 'physical [clutter] into *psychological* clutter' (Fernihough "Consciousness" 71, original emphasis), if not to dispense with clutter altogether. Clutter seems to have fallen by the wayside in the 'emphatically teleological […] "progress" from realism to either naturalism or aestheticism and Decadence and then to Modernism' (Ardis "Gender" 61), an ornamental excrescence on the 'Victorian steam-contraption [that] became obsolete in 1910 or 1922' (Baldick 401). Aligned with timely scholarship by scholars like Chris Baldick (2004), Ann Ardis (2005; 2002), Laura Marcus, Michele Mendelssohn, and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr (2016), this chapter seeks to complicate this neat literary genealogy and establish continuities

across the Edwardian and modernist divide. I argue that clutter does not simply play a pejorative role in 'modernist self-fashioning and manifesto making' (L. Marcus et al. *Late Victorian* 2): it is also a productive resource.

Objects are ubiquitous and sometimes obtrusive parts of Woolf's writing. This fact leads some critics to interpret Bennett and Woof's feud as a cover for other antipathies, that is, not really about the objects that are its constitutive tropes. Lewis considered it to be little 'more than a boy and girl quarrel,' a squabble between "'Palace" and "'Pub'" (*Men Without Art* 161). Bennett described it as a "battle of the brows," a class row about whether art is the inspired pant of genius or the product of workaday craftsmanship ("Review of *AROO*" 5). More recently, scholars seeking to re-establish the Edwardians' reputations read Woolf's essays as a 'demonstrably slanderous' (Baldick 10) 'attempt […] to take down a formidable literary luminary in order to establish Woolf's own aesthetic foothold' (Bachman 434).[2] Some critics find Woolf's essays fraudulent or self-aggrandising because they detect no significant difference between Bennett and Woolf's treatment of objects. For instance, Nancy Armstrong argues that, while claiming 'to rescue Mrs Brown from terminal objecthood,' Woolf's description of Mrs Brown is 'more reminiscent than dismissive' (47) of the "materialists" she censures. Samuel Hynes also assumes that Woolf's differences from Bennett are rhetorical and not substantive since Mrs Brown 'is put together in pretty much the same way [as] Hilda' – of Bennett's *Hilda Lessways* (1911) – 'out of physical descriptions and details of a characteristic environment' ("Contention" 39). Following Robert Squillace, who warns that we do Bennett a disservice by seeing him as 'merely a convenient straw man' (28), this chapter demonstrates that Woolf appropriates Bennett's objects with a difference. I suggest that her early critique of materialism opens up a

[2] Noteworthy reassessments of these Edwardians include *The Novels of Wells, Bennet and Galsworthy: 1890-1910* (Bellamy 1971), *Bennett, Wells and Conrad: Narrative in Transition* (L. Anderson 1988), *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett* (Squillace 1997), *The Arnold Bennett Companion* (ed. Shapcott 2015) and *Realism, Form, and Representation in the Edwardian Novel: Synthetic Realism* (Jones 2021).

serious, but open-ended, conversation about the place of objects in fiction. Overstating the essays' polemics may prevent us from seeing the important variances *and* links between earlier literary traditions and modernist practice, an intellectual interchange clearly visible in Woolf's lifelong preoccupation with objects and their literary efficacy in delineating "life."

Although Woolf does not explicitly adopt the term, "clutter" is a pertinent lens for examining modernist debates about the place of objects in fiction. As Jonathon Shears and Jen Harrison's *Literary Bric-à-brac and the Victorians* (ed.2013) and Helen Kingstone and Kate Lister's *Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects* (ed.2018) demonstrate, the Victorian and Edwardian eras seem 'intrinsically' (Kingstone & Lister 1), 'peculiarly' (Shears & Harrison 4) associated with clutter – a term that evokes an incongruous medley of domestic objects with little value and, at best, a vexed relationship to art and purpose. Like many modernists, we tend to think back to the nineteenth-century through the clutter that filled their homes and pages. For instance, in *As We Were: A Victorian Peep Show* (1930), E.F. Benson begins by exhibiting 'a pair of goblets incredible even when actually beheld and handled, chalice-shaped, of cloudy pink glass outlined in gilt … a globular paper-weight, in which were embedded, like a layer of flies in amber, small gaudy objects, vastly magnified and resembling sections of jam roll and sea anemones' (1). This 'cascade' of objects – excessive in size, decoration, and complexity – is daunting enough but surmounting them all is a vanished pincushion, the absent but 'effulgent centre' of the Victorian drama (18).

> Picture then (with an effort) a domed and elliptical oblong, the sides of which below the dome were perpendicular. Its scale, shape and size were those of a blancmange for not less than eight people: such was the pincushion. It was covered, dome and sides alike, with rich crimson velvet, and round the lower edge of the dome ran a floral pattern, worked in white glass beads, slightly opalescent. Down the perpendicular sides it was draped with many tassels… and on the top of the dome was worked a Royal Crown, also of beads. (2)

The pincushion becomes a Proustian madeleine, playing a 'dumb but distinguished role' in the tension between domesticity, austerity, and industry – those Victorian gods – and the ceremonious, eccentric, lavishly decorated, but useless goods that constitute our Victorian imaginary (3). It has a literal and historical function but, as Benson notes, 'we shall never know whether it actually ever functioned at all,' in either capacity (3). Benson's pincushion is reminiscent of Cardinal Manning's 'Hat' in Lytton Strachey's caustic *Eminent Victorians* (1918): both writers concretise and deconstruct the "Spirit of the Age" through an elaborately tasselled, 'strange, incongruous, almost impossible object' (Strachey 93). The pincushion and the Hat attain a 'mysterious glamour' by symbolising a dead person or culture, but they are bathetic and ridiculous "trophies" – Manning's Hat incongruously hangs from the vault of a Cathedral (ibid.) and Benson's pincushion is absurdly huge (2). They elicit the mix of sentiment and ridicule, nostalgia and antipathy, that inflects many modernists' responses to their Victorian heritage.

Secondly, as Benson's ambivalent retrospective demonstrates, "clutter" is not intrinsically pejorative. This becomes clearer by comparison with a cognate term, "litter," which connotes trash, debris, and brokenness as well as public spaces like the street. Trash has a more dramatic status as the abominated, abjected Other of art, but "clutter" equivocally conjures the homely, quotidian, decorative art of the domestic sphere. I also want to avoid – and, here, Benson's non-functional pincushion is again apropos –the practical connotations of clutter's Latinate synonym, "paraphernalia," which denotes equipment or accoutrements. As any survey of decluttering manuals attests, clutter is more of an *impediment* to life, an obstructive connotation that harks back to clutter's late Middle English origins in 'clot'. Furthermore, while "paraphernalia" is closely associated with 'property' (*OED* 2021), the extent to which clutter "belongs" to its owner is ambiguous – some pieces may have been purposefully selected, while others may have unintentionally accumulated within the home, potentially disfiguring it. Neither the aide nor the other of art, clutter is better understood as an aesthetic crisis *within* art.

These tonal ambivalences are literally inscribed in the etymology of "clutter," which indicates a multiplicity of objects as well as fluency disorders – rattles, stammers, stutters (St. Louis et.al 2007) – and sounds like "hubbub" (*OED* 2021). This compass shows that clutter is not only physical but *narrative*, not only literal but *literary*. Literary clutter is visible in formal enumerative and descriptive strategies like the list, which Eva von Contzen defines as 'several (usually three or more) distinct elements employed in direct succession and in loose, if at all, syntactic and conceptual coherence to both the other elements and the surrounding narrative material' (36). Coherence is crucial to the list's utility, as well as to its ideological functions of referential ballast, encyclopaedic inventory, and syntagmatic closure. However, Francis Spufford explains that the literary list does not so much aspire to these functions as make them visible, always raising 'the paradox of authority and order' (5). The reader questions whether lists of objects demonstrate verbal dexterity like 'a strongman's display' (ibid.) or whether this 'is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced' (Woolf "MF" *SE*8). Spufford's categories of list-makers oscillate between the grandiose and bathetic, 'impresarios of matter, commanding spoons, haystacks and Italian scooters to dance together' and 'connoisseurs of the mixed, the mingled, and the confused' (6). As such, the reader may ask whether the list reveals selective design or 'an abdication of control over a torrent of separate pieces of data?' (5) Clutter raises similar anxieties for, while it may be organised into displays with aesthetic, emotional, or 'autobiographical resonance' (Melchionne 195; see also A. Anderson 37), it is often perceived as a 'crowded and confused assemblage' (*OED* 2021). As Adam Phillips argues in "Clutter: A Case History" (2002), clutter 'tantalizes' and thwarts through an 'absence of pattern,' marking an apparent "abrogation" of 'self-control' (60, 65). Just as the clutterer is tainted by association with her more extreme, pathologized cousin, the hoarder, list-makers seem to be suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder. But what is it that compels them? Is the list-maker a 'demiurge' or realist scribe, 'invent[ing] boldly' or 'not[ing] minutely' (Spufford 5)? "Modern Fiction" broaches these different versions of artistic agency but does not resolve them, which begs the

question – at what point does recording, annotating, or describing fall outside the hallowed pale of "art"? The list, and the cluttered scene, raise questions about the distribution of power and desire, intention and compulsion, creation and realism in the aesthetic field.

According to Spufford, literary lists are 'illusion-busting,' purposively complicating the coherence and utility that we expect from non-literary lists (2). Woolf specifically targets the list's pantonym – the governing concept 'which triggers the description, […] generates the vocabulary' and sets 'up a system of expectations' about the ensuing descriptions (Hamon 322). For instance, in *Jacob's Room* (1922), Woolf remarks that 'brown panelling,' 'a fern in a pot,' 'a few phrases,' 'the barrel-organ,' and shouts in the street, have 'for centre, for magnet, a young man alone in his room' (129). In what respect does Jacob harmonise these fragmented details? For details do not illuminate Jacob. Woolf notes that 'of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst' – appearance, actions, and words do not amount to the quiddity, the essential '– what?' of Jacob (94). The minimal but replete singular is invoked as a stay against this unwieldy catalogue, for '[o]ne word is sufficient. But if one cannot find it?' (ibid.). Likewise, as Orlando tries to describe what Sasha 'was like,' he goes 'plunging and splashing among a thousand images … Snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire? None of these. […] Ransack the language, as he might, words failed him' (*O*29). These examples are characteristic of how self-consciously Woolf deploys the list, highlighting fragmentation, retrospectively cancelling descriptors with an ironic aside, or ending with ellipses or question marks that indicate incompletion and thus, a potentially endless additive spiral.

The importance of the pantonym, or pattern, recurs in literary texts, art criticism, and design manuals that engage Victorian and Edwardian aesthetics. Faced with an unprecedented wealth of furnishing options now radically divorced from craft, Victorians and Edwardians embarked on a love affair with the domestic interior, a romance with chintzes, étagères and

basket-chairs that was assiduously cultivated by fiction writers, interior designers, and advertisers. Yet by the 1870s many commentators were concerned that 'England has become a vast knick-knackery;' rooms were 'filled with decorative furniture and knick-knacks, but bare of anything that can appeal to our highest sympathies' (*The Builder* 1002 & *Saturday Review* 23, qtd. in Shrimpton 18). Influential "art magazines" like *The Art Journal* (1839-1912), *The Magazine of Art* (1878-1904) and *The Studio* (1893-1964) and "ladies' magazines" like *The Lady* (1885-present) and *The Queen* (1861-1970), attempted to exert a sobering influence on 'the stylistic chaos of the age' (Cooper & Lemere 9). The 80's and 90's saw a 'campaign against trumpery bric-á-brac,' but it is amusing to read that, in 1896, a tastefully austere room should still include 'a large candelabra of Dresden china. A pot-pourri bowl of old Worcester, one delicate figure, a pair of old paste shoe buckles in a faded velvet case, and an antique miniature, *but no more*' (*The Lady* 355, 683, emphasis added). Novelists intervened in this campaign, and Oscar Wilde's American lecture series, "The House Beautiful" (1882), is a particularly famous attempt to curb the public's decorative fervour. Echoing William Morris' maxim for the Arts and Crafts Movement, Wilde advised, '[h]ave nothing in your houses that is not useful or beautiful' (403), but the British public had come to value objects for increasingly non-utilitarian reasons. This period witnessed the apogee of the belief that objects are not only a chronicle of history and the nation but the 'outward and visible signs' of *personality* (Hamilton 34). The etymological sense of "character" – literally, to engrave (*OED* 2021) – was widely applied to the domestic interior, which needed to 'bear the impress of a distinct individuality […] in all its furnishings and decorations' (Wilde 403). This decree proved difficult to balance with calls for restraint and discrimination. In *The Art of the House* (1897), Rosamund Marriot Watson echoes Wilde's injunctions to produce 'a pleasing harmony' and avoid clutter (1), but this editorial imperative wanes before the pleasures of decorating and reading decorations. Watson writes:

> … it were difficult to over-estimate the intimacy of the relations between ourselves and what for want of a better word, may be called our setting. Like hermit crabs we gather round us a medley of objects, present and recollected, that become almost a part of our personality. The pattern of a carpet, the curve of an armoire, the mellow auburn gloss on a panel of old mahogany, the amber lustre of a satinwood table, may mean almost as much to such as are in possession of developed senses as a familiar face… (152-153)

Here, Watson trains her audience in a material hermeneutics, offering a profoundly legible interior that enacts the 'miracle' of intimacy that, for Hans-Georg Gadamer, is at the heart of reading:

> … the intelligibility of mind [is] transferred to the most alien medium [the written word]. … In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity. (163)

Watson's reader-decorator is concerned with precisely this 'transformation' (and, arguably, works with a more alien and obdurate medium than the alphabet). In *The Edwardian Sense* (2010) Christopher Reed explains that the "'stylistic free-for all'" in Edwardian interior design derived from this 'desire – one might even say a compulsion – to signify' (167). In 1897, the designer George Haité expressed the need for 'a style of Design and Decoration which is something by itself, exhibiting a robust growth of line and mass, a richness of colour, an effect which is characteristically British' (145), and a 1913 commentator announced that 'we are at liberty to ransack the centuries for the architectural expression which best represents our outlook on life and manners' (Weaver vii-viii). Roger Fry denounced this historical eclecticism as 'archaeological humbug' (Woolf *Fry* 185), but he recognised that iconic objects like the ottoman and the whatnot were 'richly redolent of [a] social legend,' 'vividly and poignantly' affecting 'our historical imagination' and 'social emotions' (Fry *Vision* 44). Modernist critics of Edwardian décor were painfully aware that objects narrate, but they questioned the extent to which objects can (or should) carry the immense narrative burden that the Edwardians assigned them. Consequently, when Woolf criticizes Edwardian authors who 'have given us a house in the hope

that we may be able to deduce the human beings that live there' ("CF" *SE*49), she is problematizing an assumption at the heart of the Edwardian culture of things.

We might ask whether Watson's approach blandly glosses a category error, treating non-literary things in an 'incurably literary' way, unable to distinguish 'the associations of things' from 'things in themselves' (Woolf *Fry* 164)? At the turn-of-the-century, the "literariness" of literal objects often referred to designs that privileged form over functionality but, in Woolf's biography of *Roger Fry*, the anxiety about objects 'in thrall to […] literary associations' (125) broaches a larger, more pertinent problem for the novelist: does symbolism de-materialise the object? Elaine Freedgood's seminal work, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006), argues that interpretability is often considered the preserve of specially symbolic *literary things* whereas *literal things* fall under a 'paradigm of uninterpretability' – this distinction serves as a rubric for which fictional objects deserve close reading and which do not (10). '[L]iteral' objects demarcate a supposedly 'nonliterary' dimension of narrative (ibid.), as we tacitly assume that literal and metaphorical speech belong 'to rival and deviating universes' (Bezeczky 609, qtd. in Freedgood 5). Thus, Freedgood argues that 'an object in a novel, in order for it to have meaning, cannot be itself, even in a two-dimensional, scenery-producing kind of way' – objects lose their specificity, their materiality, in service to the symbolic 'predicate to which they must yield' (10). Freedgood's study is motivated by the question of how to read things without forcing them into 'metaphorical service' or 'an alienating system of figural exchange' (139). She adopts 'strong metonymic readings,' taking select literary objects 'literally' by searching out their meanings 'beyond the covers of the text' (4-5). However, it is worth noting that there is little scholarly consensus around metonymy. Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973) suggests that metonymy is itself '*reductionist*' and symbolic, substituting a part of a thing for the whole because the part is understood to 'symbolize some *quality* presumed to inhere in the totality' (34, original emphases) (whether that totality consists of the bounded text or the socio-historical context). According to

White, metonymy implies that phenomena have 'part-part relationships, on the basis of which one can effect a *reduction* of one of the parts to the status of an aspect or function of the other' (35, original emphasis), a reduction that Freedgood is certainly keen to challenge. These difficulties are substantial, having to do with the inherently symbolic and associational qualities of language and, indeed, perception itself. Nevertheless, what is most significant in these debates, and the methodologies they generate, is the question of what parts or details are representative of the whole – intrinsically partaking of the thing itself – and what parts or details are merely functions or subsidiaries of the whole (H. White 35), or actually superfluous and obfuscating? How do we select what is worth interpreting and analysing and what is not – moreover, are there *other non-hermeneutical relationships* to be formed with literary and literal objects? As Heather Love asks in "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn" (2010), is 'a depth hermeneutics' that probes for humanistic values (375), or even sociological insights, the appropriate approach to literary objects? If not, then are we left with literary objects as "mere" description, unilluminating clutter?

I hope to demonstrate that the horizontal encounter with objects can be just as profound as depth hermeneutics. "Reading" (and its connotations of construction and comprehension) does not easily express Woolf's approach to objects – her postures may be better understood as embodied, affective states of capture or trance. To my mind, the legibility of Edwardian objects attracted modernist concern because it situates the material world as the epistemological project of the subject rather than as the mysterious conditions of subject formation. The metaphor matters. Consequently, while Freedgood argues that the polysemy of Victorian literary objects gradually yields to a more restrictive modernist symbolism, this contention must be balanced by recognising the cluttered, but endlessly symbolic, nature of the Edwardian interior and modernist reservations regarding symbolism. As the moderns desired to pare back and re-arrange the

object-matter of fiction, the problem of Edwardian literary objects was not illegibility but *legibility* – is there anything that cannot be read in the Edwardian "significant interior"?

Just as Watson discovers a face 'in the curve of an armoire,' Edwardian authors encouraged readers to decode the literary object. In John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* (1906), the Forsytes latch upon Bosinney's hat as 'the significant trifle which embodies the whole character of a scene, or place, or person […] the detail in which was embedded the meaning of the whole matter' (19). Midway between discriminating aesthete and middle-brow philistine, the Forsytes represent the Age of Property's voracious but obtuse relation to objects. Galsworthy taps the 'secret and intimate feeling' that the Edwardian cherishes for 'all the things he had collected, his silver, his pictures, his houses' (76) while exposing his vulnerability to the anarchic energies of beauty, love, history, and psychology. Galsworthy offers an ironic but compassionate portrait of the stymied connoisseur Soames, who can test the value of 'a gold-lacquered lustre' by 'stealthily wetting his finger and rubbing it on the knobby bulbs' but cannot grasp spiritual property (18-19). As Angharad Saunders implies (2014), the reader is lessoned in the evils of a world-view circumscribed by property, yet it is to material property that he must repeatedly return if he is to understand the characters. Similarly, Arnold Bennett devotes nearly three pages of *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902) to a 'catalogue of [kitchen] furniture' (125). Contemporary readers like George Sturt found this 'inventory' jarring, asking 'was it worth while to spend so much time in describing the colour of the dresser that you had no space left even for the colour of Anna's face or whatever might manifest her feelings at the time?' (Bennett *Letters* 2:151). Sturt seems to have missed the point, which is not far to seek. He and Anna are as untutored readers for whom the object remains 'merely "the dresser"' (*Anna* 124). In fact, the dresser is 'silently awaiting [its] apotheosis at the hands of some collector,' a discerning reader who will be able to decode its 'profound depths' (ibid.). The dresser is not only 'the highest possible certification of Anna's character' (125) – it also 'reflected the conscientious labour of generations,' 'its smooth

surfaces were marked by hollows similar in spirit to those worn by the naked feet of pilgrims into the marble steps of a shrine' (123). Literally engraved upon the surface of the dresser is the enshrined culture of duty and domesticity that Anna must contest. As Charlotte Jones' recent study, *Realism, Form, and Representation in the Edwardian Novel: Synthetic Realism* (2021), explains, Edwardian objects positively demand close reading for Edwardian realism discovers 'reality immanent in the earthly,' synthesizing concrete objects with abstract ideas (16).

However, Sturt's complaint is not groundless. As Robert Belknap (2004) and Eva von Contzen (2021) observe, literary lists introduce a 'plastic' (Belknap 68), 'spatial' (Contzen 47) element into fiction, a horizontal stall, sprawl, or hiatus that interrupts narrative progression. Despite Bennett's best efforts, Sturt and Woolf suggest that Bennett's object-descriptions are superfluous, 'obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception' ("MF" *SE*8). Importantly, objects become clutter through a perceived inability (or refusal) to harmonise details into a cohesive artistic whole; the accessory, 'the trivial and the transitory' seems to triumph over the essential, 'the true and the enduring' (ibid.). Aspiring to the detailed realism of the Goncourts (Bennett *Journals* 1:16) and Honoré de Balzac (Bennett *Letters* 2:151), Bennett faces the same charges levied at these writers: the balance of whole and part disintegrates and 'all is but detail, dust' (Richard 270, translated by J. Watson 1999). While Bennett always intended that objects should be symbolically subordinate to character, rigorously synthesized with mood and psychology (*Author's Craft* 22), the Goncourts created scenes that deliberately 'resembled a museum and a pandemonium,' a dizzying 'sabbath of bric-a-brac' (*Manette Salomon* 130, translated by J. Watson 1999). In *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust* (1999), Janell Watson demonstrates that Bennett's heroes were distinguished by a 'visually oriented focus on material things [that] contributes to the growing autonomy of the object, as it becomes less tied to character development and less clearly integrated into narrative composition' (119), a fact that might account for the gradual decline of Bennett's Francophilia. The disruptive force of such

"autonomous objects" is also highlighted in Naomi Schor's *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (1985), which argues that the realist detail is often castigated as a reversal or misappropriation of value. Sturt's complaint (Bennett substitutes the colour of the dresser for the colour of Anna's face) exemplifies Schor's point: 'that which one gives to description, one takes away from character … that which one gives to the detail, one takes away from the whole' (112).

Physical and verbal, narrative but counter-narrative, possibly tacky, relatively non-essential, disordered, heterogeneous, excessive, and obstructive – clutter marks a breaking-point within hierarchies of aesthetic and cultural value. Consequently, we may define clutter as a condition wherein objects have got "out of place." Scott Herring's fascinating work, *The Hoarders* (2015), uses the phrase '*material deviance*' to describe how terms like "hoarding" and "clutter" serve as 'social constructions of an aberrant relationship with […] things' (6, original emphasis). Le Corbusier's *Decorative Art of Today* (1925) demonstrates that material deviance was a widespread modernist concern, proclaiming that objects had become improper intimates or false idols: 'they are in fact themselves slaves, menials, servants. Do you want them as your soulmates?' (xxi). Le Corbusier's functionalist 'crusade for whitewash' (135) contrasts with the intimacy Edwardians desired from both literal and literary objects, as well as with the colourful decorative schemes to be found in the Omega Workshops and Bloomsbury homes (*Daily Mail* 5). For Wyndham Lewis, Bloomsbury was guilty of reactionary tenderness for the object (in Le Corbusier's terms) as soulmate. He mocked those 'enraptured at the quality of the curious clumsy country print found on the lodging-house wall; at the beauty of cheap china ornaments, a stupid chair' (*Caliph's Design* 124, 123), but it is worth exploring this rapture in less parodic terms. It elucidates an alternative, less familiar version of modernism, one saturated with the ambivalences and tensions of clutter, an object-category at once intimate and alienating.

The Furniture of an Old Contention Revisited[3]

"Modern Fiction," "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and "Character in Fiction" are central documents in the genesis of modernism. "Modern Fiction" was originally published in 1919 as "Modern Novels," targeting the same Edwardian luminaries and making the same points as later incarnations but with no allusion to "Mrs Brown." In March 1923, Bennett wrote a review of *Jacob's Room* (1922), provocatively entitled "Is the Novel Decaying?," attributing Woolf's "failures" to her proclivity for clutter: 'characters do not vitally survive in the mind, because the author has been obsessed by details of originality and cleverness' (47). Earlier reviews of *Jacob's Room* had already lit upon its literary objects, either celebrating its 'bright and endless race of things' (McDowall 95) or deploring its 'hosts of inanimate objects … [an] endless parade of details that grow more and more uninteresting' (Bodenheim 111). In 1922, many reviews agreed that Woolf 'forgo[es] psychology,' questioning whether this 'method does not condemn her characters to be external' if not 'blanks' (McDowall 96, 97) or 'puppets' (Courtney 104). Others questioned whether *Jacob's Room* fits within the novel genre. One commentor declared that 'no true novel can be built out of a mere accumulation of these notebook entries' (unsigned, *Critical Heritage* 99). More positively, Rebecca West recommended reading *Jacob's Room* 'not as a novel but as a portfolio' of pictures, for '[v]ery strongly has Mrs Woolf preferred Jacob's room to his company' and a novel 'must primarily concern itself with humanity' (101). These lesser-known reviews reveal that the terms of the Woolf-Bennett debate – character, clutter, and the nature of the novel – were already set in public forums, anticipating Bennett's analysis. On 1 December 1923, Virginia Woolf responded to Bennett's criticisms in *The Nation and Athenaeum* with "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," which was expanded into a 1924 lecture to the Heretics Club at Girton College, Cambridge; this revised version was published as "Character in Fiction" in 1924,

[3] This subtitle alludes to Samuel Hynes' "The Whole Contention Between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf" (1967) and Beth Daugherty's "The Whole Contention Between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown, Revisited" (1983).

appearing in T.S. Eliot's *Criterion*, the Hogarth Press Essays series, and *The New York Herald Tribune*. "Character in Fiction" offers the most extensive criticism of Bennett, as well as quotations from his novel, *Hilda Lessways*. Although "Mrs Brown" is a minor character in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" she dominates "Character in Fiction" through a frame narrative that strikingly resembles Woolf's 1920 short story, "An Unwritten Novel." *Hilda Lessways*, *Jacob's Room*, and "An Unwritten Novel" are important texts in the Woolf-Bennett debate, which seemed to inaugurate an adversarial shift away from objects and yet, as we can already see, accusations of clutter abounded on both sides.

This debate proved a significant critical whetstone, as Woolf (and her critics) meditated on Bennett's reproaches for years to come. In her diary, Woolf wrote:

> People, like Arnold Bennett, say I can't create, or didn't in Jacob's *Room*, characters that survive. My answer is – but I leave that to the *Nation*: it's only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now … I daresay it's true, however, that I haven't that 'reality' gift. I insubstantize [*sic*], wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality – its cheapness. (*D*2:248)

Here, Woolf realises that Bennett's complaints have to do with different, temperamentally and historically specific, culturally reinforced conventions about what reality "is like", a point elaborated in "Character in Fiction" (*SE*43-44). The voices of 'the great Edwardians' crowd in upon the modern writer, saying "'[d]escribe cancer. Describe calico. Describe – ' But I cried, "Stop! Stop!'" (*SE*49). Such passages seem to situate modernism as a reprieve from description, but Woolf's writing accesses modern realities through her own, idiosyncratic strategies of enumeration. E.M. Forster recognised this, describing *Jacob's Room* as a 'beautiful droning or gasping,' a 'stream of glittering similes, unfinished sentences, hectic catalogues' (*Abinger Harvest* 107). In his 1941 Rede Lecture, Forster more explicitly allied himself with Bennett, asking 'can she create character? That is her problem's centre … Life eternal she could seldom give' (16).

Woolf had remarked, 'how feeble a voice and how flimsy a body' was possessed by the characters of *The Old Wives' Tale* (Bennett 1908) ("BB" *SE*33) but, Forster replied, compared to 'Sophia and Constance in *The Old Wives' Tale*,' '[w]hat wraiths, apart from their context, are the wind sextet from *The Waves*, or Jacob away from *Jacob's Room*!' (ibid.). Apparently, Jacob and *The Waves*' sextet are even more dependent on their material settings than Bennett's heroines, who exist in notoriously detailed milieux. Since the imagery adopted by both sides of the debate draws on the concept of clutter, it appears that early twentieth-century theories of fiction were circumscribed by similar semantic furniture. Consequently, we might turn to an object that has become iconic of the Edwardian era, appearing in both *Hilda Lessways* and *Jacob's Room* – a wicker chair. "Character in Fiction" situates Bennett's *Hilda Lessways* and *Jacob's Room* at opposing poles of the clutter spectrum, yet their twin wicker armchairs resonate with the same question regarding character: "Where is Hilda?," "Where is Jacob?"

The holograph draft of *Jacob's Room* reveals that Woolf deliberately excised Jacob's consciousness from the text, positioning Jacob, in Makiko Minow-Pinkney's terms, as 'a lacuna … an absent centre, a fissure in the novel round which the other characters gravitate' (28). Plotting *Jacob's Room* in 1920, Woolf 'suppose[d] that the Room will hold it together' (*JR* Holograph 1), tantalisingly suggesting that the room might offer a key to Jacob's character. However, one eliminated room from the holograph draft suggests that Woolf intended to pressure the idea that objects are a symbolic shorthand for 'the soul:'

> Her square looking glass ~~absorbed~~ [concentrated] into itself all the light that came from the drop above it. The little creature in white & golden ~~wrapper~~ was therefore perfectly delineated; her crimson toes; ~~&~~ her pale hair ~~bound~~ with the blue stones in it; the whole of her indeed, perhaps the soul. Her glass sucked it out of her & ~~gave~~ [held] it ~~back~~ [up] to her, untrembling, for her inspection; ~~Such~~ for as she gazed steadily face & reflection fitted like a glove, [finger] & nothing ~~of the tremb tremulous~~ [trembled] ~~fitful as of~~ [or] ~~flickering~~ [flickered] ~~like the souls, marred the smooth surface~~ … (*JR* Holograph 1:50)

> Strange indeed to have this visible proof ~~about one~~, available at any moment ~~given & one chose to shut the door & seize the mirror~~, granted glass & light, of the rightness of things; this this lily floating flawless upon ~~the~~ [the] times ~~roar – that one could~~ pool, fearless; as if this were sufficient – this reflection. Which meditation she destroyed by turning; ~~w wh~~ & the ~~the~~ mirror held nothing at all, or only a brass bedstead… (ibid.51)

In these variants of the same scene, the mirror changes from an object that offers an 'untrembling,' perfect delineation of the soul to a vacuum that holds 'nothing' or 'only a brass bedstead.' Playing with subject/object parity – 'fitted,' '~~fitful~~' – Woolf suggests that the soul cannot '~~seize~~' itself in an object that is '[held]…[up]' as its 'visible proof.' Woolf's many cancellations and additions reveal how carefully these scenes were written and overwritten, exhibiting something of their author's "tremble," particularly over the concept of the tremulous, fitful and flickering. Here, we see Woolf drafting a lexicon that emerges at the interstices of movement and stasis, provoking images of action in suspension, the animate yet inanimate, the vital yet inert. In these border-line oxymorons, meaning hangs suspended, nascent, tentative.

As John Nash notes, our invitation to Jacob's room is also loaded with the expectations of literary tourism (2013). In "Flumina Amem Silvasque" (1917), Woolf mocks the 'literary pilgrim' 'looking up earnestly at a house front … and bidding his anaemic and docile brain conjure up the figure of Dr. Johnson' (*E*2:161). Similarly, *Night and Day* (1919) deconstructs the sacral nature of the home museum. Katharine Hilbery shows Ralph a room converted to 'something like a chapel' or 'a religious temple' for her grandfather's relics, reverently offering up each item for inspection (9-10). While Katharine is soothed by the serene indifference of her 'magnificent' ancestors (*ND*10), Ralph implicates the 'worship of greatness' in what Leonard Woolf called the psychological law of 'mortmain,' the dead hand of the past that 'command[s]' and stultifies the living (*Deluge* 31,35) – "'Do you do anything yourself?'" he asks (*ND*15).[4] Sentimental hero-worship is only part of the problem – Woolf queries the very capacity of objects to illustrate a

[4] The entire passage is reminiscent of Leonard, as Ralph takes up Harry Davis' complaint about the thinly-disguised "Bloomsberries" in Leonard's *The Wise Virgins* (1914), 'You never *do* anything' (59).

life. Woolf is not immune to the elegiac exteriorisation of character that the relic seems to promise, for even 'old shoes have a way of being worn on this side rather than on that, which seems not gossip but revelation' ("Flumina" *E*2:162). The longevity of clothing, in particular, seems to cast the subject's ephemerality into sharp relief (we could read the shoe buckles recommended by *The Lady* [1896] as a commercialised *memento mori*). *To the Lighthouse* (1927) implies that the essence of Mrs Ramsay might be found in the 'twisted finger' of an abandoned 'glove' and "Time Passes" records the pathos of how 'a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes […] kept the human shape and […] indicated how once they were filled and animated' (43, 106). Shortly before beginning "Time Passes" in 1926, Woolf viewed the relics of the failed Franklin expedition (1845) and wryly observed that 'a spoon asks a good deal of imagination to consecrate it' (*D*3:72). Nevertheless, 'the charm worked' – 'behold if I didn't almost burst into tears' (ibid.). The fetishization of memorial objects operates, as Jean-Luc Nancy and Thomas Platt observe, through 'the *being-there* of a desire, an expectation, an imminence, a power and its presentiment, a force interred in the form and exhumed by it' (6). The "consecrated spoon" powerfully presents its visible, tactile materiality and yet loses its materiality, for what literary tourists expect to handle is not merely 'a pallid and inanimate collection of objects,' but the object as an incarnation of character (Woolf "Haworth" *E*1:7). Two types of absences are at play in the memorialised room, for the absence of the subject is only mitigated by substituting the literal object with its symbolic resonance; the object becomes (in some ways) absent in order to make the lost subject present. Thus, Bill Brown argues that *Jacob's Room* does not render 'a life of things that is irreducible to the history of human subjects;' rather, its 'pathos … depends precisely on that reduction, on the symbolic and metonymic power of objects' (*Other Things* 66). Jacob's objects reveal how the relic is poignantly situated between 'obsolescence' (Brown ibid. 68) and 'imminence' (Nancy & Platt 6), alternately marking the absence of the object and the subject. Further, it raises anxieties about the lingering power of the

past. Might the past's imminence in the present prevent us from "doing anything ourselves" (Woolf *ND*15)?

Jacob's room also invokes the tradition of still-life.[5] As Diane Gillespie's *The Sister Arts* (1988) and Claudia Tobin's *Modernism and Still Life* (2020) richly demonstrate, this genre gained prominence in the twentieth century, partly through the interventions of Roger Fry and Bloomsbury artists like Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. Still-lifes generally depict an accumulation of domestic objects, seeming to reverse the priority of subject over object. However, Elizabeth Eastmond's analysis of Frances Hodgkins' *Self Portrait: Still Life* (c.1935) (1999) demonstrates that the still-life is closely related to portraiture (intriguingly, the first still-lifes were painted on the reverse side of portraits [658]). We must pressure the colon in Hodgkins' title – do still-life objects equal the human, exhibiting the "intimacy" between ourselves and our settings that was the touchstone of Edwardian décor, or do they decentralise the human? Critics are divided about whether, as Norman Bryson suggests, still-lifes speak to the "exile" of the subject, the "erasure" of his 'scale of values' (61), or whether, as Roland Barthes argues, they denote 'man's space … his chronos … [his] imprints upon the inert' (*Critical Essays* 5). Although the still-life is deeply associated with the human through the elegiac, admonitory sub-genres of *vanitas* or *memento mori*, for some modernists, the still-life had the capacity to reveal the pure essence of objects themselves. For instance, Roger Fry deplored 'the ominous preponderance of the portrait' and 'the absence of still life paintings' in British art, a disparity that illumined the British preference for 'descriptive conceptual art' – art that narrativizes – over art with 'purely visual values' (*Reflections* 24, 26). For Fry, the still-life was pure from 'hidden meanings in things,' which, according to Woolf's biography, Fry could not speak of without 'my tongue … visibly fill[ing] my cheek' (64). Similarly, D.H. Lawrence argued that Fry's favourite

[5] For critical readings of Jacob's room as still-life, see Kathleen Wall's "Significant Form in *Jacob's Room*: Ekphrasis and Elegy"(2002), Francesca Kazan's "Description and the Pictorial in Jacob's Room" (1988) and Robert Kiely's "*Jacob's Room* and Roger Fry: Two Studies in Still Life" (1983).

artist, Paul Cézanne, created still-lifes that gave 'a complete intuitive interpretation of actual objects … It's the real appleyness ... the form and substance and thereness,' the quidditas of objects ("Introduction" 340-341, 322). Woolf admired Cézanne's *Still Life with Apples* (c.1878) for similar reasons: it was 'as if you put a real stone among sham ones… The apples positively got redder & rounder & greener. I suspect some very mysterious quality of potation [?] in that picture' (*D*1:141, original brackets). Building on Claudia Tobin's proposition that the still-life was a modernist favourite because it 'generate[s] multiple oppositions between stillness and movement, nature and culture, morbid and vital, private and public, human and inhuman' (3), I advance that the still-life intervenes in modernist concerns about "reading" objects. It stimulates the viewer to ask whether she is looking at literal or symbolic objects.

The Edwardian significant interior, literary tourism, and the implied colon between self-portraiture and still-life are important contexts for Robert Kiely's assumption that 'the objects in Jacob's room lend themselves easily to interpretations about the character of the young man' (155). Let us turn to the room itself:

> Jacob's room had a round table and two low chairs. There were yellow flags in a jar on the mantelpiece; a photograph of his mother; cards from societies with little raised crescents, coats of arms, and initials; notes and pipes; on the table lay paper ruled with a red margin – an essay, no doubt – "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" There were books enough; very few French books, but then anyone who's worth anything reads just what he likes, as the mood takes him, with extravagant enthusiasm. Lives of the Duke of Wellington, for example; Spinoza; the works of Dickens; the Faery Queen; a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages; all the Elizabethans. His slippers were incredibly shabby, like boats burnt to the water's rim. Then there were photographs from the Greeks, and a mezzotint from Sir Joshua – all very English. The works of Jane Austen, too, in deference, perhaps to someone else's standard. Carlyle was a prize. There were books upon the Italian painters of the Renaissance, a *Manual of the Diseases of the Horse*, and all the usual textbooks. (*JR*48-49)

Just as Jacob's essay queries Thomas Carlyle's assertion that 'History […] is but the Biography of great men' (34), this arrangement puts a question mark around biography. We notice that the

mirror of the holograph draft, which so fitfully performs its symbolic duty of "holding a mirror up to life," is conspicuously absent from Jacob's room. Our progress through Jacob's space is horizontal, two-dimensional, and noticeably lacking in the 'potation' that makes Cézanne's apples "round" (*D*1:141). Woolf adopts a comparatively flat listing strategy marked by the repetitious 'there were,' as if Jacob's room was merely a product of monotonous accumulation. Adverbial escalation only attends objects that foreshadow Jacob's death in the Great War, like the 'incredibly shabby' slippers 'burnt to the water's rim,' which affiliate the closing image of Jacob's shoes with those 'young men in the prime of life [who] descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea' there to 'agitate up and down like fragments of broken match stick' (*JR*216). Again, the Flanders' field poppies 'pressed to silk' against the Greek pages are telling: the soldier's floral wreath is flattened by Greek, coding Jacob as the inheritor *and* victim of his classical education in Hellenic cultural cachet and imperialist legacy. Further, as Mowbray Allen explains – and Woolf's later essay, "On Not Knowing Greek" (1924) concurs with this estimate – the Greek language was frequently thought to manifest the 'perfect harmony between the idea and its external manifestation' (25), a point of significance in a room that should be the external manifestation of Jacob. Yet the idea – the poppy symbolises Jacob as a casualty of war – is "pressed" (repressed?) by the dictionary that, being shut, has the status of object, not discourse. This is the tactic of the entire passage for, just as objects begin to swell with shape and narrative import, the narrator flattens them by swiftly moving on to other items. For instance, she does not provide an ekphrastic elaboration of the photographs and mezzotint (as in *Three Guineas* [1938]); they represent undifferentiated "Englishness." Some of Jacob's books show idiosyncrasy, but they are largely 'the usual textbooks,' denoting 'deference' 'to someone else's standard.' In fact, Jacob is so "textbook" that Fanny cannot separate his *bildungsroman* from that of *Tom Jones* (Fielding 1749) (170). Jacob has internalised the patriarchal narratives that are responsible for his untimely erasure, to the extent that he is barely visible except through the aid of material and textual prosthetics (ibid.). Consequently, it is difficult to agree with Bill Brown

and Robert Kiely's argument that Jacob's objects are symbolic of a specific quidditas we might call "Jacob;" they might belong to any of the hundreds of classically educated young men who died in the first world war.

Woolf's portrayal of Jacob resonates with Lytton Strachey's portrayal of the "eminent Victorians" as, according to Ruth Hoberman, 'part-cliché, part-mystery' (*Modernizing Lives* 47). Woolf's approach is indubitably subtler and more affectionate, but *Jacob's Room* deconstructs the clichéd wisdom of the period as assuredly as Strachey exposes the dark underbelly of Victorian virtues, revealing how character is formed (and may be consumed) by 'certain background rods or conceptions' (*MOB*81). Jacob's ordinariness is a challenge to the "biographies of Great Men," and an indictment of social structures, but he is also more than the sum of his rather prosaic parts. The allure of Mrs Brown and Woolf's 'tinselly' society hostess, Clarissa Dalloway (*D*3:32) likewise depends on the mismatch between their ordinariness and the passionate attention they provoke (a point aptly expressed in R. Lanier Anderson's article, "Is Clarissa Dalloway Special?" [2017]). The combination of cliché and mystery also illuminates the 'value' Woolf found in 'caricature' (*D*3:203). Caricature operates not by nuance but by simplified outline, exaggerating a "characteristic" detail as a metonym of the type and thus raising problems of (common) knowledge, relationality, and just arrangement of part and whole. Caricature's metonymic and "either/or" logic is usually exaggerated enough to void "straight" readings – its patent inadequacies stimulate contestation, a second look, as Woolf notes in *Jacob's Room*:

> Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old … why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world most real, the most solid, the best known to us – why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.
>
> Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love. (96)

The binary construction of knowledge is plainly absurd in light of the essential unknowability of other people. What is 'best known' and most taken for granted is turned to utter mystery, a reversal that enables 'love.'

The switch from trite inventory to rapt, suspended attention occurs in the culminating description of Jacob's room:

> Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there. (49, 247)

Suddenly switching to an elongated present tense ('is' rather than 'there were,' 'there were'), Woolf shifts the pace from a clipped list to a still-life interval. At this crucial pause, the still-life is no *nature morte*, for Woolf re-introduces the "vibrational aesthetics" (C. Tobin 22) developed in the holograph draft – the swell, the shift, the creak. Neither the organic and perishable (the flowers) nor the inorganic and relatively permanent (the armchair) are static and dead. They seem to express an inner life, divorced from human action and perception. Reminiscent of Cézanne's object that seemed to 'live of itself' (Lawrence "Introduction" 326) and T.S. Eliot's 'Chinese jar' that '[m]oves perpetually in its stillness' (*Complete Poems* 121), the wicker armchair seems to have a life outside the life of the subject.

The wicker armchair gains prominence as one of three passages repeated in *Jacob's Room*. The first is Woolf's famous injunction, '[i]t is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done –' (37, 214). Here, Woolf challenges Sidney Lee, her father's successor as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, who claimed that '[c]haracter which does not translate into exploit is for the biographer a mere phantasm' (17). In a 1927 essay, "The New Biography," Woolf continues to separate character from 'exploit' (a term loaded with the masculine "heroic principle"), suggesting that 'life' 'dwells in the

personality rather than in the act' (*SE*100). In *Modernizing Lives: Experiments in English Biography, 1918-1939* (1987), Ruth Hoberman suggests that when 'personality is seen as something not entirely manifest in action, it becomes a kind of artifact' (7), a reification that naturally tends to the supposition that objects are, as Bill Brown writes in *A Sense of Things* (2010), 'congealed actions' or a congealed self (146). Consequently, Woolf seems to refer us to Jacob's things. A second twice-repeated passage in *Jacob's Room* refers to Jacob's London rooms, which contain not one but 'three wicker chairs' (a point I will return to later):

> The rooms are shapely, the ceilings high: over the doorway a rose, or a ram's skull, is carved in the wood. The eighteenth century has its distinction. Even the panels, painted in raspberry-coloured paint, have their distinction… (93-94, 246 with minor variations).

The flower and the skull are classic *vanitas* symbols, whereas the term 'distinction…' operates more covertly, raising problems on page 94 when characters and the narrator try to bridge the ellipsis and apply the 'distinction' of the eighteenth-century panels to the modern subject, Jacob. Each effort is followed by dashes, sentence fragments, question marks; every expression of certainty is followed by a caveat and, eventually, the reflection that 'of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst' (94). Finally, as Clara tries to explain why she likes Jacob, she cancels the catalogue with "'[n]o, no, no … don't break – don't spoil" – what? Something infinitely wonderful' (94). This passage suggests, firstly, that Jacob lacks the 'distinction' of his objects which, like the Parthenon, obtain an 'extreme definiteness' and durability that 'exist[s] quite independently from our 'memories, abandonments, regrets, [and] sentimental devotions' (205-206). Secondly, Clara's 'no' gives description – the attempt to lend distinction to an evasive subject – a guilty connotation. Woolf implies that the proper address to Jacob's ineluctable "whatness" should be mute contemplation or the ostensive language she adopts for the monuments of Athens – 'There they are' (205) (a strategy famously adopted for the eponymous *Mrs Dalloway* [1925]). Thus, the repetitions in *Jacob's Room* suggest that Jacob is not reducible to

his objects and objects are not reducible to our feelings about them. This irreducibility constitutes an indistinct 'something' that impels us to 'hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery' (97). This fascination with character is eventually transferred (almost verbatim) to objects in *Roger Fry: A Biography*, as Fry resembles 'a humming-bird hawk-moth hanging over a flower, quivering yet still' in his attention 'to the stuffs, to the pots, to the hats' (152). The hum, the tremble, the quiver come to figure for a heightened attention, wherein the subject re-enacts and embodies the vital inertia of the armchair that twice 'creaks, though no one sits there' (*JR*49, 247).

"Character in Fiction" encourages comparison between *Jacob's Room* and *Hilda Lessways* by reproducing long descriptive passages from Bennett's text, interrupting the recitation to ask, '– where is Hilda?' (46). Another wicker armchair appears at a 'critical' juncture of *Hilda Lessways*, in a chapter entitled "The Little Room" (104). This room is a 'chamber of intimacy and of confidence, containing 'an old carpet, two wicker arm-chairs, a small chair, a nearly empty dwarf bookcase, an engraving of Marie Antoinette regally facing the revolutionary mob, and a couple of photographs of the Cedars' (102). In this scene, Hilda is torn between 'loyalty' to George Cannon and 'disloyalty' to her recently deceased mother, a contest of allegiances akin to that symbolised by the dresser in Bennett's earlier work, *Anna of the Five Towns* (103). About to sign a paper making George the executor of her property, she stands 'bewildered, in a dream, staring at the scratched mahogany top of the bookcase' (107).

> And the bookcase seemed to her to be something sentient, patient, and helpful, that had always been waiting there in the corner to aid George Cannon in this crisis – something human like herself. She loved the bookcase, and the Eagle pencil, and the papers, and the pattern on the wall … There he [George] was, beside her, in all his masculinity – his moustache, his blue chin, his wide white hands, his broadcloth – there he was planted on his massive feet as on a pedestal! … One of the basket-chairs, though empty, continued to creak, like a thing alive. (107-108)

Hilda's material hermeneutics tap the feeling of intimacy that Rosamund Marriot Watson foregrounds, but the sentient helpfulness of objects actually disguises the fact that Hilda is the victim of a fraud. Her "reading" of George's 'strangely significant' frayed 'wristband' – and the pecuniary difficulties it manifests – propels her towards a bigamous marriage (107). George will make away with the property that she signs over to him with the beloved 'Eagle pencil.' More ironically, Hilda's passionate feeling that objects are like 'something human' prevents her from realising that she is becoming George's object, 'eagerly imitative and mechanical' (ibid); no regal Antoinette, this scene turns Hilda into 'a slave' (104). The wicker chair's creak echoes George's fraudulent name on the document, "'Karkeek,'" as well as Hilda's transformation into something 'thin, throbbing, fragile, mournful, somehow insignificant,' like a vibrating fibre in a wicker chair (107-108). The wicker chair is tightly integrated into the plot-line, serving as a warning to those who would read objects for what they 'symbolized,' but happen to read amiss (106).

It is surprising that the striking similarities between the wicker armchairs of *Hilda Lessways* and *Jacob's Room* should have escaped unremarked, especially since Woolf herself invites this reading in "Character in Fiction" (*SE*46-47). Placed side by side, the descriptions are nearly identical:

> One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there. (*JR*49, 247)

> One of the basket-chairs, though empty, continued to creak, like a thing alive. (*Hilda Lessways* 107-108)

Moreover, by the time Jacob moves his Cambridge furniture to his London rooms he has not one but *three* wicker-chairs (94) – perhaps he got the other 'two wicker-armchairs' by way of Bennett's "Little Room" (102)? While "Character in Fiction" throws us off the scent by citing *Hilda Lessways*' description of the Freehold Villas rather than its objects – which might have

shown surprising debts to an author Woolf roundly critiques – we can speculate that *Jacob's Room* appropriates *Hilda Lessways*' wicker armchairs to reflect afresh on the place of objects in fiction and their relationship to characterisation. This hypothesis would cast the Woolf-Bennett debate in a different light, as a conversation rather than a 'slanderous' confrontation (Baldick 10). Yet although Bennett and Woolf's wicker-chairs rhyme, 'the accent falls a little differently' ("MF" *SE*11). Hilda's wicker-chair betokens the erasure of independent subjectivity, but it remains linked to character, a tight symbolic construction that ensures that objects can never become independent from (or incommensurate with) character. By contrast, since Jacob's armchair is semantically and literally vacant, we 'hang' over it, 'vibrating' with intense concentration (*JR*97). The parallel vibration of its single loose fibre exaggerates Bennett's metaphor of a 'thing alive' (*Hilda Lessways* 108), unhinging the chair's existence from 'the young man in the chair [who] is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us' although 'the moment after we know nothing about him' (*JR*96). Woolf figures the object – and Jacob – in terms of 'mystery' (97), not symbolic closure.

While *Hilda Lessways* contains scenes of literal clutter, they are not clutter in the metaphorical sense – they neatly support characterisation and plot development. Since readers might mistake the 'significant trifle' for a superfluous detail (Galsworthy *Man of Property* 19), Bennett didactically steers our interpretation, unambiguously declaring that an early, apparently trivial scene of *Hilda Lessways* has 'the dramatic pungency necessary for a really effective triumph' (28). As Hilda opens a wardrobe in search of her mother's handkerchiefs, 'she was precipitated into the most secret intimacy of her mother's existence … She was more intimate with her mother now than she could ever be in talking to her' (27). Just as, in *The Old Wives' Tale*, Mrs Baines's 'mien of assured authority' is 'impart[ed] to her dresses … as though some essence had escaped from her and remained in them' (27), Mrs Lessways' flighty personality is emblematised by how 'small garments, odd, indeterminate trifles, a muff, a bundle of whalebone, veils, bags

and especially cardboard boxes' are 'heaped pell-mell' in the wardrobe (*Hilda Lessways* 27). At this stage, Hilda is a competent object-reader and feels 'the deep, proud satisfaction of the philosopher who has correctly deduced' Mrs Lessways' 'character' from this incongruous mess (ibid.).

Mrs Lessways is reflected in objects, partly because this is what 'a bundle of whalebone' should (according to Bennett's *The Author's Craft*) *do* in a text, and partly because the 'social horror' of domesticity 'monopolize[s]' and straitens her 'existence' (31). Conversely, because Hilda 'revolt[s]' from 'this business of domesticity [which] was not life itself,' but 'at best the clumsy external machinery of life' (ibid.), domestic objects reflect her disintegration.[6] For instance, in the very moment that Hilda recognises that '[s]he did not understand herself. She was not even acquainted with herself,' her image is obscured by the wardrobe mirror as 'the image of the bed and of half the room shot across the swinging glass, taking the place of her own reflection' (27). Objects continue to symbolise Hilda's diminution throughout the novel. As she 'savour[s] the intimacy of the room' she shares with George, 'the necessaries on the washstand, the superb tortoiseshell brushes … the dressing-table, the open trunks, George's clothes on a chair, and her own flimsy trifles on the bed,' the looking-glass fails to reflect Hilda, holding only an 'image of the closed door' (214). In this cluttered scene, she realizes that her marriage has trapped her in the life of domesticity she hoped to avoid, 'her destiny was fixed hereafter' (ibid.). As George and Hilda's marriage disintegrates, she sees 'only a whitish blur instead of a face in the dressing-table mirror' (221-222). Bennett traces the culture of patriarchy and its effects on individuals through objects that reflect the state of subjectivity, showing that, as William Bellamy has argued, the Edwardians were deeply concerned with the 'dialectic that obtains between consciousness and environment' (8). According to Bellamy, Edwardian authors

[6] Hilda is destined for domesticity as her bigamous marriage to George is corrected by her "proper" marriage to Edwin Clayhanger in *These Twain* (1915).

emphasise 'the possessive and locative aspects of their characters because the human type they were depicting found [her]self, precisely, dispossessed and dislocated' (15). Hilda is socially and existentially alienated but we must recognise that her objects are *inalienable* because they recapitulate her situation at every stage. Just as Rosamund Marriot Watson foregrounds the 'intimacy of the relations between ourselves' and our 'setting' (152-153), Bennett ensures that his bookcases, looking-glasses, and wicker-chairs offer legible insights into the character they have helped to form.

Jacob's Room denaturalises this intimate reciprocity between character and objects. Mrs Jarvis exclaims, "'Jacob's letters are so like him'" (180) and, intuitively, we tend to approach letters as a particularly intimate, auratic, and tailored form of self-presentation. However, in *Jacob's Room*, letters are part of a series of unsuccessful attempts to communicate, becoming as illegible and inaccessible as any other object. Mrs Flanders' letters are excluded from the bedroom where Jacob and Florinda rendezvous, wedged 'between the biscuit-tin and the tobacco-box' (122-123) as if they were an undecipherable 'packet of marble tablets' ("Looking-Glass" *CSF*223). In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929), Woolf offers a similar representation of letters as object-like, 'invested with a new reality and significance and with a greater heaviness, too' (*CSF*223). '[*I*]*f* one could read them, one would know everything there was to be known about Isabella, yes, and about life too,' but this epistemological closure is denied in both texts (ibid., emphasis added). A vague creaking is heard, and the narrator takes it for granted that the reader will interpret the creak as a meaningful utterance, warning that 'to suppose that wood, when it creaks, transmits anything save that rats are busy and wood dry is childish. These old houses are only brick and wood … But *if* the pale blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box had the feelings of a mother, the heart was torn by the little creak, the sudden stir' (*JR*124, emphasis added). This bland assumption of readerly naïveté is odd – after all, why would we suppose that wood has a communicative function or that envelopes have feelings? On the

other hand, isn't our readerly acumen at stake here – surely, it is unfair to admonish the sophisticated reader who is only fulfilling her part of the literary "bargain" in interpreting these material cues? Doesn't Woolf's 'if' encourage us to precisely this endeavour? This passage both illumines and satirises the early-twentieth-century imperative to close reading, suggesting that interpretation may go into hyperdrive when repeatedly rebuffed. Woolf's attempt to dissuade us from interpreting the acousmatic creak (reminiscent of the inexplicably creaking wicker chair) only spurs us on – is it trivial or is it profound, is it pathetic or bathetic, is it intelligible or unintelligible? These questions arise because of 'how soon deeds sever and become alien,' because of the power of the object to divest itself of human intention (125). Even letters become profoundly alienated from their creators. Woolf implies a hostility between creating subject and created object for, even though letters should bear the 'ineffaceable impressions' of character (214), '[t]he hand in them is scarcely perceptible, let alone the voice or the scowl,' and consequently, 'we fear or hate or wish annihilated this phantom of ourselves, lying on the table' (125). Inverting Edwardian material hermeneutics, all material things seem able to fall out of interpretability, out of the purview of the (creating) subject. Hence, the 'miracle' of the post is simply that it is 'speech attempted … infinitely brave, forlorn and lost' (125), an object-lesson of *Jacob's Room* as a whole.

Jacob's *bildungsroman*, if we can call it that, is a process of being 'immersed in things … keys, studs, pencils, and bottles of tabloids strewn on the dressing-table' (191). However, interpreters like Sandra who assert that '[e]verything seems to mean so much,' are satirised (196). Sandra's ability to float 'from the particular to the universal' (212) – the metonymic transaction upon which Galsworthy's "significant trifle" depends – provokes a lengthy discussion on 'character-mongering' (214-216). The search for character can be sadistic, 'stuff[ing] out their victims' characters till they are as swollen and tender as the livers of geese exposed to a hot fire' (215). Conversely, Woolf suggests that 'character-drawing' should be a matter of 'pins and

needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls' (216). The privilege granted to 'mere scrawls' subverts legibility, a concept at stake in both *Hilda Lesways* and *Jacob's Room*, where one obtrusive narrator directs us to read non-linguistic, traditionally asymbolic details like wardrobes, and another dissuades us from reading normally readable things like letters.

This indicates a widespread debate surrounding literary objects, character, symbolism, realism, and the detail. It is salutary to recognise that Bennett is more self-reflexive about these issues than Woolf's critique allows. While he was the inheritor of Victorian realism, Bennett was not content to simply register and prided himself on never 'look[ing] at things from any other standpoint than that of a creative artist' (Hynes *The Author's Craft* x). He rejected the loaded epithet "photographic" and wrote:

> The day of my enthusiasm for "realism," for "naturalism," has passed. I can perceive that a modern work of fiction may ignore realism and yet be great … My desire is to depict the deeper beauty while abiding by the envelope of facts … They might, for the sake of more clearly disclosing the beauty, suffer a certain *distortion* – I can't think of a better word. (*Journal* 1:84, original emphasis)

Distorting the 'envelope of facts' – in Woolf's terms, a 'semi-transparent envelope' ("MF" *SE*9) – was linked to post-impressionist aesthetics in Bennett's positive review of the 1910 Post-Impressionist Exhibition, arranged by Roger Fry, Desmond MacCarthy and Clive Bell. Although the exhibition provoked disgust in some arenas, Bennett responded with public self-reflexivity:

> I am not photographic. But supposing that in a deeper sense I were? Supposing a young writer turned up and forced me and some of my contemporaries – us who fancy ourselves a bit – to admit that we had been concerning ourselves unduly with inessentials, that we had been worrying ourselves to achieve infantile realisms? ("The First Post-Impressionist Show" 135)

In 1917, Woolf praised this review (*Contemporary Writers* 62), which inadvertently invited the charge of "Modern Fiction:" Bennett's 'magnificent apparatus for catching life' fails to capture 'life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing' (8). Bennett's review also anticipates Edwin Muir's assertion in *We Moderns* (1918) that photographic realism registers only 'an appendage of the present, a triviality' (136), and Thomas Hardy's claim in *Life and Art* (1925) that the genuine realist is not a copyist but a creative 'technicist' (86). As Samuel Hynes explains in the introduction to *The Author's Craft*, Bennett's *avant-garde* status derives from more than his trenchant criticisms of Victorian stodginess and English insularity – he had his finger on the pulse of issues like realism, creativity, and technique that would become central to modernist aesthetics (and, ironically, to their rejection of his work) (xi-xii).

Ever since G.H. Lewes remarked on the '*detailism* which calls itself Realism' in 1865 (101), re-thinking realism is inseparable from the problem of the detail, and associated concerns about discrimination, selection, and form. In Bennett's *The Author's Craft*, the detail is paradoxically present yet absent: Bennett mines its "revelatory" power while dismissing it from the conversation as a 'seductive minor question of ornamentation' (24). Bennett claims that 'the tying of a bootlace is the reflection of the soul' but denounces the use of another detail, 'the ground in front of the all-night coffee-stalls was white with egg-shells' (7). It is not self-evident why a bootlace is more revelatory than egg-shells yet Bennett claims that one who gathers such observations needs an 'operation for cataract,' as if hyper-observation is a type of blindness (ibid.). Potentially, no aspect of everyday life is 'meaningless or negligible,' but the detail needs to be rehabilitated by 'design – or construction' (12, 20). The '*co-ordination* of detail according to a true perspective of relative importance' differentiates superfluous details – clutter – from significant details (7, emphasis added). Authors must not be 'diverted from the main contour by trivial accessories … there is a whole beauty, surpassing the beauty of parts' (56-57). As Naomi Schor writes in *Reading in Detail* (1987), such tenets presuppose 'a classical ideal of

proportionality' that demands the ascendency of design over detail (182). The part must never advertise itself as part; it must be homogenised and synthesised with the whole.

These tenets inflect Bennett's assertion that Woolf is more interested in 'details than in the full creation of the individual characters' ("Decaying?" 47). He writes that he has 'seldom read a cleverer book' than *Jacob's Room* but 'cleverness' is 'perhaps the lowest of all artistic qualities;' *Jacob's Room* is 'exquisitely written,' but exquisite writing is merely a frivolous trim on a book 'packed and bursting' with trivial details (ibid.). Bennett adopts a patronising, patriarchal tone, '[t]he great did not at first abound with glitter and cleverness. As a rule, they began by being rather clumsy, poor dears!' (47). Samuel Hynes suggests that Woolf's response was disproportionate: '[f]or one paragraph of mixed praise and criticism of *Jacob's Room*, Bennett had reaped six separate published attacks and one lecture' ("Whole Contention" 40). However, Bennett extended his criticisms of Woolf in *Young Authors* (1926), reviews of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *The Progress of the Novel* (1929). Repeatedly, Bennett used the concept of clutter to undermine the possibility of feminine genius. Of *A Room*, Bennett writes 'I should accuse her of wholesale padding' but '[s]he is not consciously guilty of padding.'

> She is merely the victim of her extraordinary gift of fancy (not imagination) … whereas a woman cannot walk through a meadow in June without wandering all over the place to pick attractive blossoms, a man can. Virginia Woolf cannot resist the floral enticement. (*Author's Craft* 226)

'[I]magination' carries too much gravitas to be applied to Woolf for, as Bennett says of *Orlando*, her 'vivacious descriptions of spectacular matters' are '[f]anciful embroidery, wordy and naught else!' (ibid.223). *Orlando* excels 'in fancy and in delicate realistic observation' but Woolf 'has never yet shown the mighty imaginative power' of the male artist, 'Victor Hugo' for example (ibid.223-224). Bennett's final summary of Woolf's work underscores Schor's argument that 'the detail is

gendered and doubly gendered as feminine' (*Reading* 4) – 'I regard her alleged form as the absence of form, and her psychology as an uncoordinated mass of interesting details … All that I can urge in her favour is that she is authentically feminine' (*Author's Craft* 96-97).

Bennett's assessment reflects his argument in *Our Women: Chapters on the Sex-Discord* (1920): 'intellectually and creatively man is the superior of women' and '[n]o amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter [this]' (112). Woolf's diaries of 1920 show how her doubts regarding *Jacob's Room* became entangled with her outrage at *Our Women* (*D*2:69). Beth Daugherty argues that Bennett's dismissal of female artistry, paired with his disapproval of *Jacob's Room*, must have stimulated Woolf's decision to embody 'the concept of character in a woman, Mrs Brown […] who "vitally survive[s] in the mind" yet resists traditional characterization, who is invisible to the Edwardian novelists' ("Whole Contention" 282). Mrs Brown also responds to *The Author's Craft*, which argues that the author creatively coordinates details because 'what he is trying to see is life, is the woman next door, is the man in the train' (8). "Character in Fiction" adopts this railway setting to argue that, in fact, Bennett looks 'at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her [Mrs Brown], never at life, never at human nature' (48).

Mrs Brown has a precursor in another railway traveller, "Minnie Marsh" from "An Unwritten Novel" (1920). This experimental sketch begins, as 'all novels begin with an old lady in the corner' of a passenger train ("CF" *SE*42). Although the narrator seeks to 'shield' herself against 'life,' she is intrigued by how nakedly the old lady 'looks at life' (*CSF*112-113) and begins to make up a story about her, naming her Minnie Marsh and imagining her destination at Eastbourne. Through the course of the narrative, the narrator seeks to avoid 'the laborious process' of realism that Woolf associated with Bennett in 1920, 'building up a model of life from saying how d'you do, and cutting the loaf and knocking the cigarette ash into the ash tray, and standing the yellow bicycle against the wall' (*Contemporary Writers* 159-160). She tries to dodge the

'enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life' ("MF" *SE*8) by replacing descriptions and actions with ellipses – '[s]he opened the door, and, putting her umbrella in the stand – that goes without saying: so, too, the whiff of beer from the basement; dot, dot, dot' ("Unwritten" *CSF*117). She tries to bracket clutter from the character sketch, '[But this we'll skip; ornaments, curtains, trefoil china plate, yellow oblongs of cheese, white squares of biscuit…]' for 'the detail matters nothing! … it's not the thing I want' (114-115). This strategy is revisited in "Character in Fiction," as Woolf writes that 'details could wait. The important thing was to realise [Mrs Brown's] character' (*SE*42).

Nevertheless, material details and one or two-sentence vignettes permeate "An Unwritten Novel," as a cluttered form asserts its tyranny over the narrator's imagination and diverts her from 'the track' of character (*CSF*115). For instance, the narrator pictures herself as a bad sheepdog, 'heading [Minnie] over the waterfall, straight for madness' (ibid.116). This malign image figures the author as a being that the character must escape in order to survive. The narrator is circumvented by a mundane fact, 'here's a jerk. "Eggs are cheaper!"' (116). The quotation marks indicate the intrusion of another voice, dictating that eggs cannot be eliminated from the depiction of Minnie Marsh. The narrator must momentarily leave her pursuit of "character alone" and sit contemplating the 'little fragments of eggshell' that Bennett ridicules in *The Author's Craft*, reading them as 'fragments of a map – a puzzle' (117). This unspecified voice – realist convention, or "real life"? – curtails the narrator's freedom to select objects that fit her objectives. For example, she desires to hide the commercial traveller, James Moggridge, behind a screen of aspidistra (117-118). 'Rhododendrons would conceal him utterly, and into the bargain give me my fling of red and white, for which I starve and strive,' but 'rhododendrons in Eastbourne – in December – on the Marshes' table – no, no, I dare not; it's all a matter of crusts and cruets, frills and ferns' (118). Rhododendrons are 'illicit' (118). Moggridge is a purveyor of the "innumerable buttons" of Edwardian fiction ("MF" *SE*7), but although she tries to keep his

goods out of the narrative, they spill forth against her will: 'the time's not come for bringing *them* in – the big and the little on the long cards, some peacock-eyed, others dull gold; cairngorms some, and others coral sprays – but I say the time's not come' ("Unwritten" *CSF*118). What is to be blamed for this obnoxious intrusion of crusts, cruets, frills, ferns and buttons? It cannot be Roland Barthes' "reality effect" (1986), for the story repeatedly highlights its fabricated nature. Perhaps it is 'life's fault':

> Life imposes her laws; life blocks the way – life's behind the fern; life's the tyrant; oh, but not the bully! No, for I assure you I come willingly; I come wooed by Heaven knows what compulsion across ferns and cruets, tables splashed and bottles smeared. I come irresistibly to lodge myself somewhere on the firm flesh, in the robust spine, wherever I can penetrate or find foothold on the person, in the soul… [in] [t]he enormous stability of the fabric… (ibid.)

Although "Modern Fiction" deplores 'the solidity of [Wells'] fabric' (*SE*7), here Woolf finds the weave of clutter a source of fascination as well as anxiety. Whereas Bennett pictures life as co-ordinated details, Woolf pictures life as a disorderly mass of objects that may serve as a 'foothold on the person' but necessarily prevent a totalising vision.

The elusiveness of character –lost and found amidst '[p]late-glass windows. Carnations; chrysanthemums. Ivy in dark gardens. Milk carts' ("Unwritten" *CSF*121) – creates a vibration in the narrative that belongs at once to the percipient and the object perceived, an interval that poignantly combines the vitalism of the subject and the purported inertia of objects. In a scene prefiguring the hawk-moth passage of *Jacob's Room* and the attention of Roger Fry, the narrator asks, '[h]ave I read you right?':

> – there's a break – a division – so that when you've grasped the stem the butterfly's off – the moth that hangs in the evening over the yellow flower – move, raise your hand, off, high, away. I won't raise my hand. Hang still, then, quiver, life, soul, spirit, whatever you are of Minnie Marsh – I, too, on my flower – the hawk over the down – (ibid.117)

As I have already suggested, the model of reading is supplanted by a model of attention. Interpretation and the grasping hand must be suspended, partaking of what Claudia Tobin calls Woolf's 'vibratory aesthetics' (34). The power dynamics of attention are recalibrated, as the author mimics the thing she beholds, holding herself back in respect for what Minnie 'withholds' (*CSF*117). The harum-scarum race after Mrs Brown in "Character in Fiction" suggests creative license and activity. Nevertheless, the image of the hawk-moth rehabilitates a view of the mind as 'a set of vibrating atoms' (Stephen "WM?" 132), not passive (as Leslie Stephen suggested) but *captured*, in symbiotic relationship with the material objects of attention.

One withheld "secret" of "An Unwritten Novel" is a familial connexion to *Hilda Lessways*, for 'Hilda's the sister-in-law. Hilda? Hilda?' (114). In Bennett's novel, Hilda Lessways' sister-in-law is Sarah Gailey, a lonely, 'timorous,' spinster with 'characteristic[ally] nervous movement[s],' who is assigned a shabby basement room in the seaside resort of Brighton (68, 66, 167). Like Sarah, Minnie is characterised by 'awkward angular movement[s];' she is a lonely 'spirit driven hither, thither, lodging on the diminishing carpets – meagre footholds' and finally, in a 'basement' room in another seaside resort, Eastbourne ("Unwritten" *CSF*113, 120, 114). We may recall that Mrs Brown – 'very small, rather queer, and suffering intensely' – is also imagined 'in a seaside house' ("CF" *SE*41). Just as Mrs Brown is bullied by Mr Smith (ibid.40-41), and Minnie is abused by Moggridge (*CSF*119), George Cannon bullies Sarah, 'pushing her forward with all the ruthless strength of his enterprising spirit' (*Hilda Lessways* 68). Increasingly miserable, Sarah tries to drown herself (ibid.171-172), a theme hinted at by the wistful refrain in "An Unwritten Novel," '[p]erhaps there'll be a moment later by the sea' (*CSF*118, 121). Sarah's attempted suicide 'communicated to Hilda a thrill that was divine in its unexampled poignancy' (*Hilda Lessways* 172), but Minnie 'share[s] her secret, passe[s] her poison' to the narrator and not to Hilda Marsh, who remains an ominous, disapproving presence throughout Woolf's short story (*CSF*114). Although Hilda Lessways shows sympathy for Sarah, it is notable that 'Miss Gailey

seemed unreal to her, not an actual woman, but an abstract figure of sorrow that fancy had created;' she cannot 'bear to let her imagination roam into Miss Gailey's immediate past' (*Hilda Lessways* 68). By contrast, this excursion drives "An Unwritten Novel," suggesting that Woolf aimed to re-write and concretize the minor, 'abstract figure' of Sarah Gailey through Minnie Marsh. The similarities between these two figures are too strong to be coincidental, yielding the surprising but unavoidable hypothesis that Bennett's character has a place in the genealogy of Mrs Brown. For Minnie, the narrator of "An Unwritten Novel," and Woolf herself are literally *in Hilda's house*, writing against the parameters that Bennett had helped to set for the Edwardian novel. Life may be one button-laden tyrant but, as "Modern Fiction" argues, the 'powerful and unscrupulous tyrant' of literary convention also has the artist 'in thrall' (*SE*9). Since Woolf is unable to negate the importance of Bennett and clutter to prose traditions, she must re-appropriate 'the ritual, the ancient antics' of earlier literary modes in the service of the 'unknown – you I adore' (121).

Reading scenes of clutter in *Jacob's Room* and "An Unwritten Novel" demonstrates that both texts negotiate the legacies of *Hilda Lessways*; despite Woolf's protestations, it was not by 'chance' that "Character in Fiction" alludes to this novel (*SE*46). The dialogue between *Hilda Lessways* (1911), "An Unwritten Novel" (1920) and *Jacob's Room* (1922) proves that Woolf was meditating on a specific cluster of ideas – objects, symbolism, characterisation, and life – as a means of explicating, and expurgating, Bennett's influence long before their quarrel fully commenced in 1924. Indeed, her response was less combative than many critics suggest. Minor characters and objects from *Hilda Lessways* attain new prominence in Woolf's work, shaping her theories of fiction. In "An Unwritten Novel," Woolf unearths the history of Sarah Gailey, exploring whether life or convention is responsible for the clutter-proclivities of prose, whether objects are superfluous to the depiction of character or whether, as Bennett suggested, they provide some real 'foothold' (*CSF*118) in the soul. Subsequently, *Jacob's Room* queries symbolism

and the intimacy of the Edwardian object-encounter, as images of clutter foreground Jacob's radical absence, the unknowability of character, and the impossibility of epistemological closure. If Jacob seems an obstinately flat character, horizontalized amongst his objects and not three-dimensionalised or "realised" by them, it is worth remembering that "Character in Fiction" ends by borrowing a maxim from Mrs Micawber, a notoriously "flat character" (Forster *Aspects of the Novel* 110) from Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849), entreating us 'never, never to desert Mrs Brown' ("CF" *SE*54; *Copperfield* 224).

Finally, the Woolf-Bennett debate is characteristic of Woolf's tendency to think of literary tradition in terms of how different authors treated literary objects. "Phases of Fiction" (1929) is in many ways a theory of literary furniture. Reading realist novels, 'we seem wedged among solid objects in a solid universe' (*E*5:43); Trollope's 'huge, substantial, well buttressed, and authenticated' novels peter 'out into a thin-blooded catalogue' (ibid.47-48); Dickens' 'gluttonous, restless, insatiable' eye 'snatches at a woman's steel hair-curlers […] and makes them somehow reveal the essence of a character' (56); in Proust, '[t]he commonest object, such as the telephone, loses its simplicity, its solidity, and becomes a part of life and transparent,' 'rak[ing] up' 'a whole series of thoughts, sensations, ideas, memories' (66). Each author and literary period has its own distinctive approach to objects. Her question, '[w]hat are we to do with it all?' (ibid.) echoes the final exhibit of *Jacob's Room* – 'what are we to do with' a pair of old shoes that evoke imminence and obsolescence (*JR*247), symbolism and the ability of objects to survive symbolism? What is the fate of the object in the modernist period?

'Scraping it all off' or adding 'more and more and more'?

In one of the 'two enormous chunks' culled from *The Years* (1937) (L. Woolf *Downhill* 156), Kitty looks round 'the room, with its innumerable tables, chairs and ornaments,' and says,

"'I always wanted to take a knife and scrape it all off'" (*Y* Appendix 444). In the published version, this hostility to ornament is once removed and far more ambiguous. Martin (not Kitty) looks at the 'little tables with photographs; ornate cabinets with vases of flowers; and panels of yellow brocade,' as if 'he was criticizing the room and herself too' (*Y*250). As the fastidious male identifies the society hostess with her possessions and charges her with bad taste, Kitty is put in the position of defending the very clutter she wants to "scrape off." She does not voice the fact that family duty prevented these excisions – '[i]f she moved a picture, "Where's Uncle Bill on the old cob?" her husband would say, and back it had to go again' (ibid.). Culpability, shame, heritage, demolition, preservation – a whole complex of anxieties and duties is compressed in this scene, typical of the 'sheer weight of accumulated things' in *The Years* and its record of 1880 to the "present-day" (Mao 78).

Both Douglas Mao (1998) and Steve Ellis (2007) argue that *The Years* is an explicit indictment of Victorian values, particularly its 'astounding eruption' of things and accumulation of details (Mao 80). Victorian homes are claustrophobic, crowded with kitsch, 'florid' objects like 'bamboo tables; velvet books with brass hinges; marble gladiators askew on the mantelpiece and innumerable pictures' (*Y*65-66). Characters often complain that 'there were too many little objects about' as clutter threatens to squeeze them out of frame and 'out of place' (*Y*6-7). As Thad Logan notes in *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* (2001), the Victorian middle-class home is infamous for its tendency to cover architectural features or larger furniture with plush upholstery, wallpaper, painted screens, antimacassars, counterpanes, mats, lambrequins, and curtains; individual objects with decorative scrolling, carvings, or tasselling; mantelpieces and occasional tables with ornaments and figurines. Critics like Roger Fry often discussed Victorian art and décor in terms of a disproportionate emphasis on surface veneer over "real," underlying form, the "tacked-on" application over structural fundamentals, style over utility. In *Roger Fry*, Woolf includes a description of a railway station restaurant:

> the window was half-filled with stained glass; the stained glass was covered by a lace curtain; the lace curtain was covered with patterns; the walls were covered with lincrusta walton; the tables were covered with ornate cotton cloths – in short, every object that his eye rested upon was covered with an "eczematous eruption" … Display was the end and explanation of it all. (188)

Victorian "covering up" is emphasised in Woolf's fiction as well, indicating hypocrisy, pomposity, and the stifling effects of patriarchy. In *Flush: A Biography* (1933), cluttered rooms – 'full of ottomans and carved mahogany; tables […] filigree ornaments […] curious objects […] and thick rich carpets' (15) – paralyse the Victorian woman writer, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Nero, Mrs Carlyle's dog, flings himself out of the window to escape '[t]he confinement, the crowd of little objects, the blackbeetles by night, the bluebottles by day, the lingering odours of mutton, the perpetual presence on the sideboard of bananas' (92). Nero's attempted suicide exemplifies the violence of the domestic environment, serving as sacrificial proxy for the artistic "death" of figures like Shakespeare's sister in *A Room of One's Own* (37-38) and Mrs Carlyle in "Character in Fiction" (38). Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Flush must find freedom in the minimalist décor of Casa Guidi, where '[t]here was no carpet and no fireplace… no sofas, no armchairs, no bookcases, no busts,' no homage to great men (*Flush* 73).

Victoriana, and the emotional debts it encapsulates, seems peculiarly durable, evading normal circuits of obsolescence and disposal. In *The Years*, Maggie and Sara Pargiter inherit their mother's 'great crimson chair with gilt claws,' an object that accompanies their declining fortune from 'hall' (123) to 'lodging-house room' (296), reappearing in 1891, 1907 (139), 1917 (274) and the Present Day (1937?) (297). This inherited fixture is occasionally 'freed from some surface hardness […] seemed porous; it seemed to radiate out some warmth, some glamour,' hospitably accommodating the war-torn, modernist subject (274). Another piece of Victoriana, a walrus pen-wipe, provokes greater resentment, perhaps because of its more obdurate solidity. Eleanor

thinks, 'that solid object might survive them all. If she threw it away it would still exist somewhere or other. But she never had thrown it away because it was part of other things – her mother for example…' (88). The pen-wipe and its maternal legacy has an offensive longevity. By the end of the novel, Eleanor rejoices because she 'had survived […] and the other thing, the solid object – she saw an ink-corroded walrus – had vanished' (405) as mysteriously as Benson's pincushion.[7] The sudden disappearance of formerly obstinate Victoriana enacts a fantasy of exorcism, as if historical and individual change were really as simple and definite as the flowering of a rose or the laying of an egg ("CF" *SE*38). For instance, in *Orlando*, a heap of 'heterogeneous and ill-assorted objects, piled higgledy-piggledy in a vast mound' seems 'so indecent, so hideous, and so monumental' a testament to Victorian values, that '[n]othing' 'could ever demolish it' (*O*134-135). Nevertheless, the Edwardian era dawns and 'top hats, widows' weeds, trumpets, telescopes, wreaths, all had vanished and left not a stain, not a puddle even, on the pavement' (ibid.172). This vanishing act is a kind of wish-fulfilment for those like Orlando, Flush, Kitty, and Eleanor, who feel the constraints of the Victorian influence, but it is plainly fantastical. "Scraping it all off" is not quite so easy.

As Susan Stewart argues, the Victorian and Edwardian desire to see 'the environment [as] an extension of the self' ultimately leads to the 'contradictions of genealogy and personality: harmony and disruption, sequence and combination, pattern and variation,' tradition and innovation (157). Since the interior decorator does not create but merely arranges her objects, this figure provokes anxieties about agency and dependency – for instance, Martin sees Kitty as a derivative of her ornamental heirlooms, conflating their aesthetic inadequacy with her own. Indeed, Kitty is no Lily Briscoe. *The Years* does not contain a "serious" artist, like Lily, who creates where Mrs Ramsay only combines. It does not offer a redemptive vision of art, nor

[7] In fact, the servant Crosby has rescued the walrus from a waste-paper basket and installs it on her mantelpiece (208).

enthusiasm about a future swept clean of the past. Rather, the characters of *The Years* live in houses that seem to conspire against their freedom, with objects lingering on long after the date of their obsolescence. As Kitty reflects, '[t]he years changed things; destroyed things' but they also 'heaped things up … here they were again' (*Y*258). She tries to locate herself in the present moment, repeating the talismanic word '*now*' four times, but '[p]ast and present' keep getting 'jumbled together' (ibid.259, original emphasis).

Thus, "scraping it all off" seems an apt metaphor for the modernist's feelings about Victoriana, the obsolescent but obdurate traces of the Victorian past. It matches Lytton Strachey's watchword for the new biography, his aim to 'expose' (6) rather than "parget," gloss or smooth over (Leaska 1978). However, while the presiding verbs of Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* and Woolf's *The Years* have a polemic quality, they also need a gloss. Strachey couches his '*j'expose*' within a purported quotation from a 'Master' – '*Je n'impose rien; je ne propose rien; j'expose*' or (in my translation) "I do not impose anything; I do not propose anything: I expose" – implying impartial deference to the facts and the authorities (6). Of course, this allusion is a hoax: the 'Master' is Strachey himself. More interesting is how the French verb 'expose' combines "unmasking" with "exhibiting" (Oxford Dictionaries 2020), a mixture of incisive demythologising and ceremonial display that aptly expresses the nature of *Eminent Victorians* as a museum of absurd but 'characteristic specimen[s]' like Cardinal Manning's Hat (5). Similarly, as Mitchell Leaska has observed (*Pargiters* xiv-xv), Woolf's "parget" conjures "whitewashing" but also the sensitive authorial hand, smoothing, rounding, and shaping the 'crude lumps and unmodelled masses' of her material (Woolf *Contemporary Writers* 93). The Pargiters, and other representatives of the Victorian era, are pargeters in the sense that they are liars, fakes, and 'fogies' who cannot even read their own portraits, '[w]as it Grandpapa on the cob, or was it Uncle William?' (ibid.252). Yet Kitty wonders whether the younger generation had 'any right to despise them?' (248). The Victorians remain a source of attraction, and modernists cannot resist

the desire to sort through their belongings. While both Woolf and Strachey denounced the tone of 'tedious panegyric' (Strachey 6) in Victorian biographies, 'draping the robes decorously over the recumbent figures of the dead,' they encouraged a critical museal practice that arranges a heap of Victoriana into the shapely forms of art (Woolf "New Biography" *SE*97, 100). As Laura Marcus explains, core tenets of the 'new biography' were 'form and unity' as well as 'the discovery of central motifs […] so that single aspects of the self or details of the life and person came to stand for or to explain the whole' (""New Biography"' 196). This metonymic method naturally entails simplification, selection, organisation, artifice – a kind of pargeting.

Typically, Woolf is exasperated by the mass of details in biographies and fiction. However, a little-known review of a two-volume edition of Horace Walpole's letters (1939) includes an interesting moment of "conversion." At first, this 'magnificent instalment' is scarcely readable because of its 'multitude of minor men and matters' (*E*6:171):

> But if the brain is at first inclined to jib […] [it] *finally becomes not merely a convert but a suppliant – asks not for less but for more and more*. Why, to take one instance only, is not the name of Cole's temporary cook's sister divulged?
>
> [This] is proof of the editor's triumph, justification of his system, and a complete vindication of his immense labour that he has convinced us […] that *somehow or other it all hangs together*. The only way to read letters is to read them thus stereoscopically. Horace is partly Cole; Cole is partly Horace; Cole's cook is partly Cole; therefore Horace Walpole is partly Cole's cook's sister. *Horace, the whole Horace, is made up of innumerable facts and reflections of facts. Each is infinitely minute; yet each is essential to the other*. (*E*6:171-172, emphases added)

Here, Woolf's criticism resonates with her remarks on Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells' 'immense skill and immense industry' in collecting trivial clutter ("MF" *SE*8). Nevertheless, while she was planning *The Years* in 1933, Woolf had pondered how to 'give ordinary waking Arnold Bennett life' 'the form of art' (*D*4:161) and *The Years* marks a recognition that material details are a rich biographical fund. In her review of Walpole's letters, Woolf explicitly records her transformation from an austere minimalist to a suppliant of facts, more akin to the narrator of H.G. Wells' *Tono-*

Bungay (1909), who 'want[s] to get in too all sorts of things […] even though they don't minister directly to my narrative at all' (9). We can read this alteration as a re-assessment of Bennett's materialism, as an investigation into its proper application. '[I]nnumerable facts' about Horace's life are necessary because Horace, like Jacob, is not discrete from (nor reducible to) 'the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history' (*JR*97). Details must be read 'stereoscopically,' with a double focus on details themselves as well as their relationships to one another and to the text's design.

The arrangement of select, representative details naturally raises the issue of symbolism that, as Freedgood's *Ideas in Things* demonstrates, is the bane of object-oriented readings. In "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" (1927) and "Phases of Fiction," Woolf argues that prose is naturally agglomerative ("Poetry" *E*4:436) but, besides 'amass[ing] details,' 'can [the novel] also select? Can it symbolize? Can it give us an epitome as well as an inventory?' ("Phases" *E*5:84). While Woolf's essays tend to enforce generic boundaries that are only loosely adhered to in her own fiction, she generally associates symbolism with poetry. This is evident in a conversation with W.B. Yeats, recorded in Woolf's diary. 'Poets can only write when they have symbols,' but they cannot accommodate modern objects like steamrollers because 'steam rollers are not covered in symbolism;' they are not 'embalmed by 30 centuries of association' (*D*3:330). Thus, Woolf gleefully writes, asymbolic or post-symbolic objects are 'left to the novelists –' (ibid.).[8] Secondly, Woolf seems to understand symbolism in terms of the "whole," 'the outline rather than the detail' ("Poetry" *E*4:435). In a much-cited letter (and perhaps it is suggestive that Roger Fry was her interlocutor), Woolf insists, 'I meant *nothing* by *The Lighthouse*. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I […] trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions – which they have done' (*L*3:385, original

[8] The term 'embalmed' recalls her critique of Edwardian materialists who expend undue effort 'embalming the whole' with realist detail ("MF" *SE*8-9).

emphasis). Symbolism can have a positive unifying force, but it works against the democratisation of interpretation that was so important to both Woolf and Fry, appealing to 'particular and definitely conditioned emotions' and values (*Fry* 183). The reductive, totalising nature of symbolism is at odds with the novel genre, the polysemy of the detail, and thirdly, the materiality of objects. In "Novels of E.M. Forster" (1927), Woolf again distinguishes between 'the real and the symbolical,' both as a matter of genre and as a matter of 'two different realities' (*E*4:496). Forster's task is 'to connect that actual thing with the meaning of the thing' but 'the change from realism to symbolism' is often jarring because of Forster's didacticism and commitment to 'photographic' representation (ibid.) (as we will see, art's commitment to morality and verisimilitude were also two of Roger Fry's pet peeves). Characteristically, Woolf opts for hybridisation: what we want is for 'a writing table [to be] a writing table, and a waste-paper basket a waste-paper basket' but 'at the same time' to feel 'that the thing we are looking at is lit up, and its depths revealed. It has not ceased to be itself by becoming something else' (ibid.495-496). These passages suggest that Woolf's dislike of symbolism, qualified by a desire for poetic depth and holism, was motivated by fidelity to the object *qua* object. Symbolism is linked to the writer's servitude to '30 centuries' of tradition (*D*3:330), the uneasy subordination of detail to form and, according to Gillian Beer, 'the means by which we make *things* serve the human' (*Arguing* 195, original emphasis).

Orlando, written at the same time as "Phases of Fiction" and "The New Biography," illuminates these issues. On the opening pages, the narrator refers Orlando's segmented body ('shapely legs, the handsome body, and the well-set shoulders') to the attention of 'those who like symbols, and have a turn for the deciphering of them' – happy is 'the biographer who records the life of such a one! Never need she vex herself, nor invoke the help of novelist or poet. From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after' (11-12). This linear career would commend itself to a biographer like Sidney Lee, who

emphasised the importance of action and event in *Principles of Biography* (1911). However, Orlando's biographer soon has to 'admit a thousand disagreeables which it is the aim of every good biographer to ignore,' 'that riot and confusion of the passions and emotions' (12). Even the simplest action or memory 'agitate[s] a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting,' so that brevity becomes the antithesis of biographical accuracy (48). Orlando's 'identity' is 'chop[ped] up small' through all the fragmented sights and sounds (s)he encounters (178). 'Hair, pastry, tobacco – of what odds and ends we are compounded … What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables!' (104). Cataloguing Orlando's constitutive parts is a losing game for (s)he is a species of clutter, un-assemble-able into a straight narrative (all puns intended).

As a writer, Orlando represents two tendencies in literature – metaphorical excess and an austere, symbolic economy. (S)he is prone to listing, calling Sasha 'a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds' (24), for '[e]very single thing' is 'cumbered with other matter like the lump of glass which, after a year at the bottom of the sea, is grown about with bones and dragon-flies, and coins and the tresses of drowned women. "Another metaphor by Jupiter!"' (60). Orlando grows sceptical about simile, not merely as an artificial style but as an ontological dilemma – are things many, as in experience, or do they have an integrity of their own? If the latter is true, then simile can be an act of violence to the thing itself, a point dramatized in the 'terror' Orlando produces during her stay with the gipsies. The gipsies see Orlando as 'someone who does not do the thing for the sake of doing; nor looks for looking's sake; here is someone who believes neither in sheep-skin nor basket; but sees (here they looked apprehensively about the tent) something else' (87).

> She likened the hills to ramparts, to the breasts of doves, and the flanks of kine. She compared the flowers to enamel and the turf to Turkey rugs worn thin. Trees were withered hags, and sheep were grey boulders. Everything, in fact, was something else. (86)

Thus, even before the Victorian era dawns, Orlando is complicit in verbal clutter, which transforms everything into "something else." *Orlando* depicts the affective, linguistic, and material backbone of the nineteenth-century in terms of clutter: 'furniture was muffled; walls and tables were covered; nothing was left bare' – 'glass cases [led] to artificial flowers, and artificial flowers to mantelpieces, and mantelpieces to pianofortes, and pianofortes to drawing-room ballads, and drawing-room ballads (skipping a stage or two) to innumerable little dogs, mats, and china ornaments' (132-133). Likewise, 'sentences swelled, adjectives multiplied, lyrics became epics, and little trifles that had been essays a column long were now encyclopaedias in ten or twenty volumes' (133). *Flush* also records the Victorian tendency to proliferation – 'on top of the wardrobe stood three busts; the chest of drawers was surmounted by a bookcase; the bookcase was pasted over with crimson merino; the washing-table had a coronal of shelves upon it; on top of the shelves that were on top of the washing-table stood two more busts' (16-17). This layered décor has the same effect as Orlando's metaphors for, '[n]othing in the room was itself; everything was something else' (ibid.17). Since he is a domesticated animal, Flush does not necessarily have a privileged connection to 'the naked soul of things' (87-88), but he presents a critical counterpoint to his writing mistress, Swinburne, and Shakespeare because he knows the world as 'only the dumb know. Not a single one of his myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words' (86-87). *Flush* illumines a salient pattern in Woolf's work, suggesting that 'words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words' (27).

Reacting against the encyclopaedic tendencies of Victorian writing, Orlando seeks to 'almost dispense with language' or to reduce it to symbolic names or phrases (*O*147). This abbreviated 'cypher language' (ibid.164) is meant to help the biographer/novelist 'get on with the text' (149) but it actually necessitates lengthy parenthetical explanations. How does the phrase "'the biscuits ran out'" 'stand for kissing a negress in the dark when one has just read Bishop Berkeley's philosophy for the tenth time' (unless this inter-racial liaison is permitted by Berkeley's

assertion that things only exist when perceived) (150)? Why does "'Shelmerdine'" 'signify' 'autumn crocuses' and "'Orlando'" mean 'bowing and swaying of bracken as if something were breaking through' or 'a ship in full sail' (151)? Why, in 'saying "Bonthrop,"' should the reader understand that 'she said in effect, "I'm dead"' or that 'the same word signified, mystically, separation and isolation and the disembodied pacing the deck of his brig in unfathomable seas' (150-151)? When the narrator states that the phrase "'Rattigan Glumphoboo" described a very complicated spiritual state – which if the reader puts all his intelligence at our service he may discover for himself,' the reader feels like the butt of a joke (164). While Woolf clearly caricatures a symbolic language – pushing it to bizarre extremes – this strategy also speaks to her desire to condense 'a flock of irrelevant ideas' and 'associations' into an image of 'truth' (98). These images are characteristically unspeakable or inexplicable, denoting homage to the mystery of things. If truth is too complex, variegated, and strange to be spoken in language, then maybe a cipher language *is* appropriate. As Woolf explains, the fragmented word "'Sh– p–re?'" is apt because 'when we speak names we deeply reverence […] we never speak them whole' (181). There is a wholeness in life and personality, but language cannot capture it. The cipher language gradually tends towards the complete cessation of speech. Woolf introduces a 'great blank' in the text, a space between paragraphs that nevertheless 'indicate[s] that the space is filled to repletion' (147).

Since metaphorical excess and symbolic minimalism are both problematic, and it is 'monstrously difficult' to turn 'Life' into 'Literature' (166), Woolf turns to the "radiant waste-paper basket" trope of "Novels of E.M. Forster." One of Orlando's final epiphanies combines a 'toy boat on the Serpentine' with 'Ecstasy' (167) – 'the thing one is looking at becomes, not itself, but another thing, which is bigger and more important and yet remains the same thing' (166-167). In place of simile and symbolism, Woolf selects an object that stimulates innumerable associations and then 'compose[s] them into something tolerable, comprehensible,' without

losing its own independence (187). Although objects act as vital repositories of the past, 'a platform, a dais' for memory (172), their value lies in the fact that they hold much more than human concerns. Although Orlando and her house are intimates – (s)he knows its 'sorrows and joys' and 'secrets' and the objects 'too, knew her' – the house has also gone 'past the touch and control of the living' (183-184). It has become like the empty dining room of *Between the Acts* (1941), 'a shell, singing of what was before time was' (33), 'frail as a shell, as iridescent and as empty,' the 'great wings of silence beat[ing] up and down the empty house' (*O*183-184). The house belongs to Orlando and to history but also has its own career. Placards ask "'[p]lease do not touch," which, though she had put them there herself, seemed to rebuke her' and all human intervention (184). The object is dual – narrating biographical meanings *and* emptied of narrative, "silent," "replete" (147).

The literary and yet non-literary nature of Woolf's objects leads us to consider her relationship with Roger Fry and his version of aesthetic formalism. For brevity's sake, I will focus on one aspect of this fruitful and provocative relationship: the objection to the "literariness" of artistic objects.[9] Some critics contest Fry's "influence" on Woolf, particularly his early arguments that life and art are separate currents, and that representationalism and allegory displaces attention from the formal values of art to issues of subject matter, morality, and verisimilitude (Fry *Vision* 33, 36-37). As Frances Spalding (1980), David Holt (1998) and Christopher Reed ("Through Formalism" 1992) note, Fry did not dogmatically assert that form was more important, or even distinguishable from, psychological meanings, emotions and practical life, and his theories evolved and changed throughout his career. Christopher Reed explains that 'Bloomsbury's later aesthetic theorising' 'attempt[ed] to reintegrate representation into the formalist paradigm, without sacrificing an ideal of purely aesthetic experience,' and that

[9] Extensive accounts of this relationship include Allen McLaurin's *The Echoes Enslaved* (1973) and Ann Banfield's *The Phantom Table* (2000).

it was this post-war incarnation that generated Woolf's support (ibid.24). Woolf's diary of 1918 suggests that she was in favour of non-narrative pictures being incorporated into fiction: 'I see why I like pictures; its [*sic*] as things that stir me to describe them … & I insist (for the sake of my aesthetic soul) that I don't want to read stories or emotions or anything of the kind into them; only pictures that appeal to my plastic sense of words make me want to have them for still life in my novel' (*D*1:168). This passage is tongue-in-cheek, parenthetically suggesting that Woolf had been brow-beaten into deciding between a language of plasticity and a language of emotions. As Reed suggests, she probably welcomed the more mature arguments of Fry's lesser-known essay, "The Double Nature of Painting" (1933). Here, Fry argues that formalism and representation need to be hybridised in order to engage with 'the real problem of painting – how is one to represent the outside world in such a way that it enters completely into the pictorial unity' (*Reader* 381)? In this piece, Fry continues to uphold Cézanne's emphasis on 'the object,' not 'as a vehicle of associated ideas but as a plastic volume,' but he also charts a third way between 'pure painting' and 'an entirely literary painting' – 'works which appeal to us by a plastic harmony […] *and* move us by the associated ideas of the objects represented' (385-386, emphasis added). Earlier still, in 1905, Fry had argued that 'the mere beauty of a pattern could be heightened if it were at once a pattern *and* a drama, that a chord of colour would vibrate more richly to the eye if at the same time it woke an echo in the imagination' (*Reader* 27-28, emphasis added). In "Walter Sickert: A Conversation" (1934), Woolf echoes Fry's image, suggesting that the novelist is 'striking two notes to make one chord, stimulating the eye of the mind and the eye of the body' (*E*6:43-44). The important thing is that these narrative, or literary, elements are consonant with the objects presented, rather than being "tacked on" through conventional symbolism.

Thus, we must be careful of ascribing Fry's criticism of "literary" objects or a "literary" taste for objects to pure formalism. Rather, Fry associates "literariness" with 'a flood of

commonplace sentiment and obvious narrative' (*Reader* 27), convention, display, snobbery, and a focus on 'merely decorative arabesques' rather than 'fundamental principles of structural design' (Woolf *Fry* 166, 223) – issues that Woolf herself broached in her Bennett essays. Of course, we bring our biography and imagination to our encounters with art, but the 'danger' of 'a strong personal rhythm' is that, 'unless [the artist] constantly strains it by the effort to make it take in new and *refractory* material[,] it becomes stereotyped' (ibid.228, added emphasis). Therefore, when Fry maintains that things are 'not literature… not biography,' it is because he wants to open himself up to the refractory 'power' of things themselves (227). Conversely, when he speaks of 'literary tyranny,' he is speaking of the demand that pictures should inculcate 'irreproachable morality' and adherence to cultural values (*Reader* 383). In Woolf's biography, one of Fry's most praiseworthy characteristics is the commitment to 'finding in things themselves the actual material of poetry and the fullest gratification for the demands of the imagination' (*Reader* 125). His struggle to free objects from "literary associations" demonstrates a commitment not 'to write prose poems, or to make the picture a text for a dissertation' but to write 'of pictures as if they were pictures, and nothing else,' forging 'for himself a language that wound itself into the heart of sensation' (Woolf *Fry* 106). 'Like a water-diviner,' Fry seeks to tap 'some hidden spring sunk beneath the incrustations that had blocked it … There it was – this reality,' expressed 'without a single adjective' (ibid.172). Texts like *Orlando* and "Phases of Fiction" suggest that Woolf would have found Fry's 'sacrilegious' approach to literature salutary, agreeing with his indictment of 'the writer's vice of distorting reality, of importing impure associations, of contaminating the stream with adjectives and metaphors' (ibid.).

As the final chapter of this thesis will argue, "there it was," is a distinctively Woolfian strategy for depicting things themselves without subjecting them to the 'deformity of words' (*Flush* 87). Woolf often praises painting for its ability to visualise and solidify, without falling into the pitfalls of language. Her essay on the 'literary painter,' Walter Sickert (1934), emphasises the

'zone of silence in the middle of every art' (*E*6:39). Sickert dispenses with 'the three or four hundred pages of compromise, evasion, understatement, overstatement, irrelevance and downright falsehood which we call biography' and 'then, cloaked in the divine gift of silence, he paints:' '[t]here it is – stated' (ibid.). A novelist would have difficulty telling the story of Sickert's *Nuit d'Amour* (c.1922) without falling 'into the depths of sentimentality,' but Sickert 'merely takes his brush and paints a tender green on the faded wallpaper … green is enough' (40). Sickert's pictures have plot; they are realist. He composes 'the very castors on the chairs and the fire-irons in the grate just as carefully as Turgenev,' and 'has something in common with Balzac, Gissing and the earlier Arnold Bennett'; he develops an intimacy between subjects and objects wherein '[t]he bed, the chest of drawers, the one picture and the vase on the mantelpiece are all expressive of their owner' (ibid.41). Yet his pictures do not only narrate action, real-world reference, and biography. They are 'complete' in a way that derives from 'combinations of line and colour,' 'the flash of the stuffed birds in the glass case, or the relation of the chest of drawers to the woman's body' (40, 45). The emotion derived from the picture is more than the sum of its narrative elements – it derives from the relationship between things. Carefully arranged, 'the red petticoat, the yellow chest of drawers' 'make us feel something that had nothing to do with the story,' 'that cannot be expressed in words' (45). This unspeakable meaning is concentrated in 'a scooped-out space filled curiously with the curves of fiddles, bowler hats, and shirt fronts converging into a pattern with a lemon-coloured splash in the centre' (45). The clutter surrounding Sickert's luminous centre resonates with *Jacob's Room*, which offers us a myriad of things enclosing a central 'vacancy' (*JR*216).

Woolf also adopts Sickert's biographical tactics for *Roger Fry*, selecting specific objects or scenes that will exhibit Fry's personality as effectively and economically as the green wallpaper of *Nuit d'Amour*. There are an abundance of telling moments, 'the play of light on the leaves of the elm tree,' 'his father skating,' 'Pierpont Morgan,' 'buying pictures in Italy,' a poppy – but Woolf is

quick to remind us that, just as in *Jacob's Room*, 'the central figure remained vague' (290). While 'we can single out some of the processes that went to the making of' Roger Fry, '[i]t must always be kept in mind that such analysis halts before the ultimate concrete reality of a work of art' or a personality (296). Just as Roger Fry halted before a work by Cézanne – 'reason could penetrate no further […] but what he saw *was there*' (263, emphasis added) – Woolf's biographical subject is a source of endless mystery and profound *thereness*.

Although 'the critic of Roger Fry' cannot hope to do justice to her subject – she 'may well drop the stick to the ground and give up pointing' (296) – there are many things to point to in Fry's history, especially the cluttered milieu that surrounds the 'scooped-out' centre of biography ("Sickert" *E*6:45). Fry admitted that his 'museum appetite' was 'a robust one' and Woolf repeatedly pictures his 'littered' work-room, filled with 'paintings and carvings, Italian cabinets and Chippendale chairs, blue Persian plates, delicately glazed, and rough yellow peasant pottery … [e]very sort of style and object seemed to be mixed, but harmoniously' (*Fry* 163, see also 269-270). 'Pictures,' 'peasant pots' and 'Broussa handkerchiefs' accumulated until they "'threatened to choke my room entirely'" (174). During World War I, Fry lives in 'an untidy room' that encapsulates the tensions between the real, 'hurried and distracted life' and 'the still life' of art (214). Fry's charwoman, 'Mrs Filmer,' 'had obeyed the command on the placard "Do not touch'" (215).

> Rows of dusty medicine bottles stood on the mantelpiece; frying pans were mixed with palettes; some plates held salad, others scrapings of congealed paint. The floor was strewn with papers. There were the pots he was making, there were samples of stuffs and designs for the Omega. But on the table, protected by its placard, was the still life – those symbols of detachment, those tokens of a spiritual reality immune from destruction, the immortal apples, the eternal eggs. (ibid.)

Nothing but a placard, like the one in Orlando's house, separates the accumulations of real life – messy, incongruous, chaotic – from the still life. Woolf does not explain how Fry's still life was

arranged, and there is little of formal unity or design in this messy room. The emphasis is rather on the protective attitude towards objects – this mess should remain free from the tidying hands of Mrs Filmer and the traditional biographer – and on Fry's delight in clutter. Whereas, in 1917, Fry had controversially argued that "life" demanded 'responsive action,' while "art" only required 'disinterested intensity of contemplation' (*Vision* 29-33), Woolf merges responsiveness and contemplation into an image of clutter that is at once part of everyday life and 'detached from the deformation which is possession' (*Fry* 214). Again, vibrational aesthetics take centre-stage – Fry responds 'to the whole vibration' of daily life but 'at the centre of that vibration was a gravity and a stillness,' a rapt attention to objects (ibid.297).

This chapter has argued that clutter provided Woolf with a category for thinking through our relationships with things, particularly the things of the Victorian past. As Ruth Hoberman argues in "Aesthetic Taste, Kitsch, and *The Years*" (2005), Woolf's approach to Victoriana is 'distanced, ironized, but also resonant with loss and longing' (78-79). Woolf recuperates the clutter of Edwardian fiction to frame the elusive biographical centre, suggesting that the subject is formed through association with things but that things are not reducible to their narrative associations. In her hands, clutter acts as a formidable challenge to subject/object intimacy but it also formulates a new relationship to things, not based upon reading and interpretation but upon an embodied, quivering trance that suspends epistemological endeavour. Clutter also has aesthetic implications, raising questions of realist convention, symbolism, the detail and its relationship to the whole, and the connections between life and art. While Woolf always emphasised the unity and holism of art, an analysis of clutter reveals the aesthetic of 'promiscuous associativeness' that Jane Goldman identifies in her work, an aesthetic that discovers a pattern in the chaotic fragments of experience (41). Finally, because clutter only circumstantially "belongs" to the subject, outlasting and foiling her at every turn, it is able to hint

at other worlds: the world of the past and the world of art, which bestows permanence on the transient disjecta of history.

Chapter 2

'strange oscillations': Sympathy with Objects

The image of Roger Fry, 'plunging his eyes into [objects] as if he were a humming-bird hawk-moth hanging over a flower, quivering yet still,' delineates a characteristic *mise-en-scène* of attention in Virginia Woolf's work (*Fry* 152). In the previous chapter, I have contrasted this figure of detached yet concentrated attention with the Edwardians' attention to domestic objects, read as material biographies. Now, it is useful to turn to other contemporaneous figures in philosophy and psychoaesthetics who sought to develop a type of attention based on '*sympathy*[,] by which one is transported into the interior of an object' (Bergson *Creative Mind* 173, original emphasis). Although sympathy has been primarily theorised as an interpersonal phenomenon, in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century many continental theorists re-formulated sympathy – or empathy – as an attentional posture specifically directed towards objects.[1] Most notably, Theodor Lipps and Henri Bergson used the terms "empathy" and "sympathy" to explain the mental and kinaesthetic reciprocity between self and inanimate world, suggesting that objects are "vitalised" by the percipient's sympathetic activity.

As Vernon Lee introduced the concept of empathy to the Anglophone literary sphere in *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1912) and *The Beautiful* (1913), she

[1] The idea of empathy – or "feeling into" – can be found in works as early as Novalis' *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1802). Key empathy theorists include Heinrich Wölfflin and Johannes Volkelt, but this chapter focuses on Theodor Lipps and Henri Bergson as well-known thinkers in the British avant-garde scene. "Empathy" first gained currency in the Anglophone world when Edward Titchener translated Theodor Lipps' work into English (1909), coining "empathy" to reflect *Einfühlung*'s etymological mirroring of *Mitfühlung*, the German word for "sympathy." While critics like Rae Greiner (2011), Timothy Vincent (2012), and Meghan Marie Hammond (2014) argue that the lexical shift from "sympathy" to "empathy" signals a historic transition and crucial conceptual differences, others question whether "empathy" can be considered properly independent from "sympathy" (Wispe 1987, Jahoda 2005, Miller 2012). Lipps and Vernon Lee use the terms interchangeably; Bergson's description of intuition as sympathy is clearly indebted to Vischer and Lipps' empathy, but he does not adopt their term. Since Woolf uses "sympathy," I mainly use the phrase "subject/object sympathy". In what follows, I demonstrate the significant overlap between sympathetic and empathic procedures, while remaining sensitive to context and the turn-of-the-century commitment to developing a term that analogises our relation to subjects *and* objects.

emphasised that, in Lipps' words, empathy 'brings outer things closer to us, makes them more intimate and in so far more seemingly intelligible' ("Aesthetische Einfühlung" qtd. in *Beauty and Ugliness* 44). As such, the modern formulation of empathy corresponds to the desire for intimacy I have been treating thus far in regard to the Edwardian domestic interior, as well as to Romantic experiments with 'the commensurateness of mind and nature,' 'feeling one's way, so to speak, into' natural objects (Garber 201).[2] However, whatever intimacy with things empathy might potentially disclose, I will suggest (in accordance with Justine McCarthy [2000]) that empathy can also give rise to an 'unremitting solipsism' (McCarthy 28), the idea that 'our veritable intellectual and moral life, like our veritable physical life, takes place in isolation' (Lee *Althea* 115). In this passage, which echoes her friend Walter Pater's conclusion to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Vernon Lee demonstrates her aestheticist credentials which, as the following chapter will show, can be traced back to the eighteenth-century empiricist view of objects.[3] In contrast to Lee's promotion of empathy, T.E. Hulme adopted the arguments of Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908) to castigate the empathic world-view as romantic, egoistic sentimentality. Lipps and Bergson had proposed 'an intimate feeling towards the world' that Hulme would eventually reject, shifting his attention to how objects equally disclose 'the disharmony or separation between man and nature' (*Collected Writings* 277, 274).[4] Lee's positive endorsement and Hulme's negative response are the two most important conduits for British modernism's mediated receipt of continental empathy.

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[2] See Frederick Garber's "Nature and the Romantic Mind" (1977) and Richard Eldridge's *The Persistence of Romanticism* (2001).

[3] Angela Leighton (2000) and Laurel Brake (2006) note that Pater was a crucial referent for Lee's thought. Although Kirsty Martin (2013) and Emily Harrington (2006) argue that Lee's account of empathy diverges from Pater's somewhat solipsistic aesthetics, I suggest that she retained Pater's emphasis on our ineradicable subjectivism, a conviction derived from his study of eighteenth-century empiricism (see Hext [2013], Matz [2001] and Inman [1981]).

[4] Since Karen Csengeri's *The Collected Writings of T.E Hulme* (1994) most faithfully dates the evolution of Hulme's thought (Kimball 1997), all quotations will be taken from this edition except for "Plan for a Book on Modern Theories of Art" (not included).

Woolf does not sit easily in the aestheticist tradition of Lee or the reactionary tradition of Hulme (although his influence on her close friend, T.S. Eliot, is readily detectable).[5] Kristin Mahoney (2013), Patricia Pulham and Catherine Maxwell (2006) and Christa Zorn (2003) explain that Lee – like the Edwardian triumvirate discussed in the previous chapter – has been unduly dismissed from modernist genealogies, even though her long, innovative career paralleled that of many modernists. While Woolf has clear, if vexed, ties to aestheticism and belonged to some of the same social and intellectual circles as Lee, she frequently criticised Lee's 'egotistical diversions' ("Sentimental Traveller" *E*1:157). On the other hand, although Woolf does not comment on Hulme's writings, these modernists seem temperamentally and intellectually opposed to one another. Hulme has become the standard-bearer for a particularly hard, masculine ethic of modernist impersonality, providing a challenge for scholars like Kirsty Martin, who seek to demonstrate 'that emotion matters to modernism' (12).[6] This chapter will argue that, despite Woolf's seeming indifference to both Lee and Hulme, these authors drew out the ramifications of subject/object sympathy that would prove most fruitful for her work. Lee and Hulme were important critics and interlocutors of Lipps and Bergson, and we will see that Woolf's writing responds to these four thinkers in hitherto neglected ways. Secondly, these authors helped to create the purported gulf between empathy and impersonality, a distinction that proved a provocative catalyst for modernist theories of affect. I wish to underscore the extent to which debates about empathy and impersonality were, in fact, debates about the affective character of our relationship to objects (particularly at the tacit, physiological level), the affects "appropriate" to this relationship, and the relative agency of subjects and objects. These three points are foregrounded in my discussion of what sympathy and impersonality mean for Woolf. Following Eve Sorum's recent study *Modernist Empathy* (2019), I will suggest that

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[5] See Beasley (2007), Comentale and Gąsiorek (2006), and Levenson (1984) for a discussion of Hulme's impact on Eliot.

[6] For other studies of modernism and emotion, see *Modernism and Affect* (ed. Taylor 2015), "New Feelings: Modernism, Intimacy, and Emotion" (Sim & Vickery 2014), *Affective Mapping* (Flatley 2009), and *Feeling Modern* (Nieland 2008).

sympathy and impersonality are not simply dichotomous but dialogic and should be considered in tandem. Finally, my re-reading of Woolf's pleas for impersonality will show that they were often intended as a defence of the object itself, and a critique of 'anthropomorphic aesthetics' (Lee *Beauty and Ugliness* 1). In exploring how Woolf responds to complex traditions of subject/object sympathy – as presented by Lipps, Lee, Bergson, and Hulme – I hope to unravel their different implications for subjectivity, creativity, and social life.

As an affective experience and an ethical imperative, sympathy is a difficult concept to apply to objects because many models of sympathy require a mutual sentience, if not sapience, that objects patently lack. Sympathy's first two sets of synonyms – including affinity, mutual influence or affect, attraction, consonance, harmony, likeness, and conformity – suggest some lines along which subject/object sympathy might proceed. However, these affiliations have become oblique in contemporary usage and sympathy with objects becomes an altogether thornier issue when sympathy is defined by its third, popular sense: the capacity to enter into or share the feelings of another. This interpersonal model was famously formulated in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), an elaboration of David Hume's discussion of sympathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1738-1740). Focusing on sympathy's psychological roots and social benefits, Smith posits that when the object meets the sympathiser's standards of what is 'just and proper and suitable' (54), he is able to 'enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him' (46). The same interpersonal emphasis enters the literary sphere through George Eliot's dictum that writers should encourage 'active participation in the joys and sorrows of our fellow-men' ("Worldliness and Other-Worldliness" 63) and 'call forth tolerant judgment, pity and sympathy' (*Letters* 229). These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century legacies shaped a popular understanding of sympathy as deeply humane; it is both personal and social, both a natural, spontaneous overflow of emotion and an act of volition that can be cultivated into civic virtue.

Sympathy that is predicated on the interpersonal – through notions of agency, participation, and mutual responsiveness – has obvious moral clout. However, both sympathy and empathy have been seen to reinforce the authoritative subject who (in the fashion of Locke) can sympathise with others on the basis of their recognisability as 'eventual equals' with, at least, latent capacities for agency (Hemmings 213). In her discussion of empathy with women and ethnic categories that are deemed less-than- or "other-subjects", Clare Hemmings points out that the one who is empathised with 'must be understood to have some measure of self-possession or autonomy in order that empathic engagement not be a transfer of the subject's own qualities (and hence bad empathy)' (205). The one sympathised with must be minimally agentic and discrete, or else empathy loses its ethical value. Yet Hemmings is critical of the Western 'fetishization of agency,' arguing that empathy always depends on tacit 'relations of recognition:' while another's agency always raises the possibility of alterity, the other must be agentic in a way that recognisably approximates how *I* am agentic, or else empathy falters (211, 213). Consequently, the "good" or "bad" empathy distinction is insecure because empathy always involves some degree of training, domesticating or, in Leslie Stephen's words, 'annex[ing] your consciousness' to a common domain (*Science* 237). Applying Hemmings' logic to our purposes, we must ask whether an ethical subject/object sympathy would require us to reconceptualise objects as minimal or germinal subjects, thinly or covertly agentic?

If so, how might this conception of objects avoid the charge of facile sentiment, becoming yet another category of what Scott Herring calls 'an aberrant relationship with […] things' (6)? When speaking of "the life of things" and, more radically, "communicating with objects," I must admit that I feel the defensive 'nervousness' Stanley Cavell mentions in *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1988), as if I were endorsing the 'discredited mysteries of animism' oft associated with Romanticism (68, 45). Although animism aligns with the post-humanist and object-oriented aims of this thesis, it is hard to fully endorse animism as

something other than projection, a live being's desire to see liveness everywhere. 'But,' as Cavell goes on to ask, 'in favor of what is [animism] to be overcome' (71)? If overcoming animism was to say that objects were dead or mechanical, I would not want to make that assertion. I suspect that nervousness about animism often has to do with guilt about enlivening the world through sentimental projection or "killing it off" through scepticism. There's a certain self-aggrandizement implied in saying that I have the power to do either, but this guilt also implies my stake in the world, my responsibility for its "liveness" or "deadness." As Cavell suggests, animism trades off with scepticism about the vital existence of objects and persons, a transaction that often means trading in 'one form of craziness for another' (Cavell *In Quest* 55). These uncomfortable bargains are especially visible in discussions of subject/object sympathy. To take a theme from Cavell's work, it is as hard to *live* or *say* our animism as to live or say our scepticism about the independent existence of the material world (the focus of the following chapter).

Although animism is skittish – its appearances in literature and criticism are rarely substantial and un-ironic – some contemporary theorists find an ethical value in animism. Jane Bennett's seminal work *Vibrant Matter* (2010) advocates a strategic, methodological 'naiveté;' we might 'revisit and become temporarily infected by' disreputable ideas like animism in order to investigate "thing-power" (18). She uses animistic language to argue that objects have 'energetic vitality,' not 'dead stuff' but 'live presence[s]' that powerfully and productively shape human life (5). Sharing Bennett's post-humanist focus, Jay Bernstein argues that animism can be the signature of an ethics based on human finitude (2006). Animism is 'an acknowledgment of a thing's meaning in excess of our meaning it, and […] *paradigmatic* of this excess is a thing's being alive, its having a life that is its own' (261, original emphasis). Further, Avery Gordon argues that animism can decentre and subvert the "discrete" subject, showing how identity is constructed by encountering and internalising "the outside" (1997). Animism and social constructivism propose analogous views of the subject: there are multiple "'someone'" or "something" "elses" *unknown to*

us … taking residence within us, without our full permission, making us who we are yet alien to ourselves' (ibid.48, original emphasis).

These critics endorse a qualified, strategic, or thin animism, but I feel a little uncomfortable about "strategizing" animism, as Bennett suggests. Surely the only thing that makes animism meaningfully different from general idiomatic, or poetic forms of anthropomorphism is the level of sincerity, or literal-mindedness, with which we apply the idea? As we will see, empathy theorists like Vernon Lee would argue that some degree of animism is physically, psychologically, and idiomatically hard-wired into the human, but the proclivity to see human attributes in objects is a far cry from believing that they have a life in and of themselves. When William Wordsworth says that daffodils toss 'their heads in sprightly dance' (*Poetical Works* 3:6), this statement seems quite natural – few readers would feel that they are being asked to say yes or no to animism. It would be jarring to read the flower's dance as a literal proposition (flowers are alive and can make rhythmic, concerted movements) or as totally metaphoric (flowers are not alive and this dance is simply a rhythm imposed by the viewer). The poet's feeling of intimacy with this 'jocund company' (ibid.) depends on an easy blurring of the literal and figural; it is accessible because we often attribute emotional or intentional qualities to objects and animism proper has little or nothing to do with such statements. Wordsworth's language is interpretable as animism, but has the poet said (or have *we* read) more than he means? Is it more accurate to read such passages as a culturally and linguistically normalised mode of non-literal thinking than as a real flirtation with animism? On the other hand, there seems to be something about "sincere" animism that tends to extremes of intimacy or horror. Characteristically, intimations of animism seem to be caught between hostility and sentimentalism, Romantic legacies or the Freudian uncanny. Contrast, for instance, Gordon's sinister description of animism as 'the idea that everything in the world outside yourself is alive, perhaps with designs on you, clearly capable of quietly creeping in or noisily invading' you (48) with William

Wordsworth's far happier (if less committed) animism and his 'quiet sympathies with things' (*Wordsworth* 678; see Miall 2011 and Fischer 1988). Consequently, the difficulty of animism seems to lie in its idiomatic inevitability and in the extravagances that arise from taking animism seriously. It is both hard to *say* and *avoid saying* our animism.

Woolf is particularly sensitive to these factors. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929) is an exercise in sympathy, as the narrator tries to 'put [her]self in [Isabella's] shoes,' 'penetrat[ing] a little farther into her being' and into the 'nocturnal' life of objects, seeing the 'things that never happen […] if someone is looking' (*CSF*224, 221). She spends considerable time analogising the mystery of things and the mystery of human beings: a 'room' might have 'passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being' and Isabella too 'was suffused, like the room again, with a cloud of some profound knowledge' (ibid.221, 225). Yet "'prizing'" into the life of things or persons demonstrates that there is simply 'nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. … As for her letters, they were all bills' (225). This non-epiphanic conclusion seems to point both ways: if Isabella is simply a bitter old woman, then her objects are simply objects. Woolf suggests that, as I have mentioned earlier, there is a certain misanthropic element to "overcoming animism" – when we deny the inner life of things, we seem to be denying the inner life of other people. She also highlights the ways that the artist's sympathetic imagination might be responsible for this "deadening" effect on the world.

If sentimentalism dogs animism, this problem is but compounded for the female writer because, as Jessica Feldman (2002), Peter Nicholls (1995) and Suzanne Clark (1991) note, the connection between sentimentalism and femininity runs deep (2002). Woolf was keenly alive to the woman writer's fear 'of being called "sentimental"' (*AROO*61) and often wrote 'in dread of "sentimentality"' (*D*3:110, also 36). She records her experience of reading a paper for the Memoir Club: "'Oh but why did I read this egotistic sentimental trash!" That was my cry… I

couldn't help figuring a kind of uncomfortable boredom on the part of the males; to whose genial cheerful sense my revelations were at once mawkish & distasteful' (*D*2:26). We may be tempted to read this passage as an example of self-censorship: Woolf internalises the male gaze and disowns her feelings as 'distasteful' sentiment. However, the gendered stigma attached to displays of emotion does not account for all of the problem. Woolf repeatedly conflates sentiment with egoism, exemplifying Michael Bell's argument that the 'attack on sentimentality' was launched with special ferocity in the modernist period to secure 'an implicit criterion of true feeling,' to cordon off substantial passion from mere 'mawkish self-indulgence' (1-2).

Woolf is equally reluctant to endorse sympathy because she believed that (masculinised) egoism is the foundation of (feminised) sympathy and produces skewed and inauthentic gender relations. In "Reminiscences," an early memoir (begun in 1907), Woolf explains that the Victorian home depends on women's 'infinite consideration for others, [her] silence with respect to her own feelings' (*MOB*52). This demand for sympathy creates 'an atmosphere all choked with too luxuriant feelings, so that one had at times a physical need of ruthless barbarism,' a need to 'brush aside all our curiously conventional relationships' and see them 'bathed in an impersonal light' (ibid.53). The most famous example of Woolf's association of sympathy and egoism can be found in the character of the Victorian patriarch, Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), 'the egotistical man, [who] plunged and smote, demanding sympathy' (34). That same year, in her essay "Two Women" (1927), Woolf criticised the female writer's adoption of sympathy as a literary ethic because it produces a sentimental literature that subscribes to the patriarchal idea that "'the essentials of a woman's being are *that they are supported by, and they minister to, men*'" (*E*4:420, original emphases). She argues that, because women have been 'trained' in 'unquenchable sympathy,' their writing is rife with "'little feminine dodges'" like 'sweetness, unselfishness, [and] sympathy,' tending 'to produce a hothouse atmosphere' in which all emotions are 'discharged solely on personal relations' (ibid.421-423). Woolf expands on this

point in "Professions for Women" (1931) and, after killing the epitome of feminine sympathy, the 'Angel in the House,' 'what remained was a simple and common object – a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot,' a subject and an object in a less sympathetic, but apparently more egalitarian relationship (*SE*142). Finally, Woolf's most extensive discussion of sympathy, "On Being Ill" (1930) links sympathy with egoism writ large – anthropocentrism. She states, 'sympathy we cannot have,' for sympathy promotes an 'illusion of a world so shaped that it echoes every groan of human beings,' whereas the world is full of objects that have 'nothing to do with human pleasure or profit' (*SE*103). After critiquing sympathy, Woolf famously records her pleasure in a lightly personified flower that, 'divinely heartless,' 'rebuffs the moon' (ibid.105). '[I]t is in their indifference that they are comforting' (ibid.). An impersonal relationship to autonomous, indifferent objects emerges as an alternative to the gendered problem of sympathy.

Peter Nicholls has associated modernist impersonality and anti-sentimentalism with virulent masculinity as well as two other trends – a desire for 'strong and authoritative versions of the self' and a hard, object-centred aesthetic (193). For Nicholls, this aesthetic is defensive, serving to inoculate the modernist self against 'the turbulent movements of desire by discovering that desire as the property of some external object' (194). In his account, the modernist preference for hard, "indifferent," solid objects supports an idea of 'the self as closed, autonomous and antagonistic' but one that simultaneously eschews 'any form of romantic individualism' or 'notions of authenticity and spontaneity' (251). Nicholls raises two difficulties that will be examined in this chapter. Firstly, there is a certain contradiction in Nicholls' effort to square modernists' insistence on autonomy with their patent recognition that the self is not parthenogenetic, but is rather born out of cultural, historical, and embodied contexts. Can we, as Charles Altieri advises, rethink how autonomy – 'the most maligned of modernist principles' ("Modernist Claims" 2) – interacts with their ideas about creativity and subjectification? Secondly, it is not necessarily self-evident that an object-centric aesthetic serves to defuse 'the

turbulent movements of desire' and protect the "closed" subject (Nicholls 194, 251). Rather, being with objects and, more radically, the possibility of "becoming-object" reframes issues of power, desire, and agency by challenging the intentional structure of consciousness and showing how it is *subject to* the material field in ways that are both disturbing and productive.

The works of Charles Altieri, Rochelle Rives, and Anthony Cuda are essential to this chapter, suggesting that modernist impersonality is not a claim for the subject's "immunity" but an exploration of how the subject is constructed through relations with objects. Firstly, Charles Altieri has argued that '[i]mpersonality' can be understood as an artistic determination to 'renounce the pleasures of imaginary identification in favor of building personal energies in consort with how an object or an objective force might yield possibilities of feeling' ("Modernist Claims" 2). The focus here is not on the subject's empathic manoeuvres but on the *object*'s affordances. Affordances, or an object's "invitation character," illuminate how objects are always already pregnant with meanings, affective possibilities, and phenomenological significances, besides the ones that are idiosyncratically or culturally assigned to them. Impersonality can be understood as a disposition, a way of resonating with, responding to, and negotiating the solicitations of a material field without authoritative or instrumental intent. Similarly, Rochelle Rives' *Modernist Impersonalities* (2012) suggests that impersonality is a 'move away from the person toward a "world," a move that 'occasioned its own sense of anxiety about the potential loss of personal authority' (4). In this chapter I suggest that, for Woolf, this anxiety is specifically related to objects, as she explicates the subtext of automatism that runs throughout Lipps' and Bergson's discussions of subject/object sympathy. For Woolf, objects have a normative function, fostering a perilous automatism in the subject by inculcating certain, unconscious modes of mental and physical comportment and concretizing social conventions. Our intimacy with objects – a cornerstone of subject/object sympathy – and our responsiveness to their affordances can foster a readymade language that threatens the integrity of the writing subject

from within. On the other hand, unconscious responsiveness can be a vital resource, as objects' affordances provide the raw materials of art. Consequently, subject/object sympathy, and the unreflective responsiveness it implies, is double-edged. This recognition guides Anthony Cuda's perceptive study, *The Passions of Modernism* (2010). Cuda utilises "'passion" (in the broadest sense of the word, something which "moves" us or causes us to suffer),' to describe the modernist fascination with passivity, an experience of responsiveness to material stimuli 'that transforms the autonomous mind into something like an automatic object' (4). Like *The Passions of Modernism*, this chapter focuses on the pleasures and vulnerabilities of *being moved* by objects, elaborating on the gendered aspects of such experiences and their relation to habit and attention.

The unconscious responsiveness I have mentioned may seem incompatible with the idea of attention, especially when attention is conceptualised as a mental spotlight, instrumentally focused on particular aspects of the environment and judicially intervening in 'the noisiness of our surroundings' (Külpe 215; see also Dewey 1886). However, as Jonathan Crary explains in *Suspensions of Perception* (1999), attention and the "disintegration" of attention (distraction and states of trance, reverie, absorption, and even autohypnosis) exist 'on a single continuum,' 'imperceptibly mutat[ing]' into one another in 'a dynamic process' (47). Attention can indicate the '*voluntary* activity of the subject' but it also includes the abeyance of the ego, or a pre-egoic physiological and affective openness, blurring the lines between intentional focus and 'automatic or involuntary states' (42, original emphasis). Thus, attention can be considered as a rhythm or a hum – where objects unobtrusively fill the attentional field – inasmuch as it can be considered a snap or a crash – when objects emerge from their tacit character and behave in obtrusive ways.

In this chapter, I focus on the attentional mode that Woolf called 'non-being' (*MOB*79). For Woolf, 'non-being' is entrenched in the ordinary domestic milieu, signalling the life 'not lived consciously … the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing;

cooking dinner; bookbinding' (ibid.). As Peter Dula has argued, the ordinary is 'a mode of attention… a kind of relationship' that 'is first[ly] about presentness' (13,18). Household objects constitute a realm of the immediate that is so pervasive and anodyne that we scarcely realise how it modifies our behaviour, tacitly articulating a social code that structures our physical comportment. This habitus, and our habituated attention to it, resonates with Lauren Berlant's discussion of intimacy: it depends on 'taken-for-grantedness' and 'flowing reiteration,' 'tacit fantasies, tacit rules and tacit obligations' (286-287). Domestic objects operate as cultural givens, resting in and giving rise to the security of a self-evidence that hardly needs to be spoken.

Nevertheless, the domestic object is not simply the guarantor of ontological security but illumines what Stanley Cavell has called 'the surrealism of the habitual' (*In Quest* 154). Woolf emphasises this dimension by making jarring distinctions between things that are "unreal" and things that are "real." From *The Voyage Out* (1915) to *Roger Fry* (1940), objects like hats and tablecloths are designated (albeit never programmatically) 'half-phantoms,' making adherents or 'disbeliever[s]' of Woolf's characters ("Mark" *CSF*86). Although these lists can seem erratic, I suggest that this distinction rests upon a difference between 'things in themselves' (*AROO*84) and objects that are "unreal" because they generate automatic adherence to social conventions. This approach to the ordinary, household milieu shows that for Woolf – and, according to Peter Dula, Stanley Cavell – the ordinary is not a 'place where skepticism cannot take hold' but 'a place where skepticism is produced and confronted' (20). One of Cavell's primary themes is this intimacy between scepticism and the ordinary. He argues that the ordinary is inherently linked to a view of our present world 'as limited, as implying a world elsewhere … an elsewhere, or an otherwise, which for better or for worse, its inhabitants are drawn to inhabit' (*In Quest* 149), a suggestion that neatly aligns with Rochelle Rives' discussion of impersonality as a move to another world. The following chapter will explore material objects scepticism as a philosophical problem in Woolf's oeuvre but now we will turn to the act of sympathy and consider its efficacy

as a route into that "elsewhere", or "otherwise," *par excellence* – the object. Can sympathy help us inhabit it?

'Have we swallowed the vase! or is it the vase that has swallowed us!'[7]

While the subject/object dynamic has an indirect and complicated place in most structures of sympathy, it becomes prominent in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century continental theories of empathy or *Einfühlung* (literally, "to feel into"). Vincent Sherry argues that '[i]n romantic and postromantic poetics no experience figures more largely than the act of empathy' (11). Andrea Pinnotti adds that, in conjunction with Romanticism, eighteenth-century British philosophy is an important antecedent for the 'golden age of empathy' (c.1895-1905) (94).[8] The famous eighteenth-century empiricist David Hume asserted that the 'passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts' (604), an idea echoed by Robert Vischer, Theodor Lipps, and Henri Bergson, with one fundamental modification – the pronounced inclusion of the object into sympathetic schema. Correspondence and contagion are no longer limited to discussions of subject/subject sympathy; rather, empathy provides a model for explaining the synchronisation of subject and object. In our contemporary period, philosophers, psychologists, neuro-scientists and literary critics have embraced early twentieth-century empathy as a prescient model of embodied affectivity and enactive or distributed cognition. Cognitive scientists David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese influentially suggested that the early theorisation of empathy tapped into the fact – now supported by neuroscientific research – that we are biologically geared towards 'experiential understanding of objects and the inner world of others'

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[7] Anstruther-Thomson, *Art & Man* 151 (abbreviated)

[8] One of the most prominent empathy theorists, Theodor Lipps, translated Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* into German (1895-1906). Peter Rosan (2014) and Peter Hacker (2017) suggest that Humean sympathy is remarkably similar to Lippsian empathy and can be considered its progenitor, especially influencing Lipps' approach to other minds and the ontological status of objects.

(198). For many theorists, empathy discloses the 'subject's bodily directedness towards the valences and affective affordances of a given situation:' it provides an account of subjectivity as relational and embodied, resonating with others and with objects to the extent that there 'is no strict separation between inner and outer' (Fuchs & Koch 4, 6). Cutting across dichotomies of object and subject, outer and inner, matter and mind, empathy has links to later phenomenological theories, especially those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who posits the subject's embeddedness in, and co-extension with, material environments (phenomenology will be discussed further in the following chapter). It would seem that empathy promotes the object's agency, investigating how objects can solicit affection and affect bodies, brains, and cultures.

However, subject/object empathy does not *necessarily* imply that objects are animate or agentic. As Pinnotti explains, on one hand empathy theorists were motivated by the question of how 'a mere object […] appears nevertheless to the subject as if it were expressive of a soul, a character, or a personality, of its own life … how can a mere object present itself as if it were a subject?' (94). Such questions imply that objects have an independent vitality approximating that of subjects but, as Sherry points out, empathy can also be defined as simple projection wherein one's 'inner vitalist core' acts as a 'surge [that] carries its possessor into a feeling of contact with nature or objects close by' (12). Often the object is simply 'a void container:' all the animation, '[t]he sense (the feeling, the *pathos*) is on the side of the subject, and during the empathic process it is transferred to an object that was hitherto empty' (Pinnotti 95, original emphasis). This tendency means that empathy can sometimes be better understood as anthropomorphism, symbolism, or personification than a serious enquiry into the "life" of objects. Further, empathy often makes such anthropomorphism the bedrock of our relationship to objects. As one empathy theorist, Johannes Volkelt, says, '[o]nly when the impersonal objective has been thus anthropomorphized or – to use our familiar expression – raised to a symbol, is it capable of appealing to us' (*Der Symbol-Begriff* 130 qtd. in Mallgrave & Ikonomou 42). Consequently, the

degree to which empathy invests itself in the object's 'own life' (Pinotti 24) is often superficial or rhetorical and can, at worst, smack of bad faith.

In *On the Optical Sense of Form* (1873), a seminal document in the genesis of empathy, Robert Vischer laments how interpersonal sympathy 'banish[es] from the world of feeling every inanimate objective form' (303). Such a model fails to recognize our 'pantheistic urge for union with the world, which can by no means be limited to our more easily understood kinship with the human species but must, consciously or unconsciously, be directed towards the universe' (109). Vischer argues that the subject 'unconsciously projects its own bodily form – and with this also the soul – into the form of the object. From this I derived the notion that I call "empathy" [*Einfühlung*]' (92).

> I project my own life into the lifeless form, just as I quite justifiably do with another person. Only ostensibly do I keep my own identity although the object remains distinct. I seem merely to adapt and attach myself to it as one hand clasps another, and yet I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other. (104)

Firstly, this passage reveals a structural similarity between empathy and sympathy, undermining Timothy Vincent's argument that there is a definitive transition from romantic sympathy to modernist empathy (2). What difference there is seems to lie in Vischer's certainty that the empathic 'transplantation' is successful, rather than in his procedure, which approximates earlier characterisations of interpersonal sympathy as "entering in." Secondly, it is by no means certain that, as Vincent argues, Vischer 'acknowledges the separateness of the object […] while at the same acknowledging the role of psychological projection in the creation of reality and [thus] avoiding the problem of solipsism' (6). For Vincent, empathy counters the solipsistic claim that objects only exist as the mental projections of the subject (this position was held by the empiricists Bishop Berkeley and David Hume and is the focus of the following chapter) (6). However, while Vischer admits that the object's power 'pull[s] against our purely subjective position,' he also defines empathy as 'an act that is predominantly subjective: the form being no

more than an arbitrary, willful, and unilateral means by which the body can enjoy itself' (109, 106-107). Does the object have any allure, except as a vehicle of self-gratification? This question opens up a little-noted but well-trodden track – even though its ostensible goal is contact with the distinct "life of things," empathy can move towards radical subjectivism, even solipsism. I suggest that many empathy theorists wanted to start with the second of Vincent's clauses – the percipient plays a crucial role in the constitution of material objects – *and* move past it, directing themselves towards a (to varying degrees) mind-independent object that also constitutes *us*, shaping our mental, physical, and affective life. Yet these two emphases proved difficult to balance, and many empathy theorists tend to confuse or gloss over the question of whether empathy is an adaptive response to a mind-independent object or a 'willful' projection of subjective feelings onto an object that is inherently and ontologically dependent on the subject (Vischer 107). *Pace* Vincent, the problem of solipsism that haunted eighteenth-century empiricism also haunted empathy theorists, especially Theodor Lipps who, Peter Hacker has argued, rooted his account of empathy in the tradition of Hume (379).

Theodor Lipps shared Vischer's emphasis on subject/object union through empathic penetration, stressing the involuntary nature of the *Einfühlung*-instinct. As Gustav Jahoda explains, the human proclivity to '"imitation" has long served as an explanatory tool' for the operations of sympathy (152) and Lipps asserted that the perceived qualities of objects 'are "instinctively" and simultaneously mirrored by kinaesthetic "strivings"' and 'corresponding feelings in the observer' (Montag et al. 10). In "Empathy, Inner Imitation, and Sense Feelings" (1903), Lipps writes:

> I am transported into [the object]. I am, so far as my consciousness is concerned, entirely and wholly identical with it … This is esthetic imitation and this imitation is at the same time esthetic empathy. (298, trans. Rader)

This automatic mental imitation of an object's properties is at the heart of Lipps' theory of empathy. However, Lipps' theory becomes convoluted because consciousness seems to both *construct* objects – as eighteenth-century empiricists had argued – and *be constructed by* objects. Lipps proposes a strange dynamic in which the object cannot exist without the subject – stating that 'a "sensuously given object," strictly speaking, is an absurdity' ("Einfühlung" 106, trans. Koss 156) – and yet the subject involuntarily imitates the object, suggesting that the object pre-dates him. It is unclear whether Lippsian 'sympathy' is simply 'a psychic, an ego-experience' of penetrating objects, an imitation of an *a priori* object, or, more threateningly, an experience of 'an object different from myself that penetrates *me*' (*Die ästhetische* 21, trans. Jahoda 159, emphasis added). If the penetrative procedure was reversed – and Lipps' theory of imitation suggests that this can be the case – then the intentional ego might be destabilised and altered as the object "enters" and "enlivens" us. This is precisely the point that Wilhelm Worringer's critique of empathy, *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), foregrounds.[9] Worringer argued that, through empathy, '[w]e are delivered from our individual being … we are absorbed into an external object, an external form, with our inner urge to experience … In this self-objectivication lies a self-estrangement' (ibid.59). Yet Lipps does not generally dwell upon the self-estrangement that can occur through imitating objects. Instead, he advances the (basically Humean) view that objects do not exist independently but purely insofar as the percipient vitalises it through empathy. 'The object that I enliven or besoul aesthetically carries in it a reflection of my personality. I find myself in it as in a mirror' ("Ästhetische Einfühlung" 416, trans. Fizer 48). It is little wonder that Worringer developed the concept of abstraction as a counter to empathy, reinstating objects as autonomous from the human and not only as a 'gratification of that inner need for self-activation' (14).

[9] *Abstraction and Empathy* takes its understanding of empathy from Lipps' work. Worringer attended Lipps' lectures in 1904-1905 and includes two volumes of Lipps' *Aesthetics* in *Abstraction and Empathy*'s bibliography (Koss 2006).

John Fizer explains that Lipps' confused, and somewhat solipsistic, ontology derived from his belief that, just as the eighteenth-century empiricists had argued, 'we are unable to neutralize ourselves:' 'we always experience reality through an ego-dominated empathy, and thus can never reach reality as pure phenomenon' (50). Consequently, when Lipps suggests that 'the antithesis between myself and the object disappears' through empathy ("Empathy" 294, trans. Rader), this synthesis is not a union of distinct entities but the natural culmination of the empiricist belief that objects do not exist independently of the perceiver. Objects are not subjects or quasi-subjects or Others – rather, they are simply "my" subjective perceptions. As such, while empathy seems to invoke one of Cavell's 'form[s] of craziness' – animism, the "life of the object" – it may actually be closer to the other – scepticism about the object as such (*In Quest* 55).

Lippsian empathy is rarely associated with Henri Bergson, yet its formulae are strikingly resonant with Bergson's definition of intuition as sympathy.[10] In "Introduction to Metaphysics" (1903), Bergson describes 'intuition' as 'the *sympathy* by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it' (*Creative Mind* 173, original emphasis). His terms are nearly identical with Lipps' but, ontologically, Bergson and Lipps have antithetical views of the object. Unlike Lipps, Bergson believed that objects have 'a reality, independent of ourselves,' that is unique, delicate, and fugitive to reason (*Matter and Memory* 239). The object's 'objectivity – that is to say, what it contains over and above what it yields up – must then consist […] precisely in the immense multiplicity of the movements which it executes, so to speak, within itself as a chrysalis. Motionless on the surface, in its very depths it lives and vibrates' (ibid.). Analysis 'is condemned' to be 'eternally unsatisfied' in its 'desire to embrace the object' because it operates by generic

[10] A notable exception to this oversight is Lars Spuybroek's *The Sympathy of Things* (2016).

concepts and comparisons that 'will never give us anything more than an artificial recomposition of the object of which they can symbolize only certain general and, as it were, impersonal aspects' (*Creative Mind* 174, 179). Analysis can only give us relative knowledge because it remains on the surface of things, solidifying and immobilising the vibrations 'of the real in order to obtain there a fulcrum for our action' (*Matter and Memory* 248). By contrast, as Angela Hague has recognised, it is 'the sympathetic coinciding of subject and object that [enables] *absolute* knowledge' (16, original emphasis). Again, in *Creative Evolution* (1911), Bergson situates intuition between the extremes of blind, mechanical instinct and reifying intelligence (185). Both are 'equally inadequate to their object:' what is needed is an intuition that 'discerns […] from within, quite otherwise than by a process of knowledge – by an intuition (*lived* rather than *represented*), which is probably like what we would call divining sympathy' (185-186, original emphases).

Matter and Memory (1896) paves the way for this understanding of sympathy by mediating between the dualisms of realism and idealism, which had plagued philosophy for decades, 'giving rise to interminable metaphysical discussions' (77). Realism holds that phenomena are distinct from perception – suggesting that the ultimate nature of matter may be radically different from the mind – and idealism holds that phenomena *are* perceptions – raising the problem of why we so persistently feel that the external world exists independently of our perceptions and does not always coincide with them. Both philosophical positions posit a separation between subject and object, whereas Bergson suggests that the body is a centre of action and motor reactions, enmeshed in the material world. '[T]he reality of things is no more constructed or reconstructed' by the body, 'but touched, penetrated, lived' (77). Since Bergson sees perception as located in objects – rather than as the maker of objects – he aims 'to seek experience at its source, or rather above that decisive *turn* where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes properly *human* experience' (216, original emphases). By suggesting that we *can* think of experience in pre- or post- or para-human ways, Bergson does not consider the subjectivist character of knowledge

to be fundamental; subjectivism results from our acquired habits of looking at things instrumentally. Bergson believes that, by dispensing with utilitarian habit, we can access non-anthropomorphised reality and not simply 'an adaptation of the real to the interests of practice and to the exigencies of social life' (214). *Matter and Memory* consistently argues that we can 'actually [be] placed outside ourselves' and 'touch the reality of the object in an immediate intuition' (86). Certainly, perception and memory are always mixed in everyday life – perception includes recollection, affection, negotiation. Nevertheless, besides perception that is 'impregnated with our past,' there is a perception that is 'confined to the present and absorbed, to the exclusion of all else, in the task of moulding itself upon the external object' – an 'impersonal basis remains in which perception coincides with the object perceived' (36,75). Again, in *Laughter* (1900), Bergson writes, '[w]ere […] detachment complete, did the soul no longer cleave to action by any of its perceptions … [i]t would perceive all things in their native purity: the forms, colours, sounds of the physical world as well as the subtlest movements of the inner life' (105). Impersonality is a crucial factor in Bergsonian subject/object sympathy, understood as profound, unmediated contact with the object itself.

This is especially evident in Bergson's writings on aesthetics. Unlike the utilitarian intellect, aesthetic intuitive sympathy is 'disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting' – or, in *Matter and Memory*'s idiom, "moulding itself" – 'upon its object' (*Creative Evolution* 171). The art object is not, as with Lipps, a 'reflection of my personality' ("Ästhetische Einfühlung" 416, trans. Fizer 48), but actually 'puts to sleep the active or rather resistant powers of our personality, and thus brings us into a state of perfect responsiveness, in which we realise the idea that is suggested to us and sympathize with the feeling that is expressed' (*Creative Evolution* 44). However, a certain anxiety lingers in *Time and Free Will*'s (1910) claim that sympathy, which operates via unconscious responsiveness, is similar to 'physical contagion' (15). Reminiscent of Lipps' theory of imitation, Bergson writes that the artist presents objects 'which our body is likely to imitate mechanically,

though slightly, as soon as it perceives them, so as to transport us all at once into the indefinable psychological state which called them forth' (18). Thus, '[i]n the processes of art we shall find, in a weakened form, a refined and in some measure spiritualized version of the processes commonly used to induce the state of hypnosis' (14). Art 'arouses sympathy in our minds, just as a mere gesture on the part of the hypnotist is enough to force the intended suggestion upon a subject accustomed to his control;' 'the pale immobility' of sculptures are capable of imposing 'fixity' on our life, 'absorbing our thought and will in their own eternity' (15-16). It is evident that Bergson puts greater emphasis than Lipps on the degree that objects influence *us*, registering the fine line between sympathetic communion and hypnosis – 'perfect responsiveness' (*Creative Evolution* 44) parallels mechanical imitation (*Time* 18).

Lipps' and Bergson's concepts of sympathy describe our unconscious, involuntary, and intuitive responses to objects. However, the degree to which "life" and power belong to objects – and, concurrently, the degree to which they might positively *and* negatively impact subjects – depends upon each author's ontological view of the object. Lipps' metaphors suggest that the object is external, mind-independent, but he ultimately adheres to the sceptical view that objects are not vital (or even existent) in themselves but simply reflect the percipient's affective states. By contrast, Bergson's arguments in *Matter and Memory* and his elaboration of *élan vital* in *Creative Evolution* provide a basis for understanding subject/object sympathy as an intuition of the object's unique "vital force," an idea that, as Jane Bennett has argued, comes very close to animism (2010). Contemporary commentators agreed with this assessment. In *Body and Mind: A History and Defense of Animism* (1911), William McDougall cited *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution* as evidence of Bergson's place 'among the defenders of Animism,' rallying against sceptics like David Hume (84). Similarly, a 1914 article in *Nature* (a scientific journal of the period), complained that 'M. Bergson's demerit perhaps is his animism … which is simply

vitalism writ large' (475). It is remarkable how quickly discussions of subject/object sympathy fall into the well-trodden dilemmas of animism versus scepticism.

Lipps and Bergson's theories resonate closely with Vernon Lee's, focusing on the ways that memory, attention, and habit inform our embodied responses to objects. Nevertheless, both authors came under fire in the same year, in (respectively) Lee's *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912) and *Vital Lies* (1912). These contemporaneous critiques are revealing, especially because Lee is often depicted as a mere conduit for continental ideas rather than as an independent empathy theorist. In fact, by studying British physiological aesthetics and observing Clementina Anstruther-Thomson's motor responses to art objects in museums and galleries, Lee arrived at a formulation of empathy that resonated with continental ideas but was more closely affiliated with the tradition of British philosophical empiricism, and its reverberations in nineteenth-century aestheticism (especially as conceived by the seminal figure, Walter Pater). Lee criticised Lipps and Bergson for obfuscating the simple fact that empathy is essentially anthropomorphic projection. After Lipps and Bergson's somewhat mystical intimations, such pragmatism may seem refreshing. However, Lee's work reveals a trend that the next chapter will further foreground: many object-theorists begin with flat-footed statements that few laypersons would contest and then suddenly veer into an eerie subjectivism that radically doubts our common-sense world.

Lee and Anstruther-Thomson discovered that contemplating objects initiated physiological responses; these bodily changes resulted in emotions which were then attributed to the object as if it had 'modes of being, moving, and feeling similar to our own' (*Beauty and Ugliness* 17). Their findings were first published as the 1897 article, "Beauty and Ugliness," and then, following Lipps' harsh review in 1900, revised and expanded into a book of the same name in 1912. Although Lee agreed with Lipps that empathy is a crucial component of psychology, *Beauty and Ugliness* accuses Lipps of 'metaphysical mythology' (55):

> … one catches a glimpse in Professor Lipps' thought of the vague entity of a homogenous ego, separate and almost material, leaving the realm of reality […] to take up its abode in "the work of art," to participate in its life and to detach itself from its own, after the fashion of the Lenten retreat of a Catholic escaping from the world and purifying himself in the life of a convent … (ibid.59)

Although, as we have seen, Lipps was far from adamant about the objective existence of things 'separate' from the observer, Lee objects to the mere implication that 'the ego […] could divest itself of the subjective, inner character which belongs to it, and clothe itself in the objective, external character of the non-ego into which it is supposed to have entered' (55, 56-57). In *The Beautiful* (1913), Lee again reiterates that 'the literal connotations of the German word [*Einfühlung*]' lead to 'mischievous misinterpretations' (66) about the ego's egress "into" objects. By her reckoning, the ego had (quite literally) nowhere to go or, to use a different cliché, everywhere you go, there you are. Like her friend and mentor Walter Pater, she believed that the ego is irremediably subjectivist and that 'objects' are merely 'impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them' (Pater *Renaissance* 119). In a note to an unpublished story, Lee writes:

> We see [objects] in the light of our preconceived ideas, of our feelings & fancy … who shall decide what would really remain for the crucible or the microscope if it were possible to get rid of this personal light, and to see the thing in itself, the never perceived, unreal reality? Perhaps nothing at all. ("Preface")

Since the ego is firmly entrenched in its own feelings, even the bare admission of an object's existence is a form of projection – 'when we say "it is" the real case is largely compounded of "I am"' (ibid). Due to our tendency to assume that objects have an independent being, we make statements like "'*this thing* tastes or smells nice or nasty'" rather than the more accurate statement "'*I* taste or *I* smell something nice or nasty'" (*The Beautiful* 58, original emphases). For Lee, this proves an anthropomorphic bent in language and psychology, a tendency to imagine that things are nouns when they are only adjectives (using nominative words when the only proper ones are

accusative [ibid.]). To say a thing is nice or nasty does not seem like anthropomorphism or personification but, in Lee's reckoning, such statements reveal that language is inherently prone to projecting qualities onto objects that are, in fact, devoid of qualities, perhaps 'nothing at all' ("Preface"). Slowly replacing "it is" with "I am," "this thing" with "I," Lee argues that

> …all the real truth in the *Einfühlung* hypothesis is connected with the subjective existence of the work of art, that is to say, with the *idea of it which we make for ourselves*; an idea made up in part of our experiences of life and activity […] [including] our own body. (Lee *Beauty and Ugliness* 59, emphasis added)

Lee's attack on Bergson in *Vital Lies* is significantly harsher than her critique of Lipps, but it continues her excoriation of "*it is*" (161, original emphases). In *Vital Lies*, Lee argues that art answers the subject's 'craving' to 'imaginatively [project] life like his own beyond his own life's limits, and thereby [attain] a wider, more vivid, and more harmonious sense of living' (108). This sense of intimacy and expansion is duplicitous: art '*makes* it, observe, not *discovers* it. And makes it because we *want* it' (109, original emphases). Our desire arises 'just because no such world of life *continuous with our own* sends us a message, a testimony, of its independent existence' (ibid., original emphases). In a rather bewildering passage, Lee both defines sympathy as an 'egoistic' effort to make the object yield to 'possession *by our desires*' (160) and declares that egoism is all there is – we have no testimony of anything beyond the self, anything that resists our desires. Lee insists that the "I" and not the "it is" is fundamental and, using Henri Bergson as an exemplar of this category error, claims that his philosophy is guilty of mystical bad faith. When Bergson's philosophy proposes a '*profound*, *intimate* penetration beyond the surface of things'

> it has mistaken the obscure ebbings and flowings, and quiverings and shrinkings of its inner, perhaps its bodily, microcosm, for a profounder experience of the Universe; and, like the eastern ecstasy-monger, it has taken its own fixedly contemplated navel […] for the hub of all existence. … Let us say: "I wish," "I want," "I love," "I make," but not *it is*. (*Vital Lies* 161, original emphases)

Since Bergson's interest in memory, the body, and the subject/object relation resonates closely with Lee's own work, this polemic is rather baffling. It would not be surprising, say, in Wilhelm Worringer or in Worringer's champion, T.E. Hulme, whose rejection of sympathy in "Romanticism and Classicism" (c.1911/1912) and "Modern Art and its Philosophy" (1914) is often read as modernism's rejection of emotion as a whole. Hulme and Lee are rarely associated in critical literature, except as the two primary conduits for the Anglophone reception of empathic theories, but their writings of this period show some similarities. Both Lee's *Vital Lies* and Hulme's "Romanticism and Classicism" affiliate subject/object sympathy with egoistic "navel-gazing". Both authors announce their departure from Bergson's philosophy at roughly the same time, around 1912. "Romanticism and Classicism" marks the beginning of Hulme's disillusionment with Bergson, aiming to replace 'a language of *intuition*' – a term profoundly weighted with *Bergsonisme* – with a 'visual concrete' language (*Collected Writings* 70, emphasis added).[11] Concurrently, this essay also targets certain 'German writers on aesthetics' (ibid.59). While Hulme does not name his antagonists here, he was at this point reading the work of Vischer and Lipps in preparation for an (unwritten) book on modern art theories; he planned to link 'Bergson's aesthetic' and 'the German psychological systems,' while rectifying 'Vernon Lee's incorrect account' of Lipps' aesthetics ("Plan for a Book" *Speculations* 264) (written c.1912-1913). In light of the parallels already established between German theories of empathy and Bergsonian sympathy, it is noteworthy that Hulme also intended to scrutinize this link and that, contemporaneously, Lee criticised these two theoretical strands. However, while both Lee and Hulme found much to criticise in the continental tradition, it is possible that these authors have not been compared because they ultimately arrived at two radically opposed positions. Both

[11] Between 1909 and 1912, Hulme wrote 12 essays on Bergson and translated his *Introduction to Metaphysics* into English (1913). In Hulme's "Plan for a Book on Theories of Modern Art" (c.1912-1913), he mentions Vischer and Lipps alongside Bergson as major aestheticians of the time. However, Hulme had begun to lose faith in Bergson's world-view by late 1911 when, at the International Philosophical Congress, he met Pierre Lasserre. Lasserre believed that Bergson was simply a covert romantic whose ideas were incompatible with the political conservatism that Hulme would increasingly espouse (Csengeri 'Introduction' xix).

concluded that empathy was a matter of anthropomorphism but where Hulme pugnaciously attacked anthropomorphism, Lee defended it as the only pragmatic explanation of empathy.

This point can be demonstrated by returning to Hulme's "Romanticism and Classicism." Hulme criticises the unspecified 'German aesthetes' (*Collected Writings* 68) by way of John Ruskin, who prefers those '[poets] who have so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things, [and] are filled with intense passion and gentleness of sympathy' (Ruskin *Modern Painters* 2:77, qtd. in Hulme ibid.67). Hulme is not simply concerned with the sentimentality of Ruskin's position. In the portions of *Modern Painters* (1843) that Hulme references, Ruskin develops a concept of the 'imagination penetrative' that aligns with Lipps' and Bergson's ideas of penetrative sympathy (158). Ruskin argues that the 'highest imaginative faculty' is 'penetrating[,] possession-taking': '[i]t never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside and plunges into the very central fiery heart; nothing else will content its spirituality' (159-160). For Hulme, the Ruskinian imagination is not concerned with objects themselves, but with plunging into their depths and filling them 'with mystery or with emotions' ("Romanticism" *Collected Writings* 69). Of course, objects elicit emotions, but we should not simply value objects for their affective resonance: we should see the 'object of aesthetic contemplation [as] something framed apart by itself and regarded without memory or expectation, simply as being itself' (ibid.70). By the time that Hulme champions Worringer in "Modern Art and its Philosophy" (1914), he identifies his German antagonists as theorists of 'empathy (*Einfühlung*)' (*Collected Writings* 273) and reiterates the complaints he had made about Ruskin. Like Ruskin, current empathy theorists are interested in 'an objectification of our own pleasure in activity, our own vitality' rather than objects themselves (ibid.274). The nascent critique of empathy in "Romanticism and Classicism" might account for the fast ascendancy of Worringer over Lipps in Hulme's estimation, a volte-

face that has puzzled critics.[12] We might speculate that, around 1912, Hulme noticed that empathy theorists (and perhaps, Bergson) had a precedent and an ally in the Ruskinian tradition of imaginative penetration, and was already antipathetic to the sentimental, grandiose claims of empathic penetration, a more explicit theme of his subsequent essay, "Modern Art and its Philosophy" (1914).

Consequently, Hulme's essays are not an attack on emotion *in toto* so much as a defence of the object's autonomy, responding to a very specific tradition that can be traced to Lipps and Bergson's insistence about penetrating the object through sympathy. While Woolf is unlikely to have sympathised with Hulme's increasing authoritarianism and reactionary politics, the impersonal relation towards objects he advocated might have been salutary, resonating with her later argument that the things that matter are 'free from taint, dependence, soilure of humanity or care for one's kind' (Woolf *O*167). As Hulme's ideas matured through Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* – particularly its argument that the pleasures of art 'did not consist in the possibility of [humans] projecting themselves into the things of the outer world' but in 'purify[ing] [the object] of all its dependence on life' (16-17) – "'getting rid of" anthropomorphism became Hulme's chief intellectual endeavour' (Levenson 92). By contrast, Lee doubles down on anthropomorphism and, consequently, moves farther away from the object that empathy would seem to embrace. Thus, Hulme and Lee served to polarise discussions of empathy in the Anglophone sphere. Given the efforts of continental theory to unify subject and object, it is ironic that, in their different ways, Hulme and Lee's interventions served to exacerbate this dualism.

[12] It is not clear when Hulme read Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, but after the two met at the 1913 Berlin Congress of Aesthetics, Worringer figured prominently in Hulme's art criticism and Vischer and Lipps were never (positively) mentioned again.

Echoing Hume's assertion that objects only seem mind-independent because of custom and associative habit (*Treatise* 129), Lee declares that '*things* are merely groups of actual and potential reactions on our own part, that is to say of expectations which experience has linked together in more or less stable groups' (*Beautiful* 17, original emphasis). Consequently, Lee is more concerned with the embodied rhythms of '*attention* and *memory*' (ibid.32, original emphases) than with the object 'regarded without memory or expectation' (Hulme "Romanticism" *Collected Writings* 70). The vital movement we attribute to objects in moments of empathic contemplation – such as when we say that a mountain is "rising" – does not merely derive from our presently active feelings, but 'our remembrance of all similar acts of raising' and our future expectations about rising (ibid.64). While ordinary attention is usually instrumental and oriented towards present activity, empathic contemplation allows for the combination of past, present, and future feeling, which 'thickens and enriches' 'that inert mountain, that bodiless shape, with the stored up and averaged and essential modes of our activity' (ibid.65-66). This discussion of how memory moderates perception echoes Bergson's *Matter and Memory*.

Nevertheless, Lee is hesitant to endorse any 'impersonal basis' wherein 'perception coincides with the object perceived' (Bergson ibid.75). While Lee seems to imply the possibility of 'living ourselves into the life of other creatures,' she adds the caveat that 'what we are living in, what has invaded and ousted our personality is our own residual and composite and averaged experience' (*Music* 190). What invades us is simply our own memories – besides this, any ousting of personality is fictitious. In *Music and its Lovers* (1932), she comes close to describing an impersonal attention, wherein "'Listeners" are absorbed and integrated in the "special" – what I call the *sui generis* – emotion produced by the music; for them there is no reference to personal interests and emotions (these are excluded from that "higher plane" of contemplative activity)' (119). In such states, '[o]ur conscious self is passive … in more than the grammatical sense; passive in the etymological sense of passion, endurance or suffering … it is attention which has

been laid hold of from without and something done to it and to us' (110). This discussion of depersonalised, passive attention echoes a passage from *The Beautiful*, where Lee describes the 'physiological power of colour and sound, this way which they have of invading and subjugating us with or without our consent and long before our conscious co-operation … we are not *doing*, but *done to* by those stimulations from without' (23-24, original emphasis). Seeming to endorse a disinterested attention that would have harmonised with Bloomsbury aesthetics, *Music and its Lovers* received high praise from Roger Fry (*Vernon Lee Papers*) and seems to have modified Woolf's usually acerbic opinions about Lee (see *L*5:137). Nevertheless, *Music and its Lovers* is careful to emphasise that so-called "passive attention" is 'not merely being *acted upon*, it is acting,' albeit in a hidden fashion that makes us unaware that 'all these activities are our own' (*Music* 110-111, original emphasis). Indeed, Lee warns that such states of absorption will 'recommend us to think rather in terms of "it is" than in those of "I am" (ibid.111), a tendency condemned in *Vital Lies*.

Overall, Lee does not seem to take *Einfühlung* literally, but when she does, *Einfühlung* is coded as suffering. Some of her short stories contain images of a seductive but perilous empathy, associating 'that queer instinct, one might say mimetic, of *einfühlen*' with 'a paralysing transformation into that other one' (Lee "Lore of the Ego"). In "The Legend of Madame Krasinska" (*Vanitas* 1892), the titular character uncannily transforms into a person that she sees sketched in a portfolio. A moment of empathic identification leads to a kind of psychic transfusion, where Madame Krasinska takes on the memories and mental characteristics of another, until her identity dissolves and she cries "'I am she – I am she – I am mad!'" (ibid.255). This short story is a literal, pathologized version of Woolf's suggestion in *Three Guineas* (1938) that '[c]omplete understanding could only be achieved by blood transfusion and memory transfusion' (92). Both Lee and Woolf felt that empathy threatened the boundaries of the self and, subsequently, valued what Woolf called the 'screen-making habit,' a distance between self

and other that 'probably' 'preserves our sanity:' '[i]f we had not this device for shutting people off from our sympathies, we might, perhaps dissolve utterly. Separateness would be impossible' (*D*3:104). Since Lee's short stories imply that the self is fragile, permeable, and precarious, we could speculate that her theoretical insistence on the "I am" stems from anxiety about the influence of objects (in the following section, we will see that Woolf shares this anxiety). If empathy is hard-wired into human psychology and physiology, as Lee believed, then we are constitutionally susceptible to environment and such passivity can be painful and pathological. The account of empathy developed in "Madame Krasinska" contrasts with other of Lee's more aggressive accounts of empathy as "enlivening" activity – something we "do to" a basically inert environment.

Much writing on empathy seems to elide a central confusion – does empathy mean penetration of the object or an experience of being penetrated *by* an object? This is clear in the disparities between Lee's and Anstruther-Thomson's writings. Although their work was jointly authored, we receive Anstruther-Thomson's contributions through a dense apparatus of Lee's footnotes and caveats, especially as, Carolyn Burdett explains, she began to believe that a strong embodied response to objects was not universal but 'a consequence of Anstruther-Thomson's distinctive physio-psychological "type"' (12). In her introduction to Anstruther-Thomson's posthumously published *Art & Man* (1924), Lee gives her own spin to her collaborator's views of empathy. She recalls that, looking at a sunset, Anstruther-Thomson remarked "'[n]ow we have become mere intruders. Now it is *They* who are in possession'" (ibid.13, original emphasis). Retrospectively, Lee rejects the idea that Anstruther-Thomson actually felt dispossessed: 'the only personality in the matter was her own ways of feeling, her own modes of being […] which she projected into the sights and sounds of nature and of art, only to receive them back, as if no longer her own, rather as one receives one's voice and words back from an echoing hill' (ibid.14). This seems like a rather strained interpretation of Anstruther-Thomson's feelings, fitting rather

with Lee's chosen epigraph for *Art & Man*, Coleridge's lines, 'We receive but what we give/And in our life alone does nature live' (*Poetical Works* 2:1078, qtd. in Lee "Introduction" to *Art & Man* 70). By contrast, Anstruther-Thomson places a noticeably stronger emphasis on the agency of objects and the force they exert upon the perceiver, describing how 'the shape of the vase' 'suddenly *thrusts into our own body* a feeling of lifting *which we cannot help realising*' (139, emphases added). For Anstruther-Thomson, the object demands specific ways of looking, specific physiological responses; it moves and positions the viewer. '[W]e go on rapidly assimilating the shape of the vase' until we must ask, '[h]ave we swallowed the vase! or is it, on the contrary, the vase that has swallowed us! I do not know, but anyhow we are seeing it with a delightful feeling of completely possessing it' (151). The possibility sandwiched between the correlative pleasures of swallowing and possessing the vase is possibly the most interesting – what would it mean to be swallowed up by things? To be ingested, in *Einfühlung*'s literal sense? It is unfortunate, but characteristic, that this question is passed over with a cursory 'anyhow,' as Anstruther-Thomson moves on to the delights of possession.

This overview of the continental theorisation of empathy and its controversial introduction into the British literary scene suggests that, when Woolf broaches the topic of subject/object sympathy, she does so with two issues in mind. Firstly, both Lipps, Bergson, and Lee recognised that our sympathetic engagement with objects happens largely on the unconscious, involuntary, intuitive, and bodily stage. Before the unconscious accumulated the psychological connotations it carries today, it was deployed to describe the dynamic, bi-lateral interactions of subject and object, the ways perception modulates its objects and the ways that objects "mould" (Bergson *Matter and Memory* 36) percipients. In this light, Woolf's emphasis on writerly and readerly unconsciousness – so frequently coupled with an intense attention to

objects – can be understood as a sympathetic, not a Freudian, aesthetics.[13] Woolf's dictum, '[o]bserve perpetually' (*D*5:358) corresponds to the Bergsonian procedure wherein, under the aegis of art, personality lapses into unconscious receptivity to the object world. Woolf notes how 'tremendously important unconsciousness is when one writes' (*D*4:186) and describes reading in a manner that corresponds with Bergson's ideas on aesthetic sympathy as hypnosis. Reading is a 'trance-like intense rapture' that occurs 'with a violence that lays me low … the state of reading consists in the complete elimination of the *ego*' (*L*5:319, original emphasis). Similarly, in "The Leaning Tower" (1940) Woolf argues that novelists should utilise a state of unconscious, embodied receptivity:

> … seeing all he can, feeling all he can, taking in the book of his mind innumerable notes, the writer becomes – if he can – unconscious… Then, after a pause the veil lifts; and there is the thing – the thing he wants to write about – simplified, composed. Do we strain Wordsworth's famous saying about emotion recollected in tranquillity when we infer that by tranquillity he meant that the writer needs to become unconscious before he can create? (*E*6:263-264)

If we interpret the literary importance of unconsciousness as an offshoot of object sympathy, we can avoid the early critical tendency to equate Woolf's emphasis on unconsciousness with her "retreat" into a bloated (and frequently pathologized) subjectivity. Madeline Moore and Daniel Albright have read the 'plasticity' and 'superhuman receptivity' of Woolf's imagination (Albright 5) as a renunciation of objects, an 'escape from the everyday world' that entails 'belittling its importance' (Moore 22).[14] Citing a 1929 diary entry, Albright writes, 'her huge, isolated subjectivity is purged of all that is low, mundane … and assumes a quality of metaphysical ego-

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[13] Heinz Kohut has argued that empathy, as an aspect of psychological aesthetics, was the 'first step' in Freud's theorisation of the unconscious (211). In a letter, Freud acknowledged, 'I found the substance of my insights stated quite clearly in Lipps, perhaps rather more so than I would like' (325). Lee found Freud's work a 'mysterious and rather unprofitable whirlpool,' but shared his belief that 'the bulk of our life is unconscious or semi-conscious' ("The Psychological Radiograph"). Similarly, although Freudian ideas permeated the modernist milieu, Woolf often expressed discomfort about his ideas: see Jan Goldstein (1974), Panthea Reid Broughton (1987) and Maud Ellmann (2010) on Woolf's negotiation of Freudian insights.

[14] For revisionary work on modernism and the ordinary see Bryony Randall's *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (2007), Liesl Olson's *Modernism and the Ordinary* (2009) and Lorraine Sim's *Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience* (2010).

apprehension' (5). However, this entry is interested in precisely those 'curious props/ By which the world of memory & thought/ Exists & is sustained' (Wordsworth *Poetical Works* 3:272, qtd. in *D*3:247), 'the happy undistinguished days, ripe & sweet & sound; the daily bread' (*D*3:248). As in the passages cited above, Woolf claims that ordinary intercourse with objects causes 'the unconscious part' of her brain to expand: 'I feel my mind take shape, like a cloud with the sun on it, as some idea, plan, or image wells up' (ibid.). This receptivity is not, as Albright argues, an ego-apprehension but an *object*-apprehension; it admits of no radical difference between the metaphysical and the mundane; moreover, these ordinary rhythms of attention are a necessarily preliminary to the creative process.

This 'anti-metaphysical metaphysic' understanding of the unconscious and the sources of inspiration has a long literary history, resonating with Romanticism, Pater's desire to become 'one complex medium of reception' (*Marius* 1:107-108), and T.S Eliot's configuration of poetry as a 'hint of something behind, something impersonal, something in relation to which the author has been no more than the passive (if not always the pure) medium' ("A Commentary" 77). Nevertheless, for Woolf, the passivity of our relations to objects provokes anxiety. A passage from *The Waves* (1931) registers the vulnerability of '[m]oving oneself in this radiant yet gummy atmosphere … something adheres, something sticks to one's hands, taking up a newspaper even. Then there is the being eviscerated – drawn out, spun like a spider's web and twisted in agony around the thorn' (150). For Woolf, the environment is both sticky and sharp, attaching itself to the subject but also potentially fixing, exposing, and piercing her. It is artistically generative, but it also induces automatic responses and adherence to internalised gender norms. As we will see in the following section, the female writer cannot surrender herself as wholehearted as Pater and Eliot recommended, nor enjoy the 'observation of one's own automatism' (Eliot *Complete Poems* 235).

Secondly, debates around empathy had divided the field between those who, like Hulme, advocated an impersonal relation to objects and ones, like Lee, who believed that, because of the subjectivist character of knowledge, impersonality was impossible. Earlier, I suggested that empathy implies a subject that is '*done to* by […] stimulations from without' and that, troubled by this prospect, thinkers like Vernon Lee insisted that empathy was rather a demonstration of the ego's '*doing*' power (*The Beautiful* 24, original emphasis). Yet I want to acknowledge the fact that Lee (and Woolf) often criticised '(male) egocentricism or self-indulgence' (Zorn 8), as well as the transcendental implications of Lipps' and Bergson's penetrative sympathy. The poignancy of Lee's situation is that, in rebuking egoism, she was nevertheless thrown back upon egoism, a belief that the perceiving subject is the foundation of the world. She loved 'beauty, if it's only a stone, or a pot' (Woolf "Portraits" *CSF*245), but she nevertheless wondered whether a pot might be an 'unreal reality? Perhaps nothing at all' (Lee "Preface"). These contradictions in Lee's thought may account for Woolf's frequent, disparaging comments about Lee, 'a garrulous baby' (*L*2:261) 'who really turns all good writing to vapour, with her fluency and insipidity' (*L*1:400). Woolf's major quarrel with Lee was that her 'egotistical diversions' prevented her from 'depicting any object as it might actually be seen' ("Sentimental Traveller" *E*1:157); her 'images and symbols […] illustrate not the object but the writer' ("Art and Life" *E*1:279).[15] As critics like Talia Schaffer (2000), Christa Zorn (2006), Patricia Pulham and Catherine Maxwell (2006) seek to re-establish Vernon Lee's literary importance, they often see these comments as Woolf's strategic effort to diminish a 'feminist foremother' (Schaffer 194) just as she had diminished her 'Edwardian uncles' (as Maria di Battista calls Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy [45]). Nonetheless, reading Lee's account of empathy lends some weight to Woolf's primary objection to Lee's work – egoism *is* a cornerstone of Lee's understanding of the self. Lee and Woolf are linked by myriad

[15] In "The Modern Essay" (1925), Woolf qualifies this opinion, arguing that Vernon Lee belongs to the type of writer characterised by 'some fierce attachment to an idea' (*SE*21). In an unpublished series of "Portraits" (dated by Susan Dick to 1937 [*CSF*307]), Woolf implies that Lee's redeeming 'idea' was her love of beauty: 'I who love beauty always feel, I knew Vernon Lee' (*CSF*246).

concerns – a commitment to pacificism, a concept of androgyny, a concern with the body, memory, and sensation – but the problem of egoism was a crossroad where Lee's empathy shifted from an interest in the object's "life" towards scepticism about its very existence, and this is a route that Woolf did not follow. After exploring Woolf's troubled vision of subject/object sympathy, we will look at the alternative vision of impersonality developed in *A Room of One's Own*.

'trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy'[16]

Woolf's writing demonstrates a sustained desire to inhabit other viewpoints, yet her narrators often express guilt about their lack of sympathy. In "Sympathy" (an unpublished short story probably written in 1919 [Dick *CSF*299]), the narrator is frightened by the fact that a death – pictured, like that of Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), as a sacrificial act that 'removed the boundaries and fused the separate entities'– produces no sympathy, indeed, 'scarcely any sensation at all. Terrible! Terrible! to be so callous!' (*CSF*110, 111). The narrator reflects that sympathy is impossible because '[t]here is a moment I can't fancy: the moment in other people's lives that one always leaves out; the moment from which all that we know them by proceeds' (ibid.109). Superficially, this early story implies that sympathy fails because of 'the blind moment' (ibid.), which Martha Nussbaum characterises as 'our epistemological insufficiency toward one another' (732). Yet, as Nussbaum adds, sympathy that is built upon knowledge and rational judgment may be a type of violence in itself: '[d]oes she not shrink from the hand I stretch to her? … The pity which bids me tender my hand to her to bite becomes, or will become, an impulse of compassion which in its generosity appears to her contemptuous' (Woolf "Sympathy" *CSF*109). This passage anticipates "An Unwritten Novel" (1920), where the narrator reassures

[16] Woolf *W*67

her elusive subject, 'I won't raise my hand' (*CSF*117) but will remain suspended and vibrating over Minnie's unviolated mystery. In "Sympathy," Woolf's narrator remains with the 'outward sign I see and shall see for ever; but at the meaning of it I shall only guess' (*CSF*108). In a scene that prefigures *Jacob's Room*, she turns to 'the yellow arm chair in which he sat, shabby but still solid enough, surviving us all;' 'the mantelpiece [is] strewn with glass and silver, but he is ephemeral as the dusty light which stripes the wall and the carpet. So will the sun shine on glass and silver the day I die' (111). Rejecting a sympathy of knowledge and a sympathy of impulse, the only functional version of sympathy in this short story is based on ephemerality and absence.

The relation of what is hidden and what is demonstrated (or demonstrable), the tension between blindness and spectacle, is fundamental to sympathy which, in John Locke's rational model, depends on responding to physical signs and 'delving extensively into questions about what is really (and not only apparently) real' (Cates 340). John Jervis examines this point in *Sympathetic Sentiments: Affect, Emotion and Spectacle in the Modern World* (2015), arguing that 'sympathy seems inherently to entail public forms of expression whereby being "on show" is both a condition of the authenticity of such feelings and of their capacity to be masked and simulated' (2). Both the suffering body and the sympathising body express themselves in culturally-validated forms, and this physical "staging" of socially acceptable emotions explains some of Woolf's hesitancy about sympathy. Since full penetration into another's mind is impossible, we can only evaluate surfaces and we can no more verify the authenticity of others' pain than we can be sure that our sympathy is not appropriative voyeurism. This problematic is evident when we compare the endings of "An Unwritten Novel," where it turns out that the narrator has deluded herself, and "Sympathy," which ends with the fact that there has been no death at all – 'O why did you deceive me?' (*CSF*111). It seems that sympathy is an imaginative journey that has to travel *through* scepticism into faith, without fully neutralising the risk of insincerity (in the sympathiser *and* the thing sympathised with).

Here, sentimentalism – which D.H. Lawrence famously defined as '[f]aked feelings!' (*Phoenix* 545) – rears its ugly head. Woolf often puts the word "'sentimental'" in quotation marks, as if it were an external charge, a word 'owed' to another (*MD*31), used to police the boundaries of "proper feeling". Nevertheless, Woolf generally follows the modernist tendency to associate sentimentality with what is 'unreal, strained, verbose' ("Not One" *E*4:469), with falsehood, slovenliness, romanticism, and egoism. In a 1917 essay on periodisation, Woolf offers a similar argument to T.E. Hulme's "Romanticism and Classicism," suggesting that "romance" is not a historical trend but a writerly orientation: '[w]hen we say that a poem is romantic […] perhaps we most constantly feel that the writer is thinking more of the effect of the thing upon his mind than of the thing itself. And up to a point there is nothing more real than the effect of things upon one's mind' ("Romance" *E*2:75). Nevertheless, if this is the writer's sole interest, then he "'lives alone, /Housed in a dream, at distance from the/Kind'" (Wordsworth *Poetical Works* 5:128 qtd. in Woolf ibid.). For Woolf, modern writing may not be spurred by the moral imperative to cultivate "'the better feelings and sympathies of his readers by strains of generous sentiment and tales of fictitious woe'" ("Antiquary" *E*3:455), but it is involved in bridging the distance between ourselves and things (and other people) by focusing on things themselves, an endeavour that might be construed as 'something akin to sympathy' ("Rereading Meredith" *E*2:275). The following year, Woolf discussed George Meredith's move from realism to romance; were Meredith to 'describe a tea party[,] he will begin by destroying everything by which it is easy to recognize a tea party – chairs, tables, cups, and the rest; he will represent the scene merely by a ring on a finger and a plume passing the window,' symbolic details charged with 'high emotional excitement' (ibid.274). Yet Woolf wonders whether this destruction of furniture sacrifices 'something of greater importance than mere solidity … is it a touch of something more akin to sympathy?' (ibid.275). In these two essays, both dealing with the relative virtues and pitfalls of "romanticism," Woolf begins to sketch a sympathy for objects that does not reduce them to

symbols or effects; a true sympathy for objects would show fidelity to their being, paying them the respect of close, but impersonal, attention.

In *On Sympathy* (2008), Sophie Ratcliffe makes a provocative claim that is particularly pertinent to Woolf's concept of sympathy. She writes that 'contemporary views of sympathy might include the idea of sympathy as an ideal emotion or understanding based on a lack of knowledge' (19). "Sympathy," "An Unwritten Novel," *Jacob's Room*, and *To the Lighthouse* all prove that Woolf is interested in 'intimacy' without 'knowledge' (*TL*44). Ratcliffe's second point is the one I want to emphasise here: 'such a view could involve a sense, not of having "object-relations," but of *being*, perhaps, *something nearer to an object oneself*' (ibid., emphasis added). "Becoming object" was a crucial element in Bergson and Lipps' rhetoric of object-sympathy, and Woolf elaborates on this possibility throughout her career, revealing some crucial differences between *identification with* objects and *being* an object. Woolf shows that the first can support the voracious egoism that we find in some of Vernon Lee's work. For instance, in *The Waves*, Susan thinks 'I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees […] I am not a woman, but the light that falls on this gate, on this ground' (56). Superficially, this is the fusion that continental theorists of subject/object sympathy had promised, but it actually denotes the gluttonous, possessive, complacency that is Susan's most remarkable characteristic – it reaches its apex in the claim, 'all are mine' (ibid.). This later iteration of Mrs Dalloway's feelings of '[o]dd affinities' with 'even trees, or barns' (*MD*130) is much darker, suggesting that Woolf recognised that identification with the external world could also betoken 'a dangerous yearning for reassurance that the world I inhabit is conformable to my designs upon it, that it has the meaning I want it to have' (Wicker 2). On the other hand, understanding the self as an object shows that our minds and bodies are not our own; they are, in fact, opaque to us. Secondly, it illumines how we are constructed by our habitual, largely sub-conscious, engagement with things. This latter consideration was certainly part of the continental tradition of subject/object sympathy, but they tended to see the object as

a benign participant or simply the pliant receptacle of the ego's activity. By contrast, Woolf is especially candid about the ways that the external environment can "score" itself upon 'the consciousness' ("MF" *SE*9), even overwhelming it or dissolving it. In *Moments of Being*, the self is not only a 'container of the feeling of ecstasy,' but also a 'powerless' recipient of violent shocks, and Woolf famously conjectures 'that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer' (76, 80-81). As Anthony Cuda explains, many of Woolf's metaphors for creativity include non-identity, passivity, vulnerability, and the threat of violence, providing 'a version of modernist impersonality rooted not in detachment or aloofness, but in intimate and personal experiences of weakness and powerlessness' (160). These scenes reveal that, as Eve Sorum has noted, moments of empathic openness to the external world are 'equally invasive of the empathizing subject as [of] the object of empathy' (14).

However, while Sorum focuses on 'intentions, motivations, and emotions' rather than pre-conscious 'affect and automatic responses' (18), and Cuda emphasises shock and violence, I examine how subject/object sympathy "invades" on a more tacit level, through 'the cotton wool of daily life' (Woolf *MOB*81). Sorum seems to avoid the issue of automaticity because, as Lisa Blackman has explained, it sometimes implies that affect precedes cognition and that the two can be neatly separated (375). Woolf's work does not hold to this dualism, nor to the idea that the soma can be distinguished from the social or the body distinguished from the cultural. Consequently, I do not agree with Jervis' clear-cut distinctions between 'sensation,' that 'engages us primarily as organic and physical beings, through energy, force, and flow,' and 'sympathy,' that 'engages us as cultural beings, through the power of reflexive awareness' (5). In explicating how objects can automatise our mental, emotional, and physical behaviour, I intend to show that sympathy with objects offers a vivid explanation of the slow culturation of the body and mind, shaping the whole being through unconscious perceptual and behavioural repetitions. As Woolf writes, our 'boots be[come] a little worn on the left side,' producing 'that feeling of existing in

the midst of unconsciousness' (*W*156). Inasmuch as habit leads to subjectification, it also leads to *objectification*, '[o]pening, shutting; shutting; opening; eating, drinking; sometimes speaking – the whole mechanism seemed to expand, to contract, like the mainspring of a clock' (ibid.). Inasmuch as habit can produce 'the same ripple of well-being, repeats the same curve of rhythm,' it can lead to a state of 'despicable nonentity' (ibid.157, 159). In what follows, I will focus on how Woolf pictures our habitual openness to objects as a 'self-displacement' or 'self-surprise' (Ingerslev 225), producing behaviours and language that we do not intend. Line Ingerslev has described habit as 'a form of bodily anonymity,' where what 'the body feels and […] does is how I feel and what I do, but I have no grasp upon where it comes from… my body's past affects me [but] escapes me. I am not the origin' (226). Woolf reveals that habit involves both subjectification and self-*alienation*, wherein the body and the narrative, purposeful "I" are non-coincidental – the "origin" of these actions (simultaneously mine and not mine) lies in our sympathetic receptivity to the objects that surround us, as well as their historical and cultural associations. This receptivity complicates 'our experience of agency' (Ingerslev 225) and points to an agency elsewhere.

Woolf suggests that sympathy involves a suspension of instrumental consciousness where, as A.J Steinbock writes, attention is not simply 'an initiatory subjective act' but a dispositional openness to 'the affective force exerted on the parts of the matters themselves' (21). Bernard's desire 'to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding – impossible to those who act' (*W*67) aligns with Bergsonian sympathy, which suspends 'my action upon things' (*Matter and Memory* 244). Sympathy also includes the abeyance of individualism which Woolf associates with the (male) urge to possess. For instance, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf describes how men cannot 'pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it;' they cannot see a woman or a dog go by without saying "'[c]e chien

est à moi'" ("this dog is mine") (39).[17] Likewise, in *The Waves*, when Bernard is 'charged in every nerve with a sense of identity,' he cannot even 'see a tooth-brush in a glass without saying "*My* tooth-brush' (66, original emphasis). By contrast, Bernard experiences sympathy as dispossession, as an experience of vulnerability, where one is 'interrupted, torn, pricked and plucked at by sensations, spontaneous and irrelevant' (*W*66). '[T]rembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy,' Bernard becomes 'unmoored' 'from a private being:' 'I do not remember my special gifts, or idiosyncrasy, or the marks I bear on my person; eyes, nose or mouth. I am not, at this moment, myself' (67). While the body is a crucial site for Lee's version of empathy, the 'vibrations' of Woolfian sympathy create a disjuncture between 'eyes, nose or mouth' and the self. It is not that subjectivity has been replaced with the somatic, rationality yielding to the non-cognitive body, but that the body has ceased to be a private space. Bodily appendages become marks – in Anthony Cuda's words, 'marks of passion' (146) – that are both traces of, and channels for, our infinite susceptibility to the outside world. In Woolf's version of sympathy, the subject experiences her body as a public site, 'interrupted' and riven by externality.

"Street Haunting" (1930) anticipates this passage from *The Waves*. As in Bergson's account of sympathy, street haunting begins with the "vanishing" of habit, memory, instrumentality, and individuality. Woolf writes of abandoning the 'shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others' and becoming 'a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye' (*SE*178). Yet unlike Bergson, who believed that sympathy penetrates its objects, Woolf proposes an eye that only 'penetrate[s] a little way' and is 'content still with surfaces only' (ibid.187, 179), a model that resonates with the earlier short story, "Sympathy." '[O]ne could penetrate a little way' into the lives of others,

[17] Woolf quotes a phrase from Blaise Pascal's *Pensées* (1670), which goes on to attribute 'the beginning and the image of the usurpation of all the earth' to the adjective "mine" (see footnote by Snaith, ed. *AROO*262).

'far enough to give oneself the *illusion* that one is not tethered to a single mind but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and the minds of others' ("Street Haunting" *SE*187, emphasis added). Although Woolf was sceptical about the value and efficacy of sympathy, she often endorses a spatial understanding of expansive (not penetrative) sympathy. She records instances when 'one's life is not confined to one's body' (*MOB*81) and 'our senses have widened. Membranes, webs of nerve […] have filled and spread themselves […] catching in them far-away sounds unheard before' (*W*79). The experience of sympathy produces a model of 'the true self' as 'neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something' 'varied,' 'streaked, variegated' ("Street Haunting" *SE*182). This "streaking" takes place in the physical body and is an important aspect of the subject's development. In *The Waves*, Neville says, 'I took the print of life not outwardly, but inwardly upon the raw, the white, the unprotected fibre. I am clouded and bruised with the print of minds and faces and things' (*W*127). Likewise, in *Moments of Being*, Woolf imagines herself as 'a porous vessel afloat on sensation; a sensitive plate exposed to visible rays;' 'I fumble with some vague idea about a third voice… I see myself taking the breath of these voices in my sails and tacking this way and that through daily life as I yield to them' (146-147). This idea of a "streaked," malleable, heteroglossic self is a crucial part of Woolf's conception of writing, but it is also an acutely vulnerable image of selfhood.

Woolf was keenly aware of 'how many other than human forces are always at work upon us' (*MOB*146). As she thinks through her own development, subjectification occurs through a series of concrete, lived spaces and cannot be described without reference to rooms, 'folding doors' and 'oval tea tables' ("Hyde Park Gate" *MOB*179; see also "Sketch" *MOB*129-131). The domestic interior is an especially important influence, as Woolf reflects on how her writing was influenced by her 'tea-table training' (*MOB*164). Retrospectively, she sees herself, 'not reviewing a book but handing plates of buns to shy young men and asking them: do they take cream and sugar?' (ibid.). This might be a calculated strategy, a way 'to slip in things that would be inaudible

if one marched straight up and spoke out loud' but, more often than not, Woolf's 'Victorian manner' verges upon unconscious reflex (ibid.). By contrast, the transition from gloomy 22 Hyde Park Gate to the more spacious 46 Gordon Square initiates a period of experimentation, 'revelation', and freedom (*MOB*201). It is not simply that the domestic interior is 'soaked, if walls take pictures and hoard up what is done and said[,] with all that was most intense […] all that makes the most private being' (*MOB*130), but the subject is "soaked" in objects or, to paraphrase Anstruther-Thomson, swallowed by vases. This is overwhelmingly true for women who 'have sat indoors all these millions of years' (*AROO*66). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's argument hinges on how women's 'sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room;' the lack of private space produces the stylistic and thematic features of a distinctively feminine tradition (51). In this essay, Woolf's purpose is to show how profoundly women are embedded in the domestic sphere and, while 'one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face,' the rooms that a woman inhabits are (by and large) not her own (ibid.66).

In *Orlando*, Woolf portrays the Victorian drawing-room as a particularly pernicious type of interior that "automates" the writing subject. Although the changing centuries have hitherto found Orlando 'fundamentally the same' (137), she is unable to resist its influence. The only 'light that penetrated to the drawing-rooms where grown men and women lived came through curtains of brown and purple plush,' and Orlando too is swaddled and incapacitated by layers of crinoline, bombazine, and a damask bed quilt (133, 136). She is suddenly prone to blushes, nervous glances, and womanly poses, but '[h]er words formed themselves, her hands clasped themselves, involuntarily … It was not Orlando who spoke but the spirit of the age' (142). Woolf demonstrates how material objects reflect what is considered normal and necessary in a given cultural period and solicit particular kinds of mental and physical comportment. A plush curtain, a damask quilt, a bassinette can elicit involuntary behaviours. In this way, objects have a

"didactic" function, and Orlando exemplifies the argument of *A Room of One's Own*, being 'educated' (ibid.51) by her environment. This is especially damaging for the female writer. When Orlando tries to write, 'the pen began to curve and caracole with the smoothest possible fluency … [n]othing more repulsive could be imagined than to feel the ink flowing thus in cascades of involuntary inspiration. What had happened to her?' (138). In this scene of automatic writing, Orlando's writing is simultaneously hers and *not* hers, a condition that interested modernists like Gertrude Stein, who experimented with automatic writing (see Steven Meyer's *Irresistible Dictation* [2001] and Lisa Blackman [2014]). As Lisa Blackman explains, automaticity raises questions of where inspiration comes from, 'why and how subjects determine authorship and what [it] feels like when the subject is not considered rational and autonomous, but rather […] part of a distributed system of co-enaction, which includes human and nonhuman actors and agencies' (374). Woolf shows how authorship is complicated by the fact that, as Kym Maclaren writes, 'it is the situation itself that holds the history of our habits, that appears within the frame of an already *instituted* meaning; thus, it is the situation itself that does the moving' (52, original emphasis). This factor highlights the degree of passivity and relationality that underlies any creative negotiation of a given situation.

Orlando "becomes object" in a passage that gives a darker twist to the 'strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy' in *The Waves* (67). As Orlando writes, she feels 'an extraordinary tingling and vibration all over her, as if she were made of a thousand wires upon which some breeze or errant fingers were playing scales:'

> Now her toes tingled; now her marrow. She had the queerest sensations about the thigh bones. Her hairs seemed to erect themselves. Her arms sang and twanged… (O138-139).

In this passage, Orlando becomes a physical incarnation of that famous emblem of Romantic inspiration, Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" (1795) – an instrument like a wind chime that is placed in a window and makes sounds because of the wind passing over it. Coleridge's poem

suggests a passive theory of the mind and speculatively engages with pantheism and materialist constructivism, imagining how all 'animated nature' might be 'Instruments diversly fram'd/That tremble into thought, while thro' them breathes/One infinite and intellectual Breeze' (*Poetical Works* 2:1022). Coleridge presents an idea of the human as '[m]echaniz'd matter,' 'organic harps' (ibid.1023), avoiding the stickier problem of automatism by focusing on how all bodies participate in a joyful, harmonious, pantheistic "life." Timothy Morton teases out some of the tensions in the Aeolian harp model of creativity, an instrument that apparently 'organize[s] sound without human input,' 'open[ing] up possibilities of surprise' and "'un-intention'" that, at their most negative pitch, might imply that 'life' and creativity are 'reducible to machinic automated processes' (313, 320). Woolf's allusion to Coleridge's poem is pointed and rather bleak, refusing the element of fantasy that Coleridge indulges. When Orlando's body is transformed into a "trembling Instrument," '[t]he vibration seemed' to intimate 'some of the darkest manifestations of the human soul' (*O*139). This invocation adds another layer to the 'vibratory aesthetics' (C. Tobin 34) discussed in the previous chapter: "vibration" does not only model an ethical suspension of activity in respect to the object's "own life," but also shows that we sympathetically "vibrate" to the tune of the material environment. By emphasising our unconscious receptivity to an object's affordances, theories of subject/object sympathy had given a psychological explanation for this Romantic ideal. However, unless the theorist decided to dodge into material objects scepticism (as Vernon Lee did), subject/object empathy suggested that humans might be more vulnerable to objects than had been otherwise assumed. This passage from *Orlando* links the Coleridgean model of sympathetic sensibility to Hulme's assertion, in "Romanticism and Classicism," that 'many acts which we habitually label free are in reality automatic. It is quite possible for a man to write a book almost automatically' (*Collected Writings* 64). Indeed, for the female writer, this is not only a possibility but a threat, prefigured in Coleridge's picture of the harp as a 'coy Maid,' ravished by the male, ventriloquist breeze (ibid.1022). The vibrations of sympathy ultimately resolve themselves into 'a ring of quivering

sensibility about the second finger of [Orlando's] left hand' (*O*139), the wedding finger. Orlando feels compelled to join the Victorian cult of domesticity, to become 'indissolubly linked together' with a man (140).

In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Mrs Ramsay proposes a vision of "becoming object" that also includes an experience of automatism. Famously, she speaks of '[l]osing personality,' 'attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw … until she became the thing she looked at' (53). She describes a sympathetic identification wherein

> …one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus … as for oneself. (53-54)

Yet this trance-like experience has the capacity to 'lift up […] some little phrase or other which had been lying her mind … suddenly she added, We are in the hands of the Lord' (53). Mrs Ramsay is horrified to find this 'insincerity slipping in among the truths' because it indicates an unconscious acquiescence to religious beliefs that she has long since set aside (54). Mrs Ramsay lapses into the socio-cultural schemata that filter our relationship to the world and automatise our perceptual activity. It is tempting to read her automatic speech as the opposite of her experience of subject/object sympathy. However, we should be cautious because "becoming-object" involves the same elements of passivity, unconsciousness, and receptivity that contribute towards automatism. Mrs Ramsay finds pleasure in being 'hypnotized' by the objects she sees, 'as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight,' but it is equally possible that an object might burst a different 'sealed vessel,' lifting some other, undesired memory to the 'floor of the mind' (54). The parallel processes of sympathy and automatism are possible because, for better or worse, we are primed to be receptive to human and non-human others. Furthermore (and here Woolf's work aligns with Lee's and Bergson's), the experience of subject/object sympathy is deeply connected 'to the

exigencies of social life' and 'impregnated with our past' habits (Bergson *Matter and Memory* 214, 36). Consequently, although endorsing Mrs Ramsay's ability to 'be[come] the thing she looked at' would be a vindication of subject/object sympathy, we must not ignore the tensions and equivocations that surround this famous passage. "Becoming object" remains a perilous prospect.

"The Mark on the Wall" (1917) provides a final example of these concerns. This short story develops through the rhythms and vagaries of reverie and is sometimes read as a piece of 'fantasized, egotistical self-expression' (Morrison 30), where "reality" is juxtaposed to "imagination" and eventually rejected. T.S. Eliot encouraged such readings, claiming that Woolf was interested in 'contemplating the feeling, rather than the object which has excited it' (*Complete Prose* 2:365). In 1921, he asserted that 'the charm of Mrs Woolf's shorter pieces consists in the immense disparity between the object and the train of feeling which it has set in motion;' 'images and feelings' 'float away from it [the object]' rather than cleaving to it (ibid.). In other words, Eliot felt that Woolf was following through on her 1917 suggestion that 'there is nothing more real than the effect of things upon one's mind' – but "The Mark on the Wall" also emphasises her caveat, '*up to a point*' ("Romance" *E*2:75, emphasis added). While creative freedom and individual perspective is clearly at stake in this short story (as it was in her "Bennett" essays), and Woolf 'want[s] to think quietly, calmly, spaciously, never to be interrupted … sink[ing] deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts,' she also wants to 'steady [her]self' by repeatedly turning to an unidentified object, the mark on the wall (*CSF*84-85). This is because, just as in *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse*, reverie – unstructured, non-instrumental, open-ended – includes the threat of lapsing into 'automatic fancy' and internalised social norms (ibid.83). Woolf does "float away" from objects through the associational fluidity of her reverie, but this distance is strategic, intended to problematise 'a whole class of things […] which as a

child one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation' (86).

In a striking passage, Woolf claims that certain objects are "unreal." Their reality is based upon convention, 'habits – like the habit of sitting all together in one room until a certain hour, although nobody liked it,' and tacit social 'rule[s]' (ibid.):

> The rule for tablecloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little yellow compartments marked upon them … Tablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths. How shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms, and the damnation which visited the disbeliever in them was only a sense of illegitimate freedom. (ibid.)

The tablecloth codifies a specific habitus, which is then generalised as a condition of reality. It exists as a self-evident truth, but actually denotes 'the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker's Table of Precedency,' giving rise to a world of 'professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen' (86-87). Since objects have this normative function, Woolf repeatedly makes distinctions between things that are "real" and things that are "unreal," encouraging her readers to become, as it were, apostates of the tablecloth. This strategy renders the domestic sphere intensely uncanny. Although 'we seem [to be] wedged among solid objects in a solid world,' solidity is suddenly abolished and 'comfortable reality has proved itself a phantom too' ("Phases" *E*5:43). In *The Voyage Out* (1915), Rachel 'finger[s] different objects,' saying, "'I believe in the bed, in the photographs, in the pot, in the balcony, in the sun […] But I don't believe in God, I don't believe in Mr Bax, I don't believe in the hospital nurse'" (290-291). She arrives at these distinctions because she has been disillusioned by 'the mechanical respect' her fellow churchgoers have for the vicar, Mr Bax, and their religious feeling which 'seemed to rise automatically' like 'the ghosts of unnumerable services on innumerable Sunday mornings at home' (ibid.263,262). These social rituals produce

subjects that are 'slavishly acquiescent,' like the hospital nurse who is like 'a limpet, with the sensitive side of her stuck to a rock, for ever dead to the rush of fresh and beautiful things past her' (265). Similarly, In *Jacob's Room*, 'serious sixpenny weeklies' reveal 'a world capable of existing – there was no doubt about that – but so unnecessary, such a thing to believe in' (43). Jacob scans 'the street for lilac or bicycle – anything to restore his sense of freedom' (ibid.). Again, in *Roger Fry*, Woolf includes a list by Lady Fry of "'Things that were not –: Things that were:'"

> Among the things that were not, she counted lucifer matches; hot-water bottles; night-lights; Christmas trees; hoardings with posters; Japanese anemones; spring mattresses; and gas for teeth extraction. Among the things that were, she counted flint and steel; rushlights; prunes and senna; clogs and pattens; beadles and chariots; tippets and sleeves (in one); snuff-boxes and Chartists. (17)

Woolf might have decided to include this eccentric list in Fry's biography because it paralleled the hierarchies already at work in her own fiction, recurrent contrasts between "real" and "unreal" things. These apparently arbitrary oppositions reveal how material objects concretise – "make real" – certain prejudices and inhibitions that are socially and historically contingent. By exposing the "unreality" of certain objects, Woolf hopes to defamiliarize the tacit conventions of social life.

Nevertheless, some objects are "worth believing in." The narrator of "Mark on the Wall" turns to the unidentified mark and 'feel[s] that I have grasped a plank in the sea;'

> I feel a satisfying sense of reality which at once turns the two Archbishops and the Lord High Chancellor to the shadows of shades. Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours. (*CSF*88)

Superficially, this passage is reminiscent of the worshipful attitude towards "unreal" objects that Woolf has earlier condemned. However, the difference between the tablecloth and the chest of drawers is that the tablecloth encapsulates one form of social life: it leaves no room for polysemy or dissidence. Conversely, the chest of drawers is a manifold, containing planes of existence from which the human is radically absent. Succinctly, it exists as a thing in itself as well as a thing for us. The narrator begins to imagine the 'million patient, watchful lives' of 'a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms … but something is getting in the way…' (*CSF*89). This potentially animistic excursion into the 'lives' of a tree is halted by the intrusion of a male voice, who identifies the mark as a snail.

Like Bergson and Lipps, who were (to varying degrees) interested in 'the interior of an object' (Bergson *Creative Mind* 173) and our empathic exchanges with the material world, Woolf is interested in the interrelations of thought and external objects. Yet she is more modest in her claims for sympathetic access into persons and things, as well as more cognizant of the detrimental effects of objects, developing a conception of the self as susceptible, receptive, and porous. She differed from Lee by arguing that, as Michelle Levy has noted, objects offer an 'impetus for thought and imagination' *and* impose 'crucial constraints on the life of the mind' (141). By evading this fact, object sympathy might tend towards egoism, a recognition that links Woolf to Hulme even while it differentiates her from his later absolutism. We will now turn to *A Room of One's Own*, which blends concerns about the material bases for subjectification with the proposition that impersonal attention to things themselves is a path to intellectual freedom.

‘purely personal relationships to mustard pots and flower vases’?[18]

In “How it Strikes a Contemporary” (1923), Woolf advises us to ‘take a wider, less personal view of modern literature’ (*SE*30). It is difficult to assess contemporary writers because many of our opinions are ‘entirely dependent upon our position at the table and certain purely personal relationships to mustard pots and flower vases’ (ibid.). Yet Woolf is not only concerned to moderate the critical reception of modern literature. The ‘personal’ element is also crucial to the *production* of modern literature, and its focus on ‘the senses of sight, of sound, of touch – above all, the sense of the human being, his depth and the variety of his perceptions, his complexity, his confusion, his self, in short’ (*SE*28). ‘To believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be released from the cramp and confinement of personality’ but ‘our contemporaries afflict us because they have ceased to believe. The most sincere of them will only tell us what it is that happens to himself’ (*SE*29). In the preface to *Poets of the English Language* (1952), the late modernist W.H. Auden agreed with this estimate, elucidating the contemporary loss of faith in analogy, that ‘ultimate and intelligible unity’ which connects ‘all the diversity of existence’ (xxviii). For Auden, analogy is problematic because it is an ‘oversimplification of the relation between the objective and subjective world’ (xxix), a point that Gillian Beer also raises, claiming that analogy is a condition of anthropomorphism (2000). As we will recall, Lee suggested that empathy was analogical in structure, being ‘that inference from our own inner experience which has shaped all our conceptions of an outer world’ (*The Beautiful* 68). In “How it Strikes a Contemporary,” Woolf suggests that analogy has some value, especially when paired with impersonality: the ability to ‘set [experience] outside herself’ and ‘know the relations of human beings towards each other and towards the universe’ (*SE*29).

[18] Woolf “How it Strikes a Contemporary” *SE*30

A Room of One's Own may appear as a bourgeois plea for a private space where the (writing) subject can become individuated and discrete. It has also been criticised as inadequately feminist, most notably by Elaine Showalter who claims that the essay 'depersonalizes, and even de-sexes, the subject' (282). The problem that a reader faces is that *A Room* advocates for self-ownership and self-dispossession, for voicing and anonymity, personal perspective and impersonality, all at the same time. I suspect that much of the critical controversy around impersonality rests on an implicit assumption that the prefix *im-* means the opposite of personality, and that personality is something "owned" by a subject, as opposed to what is cleansed of subjectivity, 'unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving' (Daston & Galison 17). Of course, Woolf never suggests that this is the rhetoric of *A Room of One's Own*; she gives us ample opportunity to 'observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker' (4). Furthermore, the previous discussion of Woolfian sympathy has revealed a concept of subjecthood wherein much of what we feel (in an affective, cognitive, and physiological sense) does not belong to us, even if we experience it with some sense of ownership. As Woolf's characters tremble with the 'vibrations of sympathy' (*W*67), they realise that the body may *feel like* a private space, but it internalises objects, ideas, and affects that cannot be wholly privatised. Objects, ideas, and affects have an origin in historical, cultural, communal, and material processes. We host them, because we are likewise material; our memories and habits have an active, constitutive impact on the ways that we receive them; but we are not in full possession of them (sometimes we might want to eject them). This materialist understanding of subjectification means that the body itself is always already impersonal, i.e, not just personal. I argue that Woolf's critique of personality is not a critique of a noun – for "'I" is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being' (*AROO*4) – but a critique of a verb, the personalising activity that we exert on what we encounter, trying to possess it. *Im*personality is also a verb, an effort to 'strain off what was personal and accidental in all these impressions' to 'reach the pure fluid, the essential oil of truth,' which, interestingly enough, is not a neutral

statement of fact but 'a thousand questions' (ibid.20). As Judith Allen has brilliantly argued, *A Room of One's Own* intends to convey 'a sense of uncertainty, as well as resistance, to the reader' (3), making us 'contrary, outside of it [civilization], alien and critical' (*AROO*73). I would add that Woolf's conception of selfhood is one that is always already 'outside' itself, always 'alien.'

As we have seen, Bergson argued that it was possible to lay aside subjectivism, provoking harsh criticism from Lee, who believed that subjectivism was ineradicable. Lee's bald, pragmatic egoism would have been uncongenial to Woolf, who argued that women live in 'a shadow shaped something like the letter "I,"' 'capital letters' that suggest 'some purely masculine orgy' (*AROO*75, 77). On the other hand, Woolf follows Bergson's logic to a certain extent, agreeing that, to think impersonally, women must suspend instrumental reason and obtain enough money 'to idle, to contemplate the future of the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream' (*AROO*83). Woolf's most important intervention is to elucidate the fact that women's financial dependency prohibits impersonal thought: it produces 'hatred and bitterness' and a skewed 'attitude towards the other [male] half of the human race' (*AROO*30). With an income of five hundred pounds a year, 'fear and bitterness modified themselves into pity and toleration; and then in a year or two, pity and toleration went, and the greatest release of all came, which is freedom to think of things in themselves' (ibid.). The woman must travel from hate to impersonality, which is not a conclusion but an open-ended process of interrogation:

> That building, for example, do I like it or not? Is that picture beautiful or not? Is that in my opinion a good book or a bad? Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky. (ibid.)

One of the most damaging effects of a patriarchal culture is that it substitutes the male image for an impersonal outlook, glorifying it as an ontological truth. Woolf argues that women's

subjugation will not end so long as women think of 'masculine values' and lives 'in deference to the opinion of others' (56). It does not matter whether women respond 'with docility and diffidence, or with anger and emphasis:' as long as they think through the shadow of the male, they will be 'thinking of something other than the thing itself' (ibid.). If, as "How it Strikes a Contemporary" claims, modern writers are too concerned with their own impressions, the female writer is also too concerned with the opinions of others, partly because she has been educated in sympathy. Subsequently, Woolf utilises her recurrent "real"/"unreal" distinction, arguing that '[a]s people mature they cease to believe in sides or in Headmasters or in highly ornamental pots … to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery' (*AROO*81). 'Do not dream of influencing other people … Think of things in themselves' (ibid.84).

While Woolf ponders 'the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer,' she also wants to confront a non-human, 'inscrutable society' that exists even when '[a]ll human beings were laid asleep – prone, horizontal, dumb' (ibid.19). Reality does not purely consist of the human world – it might be 'found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun' (83). *A Room of One's Own* ends by encouraging us not to stay in 'rooms of our own' or 'the common sitting-room' but to 'see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves' (86). What is this if not sympathy, albeit a sympathy that is substantially different from the Lockean, humanist model and from Lee's rejection of the "it is"? Steering our attention to things themselves, Woolf develops an idea of sympathy with the human and the non-human world that is synchronous with impersonality. Such impersonality is not an inoculation of the creative artist against the vulnerabilities of material existence. Rather, the writer 'live[s] in the presence of reality, an invigorating life' (*AROO*83) if a perilous one,

acknowledging how external forces tacitly impact her intellectual and physical being. This admission is remarkable, especially when we consider how Bergson, Lipps, and Lee all skirted this issue in their work on subject/object sympathy and the living, moving, acting object. While Woolf remains skittish about animism, we have seen that she goes further towards decentring the human than these earlier theorists. Her scenes of "becoming object" are less about an intuitive grasp of an object's inner life, than about the fact that we are always already object in the sense that subjectification takes place through a series of object encounters.

Chapter 3

'a world seen without a self': Unoccupied Rooms and the Legacy of Empiricism

Perhaps the strongest testament to Virginia Woolf's fascination with the object *qua* object lies in the unoccupied rooms that recur throughout her oeuvre. From *Jacob's Room* (1922) where 'no one sits' (49) to the '[e]mpty, empty, empty' dining-room of *Between the Acts* (1941) (33), Woolf attempts to narrate the object's persistent existence *beyond* human experience. The unoccupied room comes freighted with a specific eighteenth-century philosophical legacy that descends to Woolf through the patrilineal line of Leslie Stephen, whose acclaimed two-volume *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1875) explicated this tradition for a modern audience.[19] As Stephen's daughter and assistant biographer, Woolf would have been particularly aware that the unoccupied room was a well-established philosophical trope. Stephen – and the prominent figures of his *History*, George Berkeley and David Hume – used this trope to affirm allegiance to the empiricist school of experience and their subsequent agnosticism regarding any 'permanent, unexperienced substratum of material substance underlying […] sensations' (Snyder 131). Through this genealogy, the modern novelist inherits the unoccupied room as a spatial shorthand for two antithetical propositions: objects are ontologically independent of the percipient or, as the empiricists would have it, objects are simply sense-perceptions, ontologically dependent on a perceiving mind. The first proposition endorses the unoccupied room; the second abjures it as a 'transcendental region of antinomies and cobwebs of the brain' (Stephen "WM?" 144).

Stephen was of the latter opinion, arguing in "What is Materialism?" (1893, 1903) that, since we can 'know nothing directly except the modifications of our consciousness, thoughts,

[19] Through the *History*, numerous *Cornhill Magazine* essays (1871-1881), and the Ford lecture series, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1903, 1904), Stephen helped revive interest in the 'well-abused' eighteenth-century and was popularly regarded as its 'apostle' (Hunt 410; F. Harrison 370).

sensations, emotions, [and] volitions' (135), the unoccupied room is a logical impossibility. It stood for a linguistic aporia – 'an object without a subject is a meaningless phrase' (ibid.). That same year, the idealist philosopher Edward Caird declared that the unoccupied room epitomised the unsayable, for 'divest the world of all its relations to a subject, and it sinks into a "thing in itself," a *caput mortuum* of abstraction, of which nothing can be said' (*Evolution* 1:127-8). In the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and the interludes of *The Waves* (1931), Woolf converses with Stephen and his favourite philosophers, asking what *can* be said of objects 'as they are when we are not there … life as it is when we have no part in it' ("Cinema" *E*4:349)? How might one give literary expression to the unobserved?

The question encoded in the unoccupied room – do objects exist when unobserved? – is often regarded as irrelevant or absurd. We can better understand its urgency when we consider the basis for the empiricists' rejection of unoccupied rooms: a definition of the object as a 'set of organised sense-impressions' (Stephen "WM?" 137). This definition has two salient consequences. Firstly, it entails a time scheme that cedes temporal continuity to the vivid but perishing moment, as 'things are every moment annihilated and created anew,' with every blink of the percipient's eye (Berkeley *Principles* 281). When the moment (and the object itself) is defined as an evanescent impression centred in 'a knot of consciousness' (Woolf "The Moment" *E*6:510), the unoccupied room provides a prime scenario for considering how to 'make of the moment something permanent' (*TL*133). As a metaphor for either the ephemerality of humans' impressions or the 'solid mathematical universe of indestructible matter' (Stephen "WM?" 147), unoccupied rooms provide striking examples of the oscillation between fluidity and solidity that not only preoccupied Woolf's imagination but also the empirical imagination. Secondly, if objects are sense-impressions and sense-impressions are specific to each individual, then the material world does not necessarily produce any shared experiential norm. The idea of a public world, or "world-in-common," becomes as phantasmal as the objects that shimmer into being

and then vanish away. Stephen recognised that, if we cannot secure the commonality of the material world, this presents a considerable challenge for intersubjectivity. Defining objects as the private content of individual consciousnesses entails the further belief that we are each an 'absolute unit, cut off by an impassable abyss from a direct knowledge of other consciousnesses' (ibid.148).

Here, Stephen echoes John Locke's famous characterisation of the 'understanding' as 'a small closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or *ideas* of things without' (96, emphasis added). As Jonathan Kramnick explains, Locke offers a representational theory of mind, wherein ideas represent things and thus, 'acquire a kind of stability' (49). For many empiricists, thinking is essentially "thinking about" 'some quality or accident of a body without us; which is commonly called an object' (Hobbes 14). This "aboutness" can be interpreted as a cognitive theory of worldly engagement: thought is anchored to, and moulded by, external entities. However, because such engagement is always indirect – with ideas of things and not things themselves – the affective weight of Locke's metaphor gravitates towards an alternate pole, 'perceptual seclusion' (Kramnick 48). The famous idealist T.H. Green castigated Locke's closet metaphor for its closeted wistfulness for 'thing[s] without us' ("Introductions" 25), its nostalgia for an "impossible" contact with things themselves. Even so, in Stephen's writings on objects we find a troubled agnosticism, a tone that is resolute yet touching, poignant rather than boisterous. This tenor is worth examining, especially since Stephen finds, in "What is Materialism?", that belief in unobserved objects is a necessary premise for scientific thought and basic sociability. Lest the world devolve into 'a shifting phantasmagoria of vision, coloured, as dreams are coloured, by the predilections of each dreamer' (148), we need to construct a communal 'hypothetical consciousness, of which my own is an essential part, but which extends indefinitely beyond it' (136). This imaginary release from personal experience enables us to postulate tables, pens, and chairs 'which are independent, in a sense, of our

particular position' (137) and thus arrive at scientifically fruitful hypotheses. In this telling – if equivocal – endorsement of the unoccupied room, Stephen pre-empts its re-assessment by later twentieth-century philosophers.

This project was central to the new realism of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell who, as S.P. Rosenbaum (1998) and Ann Banfield (2000) convincingly argue, became Bloomsbury's primary philosophical influences. However, Woolf's sustained interest in the unoccupied room is not solely attributable to its ubiquity as a twentieth-century thought experiment. A longer intellectual history, one that includes its eighteenth-century heritage, helps us delineate what is at stake for Woolf in the unoccupied room. Banfield herself recommends this line of enquiry in *The Phantom Table* (2000), suggesting that Stephen's writings may have been Woolf's first introduction to the debate (29, 37-8). Banfield contextualises her argument for Russell's influence on Woolf with epigraphs from Stephen's *History* (36, 47, 51), implying that the continuities between these two philosophers repay examination. Indeed, the imaginative value of unoccupied rooms proposed in "What is Materialism?" may be one of those (unspecified) statements by Stephen where Banfield finds that 'the Russellian solution is traceable in the very text that argued its insolubility' (39). Since both Russell *and* Stephen valued extra-human, unoccupied perspectives for enabling hypotheses regarding 'the world outside our perceptions' (Russell *Matter* 227; Stephen "WM?" 139), we should be wary of schema that pit Stephen against Russell. Rather, Stephen can be seen as an (unintentional) intermediary between the empiricist and new realist stance on unobserved objects. While Stephen is ultimately bracketed in Banfield's study, she rightly finds it 'amazing' that 'Leslie Stephen as a philosopher is so infrequently mentioned' in Woolf studies (37); 'the paternal side of the inevitable Bloomsbury family tree, has yet to be explored in all its ramifications' (x).

Perhaps these omissions are due to Woolf's private sketches of Stephen, the 'tyrant father' (*MOB*128) whose 'life would have entirely ended mine … No writing, no books' (*D*3:208). However, Stephen's influence was not simply a force to be parodied, repudiated, or exorcised. Increasingly, as scholars tease out the complex valences of this relationship, we see that Stephen was 'an integral part of [Woolf's] psychic vocabulary' (Fisher 37) and a critical touchstone.[20] It is now necessary to 'queer the angle of that immensely important relationship' (Woolf *MOB*117) in the direction of Stephen's philosophy. Publicly, Woolf chose to characterise him as a philosopher.[21] In the philosopher's study she felt 'soothed, stimulated, full of love for this very unworldly, very distinguished, lonely man,' yet his 'failure[s] as a philosopher' also brought home the lesson 'that nothing is so much to be dreaded as egotism' (*MOB*172, 160). Stephen's object-philosophy is implicated in the temperamental contradictions that Woolf endlessly pores over, the brutal egotism mixed with an ability to 'show us for a minute an inspiriting vision of free life, bathed in an impersonal light' (*MOB*53). Lucidly, the *History* reveals that shackling the object to a perceiving mind enforces the subject's 'imprisonment in personal perspectivism' (van Alphen 414).

Examining how Woolf's fiction interacts with Stephen's philosophy may help to resolve the difficulties that some Woolf scholars have in squaring, per Banfield, Russellian formal logic with her playful, emotive, polyvalent writing. Indeed, Woolf's comments on Russell and Moore are tinged with irony, dissent, and impatience with their abstruse, cerebral style. Woolf laboriously "climbs" Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) 'like some industrious insect' (*L*1:348); she writes of Russell, '[o]ne does not like him … Nevertheless, I should like the run of his headpiece'

[20] For Stephen's influence on Woolf's experimental biographies and literary criticism, see Jane Fisher (1990, 1989), Virginia Hyman (1983, 1980), and Katherine Hill (1981). For revisionary accounts of Stephen, see Noel Annan's *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (1984) and S.P Rosenbaum's *Victorian Bloomsbury* (1994).
[21] See Woolf's (uncredited) retrospective in Frederic Maitland's *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (1906) (ch.21), "Impressions of Sir Leslie Stephen" (1906) (*E*1:83-85) and "Leslie Stephen, The Philosopher at Home" (1932) (*SE*111-116).

(*D*2:295). In 2012, Patricia Waugh put the problem succinctly, arguing that Woolf's 'enactive, autopoetic, extended or distributed' model of 'mind' contrasts with Russell's more abstract formulation of "'subjectless subjectivity'" (32, 34). Waugh taps a wider, scholarly feeling that the "world without a self" is incommensurate with (or, at least, pales beside) the rich entanglement of thoughts and things that is everywhere presented in Woolf's work. This is no small issue. Yet Stephen may be a more resonant point of reference than Russell because, although he was not 'a writer for whom [Woolf had] a natural taste' (*MOB*128), his eloquent, almost literary, *History* is an engrossing introduction to philosophical problems. Stephen believed that poetry and philosophy are 'concentric' and that 'the greatest works of either kind seem to have a double nature,' containing as much vividness, affective force, and linguistic play as logical argument (*Hours* 3:179). He approached Berkeley and Hume with a reader's affection, noting their 'almost unsurpassed literary skill;' their philosophy stirred 'the play of the imagination' and lent itself to 'poetical embodiment' (*HET*39, 13). This approach may have primed Woolf's own engagement with philosophy. She disliked philosophical 'exhortation[s],' but praised novels that had 'consumed' a philosophy and given it aesthetic "shape" ("George Meredith" *E*4:532). More importantly, Stephen showed that object ontology *matters* on an experiential, ethical, and social level and not just an intellectual level. Stephen realised that the eighteenth-century refutation of mind-independent objects implied that there can be no extension of minds, either towards the material or social world. I read Woolf's unoccupied rooms as reparative, as attempts to counteract the temporally and emotionally fragmented worlds that Stephen had glimpsed in Berkeley and Hume's object ontologies.[22]

[22] This analysis aligns with Anthony Nuttall's *A Common Sky* (1974), which traces the imaginative effects of empiricism on literature, as well as articles on the influence of Stephen's philosophy upon Woolf's writing, particularly *To the Lighthouse*. See, for instance, "Hume, Stephen and Elegy in *To the Lighthouse*" (Beer 1984), "Mr. Ramsay Was Young Once" (Bicknell 1987), and "An Agnostic's Daughter's Apology: Materialism, Spiritualism, and Ancestry in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*" (Gaipa 2003).

On logical grounds, Stephen found Berkeley and Hume's abjuration of unoccupied rooms incontestable, but Woolf responds sensitively to the repressed ambivalence detectable in works such as "What is Materialism?" Repeatedly, her unoccupied rooms portray a consciousness that, as Stephen desired, 'extends indefinitely' beyond the bounds of individual sense-perceptions ("WM?" 136) and shows 'the mind released from shepherding the body to knock at this door, to observe that fur, that rag, that window, that grating' (*Pointz Hall* ETS 1). For instance, in the *Pointz Hall* typescript of *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf employs Stephen's 'hypothetical consciousness' as a literary technique:

> But who observed the dining-room? Who noted the silence, the emptiness? … Certainly, it is difficult to find a name for that which is in a room, yet the room is empty, for that which perceives pictures, knife and fork, also men and women; and describes them; and not only perceives but partakes of them, and has access to the mind in its darkness. And further, goes from mind to mind and surface to surface, and from body to body creating what is not mind or body, not surface or depths, but a common element in which the perishable is preserved and the separate become one. Does it not by this means create immortality? (61)

The room that endures in its emptiness offsets the empiricist definition of objects as perishing particulars, 'fleeting, momentary, unnameable' (Green "Introductions" 16). Furthermore, the being that observes unoccupied rooms exposes a second desired continuity, a continuity between persons and *things*. Stephen shared this desire, supposing a commonality between the so-called antinomies of matter and mind ("WM?" 132-135). Woolf's determination to find an element common to forks *and* women aligns neatly with Stephen's belief that '[a] stone is "real," *and* a thought is "real,"' though, he sadly admitted, the relation between these realities was a vexed problem that had never yet been solved (ibid.135, original emphasis). Stephen's lament becomes Woolf's project, as her unoccupied rooms attempt that 'continuous miracle' (134) denied by empiricism – thought's encounter with matter. In all their various iterations, Woolf's unoccupied rooms are paired with the problems Stephen had gleaned from his reading of eighteenth-century

philosophy, problems of time and connection – 'when' as well as '[a]m I that, or am I this? Are we one, or are we separate?' (*Y*134).

This quotation from *The Years* occurs as Sara and Maggie Pargiter discuss an 'ugly little brown volume' that claims, 'the world's nothing but thought' (134). Critics generally agree that this book, which 'had fallen on the floor' (132), is by the empiricist philosopher Bishop Berkeley since Sara paraphrases his major thesis – reality is wholly mental.[23] Berkeley's famous maxim *esse est percipi* – or, as G.E. Moore translates it, 'whatever is, is *experienced*' ("Refutation" 7, original emphasis) – naturally prompts questions like Maggie's, "'Would there be trees if we didn't see them?'" (*Y*134). Her query echoes throughout other Bloomsbury texts. For instance, E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* begins with the question, "'[w]hat do our rooms look like in the vac.?" … Do they exist only when there is someone to look at them? Or have they a real existence of their own?' (1).[24] W.B. Yeats considered such questions characteristic of modern fiction which, he believed, had largely aligned itself with the latter proposition, corresponding to a 'new realist philosophy which thinks that the secondary and primary qualities alike are independent of consciousness' (109). Censoriously, Yeats remarked that if modern writers were to portray a penny it would be 'bright and dark, oblong and round, hot and cold, dumb and ringing in its own right … independent of a consciousness that has shrunk back, grown intermittent and accidental, into the looking glass' (ibid.). Yeats attributed the modern penchant for mind-independent objects to G.E. Moore's "The Refutation of Idealism" (published in 1903, the same year as the second edition of Stephen's "What is Materialism?").[25] Here, Moore tackles the Berkeleyan premise 'that what makes [any thing] real can be nothing but its presence as an

[23] Leonard and Virginia Woolf's library contains Leslie Stephen's 1734 edition of Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), a plain brown volume like that described in *The Years*.
[24] *The Longest Journey* was published in 1907, the same year in which Sara and Maggie's conversation takes place.
[25] Yeats did not endorse the anti-Berkeleyan stance; Berkeley and Moore simply represented two opposing philosophical poles along which modernist authors chose to position themselves. Yeats, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Wyndham Lewis all considered Berkeley (*contra* Moore) to be 'a virtual philosophical hero' (Law 93).

inseparable aspect of a *sentient experience*' (8, original emphases). Moore distinguished the unoccupied room as a formidable and provocative hypothesis, a literary stimulus as well as a landmark in British philosophy.

As Yeats suggests, *esse est percipi* became infamous as the crux of difference between idealist philosophy and the new realism associated with Russell and Moore (Beaney 2013, Mander *Philosophy*). The story is, of course, more complicated. Moore's decision to target Berkeley was strategic, both because Berkeley's maxim had the advantage of clarity and because it had remained the definitive background for British philosophy. Nonetheless, it was somewhat dated because the Berkeleyan paradigm of sense-based idealism had undergone significant changes by the time nineteenth-century idealism came to dominate the British scene (1874-1903 [Quinton 124-126]).[26] In fact, nineteenth-century idealists distinguished themselves by critiquing their empiricist predecessors, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. The first step in J.M.E. McTaggart's three-part programme for idealism was the refutation of empiricism (1893). T.H. Green's introduction to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1874) subjected the empiricist giant to a devastating analysis: by rigorously fortifying 'the antithesis between thought and reality,' Hume had ensured 'the bankruptcy of Empiricism' and the stagnation of modern philosophy (Hylton 22). Thanks to empiricism and its common-sense antagonists, British philosophy was caught between two narrow poles: the physical world was either 'an external reality given in immediate perception, or a mere phenomenal construction' (Mander *Idealism* 15). Nineteenth-century idealists turned to German philosophy for a solution, tracing the evolution of philosophy from Hume to Kant to Hegel, from whom nineteenth-century British idealism takes its cue (see Green 1874, Stirling 1865, Wallace 1892, Pringle-Pattison 1882).[27] Kant had improved upon Hume, but

[26] Of course, Berkeley is both an empiricist and an idealist; I highlight his empiricist affiliations to demonstrate the significant differences between his sense-based idealism and nineteenth-century British idealism.
[27] For Hegel's impact on British idealism, see James Bradley's "Hegel in Britain" (1979), Peter Robbins' *The British Hegelians, 1875-1925* (1982) and W.J. Mander's *British Idealism: A History* (2011). J.N. Findlay disentangles the

his philosophy is marred by an entrenched dualism: the dichotomy between appearances (*phenomena*) – which we know only through an inevitably ego-centric subjectivity – and things-in-themselves (*noumena*) – which exist, although we can gain no true knowledge of them.[28] Many idealists were dissatisfied with Kant's combination of epistemological idealism and indeterminate ontological realism, for it 'sets up two separate worlds that exist in a position of negation' (Dunham, et.al 164). Alternatively, Hegel's belief that the world is an "'externalisation" of the "eternal Idea'" (Findlay 22) moves from dualism to a monistic 'vision of the totality of things' (Bosanquet 25-26). Hegel offered a way for British idealists to escape the unsatisfactory bifurcation of a world "for us" and a world "in itself," unifying the traditional opposition between thinking and being, subject and object. In place of Kant's two worlds, Hegel allowed British idealists to think of the ideal as immanent not transcendent, 'not a mere other world … but the same [as the physical world], seen, if you like to say, transfigured, idealised' (Wallace *Prolegomena* 145). For instance, Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics* argued that both consciousness and external phenomena are 'media for the realisation of an eternal consciousness,' for the increasing manifestation of God in the world (78). Similarly, F.H. Bradley's "Absolute" is a theory of ultimate reality that, in the same spirit as Green, goes beyond the Kantian emphasis on finitude.

British idealism remains peripheral to this analysis because Stephen, who offered Woolf an intimate window onto eighteenth-century philosophy, was institutionally, theoretically, and temperamentally disinclined towards this powerful nineteenth-century trend. There are several reasons why Stephen declined to comment on one of the most hegemonic and prolific movements in the contemporary scene.[29] Firstly, British idealism originally predominated in Oxford, where nearly all its major thinkers studied or held prominent positions (for example,

doctrines of British "Hegelians" from those of Hegel himself, proving that British philosophers read Hegel idiosyncratically, creatively adapting his insights to the British context (2004).

[28] As discussed in the previous chapter, Bergson's *Matter and Memory* attempted to overcome this impasse.

[29] Besides a diary entry calling Hegel 'in many things, little better than an ass' (Maitland 172).

T.H. Green, F.H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, and William Wallace), and Stephen was a "Cambridge man." Oxford provided a nurturing environment for idealism's metaphysical, if not mystical, orientations. Conversely, Cambridge fostered mathematics, empiricism, and a definite impatience with metaphysics, that 'barren region haunted by shadowy chimeras' (Stephen *Science* 447; Annan *His Thought* 130-132). Secondly, British idealists developed a vigorous 'politics of social responsibility' as an alternative to the utilitarian tradition in which Stephen operated, the tradition of James Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer (Quinton 126; Mander *Idealism*). Stephen took little notice of the idealists' sophisticated critique of utilitarianism, even as he embarked on a similar project in *The English Utilitarians* (1900). In this text, Stephen culpably ignores the most current and important socio-political interventions, which at this time came from the idealist camp, preferring to concentrate on old orthodoxies and Mill's *System of Logic* (1843) (Annan *His Thought* 243-244). Finally, many British idealists enlisted philosophy in defence of religion and even the openly atheistic had a profoundly spiritual cast to their philosophy (Quinton 129-130). For J.H. Stirling, Hegel's great achievement was to see the universe as a 'materialisation' of 'the thoughts of God' (85); for William Wallace, Hegel 'prove[d] that the real scope of philosophy was God' (*Prolegomena* 208); for John Henry Muirhead, 'British idealism' was 'in essence a philosophy of religion' (197). Stephen, the famous agnostic, abominated this marriage of philosophy and religion. He believed that the two can only be 'forced into relation' 'by ingenuous sophistry' (*Science* 454; 450-454). Stephen favoured Hume because he cherished no 'pathetic desire to find some remnant of truth in the ancient dogmas' – unlike certain (unnamed) contemporaries whose 'so-called demonstrations of the existence of God' are nothing but intellectual cowardice (*HET*311). For these reasons, British idealism is a concurrent trend that never truly coincides with Stephen's thought.

Furthermore, despite their incisive critique of empiricism, nineteenth-century idealists remained squarely in the eighteenth-century fold when it came to unobserved objects. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (1897) reaffirms Berkeley's position almost verbatim:

> Find any piece of existence, take up anything that any one could possibly call a fact, or could in any sense assert to have being, and then judge if it does not consist in sentient experience. Try to discover any sense in which you could still continue to speak of it, when all perception and feeling have been removed; or point out any fragment of its matter, any aspect of its being which is not derived from and is not still relative to this source. When the experiment is made strictly, I can myself conceive of nothing else than the experienced. (145)

Nevertheless, 'to transcend what is given is clearly obligatory, if we are to think at all' – we must be 'deliver[ed] of the moment' if we are to access reality, which 'has baffled us so constantly, so persistently retreated' (ibid.127). In order to bridge the gulf that the empiricists had created between experience and objects, Bradley developed a theory of "finite centres," circumscribed points of view that momentarily constitute a 'universe in itself' but ultimately coalesce into "The Absolute" (Eliot *Knowledge* 204-5). T.S. Eliot's doctoral thesis, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (1916), provides a modernist estimate of such manoeuvres. Prodding the solipsistic nerve, Eliot suggests that Bradley's vision of unity is more therapeutic than inevitable. Since each person's experiential range necessarily differs, the 'genesis of the common world can only be described by admitted fictions' (ibid.204). 'Bradley's universe […] is only by an act of faith unified' (202). If, as Bradley suggests, finite centres are "'windowless and doorless"' (Levenson *Genealogy* 182), how can these 'discordant viewpoints [pass] to a higher which shall *somehow* include and transmute them' (Eliot *Knowledge* 147-148, emphasis added)? The "somehow" speaks volumes. Can these obscure transmutations truly dissolve the sensory circle that circumscribes the finite centre? Eliot's notes for *The Waste Land* (1922) include a telling passage from *Appearance and Reality*:

> My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings … my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside … every sphere

> is opaque to the others which surround it … the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul. (346)

As Michael Levenson (1984) and Anthony Nuttall (1974) explain, many of Eliot's literary emphases – for instance, impersonality and "the objective correlative" – should be contextualised within this early, disquieting diagnosis of Bradleian solipsism.

In their early phases, both Russell and Moore were influenced by nineteenth-century idealism, particularly their conviction that 'thoroughgoing empiricism would result in … sterile scepticism' (Griffin 385). However, Moore found the spiritualist emphasis of 'Hegelian philosophy inapplicable to chairs and tables, and I [Russell] found it inapplicable to mathematics' (Russell *Basic Writings* 7), specifically rejecting Bradley's theory of a non-relational "Absolute". Russell's studies in geometry had proved that relations were essential to a philosophically viable mathematics, and he came to regard the world as 'an infinite number of mutually independent entities, with relations which are ultimate, and not reducible to adjectives of their terms or of the whole which these compose' (*Mathematics* xviii). In other words, an 'infinite number of worlds … [some] in fact unperceived' (*Our Knowledge* 88) had taken the place of Hegel's holistic one-world solution. Russell's 'emancipation' from idealism was catalysed by a belief in mind-independent objects:

> … we allowed ourselves to think that grass is green, that the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them…The world, which had been thin and logical, suddenly became rich and varied and solid. (*Philosophy* 12)

Russell and Moore's prominence in Bloomsbury's intellectual milieu corresponds to a philosophical cross-road, defined by the effort to (*contra* Locke, Berkeley and Hume) detach the existence of the object from the experiencing ego. Their rejection of empiricism was not, like the idealists', in the interests of incorporating both subject and object into a harmonious, all-encompassing, causal Idea, but in recognition of the widening 'gulf between the world of physics

and the world of sense' effected by twentieth-century scientific advances (Russell *Matter* 222). Objects are not simply as they appear to us in experience; physics shows that an object like 'our familiar table, which has roused but the slightest thoughts in us hitherto … [is] a problem full of surprising possibilities' (Russell *Problems* 16). Foremost, Russell's tables encode the possibility that, although each entity has a "private world," it is not the *whole* world for 'we can reasonably assume that some aspects of the universe existed from [a certain] point of view, though no one was perceiving it' (*Our Knowledge* 71). Russell argued that objects are not simply experienced sense-data but also *sensibilia*, a term he used to denote phenomena that persist even when 'there happen to be no observers to whom they are data' (*Mysticism* 160).

The issue of unperceived objects inaugurated a new philosophical realism, in which rooms exist with no one in them and 'a thing is real if it persists at times when it is not perceived' (ibid.116). This challenge to the *esse est percipi* school should be contextualised by revisiting Berkeley and Hume's material objects scepticism, which Moore claimed to have refuted. Although this aspect of their philosophy seems, to the layman, an absurd and un-livable position, it has cast a potent shadow over the literary landscape – even after it has 'fallen on the floor' (Woolf *Y*132).

'A bright yet narrow room': The Legacy of Berkeley and Hume[30]

Empiricism seems to offer a similar account of subjectification as that proposed in the previous chapter – the self 'arises out of a ground of purely physical responses to one's circumstances' (R. Allen 265-262); even the most abstract ideas are derived from particular sensory-events, not so much linearly concatenated together as impregnated with imagination and

[30] Woolf "MF" *SE*10

memory. Nevertheless, while Berkeley often retains 'the planar and graphic figure of the world as "imprint"' on the senses (Law 111), his rhetoric of response, mirroring and reflection seems self-contradictory because he denied that there is any exterior, mind-independent object causing these responses. Berkeley sought to counter the thesis that all phenomena have a material basis, arguing that the mind is the ultimate foundation of reality. The 'great irony' that constitutively haunts British philosophy is that this idealist position is actually the logical culmination of strict empiricism (Nuttall 20; Williams 21). Berkeley exemplifies the twist whereby empiricism, determined to avoid *a priori* logic and delimit enquiry to the evidence supplied by the senses, gradually turned to material objects scepticism.

This trajectory is abundantly clear in Berkeley's critique of John Locke. Locke's seminal distinction between an object's primary qualities (e.g., shape, motion, and solidity) and secondary qualities (e.g., sound, taste or hardness) distinguishes between reality, which we may not experience directly, and appearances, which are definitively tied to a percipient. Locke's position on unexperienced objects is equivocal, since he argues that an object's secondary qualities depend on its primary qualities, 'its insensible' or unperceived 'parts' (449). Our sensations "testify" to an *a priori* object – a causal something "'which I did not make for myself" (Green "Introductions" 22). In this way, Locke is not a material objects sceptic. However, Berkeley feared that Locke's 'twofold existence' of objects, 'the one *intelligible*, or in the mind, the other *real* and without the mind,' would lead to 'distrust of our [God-given] senses, and doubt of the existence of heaven and earth' (*Principles* 305-306, original emphases). Through *esse est percipi*, Berkeley hoped to correlate the intelligible (or sensible) with the real and thus avoid religious scepticism.

Nevertheless, Berkeley's work was regarded as one of 'the best lessons in scepticism' – that is, material objects scepticism (Hume *Enquiry* 130). *Contra* Locke, Berkeley defines objects

only according to their secondary '[q]ualities' which 'are nothing else but *sensations* or *ideas*, [and] exist only in a *mind* perceiving them' (*Principles* 301, original emphases):

> The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see it and feel it; and if I were out of my study I might perceive it, or [suppose] that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There is an odour, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a colour or a figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, seems perfectly unintelligible.
>
> Their *esse* is *percipi* …
>
> It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding … [But] what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations; and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these… should exist unperceived? (ibid.259)

The table cannot have any existence independent of a percipient because it is simply a bundle of perceived qualities – odours, colours, textures, etc. As for the 'steadiness, order and coherence' of objects in everyday experience, and the involuntariness with which they obtrude upon our senses, this is proof of nothing but the fact that 'some other will or spirit [is] produc[ing] them' (273). If Berkeley were to take his eye off the table, fortunately, some other spirit has it always in view.

In the early drafts of "Time Passes" and *The Waves*, Woolf tests the efficacy of an observant "spirit" in 'giv[ing] an empty house' (*D*3:76). This inceptive design has been read in terms of a dichotomy between mind and matter (supposedly introduced in Woolf's early critique of "materialism"). "Time Passes" has been read as a grossly materialist episode that only serves to throw into relief idealist foci, such as the fertility of creative consciousness in "The Lighthouse" chapter. For instance, Mark Hussey maintains that the empty house of "Time Passes" represents the 'most apparently desolate aspects of life,' and 'might be described as non-being' (112). Woolf's unoccupied rooms must be resuscitated through creative intervention, for

'only by human perception are they brought into the actual world' (111). In other words, *esse est percipi* – the unobserved objects of "Time Passes" grimly symbolise non-being but, thankfully, Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast will help rescue being (and the full flush of immersion, sense-immediacy and *presence* that the word implies) through their 'magnificent conquest over taps and bath' (*TL*114).

However, David Sherman argues against this dualist conception of the object as 'either an adjunct or limitation' to the subject (167). The narration of "Time Passes" belongs to neither being or nothingness – it is 'a narration at the outskirts of ontology that correlates to an "existing without existents"' (168). Woolf achieves this by replacing the "*who* observes" with a "*what* observes." In the typescript of "Time Passes" (1926), much of the narrative burden is on 'ghostly confidantes' (279), but in the published version, ghosts are replaced with decidedly *nonhuman* "airs" and "lights" whose percepts are speculative at best: '[*a*]*lmost one might imagine*' 'moonlight gliding gently *as if* it laid its caress' (*TL*103, 109, emphasis added). Woolf's revisions limit visionary omniscience by casting all epiphanies as hypotheticals. In the typescript, Mrs McNab receives 'a revelation more confused but more profound (could one have read it) then [*sic*] any accorded to solitary watchers' (285). In the published version, her epiphany is a mere postulate – '[v]isions of joy *there must have been*,' '[s]ome cleavage of the dark *there must have been*' – and she is reduced to a lurching, leering body, 'the voice of witlessness' (*TL*107, emphasis added). Woolf's portrayal of the aged, working-class, Scottish Mrs McNab is certainly problematic, but these modifications correspond to her wider reductions of consciousness. As Mark Gaipa explains, '[o]nly if [Mrs McNab] is emptied of mind can she deliver us a view of the world unseen by any person,' at least insofar as "person" connotes fluency, agency, and higher cognitive function (26).

Likewise, although early critics argued that the interludes of *The Waves* are primarily concerned with 'the anonymous Consciousness that narrates' them (Graham 329; Guiget 302),

Draft 1 reveals Woolf's growing resolve to occlude any distinct perceiving consciousness. Originally, the room of the interludes (which dominated nearly two-thirds of Draft 1) was an *occupied* room. A woman sits at a table, characters and plot lines emerging from the room's furnishings: for instance, 'the fold of the napkin […] showed to the musing mind that long desk pitted with ink pots' where the six characters of *The Waves* study, and so on and so forth (*TWD*1:19). Yet Woolf became dissatisfied with this associational 'method of picking out things in the room and being reminded by them of other things' (*D*3:259), transferring it to Bernard, who 'fill[s] [his] mind with whatever happens to be the contents of a room or a railway carriage as one fills a fountain-pen in an inkpot' (*W*39). As the interludes and soliloquies were divided into separate strands, the narrator devolves in stages. The human '~~who~~' is transformed into a thingly 'which' (*TWD*1:21):

1. an anonymous "'She'" (*D*3:230)
2. a 'Lonely Mind' (*D*3:251, *TWD*1:9)
3. a 'shapeless form, ~~the dreamer, the thinker, who~~ which leant over the table' (*TWD*1:21)
4. a 'shadow that ~~thought~~ among the ~~br~~ glass, plate & books,' 'possessed of an extraordinary omnipotence …the force that arranges … the thing in which all this exists' (*TWD*1:39)
5. 'a ~~v great It~~' (*TWD*1:60)

Cancelling gender pronouns and indications of mind, '~~dreamer~~,' '~~thinker~~,' '~~thought~~,' Woolf elides cognitive, subjective, and intentional elements from the text. The cancellations in the passage below exemplify Woolf's decision to finally deprive the narrator of both gender and omniscience:

> ~~He or she bent~~ brooded in the dawn over a table spread with odds & ends; ~~there was~~ a napkin & a flower pot & a book. "~~I am telling the story of the world from the beginning~~; & in a small room, whose windows were open. (*TWD*1:42)

Paring back the mind's 'extraordinary omnipotence' (*TWD*1:39), Woolf also revises the deictic demonstrative, 'there was' – which indicates a percipient's localised sense-range and time – in

favour of the indefinite article 'a,' signalling a more rigorous trend towards the impersonal. Cleaned of Woolf's cancellations, this passage shows the storyteller being substituted by a tableau.

Berkeley declares, 'the table […] exists, that is, I see it' (*Principles* 25) but from the time that the lonely-mind trope was replaced with the shadow trope, the narrator's sense-organs are gradually occluded. Eventually, Woolf refused to correlate the table with the 'I'/eye, indeed, tried to delimit 'the horrible activity of the mind's eye' (*W*158) by returning to the 'all eyeless and featureless' blueprint of "Time Passes" (*D*3:76). On page 60, 'one could scarcely distinguish […] a couple of eyes, a mouth, a nose' in the 'white curtain stuff' of which the narrator, at this stage, is composed. By page 62, the eye is in question: '~~perhaps there~~ [if there] was an eye in the hooded figure at the table'. Woolf finally opts for the "if": '[i]f there had been an eye in the ~~hooded~~ tent, like a spot of green moss...' (69). From woman to mind, to shadow, to tent, the narratorial presence emerges as object, alongside other potential object-narrators, perhaps a 'hole in the wall,' 'a pool like an eye' (59). While the room continues to function as a unifying device in both draft and published versions of *The Waves* – consistently featuring table and cloth, china and flower pot, napkin and cutlery – the narrator has undergone a chilling metamorphosis. It becomes an object in a room of objects, 'looking like a curtain' (65), before its final disappearance. No longer dominated by a Berkeleyan God-like "spirit," the interludes became oriented towards that which is 'not solely of human thought,' evoking 'not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with' (*D*3:139, 113).

The theistic part of Berkeley's philosophy is frequently considered a poor solution, mere dogma.[31] However, it enables the prospect of *possible* perceptions, a caveat that makes Berkeley's

[31] Despite Stephen's religious agnosticism, he views Berkeley's theism leniently. Given his rejection of contemporary theistic philosophies, this may seem contradictory, but as a proponent of "freethinking and plainspeaking" (1873),

rejection of the unobserved table considerably less dogmatic. As an empiricist, Berkeley is mostly interested in objects as bundles of *actually* experienced qualities, but he also implies that there is an indefinite number of *possible* perspectival locations, unoccupied for the time being (excepting omnipresent God), from which an object might emerge as an *actual* sensory-event (Pitcher 123). Thus, John Stuart Mill's definition of objects as the 'permanent possibilities of sensation' still adheres to the Berkeleyan model (*Examination* 216; see Snyder 95-155). As Stephen explains, "'[t]his is a table'" is 'a compact formula, which not only indicates the sensations of an observer at a particular time and place,' but also the sensations of any other observer, were they to change positions ("WM?" 138). Though Berkeley would not have admitted it, the slippage between objects as *perspectival positions* and objects as *perspectives* means that mentalism can also develop towards panpsychism or animism. In fact, idealism has often implied that 'nature is composed of units which feel their own existence and relation to other things, just as truly, if less articulately, as we do' (Sprigge 434). As G.E. Moore explains,

> [t]he Idealist means to assert that they [chairs and tables] are *in some sense* neither lifeless nor unconscious … the phrase 'reality is spiritual' excites and expresses the belief that the *whole* universe possesses *all the qualities* the possession of which is held to make us so superior to things which seem to be inanimate… ("Refutation" 2, original emphases)

This aspect of idealism is singled out as a 'truly interesting and important proposition,' and exempted from Moore's critique of idealism (ibid.).

Strikingly, in *Time and Western Man* (1927), Wyndham Lewis attributes panpsychism to Bertrand Russell.

> [He] seldom fails to try and make us feel ashamed that when we sit in a chair, in our lordly way, we conclude that the chair is dead matter and without feeling … If he could, he

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Stephen admired Berkeley for his determination to destroy the 'fallacies which lie at the base of all logical procedure' (*Science* 449).

> would lead a revolt of the upholstery and all the humble, put-upon springs, to teach us a little sense at the same time that our arrogance suffered a sharp rebuff … (456)

It may seem strange to think of Russell as the champion of 'the point of view of an observant tea-pot' (ibid.459) – and, certainly, Lewis' "insurgent chair" grossly caricatures his position – yet 'from its inception,' Russell's theory of neutral monism has been interpreted as 'a thinly cloaked version of panpsychism' (Stubenberg 354). Rejecting both dualistic and idealist definitions of objects, neutral monism proposes 'that the things commonly regarded as mental and the things commonly regarded as physical do not differ in respect of any intrinsic property … but only in respect of arrangement and context' (Russell *Logic* 139). Russell argued that 'the physical world itself, as known, is infected through and through with subjectivity,' containing a myriad of 'points of view which we have been accustomed to regard as distinctly psychological' but might conceivably belong to objects as well (*Mind* 230; Skrbina 220). Eschewing Berkeley's emphasis on "minds," Russell conceives of perspective as a spatiotemporal position. Thus, 'what may be called subjectivity in the point of view is not a distinctive peculiarity of mind,' but a "sensitivity" to environment that can belong to 'an object whether animate or inanimate' (*Mind* 130, 260). Subjectivity of this order 'is present just as much in the photographic plate [as in a mind]. And the photographic plate has its biography as well as its "matter"' (*Mind* 130-131). We should note that, in "What is Materialism?" Stephen had suggested that the subject/object binary could be approached in two ways. One might, like Berkeley, refute the existence of matter *or* 'make conceivable [matter's] relations to an immaterial soul' (135). Through the theory of neutral monism, Russell adopts Stephen's second option, arguing that 'matter is less material, and mind less mental, than is commonly supposed … when this is realized, the difficulties raised by Berkeley largely disappear' (Russell *Matter* 7).

Woolf endorses Russell's de-psychologised, de-personalised version of subjectivity. As discussed in the previous chapter, she often imagines herself as an object, a 'porous vessel,' a

Russellian 'sensitive plate' (*MOB*146). In the interludes, objects are extraordinarily sensitive to the environment, moving and changing with the light until they seem to be 'dowered with a fanatical existence' (*W*64):

> …daggers of light fell upon chairs and tables making cracks across their lacquer and polish. The green pot bulged enormously, with its white window elongated in its side. Light […] spilt itself profusely upon the corners and bosses; and yet heaped up darkness in mounds of unmoulded shape. (97)

Such descriptions defamiliarize objects, 'lengthened, swollen, and made portentous,' even though their import cannot be paraphrased or easily mapped onto the events of the soliloquies (124). Although, as we will see below, the objects of the interludes filter into the soliloquies, there is no narrator "for whom" the objects exist. All of the object's qualities that tend to be regarded as "in the eye of the beholder" – colour, movement, and texture – seem to exist independently of an observer. Similarly, in *Between the Acts*, Woolf describes a 'blue, pure blue, black blue, blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration … No flower felt it; no field; no garden' (21). Like Russell, Woolf seems to imply that qualia exists even when it is not experienced, a pointed challenge to Berkeley.

While Berkeley seemed to have reduced our common-sense, material world to 'a mere dream,' he insists that we 'need not be much concerned' ("Dialogues" 422) – 'be not angry, You lose nothing, whether real or chimerical' ("Commonplace Book" 20). We can take comfort in the fact that the physical world in no way exceeds perception (no matter how extravagant) because everything that is perceived *is*. Berkeley disputed the charge that he had deprived his readers of anything or led them 'to think all the visible beauty of creation a false imaginary glare' ("Dialogues" 424). The world remains stable, sensible, and available because it is always 'necessarily perceived by an infinite Mind,' the mind of God (ibid.425). However, without theistic intervention, Berkeley's world presents two difficulties. Firstly, it is temporally

inconsistent: 'upon shutting my eyes all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and barely upon opening them it is again created' (*Principles* 281). In Berkeley's 'gimcrack world of facades, […] of tables and chairs that come and go' (Lewis *Time* 480), the moment of sensation is the regnant temporal unit. Secondly, despite his protests, early readers tended to class Berkeley as a solipsist because he denied the existence of things and privileged the mind (Bracken 1956). This opinion continued into the modernist period; for instance, in his Gifford Lectures (1927-1928), Alfred North Whitehead explained that Berkeley and Hume's philosophies confine reality to segregated "'private psychological fields;'" the 'impressions of sensation which collectively form this entirely private experience "arise in the soul from unknown causes"' and have no external stimuli (*Process and Reality* 326). Whitehead's observation is roughly contemporaneous with Woolf's work on *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, yet her father had already recognised that Berkeley's deistic solution did little to ameliorate solipsism. Without a divine stopgap, we have nothing but a tautological 'series of sensations significant only of each other' (*HET*40), yielding no evidence of persons and things outside 'the present testimony of our senses' (Locke 487).

Where devout Berkeley had prevaricated, atheistic David Hume foregrounded the essential discontinuity of the world. Like Berkeley, when Hume 'view[s] this table' 'nothing is present to me but particular perceptions' (*Treatise* 399). He makes no distinction between '*object* or *perception* … understanding by both of them what any common man means by a hat, or shoe, or stone, or any other impression, convey'd to him by his senses' (ibid.134, original emphases). Since the idea of perceptions without a percipient is absurd, he must subsequently 'reject the opinion, that there is such a thing in nature as a continu'd existence, which is preserv'd even when it no longer appears to the senses' (141-142). Our customary belief in the unobserved, independent existence of objects derives from our propensity to imagine that they are temporally consistent, possessing 'a continu'd uninterrupted being,' neither 'annihilated by our absence, nor … brought into existence by our presence' (137). In reality, a "solid" object is simply a 'Bundle

of Perception' that exists in 'a perpetual Flux and Movement' (165).[32] Far from external, permanent entities, objects are 'internal and perishing existences' that depend upon qualitative resemblances between moment-by-moment perceptions, custom, and imagination for the 'fiction of a continu'd existence' (129, 136). In Gilles Deleuze's reading of Hume, the lesson is that 'the world as such is essentially Unique. It is a fiction of the imagination, never an object of the understanding' (75). This also applies to views of the subject, for the self is simply a 'connected succession of perceptions,' differing from one another only 'in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind' (Hume *Treatise* 182, 7). The self emerges as a complex, idiosyncratic and ultimately contingent unit that, via impressionism, is constitutionally indebted to the outer world it disavows. Finally, Hume works out an 'intimate connexion betwixt' temporal and ontological principles, '*continu'd* and *distinct* or *independent existence*' (ibid.139, original emphases). Having discounted object permanence, object independence is 'only a palliative remedy' (140) that allows us to experience objects (and selves) as continuous, unified, and discrete.

We can now delineate the effects of the empiricist paradigm. Roland Barthes' analysis of Dutch still-lifes offers an exemplary empiricist tableau – 'objects exist only by their qualities, whereas man, and man alone, possesses existence-in-itself' (*Critical Essays* 10). There is a 'substantive world of man, an adjectival world of things' (ibid.). No confrontation between object and subject is possible, for an object is simply its myriad qualities, its 'utilised aspect' (ibid.5). These silent, static paintings are apt examples, for empiricist depredations on the object-as-such causally impact time and language itself. Since the unique, sensory particular is all that "really" exists, empiricism tends to stigmatise all common nouns, all cognitive-linguistic

[32] Since the impression is the primary building block in Hume's world-view, the term "impressionism" was originally coined for him – '[a]ll hail to Berkeley who would have no matter, and Hume who would have no mind; to the Idealism of the former, and to the Impressionism of the latter!' (Rogers 202, OED).

processes of comparing and combining, all logic of sequence and relation.[33] Due to its attack on the *a priori* (literally translated, 'what is before'), empiricism has an uneasy relationship to all that exceeds the *now* of a noun. Consequently, an empirically circumspect language must restrict itself to "'I see a slab of pale yellow" … "I hear a sound'" (Woolf *W*4). Nevertheless, even the bare noun, "cup," applies to many different (and necessarily unperceived) items and not simply the one before me, revelling in 'what in its mere singleness it is' (Green "Introductions" 36). Its uniqueness derives from its relation to precedent and sequent cups, its (dis)similarity in shape, design, and material – that is, from its situation in a general adjectival scheme. As a result, the noun is replaced by the adjective for, 'when every quality had been picked out of a supposed substance, the residuum was – nothing' (Stephen *HET*38). Yet adjectives themselves fall prey to the problem of description, for every linguistic description, no matter how precise, invokes the generic despite the fact that there is a green of 'parakeets,' of 'palm trees – green, too;' and of 'green needles glittering in the sun' (Woolf "Blue & Green" *CSF*142). Therefore, an ideal empiricist language finally replaces nouns and adjectives with the demonstrative pronoun, "this," which supposedly secures an incontrovertible uniqueness for its referent. '[E]xistence lies in the simple "this," in the mere form of presentation at an individual *now*' (Green "Introductions" 35-36, original emphasis). To meet empiricist criteria, language must undergo a profound attenuation.

All the soliloquies of *The Waves* begin with this abbreviated language of sensation (4-5). Susan is confined to monosyllabic percepts, 'I see the beetle … It is black, I see; it is green, I see; I am tied down with single words' (8;113). Jinny, whose 'imagination is the body's,' is likewise prone to empiricist deixis: "'I see what is before me," said Jinny. "*This* scarf, *these* wine-coloured spots. *This* glass. *This* mustard pot'" (131, emphasis added). Yet while "this" is an empiricist

[33] In *Reforming Philosophy* (2006), Laura Snyder explains how one of Stephen's heroes, J.S. Mill, found ultra-empiricism incompatible with the very concept of causation.

favourite, Russell observes that "this," used sequentially, may apply to any object and thus, an abominated generality creeps back into this exemplar of an 'egocentric particular' (*Inquiry* 110). Furthermore, insofar as "this" denotes a present object of attention, its semantic deficiency surreptitiously ushers in an addressee (Levinson 102). "This" only becomes intelligible via *shared context*, a state that cannot be substantiated so long as we maintain 'the essential privacy of each individual's experience' (Russell *Human Knowledge* 105). Accordingly, "this" is ambivalent, simultaneously full and empty, specific and vague. "This" marks the aspirations, but also the vexations, of an ideal sensory language.

Unlike Susan and Jinny, Bernard is not content with those states where he 'knows only words of one syllable. "The sun is hot". I say. "The wind is cold,"' for simply registering one's own sensations is akin to "navel-gazing," and antithetical to narrative (*W*110). On one hand, a sensationalist idiom seems to have a public efficacy, offering a communicative shortcut through the multi-cultural mesh. Minds might be subjective or private, but physical sensations seem universal because they are presumed to result from external forces. However, empiricism is remarkable for developing a view of the body as the ground of subjectivism; sensations constitute an insulating shield, ensuring the obliquity and idiosyncrasy of our contact with the material world and any language we use to describe it. This view is broached by late nineteenth-century theorists like William James, who struggled with the empiricist legacy in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) and *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912). James argues that sensations are fundamentally resistant to verbalisation, for while 'I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I taste it,' sensory experience is a 'dumb way of acquaintance' (*Principles* 221). Similarly, in "On Being Ill" (1930), Woolf reflects upon the incompatibility of the body and language. Language 'has no words for the shiver and the headache;' '[t]here is nothing ready made' for the sufferer, who is 'forced to coin words himself, and, taking his pain in one hand, and a lump of pure sound in the other,' must 'crush them together [so] that a brand new word in

the end drops out' (*SE*102). Likewise, *The Waves* suggests that 'for pain words are lacking' (158). The body's experiences are 'very important, yet remote, to be just held in solitude' (ibid.). Here, Woolf imagines the body as an empiricist would, as a solitary unit, full of specific, idiosyncratic sensations that cannot be communicated. Thoughts are difficult to convey but it is even more difficult to speak the body – to speak *of* it, to speak *about* it, is one thing, but to directly *speak* it is all but impossible. Woolf's reflections on a bodily language carry the recognition that, although much has been made of the unspeakability of unoccupied rooms, equally, 'a consistent sensationalism must be speechless' (Green "Introductions" 36).

Thus, defining objects – and bodies – as bundles of impressions leads to significant temporal, linguistic, and intersubjective crises. For Stephen, this was Hume's most poignant lesson. Both the *History* (46) and "What is Materialism?" (135) repeat Hume's catechism, '[w]e never can really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence but those perceptions which have appeared in that narrow compass' (*Treatise* 49). Stephen believed that Hume's influence upon the history of thought was unparalleled, the whole tenor and substance of post-Humean literature wilting under a 'cold blast of scepticism [that] seems to have chilled the very marrow of speculative activity. Men … write as though paralysed by a half-suppressed consciousness of the presence of a great doubter' (*HET*2). Indeed, Humean language echoes through the conclusion to Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), a passage that is as much a manifesto for aestheticism as an account of philosophical impressionism's logical consequences:[34]

> … if we continue to dwell on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are

[34] Although Pater was influenced by nineteenth-century idealism (Evangelista 2004, Whiteley 2010, Andrews 2011), Berkeley and Hume remained perennially significant to his thought (see, for instance, Pater's "History of Philosophy" [1853]). Pater remedied Berkeley's relatively minor status in Victorian intellectual culture and altered Hume's somewhat pedestrian impressionism to match his own values of sensuality, creativity and spirituality (Hext 2013, Matz 2001, Inman 1981).

> extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further; the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced …
>
> Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. (119)

The sad tenor of this passage notwithstanding, Pater courted impressionism, revelling in the randomness, individuality, and subjectivity of perception.[35] For instance, *Marius the Epicurean* is delighted to 'fall back upon direct sensation', 'the little point of this present moment [that] alone really is' (1:138-139). A 'natural idealist,' Marius takes it as axiomatic 'that the individual is to himself the measure of all things, and [should] rely on the exclusive certainty to himself of his own impressions' (2:134). Obviously, Pater's writing anticipates some key emphases of Woolf's work – the luminous moment, individual freedom, passionate states of contemplation, and imaginative activity. Yet if, according to Cairns Craig, empiricism is one bright 'hinterland of modernism's search for new narrative techniques' based on 'momentary impressions and that "unbounded realm of associations" that were the only reality' (248), this hinterland has another, gloomier aspect. Many modernists were reluctant to be 'led away from the object into a nervous labyrinth, where the object is entirely displaced by a set of nervous changes which are totally unlike anything but themselves' (Bowne 409, cited in James *Principles of Psychology* 220). Subsequent thinkers recognised that empiricism has a certain tautological circularity wherein we are constituted by impressions that are not impressions *of*, so that experience can offer no certain retreat from 'the dark chamber of the skull' (ibid.). Pater's exuberant subjectivism does not so much refute this darker conclusion as cast it into relief.

[35] See Perry Meisel (1980), Wolfgang Iser (1987), Max Saunders (2010) and Adam Parkes (2011) for a fuller discussion of Pater's impressionism and its influence on modernism.

Judging by his denunciation of aestheticism in a series of *Cornhill Magazine* articles (1875-1882), Stephen was averse to seeing empiricism carried out to Pater's exquisite conclusion.[36] It was precisely to counteract such 'shifting phantasmagoria' that, thirteen years later, Stephen reluctantly sanctioned the unoccupied room ("WM?" 148 [originally delivered as an 1886 lecture]). Stephen's heated response to Pater's 'narrow chamber of the individual mind' (*Renaissance* 119) is symptomatic of his deep unwillingness to resign himself to the 'narrow compass' laid out by the great material objects sceptic, David Hume, who concludes Part I of the *Treatise* feeling 'environed with the deepest darkness' (Hume *Treatise* 49, 175). Indeed, immediately after citing this dark room, Stephen asks, '[i]n what direction … are we to escape?' (*HET*48).

Anti-climactically, Stephen simply abandons the effort to discover 'facts lying outside of all possible observations' (ibid.29). After reviewing eighteenth-century empiricism, this project seemed futile. Nevertheless, he concluded (as had the nineteenth-century idealists) that total scepticism regarding the unobserved led to intellectual sterility; Hume's 'method confined him to the examination of the individual mind,' to 'the furniture supposed to be stored in that receptacle' (60). Unlike eighteenth-century empiricists, Stephen believed in a necessary, impersonal, '*a priori* element in the individual mind,' and finds it, not in the torturous question of the unobserved object, but in the unobserved yet deeply felt 'experience of the race' (55-56). As a humanist and moral theorist, an early activist, a biographer and literary critic, 'nobody believed more profoundly in the worth of human relationships' (Woolf "Leslie Stephen" *SE*115) and Stephen's work is imbued with the 'necessity of harmonising my thoughts with yours' by discovering a 'formula common to all consciousnesses' ("WM?" 149, 142). *The Science of Ethics*

[36] In "Art and Morality" (1875), "Thoughts on Criticism, by a Critic" (1876), "The Moral Element in Literature" (1881) and "The Decay of Literature" (1882), Stephen criticised Pater for epicureanism, ethical relativism, "effeminacy," and lack of social responsibility. For more on Stephen's moral philosophy and attack on Pater, see Todd Avery's *The Bloomsbury Group: Varieties of Ethical Experience* (2001).

(1882) explores this theme on a macro-level, arguing that individuals are permeated with the intellectual, instinctual, and emotional history of their culture. On a micro-level, the *Hours in a Library* series (1874-1879) revolves around 'the human being who is partially revealed to us in his spoken or his written words' (2:201) and, in *Men, Books and Mountains* (1956) and *Studies of a Biographer* (1898-1902), neither the literary nor the biographical can be described without reference to 'the occult personal charm' of the author (*Studies* 4:4). These works might be read as Stephen's effort to palliate the anxieties of the *History*. Its philosophy of objects had dismantled the primal guarantees for temporal and emotional continuity in the human condition.

Due to his social and moral concerns, Stephen's philosophical commitments are mixed, and perhaps muddied. For example (and as an obverse to the Pater conflict), Stephen admired Berkeley, but he loved Samuel Johnson, who notoriously disposed of Berkeley's mentalism by kicking a stone and declaring, "I refute it thus!" (see Stephen *Hours* 2:198-240). Johnson's pugnacious argument for solidity may not be consistent with Stephen's philosophical allegiances, but his moral sentiments and common-sense were congenial to Stephen's taste. Stephen's preference for one who had 'a very distinct sentiment, if not […] a very clear theory, about the world in which he lived' is telling (ibid.206). As Woolf read her father's work, she may have observed that his refutation of unoccupied rooms was resolute but largely cerebral; morally and temperamentally, he could not embrace the impermanence and 'forlorn solitude' of his chosen object ontology without a certain pang (Hume *Treatise* 172). Hume's shadow is not so much exorcised as endured.

Through Stephen's *History*, Woolf recognised that a thoroughgoing philosophical impressionism is incompatible with the notion of unoccupied rooms. She may also have associated Stephen's insistence on the subjectivist nature of perception with his insensitivity to others; 'the mutilations of [his] intensive brain work' may have been implicated in his 'extreme

unawareness' (*MOB*160). It is significant that, while "Modern Fiction" proposes fidelity to the 'trivial, fantastic, evanescent' impressions the 'mind receives,' Woolf immediately notes that this "impressionistic" method produces the narrowness described by Hume, Pater, and Stephen:

> … [a] sense of being in a bright yet narrow room, confined and shut in, rather than enlarged and set free … centred in a self which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond[.] (*SE*10).

With a perspicacity that testifies to Woolf's familiarity with philosophical impressionism, she separates the aesthetic benefits of literary impressionism – vagueness, valuation of the quotidian, and the unfinished, processual quality of experience – from its philosophical connotations – a mind sealed up with its private perceptions. While writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf explicitly contrasts the 'thick wall of personality' (Pater *Renaissance* 119) with the mind-independent world encoded in the unoccupied room. When 'I have wrapped myself round in my own personality,' in '[v]iolent impressions,' and 'my life is saying to itself "This is life – the only life,"' a visit to her friends' home causes Woolf to 'realise that this is existing whether I exist or not; & so [I] get bowled over' (*D*3:74). The 'bright yet narrow room' which Berkeley and Hume inhabit must be offset by another, perhaps unoccupied, room; the impressionistic moment must be brought into contact with a wider temporal space.

'Think of a kitchen table … when you're not there': A Father-Daughter Colloquy

The unoccupied rooms of "Time Passes" are foreshadowed by the paradigmatic philosophical object, the unobserved table. Andrew describes Mr Ramsay's philosophical work as the investigation of "'[s]ubject and object and the nature of reality … Think of a kitchen table … when you're not there'" (*TL*22). Strangely, Lily envisages the table, not in a kitchen, but 'lodged now in the fork of a pear tree… its four legs in the air' (ibid.). The degree of gravitas with which Woolf treats the 'phantom kitchen table' has been vigorously debated, for several

reasons (ibid.). Firstly, it is "Mr Ramsay's table:" conversant as we are with *To the Lighthouse* as a cathartic exercise, it is easy to conflate Mr Ramsay and Stephen, 'tyrant father[s]' whose influence must be bitterly resisted (*MOB*128; see also 119-20). There is also a general feeling that, aesthetically, Woolf would have preferred a silvery tree to a 'scrubbed board table' (*TL*22). Finally, there is no getting around the table's incongruous position. As a result, many scholars dismiss the table as 'absurd whimsy,' exposing a supposed conflict between Lily and Mr Ramsay, who is satisfactorily 'hoist[ed] on his own petard' (H. Harrington 371).

In particular, ecological and phenomenological approaches tend to read the table as 'thoroughly satiric' (Westling 861), demonstrating a rift between 'Mr Ramsay's world of fact and Lily Briscoe's and Mrs Ramsay's world of impressions and intuitions' (Hoffman 693; Hafley 1954), rigid logic and artistic embodiment (Westling 1999), false abstraction and 'genuine moments of *dasein*' (Storl 308; Sultzbach 2016). Many of these critics imply that Woolf's interest in sensory experience obviates her interest in the unobserved table. In making this point, I do not mean to imply that phenomenology cannot be productively applied to Woolf's work. Ariane Mildenberg's *Modernism and Phenomenology* (2017) demonstrates that phenomenology fruitfully draws attention to 'perceptual experience as […] openness, where there is pre-reflective "coexistence" or "communion" between the embodied subject and the world,' a frequent topic in Woolf's writing (3). Likewise, Louise Westling (1999, 2001, 2006, 2016) and Kelly Sultzbach (2016) have drawn out the phenomenological dimensions of Woolf's writing, linking her imaginary with that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thesis, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), offers a picture of subjectification that aligns with my readings in the previous chapter, stating that 'he who grasps [objects] feels himself emerge from them' (114). Nevertheless, a few sentences later, Merleau-Ponty writes, 'things […] are no longer in themselves, in their own place, in their own time; *they exist only at the end of those rays of spatiality and of temporality emitted in the secrecy of my flesh*' (ibid., emphasis added). Just as Vernon Lee's

account of empathy with objects led, counter-intuitively, to a denial of mind-independent objects, Merleau-Ponty seems to have begun by enmeshing subject and object in 'the same ontological vibration' and ended with the belief that 'alleged facts […] are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of *my* body, and […] encrusted in its joints' (115, 114, emphasis added). Even as Merleau-Ponty unravels the mind-body dualism, the world ends up inside the body again – once more, we have swallowed the vase (Anstruther-Thomson 1924). Moreover, the body is conceived as a "secret" site of non-disclosure, resonating with empiricism's claims about the privacy of sensation.

Perhaps Terry Eagleton is overstating the case by asserting that 'phenomenology begins and ends as a head without a world,' becoming 'a symptom, in its solitary, alienated brooding, of the very crisis it offered to overcome' (53). Yet we might advance that theories of phenomenological embodiment are not self-evidently coeval with theories of intersubjectivity or post-humanist ethics. As Patricia MacCormack explains, any theory of the 'inextricable proximity' of bodies and objects requires 'a threefold ethical consideration – the critique of the detrimental effect a claim to knowledge of another body perpetrates; address as creative expressivity opening the capacity for the other to express;' and 'acknowledgement' that 'bio-relations' are 'an ongoing, irresolvable,' 'interactive, mediative project of desire' (9-10). The irreducibility of the other that MacCormack foregrounds also recurs in John Wylie's claim that phenomenological (and, I would add, empathic) theories tend to gloss over the 'absence, distance, displacement and the *non-coincidence* of self and world' (279). Such non-coincidence is fundamental to Woolf's understanding of subject/object *and* subject/subject relationships – that absence in the midst of presence constitutes 'the conditions of our love' (*JR*96). My objection to phenomenology is thus small and precise: it sometimes gives uncritical ethical priority to relativism and, in privileging the interrelationship of self and objects, delimits their importance to their specially human significance. If this is of paramount concern to the critic, she tends to give

a sarcastic twist to those passages in Woolf's fiction that speculate on a world apart from human concerns.

Too often the table becomes a site of antagonism-by-archetype. On one hand, there is a positive constellation of Lily, Mrs Ramsay, Woolf, art, impressionism, sensation and embodied presence; on the other, the negative grouping of Mr Ramsay, Stephen, philosophy, a pragmatic, inflexible sort of "truth," and the quintessential object-without-subject, the table. After delineating the specific philosophical patrimony of the unobserved table, we are in a better position to unpick these groupings. Having examined the *History,* we cannot help hearing, in Heidi Storl's rejection of Mr Ramsay's kitchen table, Stephen chiding his purported alias: '[t]he fact that things exist independently of human use is to a considerable degree irrelevant, and an interest therein is correspondingly misguided. Things exist, or more accurately, have being only insofar as they participate in our way of being' (308). Empiricism's consequences are far from irrelevant, but that aside, Storl's argument is entirely Stephenian (*HET*55-57). Neither Berkeley, Hume, nor Stephen would spend their time as Mr Ramsey does, pondering 'night after night … about the reality of kitchen tables' (*TL*128). Thus, while many studies read the kitchen table as a critique of philosophy and elevation of art (Handley 1995, Lackey 2006, Sim 2016), broadly defining philosophy with blanket-terms like "rational humanism" (Westling 861), we need intellectual histories (like the one developed in this chapter) to finesse these broad strokes. For, although the table emblematises some sort of reality, it can scarcely be read as an attempt 'to know and represent the whole "truth" of things or people' (Handley 16). The philosophical tables that Woolf was familiar with – either through the new realist current in Bloomsbury or through Stephen's *History* – are all examples of epistemic uncertainty. Russell's table of physics is never quite as it seems, and Berkeley, Hume and Stephen's tables can never be known outside their phenomenal givenness. Whatever *the* table might be in their various philosophies, it is not rigid (in terms of physics, it is a whirl of atoms; in terms of perception, it is a whirl of

impressions). As for the privileged "link" between art and embodiment (conjoining, *ipso facto*, philosophy and disembodiment), it is clear that even highly idealist philosophies can arise from a strong, unremitting emphasis on embodiment. Berkeley's table is, by definition, *entirely* the product of embodied sensations which, many critics imply, are the specific purview of the artist.

Accordingly, it is not Woolf but Stephen who rejects the unobserved table, else what should we make of "Time Passes" and its insistent focus on unoccupied rooms? To reject the one and endorse the other is contradictory and precludes our ability to read "Time Passes" as elegiac – as Woolf's conciliatory, posthumous gift to Stephen, whose position on objects-without-subjects was so vexed, so arduously maintained. After all, one of the decisive problems of *To the Lighthouse* was 'how to bring Lily & Mr. R[amsay] together' (*D*3:106).

We should be careful of reading Mr Ramsay as 'a straight portrait' of Stephen (Q. Bell "Biographer" 97). Domestically, Ramsay resembles Stephen (as portrayed in Woolf's retrospectives and Maitland's *Life*) but as philosophers, they show substantial differences. Ramsay's love for an impersonal world 'uninhabited of men' (*TL*14) is a minor aspect singled out from Stephen's writing – for instance, "Sunset on Mont Blanc" (1873) – but otherwise muted by the socio-historical cast of Stephen's thought. Ramsay and Lily are far more preoccupied with 'the waste of ages and the perishing of the stars,' 'distant views [that] seem to outlast by a million years … the gazer' (*TL*32, 20). Ramsay's belief in the unobserved compensates for the defects he shares with Stephen. While both are 'petty, selfish, vain, egotistical,' the table is a 'symbol of [Lily's] profound respect for Mr Ramsay's mind' and its 'fiery unworldliness' (*TL*23, 24). The unobserved table is associated with the virtues Woolf loved in Stephen, 'his courage,' 'his simplicity,' and 'neglect of appearances' (*MOB*128). Next, while "What is Materialism?" contains the seeds of qualified belief in unobserved tables, Stephen was always careful to curb this efflorescence and restrict attention to experienced phenomena. These

seeds germinate in Woolf's portrayal of Mr Ramsay who becomes, in Peter Knox-Shaw's words, 'the custodian of the "real thing behind appearances"' (43).

Moreover, Ramsay and Stephen have contrasting responses to a recurrent figure in "The Window:" David Hume, 'grown enormously fat,' stuck in a bog (54; 57, 61). In this memorable anecdote, Hume was stuck in a bog, 'analogous of the absorption his mind had undergone in metaphysical mire' (Price & Hood 718), and a passing milkmaid would not help him out until he had recited the Lord's Prayer. This story was widely told, for example, in Alexander Somerville's *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (1848), Edward Bannerman Ramsay's *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* (1859), and Stephen's own *Dictionary of National Biography* (1891). When we remember how deferentially Stephen treated the Scottish philosopher, how 'paralysed' Stephen felt by Hume's shade (*HET*2), it is surprising to find Mr Ramsay chuckling over Hume's predicament. Ramsay's irreverent response seems cathartic, a means of exorcising Hume's chilly impressionism, which had 'entirely dissolved' '[t]he old bonds which held things together' (ibid.44). The final mention of Hume occurs when, as Prue tosses a ball on the lawn, 'there was a sense of things having been blown apart' (*TL*61). Space is portrayed as a cardinal "mystery," 'an unreal web' (Stephen "WM?" 134), 'ethereal and divided by great distances… as if solidity had vanished altogether' (*TL*61). It is through Johnson's reply to Berkeley, through physical contact, that the 'spell is broken' – 'Prue ran full tilt into them and caught the ball brilliantly high up in her left hand' (ibid.). Simple as Prue's action might be, Woolf never takes solidity or tactility for granted. When the 'whole world seemed to have dissolved […] into a pool of thought,' it is necessary to ask, '[c]ould things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp?' (*TL*147). In a post-empiricist world, contact with objects and persons alike is a 'miracle' (ibid.). Prue grasping the ball emblematises that 'continuous miracle,' a connection between subject and object (Stephen "WM?" 134) – this accomplished, 'Mr Ramsay felt free now to laugh at Hume' (*TL*44). As the *History* became a 'symbol of misery' for Stephen (*Letters* 1:217), one

feels that he would have like to laugh too – was it for his sake that Hume was stuck in a bog? Woolf does not challenge philosophy *in toto*: she specifically rewrites Stephen's homage to eighteenth-century philosophy, using a favoured empiricist trope – the table – to upend Hume's claims. Finally, the philosopher father is able to find relief from Hume's characteristic emphases on fluidity and impermanence.

The kitchen table episode has been read as a conflict between creativity (associated with Lily and Mrs Ramsay) and facts (associated with Mr Ramsay), yet Lily wants to 'achieve the razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary' (*TL*158). The symbol of the unperceived is initially juxtaposed with what *is* perceived, the pear tree.

> … with a painful effort of concentration, [Lily] focused her mind, not upon the silver-bossed bark of the tree, or upon its fish-shaped leaves, but upon a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seemed to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity … (22)

The effort is painful, not because philosophical questions are intrinsically uncongenial to the artist, but because visualising the unobserved in all its radical alterity requires Lily to turn philosophical doubt into creative uncertainty. The unobserved table does not allow us to be satisfied with our individual sensory field, turning all that cannot be domesticated into the experienced "now" into a sterile blank. There is a labour in accepting the independent existence of the Other, analogous to scrubbing the table clean of colour (which may more naturally appeal to the sensuous eye), but it reveals that the perceived tree of sensation is made of the same grain as the unperceived table. It is no coincidence that the table is tightly lodged in the tree, undermining the radical conflict that empiricism establishes between the observed and the unobserved. This conflict is based upon their definition of sensation as uniquely limited to a perceiving body, yet subsequent efforts to purge language of the 'erroneous theory [of the

unobserved] on which all our language is constructed' (Mill *Collected Works* 16:1090) proved ineffective. While much empiricist argument poses the unobservable as an ineradicable flaw in language, only infrequently do they recognise that the chronic presence of the unobserved might provide fertile grounds for thought and perhaps, grounds for reconceptualising sensation altogether (a point we will return to later in this chapter). By locating the unobserved table *in* the observed tree, Woolf implies that an unperceived element is ingrained in every percept, in every word we speak.

Further, there is a less-noted, austere, non-adjectival economy in Woolf's work, a 'muscular integrity' that, if recognised, makes us wonder whether she necessarily prefers silver-bossed bark to scrubbed board. Lily is not simply an artist of secondary qualities but of form: 'beneath the colour there was the shape,' 'the light of a butterfly's wing [lies] upon the arches of a cathedral,' a 'framework of steel' (19,42). She does not paint Paunceforte's luscious 'mound[s] of green or pink' (14), nor, in an impressionist style, seek to capture 'a momentary group of sensations in the perpetual flux' (Fry *Reader* 16). She construes art as a desperate battle with 'this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, [and] emerged stark at the back of appearances … were it only the shape of a white lamp-shade looming on a wicker table' (131). Similarly, her canvas deters 'disorderly sensations' 'with its uncompromising white stare' (*TL*130). Like the kitchen table, these objects are 'bare, hard, not ornamental, uncompromisingly plain,' yet this 'unornamented beauty' still 'deeply impress[es]' Lily (129). The ascetic appearance of the unobserved kitchen table even serves as a precedent for the non-representational portrait of Mrs Ramsay as an 'august shape; the shape of a dome' (44). This suggests that, just as "Time Passes" is an extended account of what the kitchen table emblematises (the unperceived), Lily's picture collaborates with Mr Ramsay's philosophy of the unobserved.

In fact, Lily's picture finally derives from a partially observed, ghostly outline on the blind that 'throw[s] an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step' (164). Through this uncanny origin, Lily's picture responds to the problems of time and connection that inhere in Stephen's rejection of the unobserved. The past trespasses on the empiricist "now," since Lily's triangular portrait draws upon memories of Mrs Ramsay, who frequently 'sat in the wicker arm-chair in the drawing-room window,' looking like a dome (44). The segregated private worlds of empiricism intersect, as Lily's 'dome' resembles Mrs Ramsay's private vision of herself as a 'wedge of darkness' (53). As Stephen desired a formula that unifies the subjective and objective ("WM?" 134), so Lily desires a 'device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored' (*TL*44). This unity is not only between subjects for, seated in the wicker arm-chair, Mrs Ramsay 'leant to inanimate things … felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness' and pleasure in 'bec[oming] the thing she looked at' (53). If subject-object continuity is exemplified in the chair, and the unperceived is exemplified by the table, Lily's art attempts to give both possibilities, to be 'on a level with the chair, with the table' (165). For Stephen, these two issues presented insoluble problems, but he nevertheless hoped for the conciliation that Woolf portrays. Woolf also adopts Stephen's hypothetical, inferential approach to the unobserved and heightens it into a recognisable aesthetic. The almost imperceptible movements and noises of "Time Passes" – 'a soft spot flutter[ed] slowly across the bedroom floor' (106) – are repeated in Woolf's vague, inferential description of the figure behind the blind: '[*s*]*ome* wave of white went over the window pane. The air *must have* stirred some flounce in the room' (164, emphasis added). Finally, as in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), the paragraph ends in that descriptive terminus, the ostensive '[t]here she sat' (164). Woolf points towards some event or revelation that is not directly given, or observable, to the reader.

But why *is* the table upside down? An immediate consequence of this position is that the table is no longer functional – we can hardly imagine Mrs Ramsay inviting her guests to dip into

a *bouef en daube* around an up-ended table. Furniture is anthropometric, scaled, positioned, and designed to meet the standardised needs of human users. Likewise, as Jules Law has observed, despite their 'counterintuitive-sounding claims,' eighteenth-century object ontologies were essentially pragmatic (94). Empiricists' emphasis on linguistic and material contingency derived from their recognition that speech, common-sense, and the relationship between objects and bodies are based on "what works," rather than enduring truths (Law 97). Substance and object permanence are rhetorical, rather than natural, facts (and hence, illegitimate areas of enquiry). While Woolf is also interested in problematising received wisdom, she is less interested in applying a functional imperative to the physical world. She constantly emphasises the chaotic, random, 'helter-skelter' aspects of experience (*AROO*22). In this light, her non-functional table does not invite derision; rather, it shows that art redeems that which rational, anthropometric design abhors: the bizarre, the uncomfortable, the useless, the 'plainly repugnant' object speaking back to the subject (Berkeley *Principles* 259). Woolf's predilection for the non-functional object involves a recognition that, while narrative operates in what Paul Sheehan has termed the "anthropometric tradition," language exceeds a strictly human paradigm because it always includes more than personal experience (10). To engage in language is to recognise that it always falls short of ergonomic excellence, that there is always a nonhuman determinant or, as I have suggested in the previous section, unobserved element in speech. In keeping with the non-functional upside-down table, "Time Passes" and the interludes depict unobserved furniture transformed into shapeless masses or exaggerated bulks, broken, decayed, slipping dizzily between the solid and the inchoate. Not only do these passages recoup scenes that are, like the non-functional object, usually thrown away because they have no human reference – they upset the very concept of human scale.

'the normal is abolished': A Tentative Solidity

Jeffrey Cohen's *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (2015) argues that "solidity" indexes a myriad of ideas – hardness, firmness, impenetrability, the epistemologically real or sound, immobility, permanence, and fixity (30-31). Woolf's "unobserved" scenes cast this lexicon into confusion, as household objects are transformed into fluid 'mounds of unmoulded shape' (*W*97). "Time Passes" also deflates universal harmony, permanence, and order, picturing the disappointment of those seekers on the beach who desire that 'the world [should] reflect the compass of the soul' as in a mirror (*TL*105). Just as Stephen meditated on the idea that 'the eternal mountains which have outlasted so many generations … are yet, like all other things, hastening to decay,' the empty house of "Time Passes" 'speak[s] to man of his littleness and his ephemeral existence' (Stephen "Sunset" 458-459). '[D]oes Nature supplement what man advanced' (*TL*110)? When left to their own devices, do objects '[keep] the human shape' (*TL*106)? Bracketing the deaths of the Ramsays, and portraying greater changes in objects than the depredations of time, damp, and vandal "airs" might effect, "Time Passes" is an exemplar of the modernist inhuman scale.[37] In "Time Passes," 'furniture [is] confounded' in fundamental, inexplicable ways (*TL*103), anticipating how the 'normal is abolished' in the furniture of the interludes (*W*69).

In both texts, objects surge in and out of being as, in various lights, '[t]he green pot bulged enormously, with its white window elongated in its side' (*W*97); at other times, darkness 'swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edge and firm bulk of a chest of drawers' (*TL*103). Furniture no longer possesses its usual size, mass, and inertia and can be heard '(had there been anyone to listen)' 'disport[ing] themselves like the

[37] For a wider discussion of "inhuman scales," see "Modernist Inhumanisms" (ed. Jaffe 2016).

amorphous bulks of leviathans' (ibid.110). Within 'the swaying mantle of silence' which swathes 'the empty room' (106), almost imperceptible noises (creaks, groans, taps, thuds) are paired with weird cacophony, incommensurate with the events that precipitate it. When 'one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro,' it does so 'with a roar, with a rupture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley' (112). When Woolf writes, 'some glass tinkled in the cupboard *as if* a giant voice had shrieked so loud in its agony that tumblers stood inside a cupboard vibrated too' (109, emphasis added), the "as if" holds auditory scales (the tinkle and the shriek) and scales of size (tumbler and giant) in tension. Two orders of presence and absence are also at work here, as Woolf reveals by introducing a third, explicitly human event into the equation.

> [A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.] (109)

The brackets achieve narrative distance *with* proximity, creating enough simultaneity between 'tea-cups' and the "unobserved" shell to make the reader think that the violence enacted in France echoes loudly enough to crack the china in Skye (ibid.). As Hermione Lee has observed, Woolf's brackets reverse values – 'what is more "important," the death of Mrs. Ramsay, or the fall of a fold of a green shawl in an empty room?' ("Introduction" 158). Further, they reverse the question of the "unobserved" as eighteenth-century philosophy typically construed it. Usually, it is the subject who, occupying a sovereign sensorial location, brackets a phantasmal unobserved object. In "Time Passes," the narration is anchored to the empty house, making *Andrew* the unobserved object. This sheds light on a fact that few empiricists willingly expounded: if unobserved objects outrage common sense, so does the continued existence of an unobserved person. Woolf's ability to criticise war through shattered tea-cups, to put 'shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs' into dialogue with human bereavement, or to construct any robust vision of subject-object relationality depends upon the interaction of the unobserved with the observed

(106). Andrew's off-stage death intervenes in the empty house, as 'there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling' (109). In Woolf's work, the acousmatic thud – a version of the auditory unobserved – frequently intimates death. As with Andrew's passing, in *The Waves*, the off-stage death of Percival is immediately presaged by a thud in the world of the interludes, '[t]he waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping' (87).

The interludes of *The Waves* are rife with images of obduracy and death, as the object-world interrupts the 'rapt egotism' of the soliloquies (148). These objects are not restricted to the italicised interludes but erupt within the soliloquies as static images, heavy with a significance that is difficult to elucidate. For instance, the trees in the interludes, 'now black as iron, and as bare' (123), stalk Neville and Bernard's narratives, contradicting the primacy of intellectual ambition, individuality, and the poetic imagination. One of the originary stimuli for Neville's soliloquies is a "death among the apple trees," which increasingly demarcates the 'unintelligible obstacle' of death (13), 'the narrow limits of my life and the line it cannot pass' (127). Against this 'implacable tree,' '[t]he ripple of my life was unavailing. I was unable to pass by. … we are doomed, all of us, by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass' (13). Woolf often links death with the mutual independence of subject and object, a topic also dramatized through failed perceptual acts and the sustained existence of the unobserved. Thus, the apple tree of death has its natural mate in Bernard's willow tree, which represents 'that which is beyond and outside our own predicament' and resists intellectual endeavour; 'its creased and crooked bark had the effect of what remains outside our illusions yet cannot stay them, is changed by them for the moment, yet shows through stable, still, and with a sternness that our lives lack' (149-151).

Death and the object that undoes human primacy come together in Rhoda's preoccupation with a puddle she cannot cross, a miniature wave that terrifies in its inhuman indifference:

> Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather, I was wafted down tunnels. Then very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle. (37; see also 92)

This passage echoes William Wordsworth's commentary on *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* (1804).[38] In his youth, the idealist thesis of mind-dependent objects mixed 'congenial[ly]' with Wordsworth's belief in personal immortality, the 'indomitableness' of the creative 'Spirit within me.'

> I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. (*Poetical Works* 8:189)

Here, there is no contrasting or comparative clause to explain how or why the bottom falls out of idealism. This passage combines placid, pleasurable subjectivism – whereby 'what I saw/Appear'd like something *in myself*' (*Poetical Works* 3:165, emphasis added) – and sudden panic, lest *esse est percipi* should teeter too close to the solipsistic abyss. In *Hours in a Library,* Stephen reads Wordsworth as an exemplar of the marriage between philosophy and poetry, specifically illustrating the empiricist 'conviction that the visible and tangible world is a dream-woven tissue' (3:179). Primed to such readings, when Woolf alludes to Wordsworth, 'the

[38] Woolf's re-interpretation of Wordsworthian concepts and motifs are examined by Frank D. McConnell (1968), James Holt McGavran (1981) and Ellen Tremper (1992); for Wordsworth's reaction to the empiricist tradition, see Anthony Nuttall's *A Common Sky*, Colin Clarke's *Romantic Paradox: An Essay on the Poetry of Wordsworth* (1962) and Anthony Rudd's *Expressing the World* (2003).

philosophic poet' ("How it Strikes" *SE*28), through the figure of Rhoda clinging to a brick wall, she shows the affective ramifications of empiricism continuing into the twentieth century.

Just as Wordsworth was absorbed with the creative gloss that the perceiving, poetic mind casts over the external world so Rhoda proclaims, 'I covered the whole street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind' (*W*121). Yet while Wordsworth is generally complacent about creative subjectivism – 'by the regular action of the world/My soul was unsubdu'd. A plastic power/Abode with me, a forming hand' (*Poetical Works* 3:165) – Rhoda's visions are always interrupted by the presence of other people, 'this clumsy, this ill-fitting body' and an awkward relation to the material world (*W*60). Mimicking the great poet of 'utter solitude' (Wordsworth ibid.164), Rhoda both seeks and evades annihilation at the uttermost edges of the world, 'I said "Consume me, carry me to the farthest limit"' (*W*121). Both desire to wander

> Far in some lonely wood, and hear no sound
> Which the heart does not make, or else so fit[s]
> To its own temper that in external things
> No longer seems internal difference
> … things that are without
> Live in our minds as in their native home. (Wordsworth *Collected Poems* 806)

Yet this exuberant declaration of *esse est percipi* has, as its compensatory counter-current, a "'nostalgia'" for hard objects that takes the form of grasping at walls, a gesture underwritten by the alternative Johnsonian thesis, *esse est obstare* – 'to be is to resist pressure or penetration' (Nuttall 144). To be is to oppose. While this non-verbal argument for objects' mind-independence may be philosophically naïve, many of Woolf's characters endorse it, reflecting that '[t]he very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare' (*TL*32) and 'fantastic pictures … grotesque, dropsical, [vanish] at the first touch of the toe of a real boot' (*W*68). Rhoda's efforts to substantiate an increasingly nebulous physical world support Nuttall's

argument that 'the modern hunger for vividness,' 'the modern reader's need to break his skin upon the real,' is symptomatic of an 'epistemological malaise' that can be traced back to eighteenth-century philosophy (262). Rhoda recovers from the idealist's dilemma by 'stretch[ing] my toes so that they touch the rail at the end of the bed; I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard' (*W*15).

In *The Waves*, this assurance is hard to achieve because objects are not consistently solid. They fluctuate between consolidated mass and hazy instability. For example, contrast these two passages from the interludes:

> All for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity, as if a great moth sailing through the room had shadowed the immense solidity of chairs and tables with floating wings. (108)
>
> … chairs and tables … seemed more ponderous, as if colour, tilted, had run to one side. Here lay knife, fork and glass, but lengthened, swollen, and made portentous. Rimmed in a gold circle the looking-glass held the scene immobile as if everlasting in its eye. (124)

The alternate fluidity and solidity of objects is not limited to the soliloquies – purportedly, the records of intensely subjective, discrete minds – but also circulates in the interludes – purportedly, records of the physical world unobserved by any consciousness. '[M]oments of clairvoyance' (*TWD*1:11) re-create these oscillations across all portions of the text. The house of the interludes – where '[e]verything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid' (15) – infects the dining-room where, Neville observes, 'things have lost their normal uses – this knife-blade is only a flash of light, not a thing to cut with' (69). Bernard also 'begin[s] to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, "Are you hard?"' (172). This condition reaches its apex in Rhoda, who senses that '[m]onth by month things are losing

their hardness,' a condition echoed in the "unperceived" world of the interludes, where even 'rocks lost their hardness' (26, 124).

It is important to note that hardness is a solution that sometimes travels towards *esse est obstare*, and sometimes towards the individual, sensing body that is the alpha and omega of *esse est percipi*. We must query the extent to which Rhoda resembles the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall," who, 'waking from a midnight dream of horror,' lies 'worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping that impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of…' (*CSF*88). Although Rhoda makes her own, almost verbatim obeisance to the chest of drawers (*W*15), in many cases throughout *The Waves*, solidity does not necessarily prove an 'existence other than ours.' We find that Rhoda invokes brick, steely and wooden surfaces in the hope of fixing identity within a sensing body: '[w]hat, then, can I touch? What brick, what stone? and so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely' (92). Doors, bed-rails, 'rolls of bread and wine bottles are needed by me [Rhoda]' in order to perform 'the antics of the individual;' hard objects are enlisted in service of her *idée fixe*, discrete personality, which comes at the cost of those 'wider and wider circles of understanding that may at last embrace the entire world' (133). When characters 'pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe,' solidity is typically a variant of the pretence that 'we can make out a plain and logical story' (151). Likewise, Rhoda's need to 'bang my head against some hard door to call myself back to my body' mimics the conventions of self-determination – '[t]he things [others] lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No' (24-25).

Solidity comes to stand for the idea that, out of sensory experience, one emerges as a self-possessed individual. This 'I, I, I' is everywhere criticised for its hyperbolic claims. For our purposes, it is especially significant that the self-aggrandising chant, 'I was the inheritor; I, the continuer; I, the person miraculously appointed to carry it on,' is grounded in the 'dry,

uncompromising, *inhabited* house, the place with all its traditions, its objects, its accumulations of rubbish, and treasures displayed upon tables' (152, emphasis added). Further, appealing to the lithic through traditions of grasping and banging has varying degrees of efficacy. After all, there is a bathetic irony in countering relentless 'Death' with the conviction that 'all is firm without shadow or illusion' because on the dining-table there are 'crisp rolls, yellow-glazed and hard' (82). It is hard to accept, as Bernard proposes, that we might '[o]ppose ourselves to this illimitable chaos' through the Johnsonian figure of a 'man who has collected himself in moments of emergency and banged his spoon on the table, saying, "I will not consent"' (134, 170). One cannot help asking whether solidity is simply invoked to substantiate a self in trouble? Is table-thumping no different from the need to 'make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces' (17)? Bernard's "heroic" charge against the devastatingly inhuman world of the waves involves just such bathetic gestures.

> … we felt enlarge itself around us the huge blackness of what is outside us, of what we are not. The wind, the rush of wheels became the roar of time, and we rushed – where? And who were we? We were extinguished for a moment, went out like sparks in burnt paper and the blackness roared. Past time, past history we went. For me this lasts but one second. It is ended by my own pugnacity. I strike the table with a spoon. (166)

Yet can the spoon truly provide any shield against the whirling blackness of time?

The Waves' temporal vision clarifies how the spoon-wielding tendencies of the soliloquies carry a double valence, ranging from *esse est percipi* to *esse est obstare*. Time is ruthlessly opposed to 'this random flicker of light in us that we call brain and feeling' (136); the human body is contrasted with the 'note of interrogation' in the 'light of the stars[,] falling […] on my hand after travelling for millions upon millions of years' (160). The haptic argument – '[l]et me touch the table – so – and thus recover my sense of the moment' – is sometimes used to assert human supremacy against the 'interrogation' of nonhuman time (ibid.), "'Will you fade? Will you

perish?"" (*TL*106). The hand reached out towards hardness is used to affirm, not Johnsonian permanence, but the empiricist "now" with which so many of the soliloquies begin. '*Now* I feel the roughness of the fibre of the curtain through which I push,' Jinny says, '*now* I feel the cold iron railing and its blistered paint beneath my palm' (*W*104, emphasis added).[39] The characters of *The Waves* often waver between passive resignation to ephemerality and hyperbolic assertions of the moment's importance. Within 'the present moment,' characters devote intense attention to ordinary objects, crying '[l]et it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure' (ibid.49), for as Woolf writes (quoting Goethe *Faust* 52), '[i]f one does not lie back and sum up and say to the moment, this very moment stay you are so fair, what will be one's gain, dying?' (*D*4:135).[40] Characters attempt to avert life's brevity, where one is 'transient as the shadow on the meadow, soon fading, soon darkening and dying,' by 'stat[ing], if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment … this inch in the long long history that began in Egypt' (*W*38).

However, their defence of the ecstatic "now" sometimes sounds shrill. Neville's plea for the moment is followed by a feeling that this is all too 'artificial, insincere. Words and words and words … Am I too fast, too facile?' (ibid.48). Bernard's phrases, Neville's poetry, Louis' fascination with history, Rhoda's visionary raptures, Susan's begetting of children and Jinny's homage to the imperial march (114-115) all indicate a desire to establish the human's place in a longer time schema. The pathos which haunts the temporal scheme of *The Waves* derives from these two versions of time – the deictic moment, 'gay with a thousand tints,' and the non-deictic time of the unobserved, the 'eternity' glimpsed 'behind' 'the gleaming tea-urn' (*W*55), ages past or ages to come that are indifferent to human life. The tension between these two time-schemes is dramatized in the structural demarcation of the unobserved in both *To the Lighthouse* ("Time

[39] "Now" occurs 582 times in *The Waves*.
[40] Herbert Marder notes that Woolf reverses Faust's meaning for, in Goethe's drama, a moment of such sensory joy would lead to damnation (122-123).

Passes" being cordoned off from "The Window" and "The Lighthouse") and *The Waves* (as soliloquy and interlude were eventually separated). Woolf's decision to separate subjective time from the world of objects suggests that time 'in its alterity, is irreducible to the subject's endless present' (Sherman 173). Nevertheless, we are not simply left with a tragic gulf between the subject's ephemeral moment and the object's relative permanence. The separation is initial, acknowledging '[t]he tree' that 'alone resisted our eternal flux' (*W*150). Woolf's next move is to expand the empiricist moment to include something permanent, to make the impression endure in a solid form, by incorporating into the moment the distanced perspective of the unobserved. As Banfield has argued, Woolf's different use of "the moment" 'joins the ephemeralness of sense-data to the timelessness of universals;' it retrospectively applies a glimpse of significant form and temporal stability to those objects that would otherwise be lost in the 'welter of unrecorded sensation' ("Time Passes" 496; *W*154). For Woolf, 'the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; [also] the voice of the sea,' that vast representative of the nonhuman (*D*3:209).

The main unit of time in the soliloquies is the moment, 'Time taper[ed] to a point' (109). Longer swathes of time are largely rendered invisible or relegated to the world of the interludes. This demonstrates more than Woolf's 'escape [from] this appalling narrative business of the realist' (*D*3:209), her move from the jogtrot of sequential, linear narrative to those significant, shining instants that represent 'the true cycles … the true events' (*W*109). *The Waves* also stages the pageant of empiricist time as delineated in Stephen's *History*. When taken at its word, we find empiricism in trouble, forced to face the full gravity of a life consisting purely of individual moments. The ecstasy of the impressionistic moment has its corollary valence of terror, as Rhoda gives voice to a distinctively empiricist 'fear':

> [N]othing persists. One moment does not lead to another … I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate … I do not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life. (76; see also 132).

While Jinny's empiricism is more serene, she also represents the limitations of a thoroughly empiricist narrative, for she 'cannot follow any word through its changes. I cannot follow any thought from present to past' (24). Her experience is "ringed" about by a bright deixis like Bradley's circle:

> … she saw nothing that was not there. It was a tree; there was the river; it was afternoon; here we were … There was no past, no future; merely the moment in its ring of light, and our bodies; and the inevitable climax, the ecstasy. (151)

To an extent, the format of '[i]t was a tree; there was the river' structures the soliloquies, with their flying leaps from scene to scene. We must nevertheless stress that, for Woolf, the empiricist moment – delimited to the body, the personal, the circumstantial, and the specific – requires a supplement. Louis is 'not a single and passing being. My life is not a moment's bright spark … I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day' (119). The 'happy concatenation of one event following another' is profoundly important (139). Woolf finds a heartening necessity in everyday rhythms, '[m]ust go, must sleep, must wake, must get up – sober, merciful word which we pretend to revile, which we press tight to our hearts, without which we should be undone' (ibid.). As Alfred North Whitehead argues, temporal repetitions endow the world with a sense of fate, as experience becomes 'heavy with the contact of things gone by, which lay their grip on our immediate selves' (*Symbolism* 43-44). Certainly, the grip of the past may have a tragic connotation, but all of Woolf's work conveys the sense that '[i]f life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills' then this bowl stands upon remembered moments that profoundly inform the present (*MOB*73). Woolf exemplifies

Stephen's argument, in *The Science of Ethics*, that "'character" is the name of an undecipherable mass of sensibilities, inherited and acquired habits of reasoning and feeling' (12). Her novels build up significance through the constant return of the *a priori*, whether in the form of literary allusions (think of Cowper's refrain, 'We perished each alone,' echoing through *To the Lighthouse*), personal memories (that, in *Mrs Dalloway*, 'flower out' and 'let you […] get the whole feel about [the event] … after years of lying lost' [130]), or the persistence of prehistory in the present (for instance, Bernard's sense that 'beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence' [*W*66]).

Thus, Woolf's definition of the moment differs from empiricism's because it incorporates much-maligned aspects of non-deictic time: the past and the future. In "The Moment: Summer's Night," the moment is composed of sensory impressions as well as 'the future [which] lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver … the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it' (*E*6:509). Woolf's moment is not strictly present tense but looks forward to the time when it will take its proper shape under the lens of memory, becoming suffused with the *a priori*. Draft 1 of *The Waves* explains how narrative shaping and pruning can only happen in the aftermath of a sensory shock.

> For it was only when the thing had happened … & the violence of the shock was over that one could understand, or live; only when one had left the room & was walking home at dead of night. Then in that darkness, which had no limit, whose shores were invisible, whatever had happened, expanded; & something dropped away. (*TWD*1:9, cancellations omitted)

The violent impressions of the moment must be tempered with time, which yields a post-impressionist 'detached and impassioned vision' (Fry *Vision* 49) that allows one '[t]o see things without attachment, from the outside, and to realize their beauty in itself' (*W*158). As memory expands and edits the event, a hardening process takes place, transforming the moment from an empiricist maelstrom into shapely, 'durable stuff' (*TWD*1:9). While the empiricist moment

deconstructs its objects into swirling qualities, Woolf's moment re-constructs 'chaotic and accidental conjunctions' into object-like forms (Fry ibid.49), 'globed compacted things' with a density, shape, and 'wholeness not theirs in life' (*TL*157). When Bernard 'come[s] to shape here at this table between my hands, the story of my life and set it before you as a complete thing, I have to recall things gone far, gone deep, sunk into this life or that' (*W*173). The power of the past to render the event concrete is also evident in Lily's painting, as her memories of Mrs Ramsay help 'to make of the moment something permanent … In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing … was struck into stability' (133). Further, whereas the empiricist moment is used to deny any mind-independent existence, Woolf suggests 'that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence' (*MOB*67). The past is exteriorised to the extent that Woolf wonders, 'will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them?' (ibid.) Perhaps the same narrative device that occupies the empty rooms of *Pointz Hall*?

Woolf produces her own, corrective version of the empiricist moment, yet it does not transcend its philosophical lineage completely. It is no less susceptible to the other, non-deictic strand of time that stalks the soliloquies of *The Waves*. The gap between the soliloquy's moment and the time of the interludes produces a 'terrible sense of impotence, of weakness, of exile amid hostile powers' (Russell *Mysticism* 65), a feeling that 'the earth is only a pebble flicked off accidentally from the face of the sun and that there is no life anywhere in the abysses of space' (*W*134). This sense of existential despair links Woolf to Russell as well as to her father (see, for instance "Sunset" 458-459), and resounds throughout *The Waves*. While the moment constructed by the sextet in the dinner-party episode contains far more than the empiricist moment – the unobserved ('forests and far countries on the other side of the world'), sequential clock time ('Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday') and the future ('[w]hat is to come') – it is nevertheless at risk (85). The characters might have 'made something that will join the innumerable congregations of

past time … part of the illumined and everlasting road,' but this construction is racked with the anxiety of nonhuman time (ibid.). Even a 'swing-door [can] cut to pieces the thing that we have made, that globes itself here, among these lights, these peelings, this litter of breadcrumbs and people passing' (84). Any affirmation, '[t]he moment was all; the moment was enough' (166), is immediately qualified by the nonhuman world of the interludes and the 'silence [that] closes over our transient passage' (37). Moments when 'I elaborate myself; differentiate myself,' 'moment[s] of obliterating satisfaction,' are disrupted by 'the sigh, as it goes in, comes out, of the tide that draws beyond this circle of bright light' (67-68). As Bernard says,

> I could not collect myself; I could not distinguish myself … I could not recover myself from that endless throwing away, dissipation, flooding forth without our willing it and rushing soundlessly away out there under the arches of the bridge, round some clump of trees or an island, out where sea-birds sit on stakes, over the roughened water to become waves in the sea. (167)

A negative pulse runs through *The Waves*, as it gradually becomes clear that true contact with the unobserved world of the interludes requires the end of phrases, the dissipation of personality and a passage through death. Yet this is not as hopeless a position as it seems for, as we have seen, empiricism is also characterised by single words, a profoundly disrupted version of identity, and constant, miniature "annihilations" – this, for giving up the unobserved, which Woolf retains. However, lest it seem that Stephen's lament is justified, and we have progressed no further towards that common element that conjoins subject and object, we should turn to the mysterious, intimate continuity between consciousnesses and the unperceived object-world that is repeatedly foregrounded in *The Waves*.

'The house, the garden, and the waves breaking … This is the truth'

Nominally, the distinction between soliloquy and interlude partitions subjective experience and unexperienced objects. The quotation marks within soliloquies creates a further separation between speakers, each of whom are distinguished by particular preoccupations and image clusters. However, the text undermines any attempt to say, "'I am this, I am that'" (80) and characters reiterate each other's signature image clusters as if through telepathy, particularly in Bernard's final soliloquy where he repeatedly asserts, 'I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda or Louis' (165). This continuity of consciousnesses is enabled by the 'strange contiguity' that Woolf establishes 'between the physical world and thoughts and feelings' (Chun 53). '[A]ll things – hands, curtains, knives and forks, other people dining – run into each other' as images and phrases from the interludes recur within the soliloquies (79). Early critics observed that this is most clearly the case in Bernard's summation (Heine 1972, Graham 1983), yet other characters also display an unexplained familiarity with the unoccupied room of the interludes, using objects, metaphors, and events from this space in their soliloquies. In this way, Woolf provides a version of sensation that is detached from the body and circulates amongst both objects *and* subjects (this understanding accords with Russell's definition of subjectivity in *The Analysis of Mind* [1921]). For instance, Neville's liquid knife-blades (69) resemble the 'lengthened, swollen' knives of the interludes (124; 15). Anticipating Bernard, Louis becomes 'disembodied, passing over fields without lodgement' and hears the 'garden sounds' of the sixth interlude, 'in the early morning petals float on fathomless depths and the birds sing' (38) (107). He hears 'always the sullen thud of the waves' (33) that also 'fell with muffled thuds' in the world of the interludes (14). The 'sea-holly and its mailed leaves' and the 'poisoned assegais' (42-43) of the interludes recur in Rhoda's narrative (76, 82). Jinny observes the gradual sharpening of shape that takes place in the interludes (for instance 3, 16, 64), as she 'watch[es] the brass handles on the cupboard grow clear;

then the basin; then the towel-horse' (31). The stirring of a blind – Woolf's first and 'most important' memory (*MOB*73) – inaugurates the interludes (3) and recurs in Susan's soliloquy, '[n]ow the wind lifts the blind' (56; see also 64). Thus, Bernard's summation is not anomalous but exemplary of how each personal point of view carries a reference to the objects of the interludes; one can see the 'whole house' of the interludes reflected within the pendant 'drop' of the moment (43). While Robert Richardson argues that *The Waves* makes 'intensity of consciousness (rather than material being or objective truth) a primary criterion of "reality"' (694), it is more accurate to say that reality emerges, as Russell argues, from objects and consciousnesses in sensitive collaboration, infinite moments of impersonal *and* personal perception assembled together to produce a glimpse into the unobserved.

As the de-subjectivised language and unobserved objects of the interludes bleed into the soliloquies, Woolf suggests that an extra-personal, nonhuman, unobserved element is inextricably embedded in even the most subjectivist language. As Maureen Chun astutely notes, '[i]f the "personal" conventional grammar of the writing [of the soliloquies] tells us that "said" binds experience to a single subject, the grammar of the secret language [of the interludes] points to an impersonal consciousness implicit in every word we write' (56). Woolf concretises this point by taking the secret objects of the interludes and placing them in the soliloquies. We may remember that objects were the original unifying device of *The Waves* – Woolf described her writing process as 'picking out things in the room & being reminded by them of other things' (*D*3:259). Long after Woolf had removed the story from the container of an omniscient mind, she continued '(to tell you this story)' by 'leap[ing], here, at this point, and alight[ing] now upon some perfectly commonplace object – say the poker and tongs' and imbuing it with significance (*W*154). In the early stages of writing *The Waves*, Woolf determined to refute the notion 'that any feeling can be so isolated that it dies with one person; that it is segregated in one strand of air, as one might coop up a Dresden china shepherdess under a glass bowl' (*TWD*1:44). Just as feelings

can be 'unmoored … from a private being' (*W*67), so the unobserved objects of the interludes become public objects, testaments to subject-object continuity, through their presence in the soliloquies. The text consistently 'proves that one's life is not confined to one's body' (*MOB* 81) as, after the lessons of empiricism, Stephen had come to dread.

In the *History*, Stephen notes the paralysing effects of philosophical impressionism upon writing (2); as Woolf takes the literary pulse in "How it Strikes a Contemporary?" (1932), she confirms his diagnosis. Modern writing resembles an impressionistic, 'bleak shorthand which preserves with astonishing brilliance the movements and expressions of the figures as they pass across the screen' (*SE*28). The screen motif – elsewhere a useful 'habit' that prevents the dissolution of identity (*D*3:104) – appears here as an obstacle to 'know[ing] the relations of human beings towards each other and towards the universe' (*SE*29). The modern preoccupation with the screen that divides self from other is, in Woolf's estimate, new: earlier authors, notably Wordsworth, are not as concerned with this predicament, achieving 'an unabashed tranquillity' that verges on 'somnolence' (28). Woolf's comparison is telling, for while Wordsworth is engrossed with the individual's perception of the external world, the anxieties of *esse est percipi* only infrequently ruffle the placid surface; in the case of Rhoda, Wordsworth's anxieties become full-blown, unremitting, and fundamental. Rhoda is an extreme example of the almost frenetic pathos with which the modern writer approaches the physical world; they 'record with agonised intensity the flying gleams, which light on what? and the transitory splendours, which may, perhaps, compose nothing whatever' (*SE*29). What has occurred to change the calm grandeur of Wordsworth's impressions to the 'bleak shorthand' of the moderns? This tenor, Woolf suggests, derives from the fact that the 'most sincere of them [modern writers] will only tell us what it is that happens to himself … They depend on their senses and emotions, whose testimony is trustworthy, rather than on their intellects whose message is obscure' (*SE*29). Yet what happens when empiricism overturns this trustworthy sensory norm? Woolf's oft-cited assertion that '[t]o

believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be released from the cramp and confinement of personality' is aspirational, for 'certainty of that kind' is ebbing in the modern world (ibid.). Jane Austen might select a 'little grain of experience' and 'set [it] outside herself,' turning it 'into that complete statement which is literature,' but the modern age has lost its faith in experience outside the self (ibid.). After considering how the confinement of personality produces the agony of object-nostalgia, it is little wonder that Woolf finds value in impersonality.

Such discussions reflect a conflict between an empiricist language of the senses and a literature that 'has roundness, weight, depth, is completed' and can be handed over to the reader as an 'entire' object, 'as one breaks off a bunch of grapes' (*W*143). Writing, life, objects – nothing can attain to this state so long as 'what I see … you do not see' (ibid.). Succinctly put, this is why *esse est percipi* casts the world into such disarray, and why 'we tell each other stories' (ibid.). However, language cannot easily redeem this situation. Lily's reflection that '[w]ords [always] fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low,' unable to express 'these emotions of the body' (146), illuminates a crisis in empiricist views of language. Any language of the body must be specific, but language is inherently generic ('ready made' [*SE*102]) and will necessarily fall short of the unique object and individual body. While I agree with Laura Doyle's argument that the body 'survives with and in language and narrative,' and have argued that language is inaugurally indebted to the nonhuman world, I wish to foreground 'the dance of distance and nearness' between materiality and language that Woolf repeatedly registers ("These Emotions" 45-46).

Faced with 'the sense of what is unescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it,' Bernard experiences one of those 'indentations in the curve of being,' those trances that were, for Woolf, at once devastating and fecund (161)(see chapter 2). The self 'coils useless on the mud where no tide comes' (ibid). This

nearly insupportable literary crisis can be negotiated in two different ways. The first is to marshal one's phrases, wield one's spoon and "'Fight!'": 'I took my mind, my being, the old dejected, *almost inanimate object*, and lashed it about among these odds and ends, sticks and straws, detestable little bits of wreckage, flotsam and jetsam … I retrieved them from formlessness with words' (ibid., added emphases). Yet although Woolf often expresses faith in the redemptive power of words, she also tempers it with a note of suspicion. Some words are 'pressed, condensed, enduring' (68), but words can also be false, fleeting, and vacuous. Bernard finally concludes

> How much better is silence; the coffee-cup, the table… Let me sit here for ever with bare things, this coffee-cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself. (176)

To engage with 'things in themselves,' language must be stemmed or abbreviated into 'a little language:'

> … words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry. … Nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor. None of those resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts, making wild music, false phrases. I have done with phrases. (ibid.).

Bernard must try a different tack, relinquish his struggle to express life in words and lapse into silence and death.

Bernard's exit from the body precipitates the most sustained connection between soliloquy and interlude, the most profound excursion into 'the mystery of things' (174). In a text that so clearly engages empiricist foci – the moment, sensations, subjectivism – the eradication of the body, empiricism's primary explicative unit, is indeed a radical step. Bernard's need to escape 'the pressure of the eye, the solicitation of the body, and all need of lies and phrases' (176) is

based on a specific view of the body as the ground of privacy (in Merleau-Ponty's terms, "secret" [*Visible* 114]). As Craig Gordon has argued, 'the affective body' can be understood as the 'vital principle of integration and organic unity' or as the uncrossable 'limit' (174). Woolf points out that 'we *be*[*come*] separate bodies:' 'the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us,' depending on our experiences (*W*145, added emphasis). We *become* 'private' individuals as a 'shell forms upon the soft soul, nacreous, shiny' (ibid.153). This contention contrasts with Stephen's view of the body, as well as that of Walter Pater and Vernon Lee, who all believed that we are fundamentally restricted to a subjective body. In Woolf's genesis story, it is the bath that inducts characters into 'this changing, this feeling garment of flesh' (72), inaugurating the conviction that each body is a separate unit, uniquely 'pierced with arrows of sensation'(144). But Bernard says, 'when I pass a cottage with a light in the window where a child has been born, I could implore them not to squeeze the sponge over that new body' (ibid.).[41] After the characters are 'covered with warm flesh' (14), any confrontation with the external will produce a violent shock. Bernard is '[t]ransfixed, stopped dead' by the sight of Elvedon where the gardeners sweep and a lady sits writing, 'I thought "I cannot interfere with a single stroke of those brooms. They sweep and they sweep. Nor with the fixity of that woman writing." … It is as if one had woken in Stonehenge surrounded by a circle of great stones, these enemies, these presences' (144-143). More to the point, it is as if the newly differentiated body, stuck in its sensory moment, manufactures its own antagonists; pre-historic Stonehenge threatens the moment, the sweeper appals the "I". All the characters experience moments when '[t]he little apparatus of observation is unhinged … some sudden exaltation possesses me,' 'some rapid *unapprehended* life' (146, emphasis added), yet their insistence on individual sensation will lead them to recoil back into the corporeal apparatus of observation, into an "I" that is '[c]lear, firm, unequivocal' (98). Thus, while John Graham sees Bernard's exit from the body and

[41] In *Principles of Psychology*, William James uses the same metaphor of water 'squeezed from the sponge awaken[ing] a premonitory tingling consciousness,' to describe how we come to see objects as 'coalesced' forms when they are actually 'nothing but clusters of qualities' (555-556).

subsequent insight into the interludes as an anti-climax, thwarting the heroic theme of *The Waves* (328), it is a revolutionary step away from the empiricist paradigm that has been so starkly re-created in the previous portions of the text. What stronger endorsement could Woolf give to the unobserved if not to take Bernard at his word, '[a]nyone now is at liberty to murder Bernard … so long as they leave untouched this margin of unknown territory, this forest of the unknown world' (84)?

As 'an elderly man, a heavy man with grey hair,' Bernard 'leant over a gate that led into a field' and died (171, 170). He loses the sensations of the body – '[n]ow it was done with. I had no more appetites to glut … no more sharp teeth and clutching hands or desire to feel the pear and the grape and the sun beating down from the orchard wall' (169-170). He becomes '[a] man without a self' (170). Bernard at the gate recalls another moment from Wordsworth's career. Bonamy Price gives the account:

> The venerable old man raised his aged form erect; he was walking in the middle, and passed across me to a five-barred gate in the wall … He clenched the top bar firmly with his right hand, pushed strongly against it, and then uttered these ever-memorable words: 'There was a time in my life when I had to push against something that resisted, to be sure that there was anything outside me.' (*Poetical Works* 8:202)

Superficially, Wordsworth at the gate simply elaborates upon Wordsworth at the wall, yet two different theses underwrite these episodes – grasping at walls is intended to 'recall *myself*' (ibid.189, emphasis added) while pushing against the gate substantiates that there is something '*outside me*'. Even so, Rhoda and Bernard deploy hardness to two entirely different ends. In Rhoda's case, the nostalgia for hardness seems almost pathological, a doomed attempt to use the body to confirm what the empiricist account of the body expressly denied – the mind-independent object. No wonder Rhoda must interminably repeat these gestures! Whereas bed-rails direct Rhoda back to the body and *esse est percipi*, Bernard's contact with the gate exemplifies

the alternative thesis, *esse est obstare*, precipitating the death of the body and a vision into the unexperienced object world.

> Thin as a ghost, leaving no trace where I trod, perceiving merely, I walked alone in a new world, never trodden; brushing new flowers, unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable; without shelter from phrases …
>
> But how describe the world seen without a self? There are no words. Blue, red – even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through. How describe or say anything in articulate words again? (171-172)

Previously, Bernard congratulated himself for his phrasemaking; now even the little words 'blue' and 'red' obscure the "this-ness" of the unobserved object world. Words efface themselves, dissipating into ostensive tokens. Perhaps the failures of *The Waves*' climax, as Graham sees it, derive from the problem of communicating the unobserved object without the tautology of *quiddita* – 'the fieriness of fire, the steeliness of steel, and the unutterable muddiness of mud' (Chesterton qtd. in Ward 97) – or without resuming the passionate, embodied language that, by this point in *The Waves*, has become suspect. If the reader yearns for the heaviness, permanence, and wholeness that empiricism denies, they must be content with ostensive gestures that silence the subject while inviting the object with the wordless affirmation, "this *is*". When Bernard is finally shown the world of the interludes, 'the house, the garden, and the waves breaking,' this epiphany is only possible because he has submitted to the Other's direction, "'Look. This is the truth'" (172).

After the "death" of the self, the waves of nonhuman time cease to trouble Bernard, the threat of the unobserved 'no longer makes quiver what I hold' (174). It seems that the dialogic relation of subject and object, demonstrated by Bernard's vision, might continue and we might 'push beyond this moment, and leave it behind us forever' (159). Consequently, Bernard's decision to quixotically 'take arms against a sea of troubles' (Shakespeare 60) is all the more

bathetic. Personality, that 'particular coat that belongs to me,' is reassumed, and 'this rubbing of my nose along the surfaces of things' ceases with the resumption of the 'I, I, I' *ad nauseum* (177). In the space of a few pages, death is transformed from answer to enemy, and Bernard moves from the advocacy of silence to advocacy of the self: "'Fight," I cry, "fight!" remembering the shape of my own nose, and strike with *this* spoon upon *this* table pugnaciously' (134, emphases added). The bright, limited scope of deixis has re-asserted itself, now increasingly pallid when compared to the nonhuman "this" of the interludes.

Woolf's unoccupied rooms demonstrate the great acuity and sensitivity with which she engages in that 'tacit intellectual co-operation […] established between minds placed far apart' by time and discipline (Stephen *HET*2). The recurring themes of the unoccupied room pinpoint the aspects of eighteenth-century object ontology that had produced such painful quandaries for her father and for modern literature – the agony of transitory impressions and the enforced privacy of one's sensory and emotional range. We might speculate that empiricism captured Woolf's imagination because it fragmented time and isolated subjects from objects, but also because it threatened literature itself by demanding that language restrict itself to those brilliantly transient impressions, those sensations of the body that, ironically, it is least suited to convey. In this and the previous chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that neither the body nor language need be considered as personal. They can be understood as the advent of the impersonal in the heart of ordinary experience, showing that everything we feel and say incorporates elements of history and environment, some parts of which are bound to be unperceived. Secondly, the refutation of the unoccupied room is based on a gulf between private, sensing bod(ies) and the publicly available, external world. Woolf refuses to accept this binary. Against the empiricists, Woolf depersonalises sensation; lifted from individual bodies, sensation sociably circulates amongst subjects and objects, forging connections between the soliloquies and the interludes. Thirdly, Woolf is deeply preoccupied with the rich, vivid and unique character of sensation but will

suspend it in favour of a minimal, ostensive style when it interferes with either the object *qua* object or the creation of community, which, as "Modern Fiction" argues, are the writer's first and foremost aims. Finally, the mind-independent object *enables* community, for if the object is simply *my* impressions it casts all externality into doubt and produces those lonely cries that we have heard through the writings of Stephen, Bradley, Berkeley and Hume. Since the rejection of mind-independent objects produces such painful crises for the subject, the question of whether things exist whether or not we perceive them is not an abstract philosophical exercise but goes straight to the heart of relationality. By bolstering the independent existence of the object, returning them to the status of common, public, temporally continuous entities, Woolf enables objects to act as mediators between subjects and as testimony of a lasting, external world. This is the answer that Stephen sought, suggesting that when Woolf "wrote out" her father's influence, she was also "writing back" (*MOB*119).

Chapter 4

'but looking together united them:' Shared Attention to Objects

While the object is often deemed the monarch of 'the common ground' (Lewis *Time* 420) – the primal guarantor of a shared world – it has nevertheless become a casualty of the subject's 'lonely thinking power,' considered to be 'zero without him' (Pater *Portraits* 108).[1] As the previous chapter illustrates, eighteenth-century philosophical empiricism plays a pivotal role in this history, defining the object as a thought, or a bundle of sensory impressions, dependent on the observing mind. At the minimum, such subjectivism provides a theoretical ground for the feeling that, even in shared rooms, my experience of each furnishing is irremediably personal. As Ortega y Gasset puts it, '[t]here is an infinity of things but … (each one of us) is alone with them' (47). At its most radical, empiricism turns Ortega's parentheses into a Bradleian 'circle[,] closed on the outside' (346), implying that "'there may be nothing else. Nothing but what we imagine'" (Woolf *ND*402). Virginia Woolf calls this, "'[t]he reason for our loneliness'" (ibid.). Here, she draws attention to an obscure murmur underlying the strident egoism of much empiricist and post-empiricist writing – refuting the mind-independent object risks deep, ontological loneliness.

For example, in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1738), David Hume aims to 'utterly annihilate all these objects' that are supposed to exist independently of perception; he advises us to 'reduce ourselves to the opinions of the most extravagant scepticism concerning them' (150). Yet soon after this proclamation of material objects scepticism, Hume pictures himself as a sailor

[1] In *Time and Western Man* (1927), Wyndham Lewis claimed that, while the object was once 'king of the physical world,' the modern emphasis on temporal seriality and private impressions had led to the object *qua* object's 'demise' (407). Lewis blames this "regicide" on philosophers like Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell, yet his account of their "sensationalist" view# of objects accords, almost verbatim, with eighteenth-century empiricist views (in fact, his critique closely approximates nineteenth-century idealist critiques of eighteenth-century empiricism) (see, in particular, pp.413-414). Despite its contorted logic, lively caricature and deliberate mis-readings, *Time*'s defence of the object is remarkable and should be understood in the context of Lewis' complex politics (Ayers 1992, Mao 1998).

who has 'narrowly escap'd shipwreck,' 'affrighted and confounded with that forlorn solitude, in which I am plac'd in my philosophy' (ibid.172). Having defined objects as 'nothing but [a] determination of the mind,' he finds himself '[un]able to mingle and unite in society … utterly abandon'd and disconsolate' (ibid.173, 172). At the end of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), James pictures Mr Ramsay as another such mariner, his head raised 'against the waste of waters running away into the open, like some old stone lying in the sand':

> … he looked as if he had become physically what was always in the back of both of their minds – that *loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things*. (165, emphasis added)

The fundamental loneliness of the human condition echoes ubiquitously across centuries and disciplines, yet this passage is remarkable for its catholic phrasing. Restricting ourselves to Woolf's oeuvre, we see that the 'infinite loneliness of *human beings*' in *Night and Day* (1919) (297, emphasis added) has been extended to a loneliness that is also '*about things*'. In 'becom[ing] physically' lithic, 'like some old stone,' Ramsay has become loneliness incarnate.

This loneliness seems to outlast any philosophical "resolution" of the sceptical dilemma for, although Ramsay and Hume hold antithetical views on '[s]ubject and object and the nature of reality' (*TL*22), they seem to be voyaging on the same sea. A waterscape seems natural for Hume, who had so insistently undermined the permanence and solidity of objects; these 'dreary solitudes' are the natural outcome of the belief that one's experience of objects is just as idiosyncratic and incommunicable as one's innermost thoughts (Hume *Treatise* 172). Indeed, in the first section of *To the Lighthouse*, Ramsay seems to have Hume's interdict on intersubjectivity in mind, reflecting on 'that solitude, that aloofness, that remoteness of hers [Mrs Ramsay's]' (57). To palliate the aching recognition that 'they could not share that; they could not say that,' Ramsay must undermine Hume, 'telling himself the story [of] how Hume was stuck in a bog; he wanted to laugh' (ibid.). However, by the time of the belated voyage to the Lighthouse, Ramsay

has laughed at Hume (61); he has retained his Johnsonian faith that '[t]he very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare' (32); he has survived the sceptical crisis on the lawn when 'solidity had vanished altogether' (61). Finally, "Time Passes" has testified to the endurance of objects, existing independently of any single, perceiving mind. The promise of the object, its potential as the public ground for being-in-common, has been preserved. Why, then, should loneliness be the truth for Ramsay (and James, the layman) as it was for Hume?

Inasmuch as this loneliness overflows any strict philosophical boundary, it also encompasses its traditional antonym, society, for this loneliness is '*for both*' Ramsay and James 'the truth about things' (165, emphasis added). Earlier, James reflects that 'there was a waste of snow and rock very lonely and austere; and there he had come to feel […] were two pairs of footprints only; his own and his father's. They alone knew each other' (151). Despite their otherwise antagonistic relationship, James and Ramsay's deep, abiding sense of loneliness creates community in microcosm. The fact that loneliness and community coexist, rather than cancel each other, suggests that Woolf's loneliness/things dyad does not have a straightforward antidote in human company. Such loneliness is not, as most theorists of loneliness suggest, simply a failure of interpersonal relations or a deficit in meaningful communication, for James and Ramsay's silent affirmation of loneliness constitutes a deeper bond than any of their verbal interactions.

To the Lighthouse delineates an 'obscure' feeling (165) which I term the "loneliness/things affect" – a sense that we are 1) profoundly restricted to our idiosyncratic experience and 2) that our experience is not certainly rooted in any external reality. Thus, our experience may not be shared by others. Why should these empiricist tenets give rise to loneliness? I suggest that loneliness emerges through the crucial conjunction in F.H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (1897), 'the whole world for each is peculiar *and* private to that soul' (346, emphasis added).

Empiricism first posits that objects are composed of impressions, "peculiar," or unique, to the individual. The idea that objects are the sum of unique impressions need not necessarily produce feelings of loneliness. It has promoted delight in vivid, sumptuous, and diverse sense-data. For the artist, sense-data is a vital resource that can be creatively reconstituted into meaningful patterns. Exploring "Modern Fiction" (1921) as a manifesto for literary impressionism, Jesse Matz argues that Woolf was attracted to 'the free play of the impression' because it allowed her to revel in paradox, inconclusiveness and synthesis (178-179).[2] As chapter one of this thesis demonstrates, Woolf often describes objects through a host of accreted impressions, a proliferation of similes and associations that show that 'nothing was simply one thing' (*TL*152). However, Woolf's delight in impressionistic 'free play' is tempered by a sense of obligation to the object itself. Orlando grows weary of simile because it turns '[e]verything' into 'something else' (*O*86) – in "The Lady in the Looking Glass" (1929), such 'comparisons' ultimately 'come like the convolvulus itself trembling between one's eyes and the truth' (*CSF*222). The narrator becomes impatient with the flowery trellis of 'phrases:' '[t]here must be truth; there must be a wall' (ibid.). As Douglas Mao suggests in *Solid Objects* (2001), Woolf frequently registers a connection between creativity and culpability, an anxiety that description may only be the 'excrescence of the human subject' overlying the concrete object (71). If, in Mao's reading, description is one suspect convolvulus, then Matz suggests that perception itself is another. Matz observes that "Modern Fiction" is marked by '[c]ritical indecision' (179) about whether one 'embraces or creates what is outside' (Woolf "MF" *SE*10). Do we embrace an *a priori* external world – the wall – *or* does the world only consist of the created convolvulus, the sensual after-effect of the individual subject? Does Woolf's 'or' indicate tension between the two predicates – "embrace or create" – or does it serve to hyphenate them? If the hyphen holds, then

[2] In *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (2001), Matz explains that both philosophical impressionism and literary impressionism privilege the subjective testimony of the senses, but literary impressionists go beyond Hume, aspiring to glean totality from fragmentation, depth from appearances, truth and essence from fleeting moments (12-24).

this tradition is one that (rightly) recognises the co-constitution of subject and object, art and its material context. Yet if the creative side of our relation to 'what is outside' were to radically predominate, then the subject risks appropriating the object it wishes to embrace.

Significantly, Matz suggests that Woolf relinquishes impressionism when confronted with 'impenetrable objects or structureless consciousness' (179). Attending to this moment, I argue that the loneliness/things affect occurs when either end of the subject/object dualism is radicalised, and doubt emerges about the *mutuality* of subject-object relations. Subjectivity supervenes too much, and the object becomes, in Marcel Proust's terms, 'no echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within' (*Swann's Way* 98). In *The Inoperative Community* (1991), Jean-Luc Nancy sheds light on the inner/outer metaphor that recurs across discussions of the loneliness/things affect. Nancy argues that, as the subject instates himself as an absolute "'without relation'" – 'perfectly detached, distinct, and closed … alone' – he is establishing a 'territory' (4). Yet because territories are defined by an 'outer edge' (ibid.) they are always already constituted by exposure '*to an outside*' (29, original emphasis). Thus, if territorial subjectivism turns the object into a ghostly echo, it is nevertheless haunted by the object, in its new character of inaccessible Other. Throughout this chapter, key concepts of Nancy's theories of community – death, exposure, work – will fruitfully illumine Woolf's work. Here, as we try to pinpoint the origin of the loneliness/things affect, we can see that the more 'structureless consciousness' disavows its relations to a structuring "outside," the more 'impenetrable' and persistent the object becomes (Matz 179).

Since the loneliness/things affect originates through a problematised rapport with material objects, it is not fully explicable by the traditional paradigm of social loneliness (for instance, the state of being literally without human companions is an inadequate description of this affect). This troubled rapport undergirds several discussions of modernism. For instance, in

Suspensions of Perception (1999), Jonathan Crary observes that by the middle of the nineteenth-century, 'an extensive amount of work in science, philosophy, psychology and art involved a coming to terms' with the fact that 'the senses could no longer claim an essential objectivity or certainty' (12). Perception was increasingly understood as idiosyncratic, disintegrated, and autonomous of any 'necessary relation to the exterior world' (ibid). Likewise, Philip Weinstein's *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (2005) argues that the 'ego's spatial contract is rescinded' in the modernist period (2). Whereas nineteenth-century literary realism assumes a 'preemptive alliance between knowing subject and knowable object,' modernists often find themselves in a 'realm of unmastered space… and unfamiliar objects' (96, 99). Weinstein names this epistemic condition, 'the unfurnishing of modernist subjects' (96). While Woolf is omitted from Weinstein's study, she frequently portrays the perceptual world as disrupted, vacated, and phantasmal. This tendency is not unambiguous. In fact, Woolf's fictions are remarkable for their peculiarly naked portrayal of the positive *and* negative affects attendant upon an initial, elemental unfurnishing. This chapter suggests that the deep loneliness that permeates Woolf's oeuvre is one negative symptom of an "unfurnished" modernism.

Empiricism contributes towards this "unfurnishing" by insisting that the whole range of experience (psychological *and* sensory) is not only unique but *private*, that is, unpossessable by any other. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) echoes this position, describing the 'drip, drip of one impression after another down into that cellar where they stood, deep, dark, and no one would ever know' (129). While life's 'secrecy, complete and inviolable' (ibid.), is often positively equated with reality – 'life […] [is] something real, something private' – Woolf is vexed by the lack of an appropriate communicative medium (*TL*50). In *To the Lighthouse*, knowledge of the other could 'never be offered openly, never made public;' it is 'nothing that could be written in any language' (44). Woolf's account of language's limitations parallels that of the empiricists. As the previous chapter explains, empiricists considered that language is too abstract to "publicise" objects,

sensations, or thoughts; it cannot convey them without compromising the specificity that is their primary characteristic. Due to the important but seemingly impossible task of communication, privacy has a dual character in Woolf's work, at once a pleasurable idyll in an 'unknown garden' and imprisonment in a dark 'cellar' (*MD*129).

Consequently, empiricism may have several affective trajectories but, hedged in on one side by radical uniqueness and on the other by unmitigated privacy, the path to loneliness seems a straightforward one. This is lucidly demonstrated in Walter Pater's "Sebastian van Storck" (1886). This short story is concerned with the affective fallout of the philosophical theorem, 'the world is but a thought' (108). For Sebastian, this 'first principle' leads to 'black melancholy' but Pater observes that it has also 'allied itself to the poetical or artistic sympathy' which 'explore[s] the various forms of finite existence all the more intimately just because of that sense of one lively spirit circulating through all things […] in the sunbeam, or the leaf' (*Portraits* 110-111).[3] We can see Pater's linkage of subjectivism and panpsychistic sympathy in Vernon Lee's account of subject/object empathy. As discussed in chapter two, Lee's account of empathy continuously evokes and then forestalls the vitality of things, returning the rich, 'heterogeneous sensations received from without' to the realm of 'inner experience' (*The Beautiful* 68). Perhaps, as Pater implies, Sebastian is deliberately perverse in his inability to enjoy the brilliant, idiosyncratic, transient rush of impressions sketched in the conclusion to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). Yet Pater subtly acknowledges that sympathy with things, when based on the world-is-thought theorem, might only hold through special pleading: with what are we having intimacy if the world is simply an 'enlarged pattern of [one's]self' (*Portraits* 109)? Might not "poetic sympathy" be a species of 'selfish and crafty love' (ibid.)? It is telling that loneliness finally trumps Pater's alternatives – sympathy, or intimacy. Sebastian's conversion to the 'the world is

[3] *Marius the Epicurean* is similarly preoccupied with the 'bold, pantheistic flight[s]' of idealist philosophies: scepticism is only the first 'step' in recognising 'the sign of a subtler but more universal motion – the sustained, unsleeping, forward-pushing vitality' in 'all mind and matter' (2:132).

but a thought' theorem places him in the sea-scape of Hume and *To the Lighthouse*, appearing 'as the pallid Arctic sun, disclosing itself over the dead level of a glacial, a barren and absolutely lonely sea' (*Portraits* 110).

While empiricism provides fertile grounds for the loneliness/things affect, its sheer ubiquity suggests that it exceeds any specific theoretic origin. In *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (1974), Anthony Nuttall proposes that empiricism's affective impact turned out to have 'a life of its own,' and that its literary expression blurs the lines between the theory of unreality and the 'passion of unreality,' the doctrinal "ism" and the felt cataclysm, the argument and the affect (2, 255). Similarly, Frank Cioffi (1992) and Christopher Ricks (2002) detect a 'disquieting hinterland' of loneliness in the Romantic, modernist, and contemporary literary landscape, one that is related to and yet distinct from philosophical conundrums (Cioffi 135). Moving away from the loneliness/things affect's philosophical predicates to its circulation in literature, the following paragraphs undertake a similar overview, engaging in what Cioffi calls a 'primordial pointing out' (ibid.). This 'pointing' methodology is apt, for the connection between loneliness and things has theoretical bases but is no complete theorem. It is intermittently felt, not consistently *lived*; just as often as it is discussed as a doctrine, it is described as an intuition. Thus, the loneliness/things affect is an unstructured, ubiquitous, yet recognisable experience that is characteristically unspeakable but nevertheless arresting – in these situations, what is more natural than to point? Indeed, in *To the Lighthouse*, James relies upon bare ostensive force to explain the 'loneliness which was […] the truth about things:' 'the Lighthouse stood there on its rock, it's like that' (165-6).

Before we begin, it is worthwhile to note that James, as a spokesperson for the loneliness he shares with his father, illuminates a point everywhere exemplified in the literary record – the loneliness/things affect is, paradoxically, social. It is "social" because it is essentially an anxiety

about the possibilities of intimacy and because, while it may originate in traditions of psycho-sensory privacy, it nevertheless worries the category of the personal. The loneliness/things affect is often described as a spontaneous, eccentric, pathological, even 'congenital' feeling (Cioffi 125).[4] Yet these expressions have distinct family resemblances, delineating a widespread, free-floating, and sporadic constituency of feeling. In "Sebastian van Storck," the most fastidious solipsism nevertheless creates community, a feeling of being 'both isolated and accompanied' (Cioffi 129). Sebastian's rejection of mind-independent objects engenders loneliness but also 'compatriots;' he realises that 'the loneliness which was gathering round him' is, in fact, a 'tradition, a constant tradition – that daring thought of his [was] an echo, or [the] haunting recurrent voice of the human soul itself' (Pater *Portraits* 109). As such, the loneliness/things affect is an exemplar of modernist feeling, as theorised by Justus Nieland in *Feeling Modern: The Eccentricities of Public Life* (2008). Nieland situates modern feelings at the paradoxical intersection of the *typical* and the *atypical*. While modern affects are 'experientially singular' – an emotional residue left unaccounted for, or obscured, by normative protocols of feeling – they are also 'impersonal, typical, or vagrant intensities that can be mechanically transmitted or externally manufactured in sites of public performance' (19). While the loneliness/things affect *claims* and is *felt* with 'all the inwardness of the most individually felt life' (Ricks 262), it is produced by external objects and transmitted through public sites like the novel and the autobiography. As in Drew Daniel's discussion of *The Melancholy Assemblage* (2013), the loneliness/things affect shows 'expressive consistency' as well as 'inherent modularity,' shifting in scale and tenor as it follows a 'nomadic trajectory across cultures and historical periods' (28-29). Through its narrative

[4] Even Hume asked himself whether his material objects scepticism had any 'criterion' of truth besides 'those numberless infirmities peculiar to myself' – was his view of objects based upon reason or simply an eccentric but '*strong* propensity' (*Treatise* 172, original emphasis)?

dramatization, the loneliness/things affect becomes the signature of an aesthetically and socio-historically salient community.[5]

Some expressions of the loneliness/things affect can be explicitly situated at the radical pole of material objects scepticism, registering 'astonishment that anything exists' outside the self (Wittgenstein "Lecture" 12). Such solipsism is often presented as studied and logical, connoting heroic or martyred exceptionalism. Leslie Stephen's writings, discussed in the previous chapter, are a case in point. For Stephen, living with the nearly un-liveable 'conviction that the visible and tangible world is a dream-woven tissue' (*Hours* 3:179) shows remarkable commitment to 'the correct performance of logical operations' (*Science* 449). Similarly, for Pater's Sebastian van Storck, the theorem, 'the world is but a thought,' results from strict intellectual rectitude. Stephen and Sebastian are what David Vincent has termed 'oppositional' solitares (27-28) – they are solitary because, unlike the coward, hypocrite, or "herd," they adopt a position outside the comfortable confines of ordinary opinion. This exclusive air of "heroic" resolution also colours Hume's loneliness; those who cannot squarely "face up to" his philosophy are as 'angels … covering their eyes with their wings' (*Treatise* 174). However, while the loneliness of unconventional opinion may have its satisfactions, when the lonely *content* of that opinion becomes "live," it produces pendular shifts between complacency and panic. Sebastian might be able to feel '[a]ctually proud, at times, of his curious, well-reasoned nihilism' but later sinks into 'intellectual consumption' (37); Stephen is 'chilled [to] the very marrow' (*HET*2); 'scepticism' leads Leo Tolstoy 'to the verge of insanity' and he glances wildly round, discovering 'emptiness

[5] Woolf was familiar with all the authors discussed in the following paragraphs. Wittgenstein belonged briefly to the Cambridge Apostles and met the Woolfs in 1925 (Rosenbaum *Aspects* 162) (for studies on Wittgenstein's influence on Bloomsbury, and modernism at large, see Rosenbaum [1998] and Michael LeMahieu & Karen Zumhagen-Yekple [2017]). The Woolfs' library includes Wordsworth's *Complete Poetical Works* (1902), 27 works on and by Tolstoy (including the cited, semi-autobiographical trilogy *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth* [1852-57]) (1930), a signed copy of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* (1887, including "Sebastian van Storck" [1886]) and *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1927) (Miletic-Vejzovic & King 248, 228, 172). From May 1922, Woolf read Proust enthusiastically and considered him 'the greatest modern novelist' (*L*3:365). Despite Woolf's scathing remarks on Joyce (*D*2:188-89, 199-200, 202-203), her holograph reading notebook "Modern Novels" reveals admiration for the '[n]ew versions of beauty' found in his experimental techniques (*Modern Novels*; see Henke 1986).

(*néant*) where I was not' (196-197); William Wordsworth grasps at hard walls (*Poetical Works* 8:189). Each of these writers was voluntarily, logically converted to a philosophical thesis, yet its affective yield is an experience of *being seized*. The same tenor recurs in accounts that foreground the "naïveté" of the loneliness/things affect, coming, apparently, "out of nowhere." For example, Leonard Woolf remembers a sudden 'sense of profound, passive cosmic despair … I crept back into the house with a curious muddle of fear, contempt, scepticism and fatalism in my childish mind' (*Sowing* 40). Likewise, Woolf recalls a childhood 'moment of the puddle in the path […] for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something … the whole world became unreal' (*MOB*87). This passage, blocked with semicolons, records an unreasoned but irreparable breach between self and an "unreal" world. Woolf attempts to assuage her condition through what has become the gestural signature of the loneliness/things affect, reaching or grasping for some *thing* in place of nothingness. This response can be understood as inchoate, spontaneous resistance to material objects scepticism, an attempt to reinstate the object as a touchstone for reality; it denotes nostalgia for the concrete, publicly-available tactility that is the object's most taken-for-granted characteristic. Acts like raising one's 'finger and [letting] it fall on the arm of her chair' blend anticipatory faith with 'awe that things should exist at all' (Woolf *VO*139).

Other statements reveal a second variety of the loneliness/things affect, correlating to the minimal pole of the empiricist axis – because of the ineradicable subjectivity of perception, 'each mind [keeps] as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world' (Pater *Renaissance* 119). As Marcel Proust writes, 'every casual glance is an act of necromancy;' no matter how much we wish to engage with others, 'my grandmother was still myself, I […] had never seen her save in my own soul' ("Guermantes Way" 156-157). This central tenet applies to objects as well as subjects, as Emily Dickinson attests: 'Perception of an object costs/Precise the object's loss (961) (see Hubbard 30-46). However, Dickinson's lament actually contradicts the empiricist definition of

objects, for (like the grasping impulse discussed above) it implies that there is some object to be lost, something independent from and unassimilable to perception. In *Fiction and the Camera Eye* (1975), Alan Spiegel argues that these layered responses to the subjectivist dilemma result in two modern visual forms, both tending to 'finally diminish the status of the object' (39). The "interior form" resembles empiricism in that the object is conflated with consciousness and 'reduce[d] to a glancing sensation, a pin-point of sense datum' (49).[6] Conversely, in the "cinematographic form" objects are fragmented but not finally reducible to consciousness, for the 'object' 'always remain[s] slightly other than and slightly apart from the life of the observer' (67). The modern '*isolato*' is defined by the latter 'sensibility,' which Spiegel calls 'a kind of ocular loneliness' (188 original emphasis, 67). Significantly, such loneliness reveals the subject in a peculiar state of possession and dispossession. For instance, when James Joyce insists upon 'the soul's incurable loneliness. We cannot give ourselves […] we are our own' (111), the subject seems to paradoxically "own" too much and too little. The whole estate of experience is 'our own' – it 'remain[s] private and idiosyncratic' (Spiegel 68) – yet it is not transferable property. *That* '[w]e cannot give' (Joyce ibid.). In affirming the incontestable ownership of perceived objects, the subject is dispossessed of public, shareable objects as well as 'the object in and of itself,' for it remains 'aloof from any single observer's appropriation' (Spiegel ibid.).

In many of the accounts above, we can detect a nostalgic desire for a companionate relationship with the material world. This desire has a well-established literary history. Discussing Romanticism, Richard Eldridge speaks of the poetic impulse to 'see and feel and hear' objects as 'not just naked material quiddities' but as 'habitations for mindedness' (3). Eldridge reads Romantic personification as the subject's wish to establish a 'lasting home' for herself through the 'creative-responsive imagination' (ibid.). As we have seen in chapter one, Edwardian fiction

[6] For Spiegel, Woolf falls into this category, rendering 'the object's dematerialization virtually complete' (47).

continued to treat material objects like 'something human,' 'sentient, patient, and helpful' (Bennett *Hilda Lessways* 107). In chapter two, we have seen how late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century empathy theorists made this feeling of subject/object connectedness the bedrock of psychological aesthetics. Overall, such ideas give rise to an idea of the object as a companion, so that one is never "really alone" in the company of things.

This consideration guides my terminological preference for "loneliness," rather than its cognate, "solitude," which bears some explanation.[7] In an effort to destigmatise solitude, many sociological, psychological, and philosophical studies have highlighted its positive historic functions as revitalising social stimulus (Manusov 2020), social critique (Vincent 2020, Engelberg 2001), opportunity for independence, individuation and inner growth (Koch *Solitude*), and creative resource (Alberti 2019). Studies by Jo Malin and Victoria Boynton ([ed.] 2003), and Delese Wear ([ed.] 1993) emphasise that solitude is especially important for women, serving as a 'retort' 'to community, to distraction, to the demands of others' (Leck, in Wear 114-115). As the theoretical fortunes of "solitude" rise, "loneliness" has become its dark double, linked to pain, pathology, and failure. Indeed, celebrants of solitude are the quickest to find clean demarcations between the two terms. David Vincent's *A History of Solitude* (2020) is representative of this trend, claiming that 'the most succinct definition of loneliness is failed solitude' (309). I do not intend to demean the benefits of solitude; the complex valences and values of solitude are reiterated throughout Woolf's writings and will be examined in detail below. However, it is worth noting that solitude's benefits often depend on an understanding of solitude as temporary, elective and, importantly, 'threaded through and hemmed around by' compensatory 'modalities of engagement' with 'non-human things' – predominantly, anthropomorphised "Nature" (Koch

[7] The *OED* attributes the first use of "loneliness" as a feeling, mood, or mental state to Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1593). The term gained ubiquity (and negative resonance) in the nineteenth century (Alberti 10, Vincent 28-29). "Solitude," as a feeling and location, originates in the fourteenth century. In Woolf's fiction, the terms "solitude" and "solitary" are nearly twice as ubiquitous as "loneliness" or "lonely," yet the terms are frequently interchangeable, depending on the adjectives or contexts attached to them.

"Solitude" 194, 190). In Philip Koch's *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter* (1994), objects take the "sting" out of solitude because 'things feel companionable, familiar, in-place, right;' objects are 'reservoirs' of memory, 'mirrors' for reflection, and substitutes for interpersonal engagement (58, 62-64). Since many writers have found 'the most innocent and encouraging society' 'in any natural object' (Thoreau 119, qtd. in Koch *Solitude* 14), Koch finds the kinds of statements I have examined above "maddeningly" hyperbolic.

The object's functions as repository, mirror, and compensation hold currency in many literary accounts of solitude. An early example is found in Andrew Marvell's tribute to 'delicious solitude,' "The Garden" (1681) (48). For Marvell's speaker, solitude enables ecstatic union with nature: 'Nectaren and curious Peach/*Into* my hands themselves do reach,' 'My soul *into* the boughs does glide;/There like a bird it sits and sings' (49, emphasis added).[8] Yet while Woolf sometimes correlates 'the blur, the dream, the ecstasy of loneliness' with nature, she tends to deflate Marvell's sense of union between self and world ("Introduction" *CSF*186). In "A Summing Up," Woolf rebukes the subjectivist tendency to 'spray over the world that cloud of gold,' to make it part of the gallant and carousing [human] company' (*CSF*209-210). The 'vast inattentive impersonal world' is far more likely to ratify loneliness (ibid.210). '[T]he tree, denuded of its gilt and majesty, seemed to supply […] an answer' – 'the soul […] is by nature unmated, a widow bird' (ibid.). Thus, Woolf depicts a rhythmic, Janus-faced loneliness that fluctuates between ecstasy and deprivation. I adopt the term "loneliness" because (unlike "solitude") its negative connotations have not been neutralised. More importantly, the affect I am describing gains its force by depriving us of precisely those surrogate companions upon which 'delicious solitude' depends. For if all that exists are gilded thoughts, can the soul have any true marriage with peach or tree? Through its world-denying character, the loneliness/things affect troubles

[8] As we have seen, this penetrative rhetoric also recurs in turn-of-the-century empathy theories.

the consolation, 'remember/loneliness is still time spent/with the world' (Vuong 2016). Votaries of solitude, enjoying the surrogate society of objects, may see the loneliness/things affect as credulous, literal-minded, and hyperbolic. Yet because the loneliness/things affect cuts the "companion-object" motif off at the roots – suggesting that objects might not even exist – it is immune to at least one of the 'gifts of solitude' (Koch *Solitude* 135). While this chapter cannot hope to chart the intricate evolution that produces such different affects in the seventeenth-century solitare and his twentieth-century widowed counterpart (plausibly, solitude has always been polyvalent), it later parses Woolf's pregnant allusion to Marvell's poem in *The Years* (1937). This striking passage is indicative of the complex modernist response to antecedent texts of solitude.

One of the most influential efforts to historicise loneliness is Fredric Jameson's model of modernist affect. Jameson famously characterises the modern subject as a monad. Enclosed within an increasingly subjectivised, 'semi-autonomous' sensorium (*Political Unconscious* 218), the modernist is incapable of transcending her point of view. Her predominant affective state is one of 'alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation' (*Postmodernism* 11). For Jameson, Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893) emblematises the modern 'aesthetic of expression,' the modern 'cultural pathology' of loneliness (ibid.14). The scream of 'atrocious solitude' and communicative failure inscribes itself in loops and circles on 'the very geography of a universe,' remaking it in the shape of the closed, autonomous individual (ibid.). *The Scream* is a visual incarnation of the loneliness/things affect, the feeling that all experience is simply 'the pattern of [one's] self,' projected 'upon the broad screen of the supposable world without' (Pater *Portraits* 109).

Notwithstanding Jameson's acuity in defining modernist loneliness as a culture of feeling, my argument that modernist loneliness is *about things* serves to counter several aspects of his

argument. For Jameson, the fragmentation and privatisation of sensory experience (which produces the loneliness/things affect) is a modernist 'textual institution' that purposively 'expresses and reproduces the newly centered subject' (*Political Unconscious* 160). This subject may be alienated but is still probative, impervious, and autonomous. As such, Jameson argues that the lonely monad functions as one of modernism's 'desperate myths of the self' (ibid.210). In this vein, modernist loneliness is often regarded as defensive, a "Utopian" compensation for the reification of modern life (ibid.255-260), or aggressive. Edward Engelberg notes that modernists are seen to 'fixat[e] on the Self so narcissistically that solitude is aggressively sought and eagerly embraced' (9). Ezra Pound's "Anima Sola" (1908) combines defensive and aggressive elements in its depiction of the monad-like poet who, 'untrammelled' from outdated traditions, achieves '[e]xquisite loneliness,' becoming a 'fixed God, a sphere, round, rejoicing in complete solitude' (19-20). Similarly, for Woolf, solitude often has positive connotations of artistic productivity and freedom from societal demands that 'shatter the sense of being which is so extreme in solitude' (*W*77). In defence of this self-affirming solitude, Rhoda 'grasps her fork – her weapon against us' (ibid.). However, the loneliness/things affect complicates this familiar narrative because it reveals a *non-elective* dimension to modernist loneliness – witness the tones of shock and nostalgia that permeate many of the statements above, often at the very summit of complacent self-aggrandisement. In fact, the loneliness/things affect profoundly disturbs the probative, "centered" subject, for the intimation that all externality is effectively dysfunctional or irresolute makes it impossible for the subject to establish herself against any external standard.[9] If one is to resolve the loneliness/things affect, objects cannot be defined solely by the individual's private sensorium.

[9] This may account for the dizzy swings between egoism and absolutism that we see in modernists like Lewis, Hulme and Pound.

The power dynamic of the monad model is worth unpicking for, *pace* Jameson, it does less to substantiate an egocentric mythology than to illuminate the paradox of possession and dispossession mentioned earlier. In the monad model (and the empiricist object philosophy to which it is indebted), the object is annexed from the public ground – where its irreducible alterity may flourish and circulate – and incorporated into the body of the monad, for it has no existence save as an idiosyncratic sensation. However, it is notable that all-encompassing possession, which spurs the first variety of the loneliness/things affect – "'[t]here may be nothing else. Nothing but what we imagine'" (Woolf *ND*402) – is also the precondition of the second variety – a sense of dispossession, 'the object's loss' (Dickinson 961). This feeling of loss actually dismantles the monad's loneliness because its physical idiom – reaching, grasping, tapping, knocking – implies a response to, or desire for, something *outside* the monad. The very instantiation of the loneliness/things affect suggests that something "'which I did not make for myself'" (Green "Introductions" 22) has made me suddenly, involuntarily aware of my dispossessed condition *inside* the monad. The intermittency of the loneliness/things affect is apposite here. As Stanley Cavell explains in *The Claim of Reason* (1999), "'feeling sealed off from objects, enclosed within my own experience'" is not ordinarily a truth that is 'live' but a feeling that remains "in the back of our minds," erratically emerging with greater or lesser force (160-161). Thus, to say, 'I am lonely – [is to say] I want' (Woolf *VO*62) – I have felt, imagined, or desired a more communal mode of being. Further, that is where I have been "living" until the loneliness/things affect takes hold. This fact alone repeals the monad's impervious status for, as T.S. Eliot explains, recognising that there is 'something capable' 'of being experienced differently' '*already*' effects the allegedly impossible 'transition to another point of view' (*Knowledge* 148-149, emphasis added). It is as if, in the same breath that affirms that one's experience of objects is ineffably lonely, one is affirming that she *has been* 'capable of imagining a mode of being less personal' than the monad would allow, capable of imagining public objects, other

minds, and shared feelings (Cioffi 131). Indeed, that is what we have been implicitly imagining all along.

Just as many scholars now focus on modernist efforts to develop meaningful intersubjectivity and new modes of intimacy, this chapter explores how the loneliness/things affect influenced Woolf's vision of community – its preconditions, potential forms, and challenges.[10] For, since the loneliness/things affect is born out of the stalemate of relativity (the disparity between individual worlds and "World"), it inevitably begs the question, "how can we establish a world for everyone?" Woolf's empiricist inheritance shaped the question of "a world for everyone" in terms of a recognition that we live in finite and partitioned worlds of experience. Her thoughts on community continuously drive up against the fact that 'though we look at the same things, we see them differently' (*TG*91). She implicates competing perspectives in the major community crises of her time: the first world war, the rise of fascism in the interwar period, the second world war, and the lust for dominance that underpinned all of these events. These contexts lent urgency (and notable equivocation) to Woolf's communitarian thought. Particularly in *The Years* and *Between the Acts*, Woolf investigates the limits and dilemmas of a "world for everyone." What sort of community would protect the luminous integrity of the unique particular, without falling prey to convention, conformity, standardisation, and public sentiments mobilised in the service of patriarchy, nationalism, and imperialism? Focusing on what Julian Heffernan names the 'metaphysical moment' of community – the fundamental issues of loneliness, communication, and experience that undergird any large-scale political edifice (18) – Woolf's answer involves a simple, but eloquent, *re*furnishing of the world.

[10] For other studies on Woolf and community see Jessica Berman's *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (2001), Christine Froula's *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* (2005), Craig Gordon's *Literary Modernism, Bioscience, and Community in Early 20th Century Britain* (2007), Emily Hinnov's *Encountering Choran Community: Literary Modernism, Visual Culture and Political Aesthetics in the Interwar Years* (2009), Oren Goldschmidt's "Can 'I' Become 'We'? Addressing Community in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*" (2012) and Petronia Popa Petrar's "Written Communities: Imagining Connection in Virginia Woolf's Novels" (2017).

Woolf accomplishes this refurnishing through the scene of shared attention to an object.[11] When we consider Woolf's sustained engagement with the eighteenth-century empiricist tradition she inherited from her father, these seemingly quotidian scenes gain extraordinary pathos. For, by insisting on the unique, private character of psycho-sensory experience, empiricism had denied the possibility of shared attention, which depends on having 'the *same* object for different people' (Russell *Problems* 20, original emphasis). This inherited model of experience is pervasive in Woolf's writing. Her characters are so rarely able to coordinate attention that they scarcely seem to inhabit a shared world. As Vera Tobin notes, characters are constantly engaged in 'doomed' 'attempts to share and make sense of their fellow characters' visual attention' (57). A paradigmatic situation is two characters looking at the same object while thinking about widely different topics, each incongruous with the physical setting. Instances of inoperative shared attention abound – '[h]e pointed … She looked in the wrong direction' (Woolf *Y*231). In this context, *mutual* seeing is a striking occasion indeed, meriting the 'relief and happiness' that occurs when characters realise that 'chairs, tables, maps, were hers, were theirs' – were shareable, enabling a 'community of feeling with other people' (*TL*92). Woolf uses scenes of shared attention to reimagine modern modes of being-in-common, for she believed that 'common life […] is the real life and not […] the little separate lives which we live as individuals' (*AROO*86). In response to the loneliness/things affect, shared attention to an object becomes a classic Woolfian strategy, loaded with existential concerns, ethical responsibilities and dilemmas.

In this way, Woolf's texts exemplify the analogy (famously proffered by Stanley Cavell in *The Claim of Reason* [1979]) between '*acceptance* in relation to objects' and '*acknowledgement* in relation to others' (454, original emphases). As we will see in *Night and Day*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*, saying "yes" to doodles, hats, and boots is saying "yes" to Ralph, Rezia, and Mr

[11] This tendency has been noted by Douglas Mao (53-54), Emily Hinnov (14), Vera Tobin (52-56, 59), Erin Greer (7-8) and Petronia Popa Petrar (222-3).

Ramsay, creating community from the triangulation of attention. But what of the times when attention is withheld, when one says "'Look!" but [another] says "No'" (*W*22)? This chapter also focuses on moments when shared attention is denied. In some instances, the loneliness/things affect has the character of fantasy, not fear: characters are not simply *unable* to coordinate attention but *unwilling* to relinquish their unique, oppositional viewpoints. Withheld attention often serves to subvert prevailing gender paradigms, as in *Three Guineas* (1938) where Woolf argues that the special perspective of the female outsider is her best contribution to the public sphere. Here, Rei Terada's fascinating response to Cavell, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction* (2009) is illuminating. Terada queries Cavellian "acceptance" because (as I argued in chapter two), in emblematising the real, the object often embodies ideological values; the object is at once an "is" and an "ought." The scene of shared attention may put one in a position that conflates seeing with endorsing a 'nonoptional,' potentially coercive, or problematic reality (Terada 75). By contrast, Terada suggests that fleeting, ephemeral perceptions do not and 'cannot sustain the thought of commonality;' impressions are alluring because they offer 'freedom from the demand for agreement,' not 'spontaneous accord' (6). As an alternative to shared attention, looking away becomes the hallmark of one who does 'not want to say "yes" to the world,' also 'a way to get away, or imagine getting away, from other people' (22). While Woolf is no more than a footnote in Terada's analysis (unsurprisingly, affiliated with looking away after ephemera), she incisively reveals a central dynamic in Woolf's thought. The question of whether or not the world exists is bound up with an invitation (or should we call it an obligation?) to witness – perhaps also, incorporation into a suspect community. To what extent do we want to be 'members one of another … part of a whole' (*BA*172)? Can shared attention be a matter of 'forced fraternity' rather than authentic 'human sympathy' (*TG*185)? What is Lily signing up for when Mr Ramsay holds 'his foot up for her to look at' (*TL*127)? And perhaps, as Frank Cioffi poignantly puts it, "'Why is it me in particular who is called on to bear witness that there is something rather than nothing?'" (133). In Woolf's writings, these are the questions that

complicate shared attention and lend a dual character – part fantasy, part fear – to the loneliness/things affect.

Nevertheless, if the duress of looking together lies in "signing on" to another's epistemology, submitting to another's direction, the amount of primacy given to the object might correct this power imbalance. As A.J. Steinbock observes, attention is not all the subject(s)' activity but also the passive experience of being allured, a 'solicitation or pull to attentiveness' that involves 'the submission of the ego to the affective [and material] field' (24, 32). Unlike the confrontation of face-to-face encounters, the attentive triangle can enable indirect exchange, one dependent upon the self-effacement of two "I"s before the object.

As T.S. Eliot's doctoral thesis, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (1916), demonstrates, modernist thinkers often proposed shared attention as the potential ground for intersubjectivity. Eliot asks, 'how do we yoke our divers worlds to draw together? How can we issue from the circle described about each point of view?' (141). He proposes that shared 'attention to a world of objects' can effect this difficult 'transmigration from one world to another' (144). Defining shared attention as '*interpretation* … a pilgrimage [that] involves an act of faith,' Eliot highlights the degree of literacy it takes to parse those delicate transactions, situational imperatives, and subtle discourses that triangulate attention between subjects (163, original emphasis). However, in the final analysis, it is not description but *recognition* that creates an intersubjective 'community of meaning' (161).

> We all recognize the world as the same 'that'; it is when we attempt to describe it that our worlds fall apart, for as we have seen, the same 'that' can only persist through a limited range of whatness. (163)

Language, Eliot suggests, is either inadequate to the task of intersubjectivity or fundamentally at odds with it. 'That' designates bare existence, an indefinable, persistent, 'common reference' (160), but any further description causes the 'that' to disintegrate into qualitative, subjective shades of whatness. In Eliot's account of attentive intersubjectivity, deixis becomes the chief descriptive method for transcending the solipsistic point of view.

This passage illuminates what Dora Zhang has called the 'stylistic signature of modernism,' 'an encounter with the limits of description' (53). Like eighteenth-century empiricists, modernists were preoccupied with the difficulty of describing private, particular sensations in language, which is inherently public and abstract. These linguistic anxieties map 'onto widespread modernist concerns about the unshareability of experience' (ibid.), which I discuss as the loneliness/things affect. Bertrand Russell's work on 'logically proper names' (*Inquiry* 135), deictics like "this" and "that," is essential to Zhang's account. However, Eliot's argument suggests that, while deictics may designate 'the sharp point, in language,' 'the essential privacy of each individual's experience' (Russell *Knowledge* 84), they can also illuminate the "blunt," or public point of experience, a recognisably *same* "that."

While some traditions see "this" as fundamentally private in character and, consequently, a mark of communicative failure, we can arguably approach "this" as a term with a public-facing, pointing-toward orientation that invites attention to a shareable object. As we have seen in the previous chapter, empiricists favoured deixis because it was supposed to mark inalienable specificity and thus, fidelity to the psycho-sensory privacy that is the basis for the loneliness/things affect. For empiricists, "this" possesses an exactitude that the surrogate noun cannot possess, for nouns like "spoon" apply to all spoons and not only to "this" hard, smooth, silver entity that I hold in my hand. However, deixis is not as tidy and replete as the empiricist, pointing at "this" spoon, implies. "This" meets his criteria of subjectivity, intentionality, and

context dependence, but it is also inadequate because "this" is exophoric – only fully intelligible through marshalling an addressee's attention to a shared, extralinguistic context.

Repeatedly, Woolf utilises deictic markers to convey the 'miserable remnant of [a character's] vision' (*TL*19), relying upon vague terms like "something." While these terms may seem like expressive failures, it seems to me that "this" only fails in terms of the epistemologist's 'unappeasable' wish for an exact, necessary correlation between word and referent, between 'my claims of knowledge and the objects upon which the claims are to fall' (Cavell *Reason* 352). Woolf is aware that language only approximates things but, as her attentive scenes teeter towards silence, she is continuously impelled to gestures that affirm that *something is there*. As an utterance, such gestures lie in the tentative space between "yes" and "so be it," between acknowledgment and faith, between "being there" and 'pilgrimage' (Eliot *Knowledge* 163). Woolf's ostensive gestures suggest that even if existence is 'in shatters, offered dazzling, multiplied, shrill and singular, hard and cut across,' '*its being is there*' (Nancy 105, emphasis added). Although "this" is semantically deficient, unsusceptible to any verification, it forcefully implies a dynamic, co-existential relationship between "this" and the thing indicated, which is posited as "there" – whole, naïve, piquant, available. The content of Woolf's "theres," "thisses" and "thats" may be ambiguous but they are only epistemologically, and not practically, inadequate. They efficiently perform the work of affirming an existence and directing attention to it. For instance, when Clarissa Dalloway carries her 'life in her arms,' lays it down before her parents and says, "This is what I have made of it! This!'" (*MD*36), "this" is not informative about life's contents, but it is a potent shorthand with almost physical qualities of contour and weight. I might never know what your "this" is, and you may never know what my "this" is, but "this" constitutes a powerful invitation to look.

Bubbles, Matchsticks, and Blots: Loneliness and Things

The Voyage Out (1915) and *Night and Day* are impelled by the tension between 'the life of solitude and the life of society' (*ND*354), private states of mind and public codes and conventions, the individual and her interpellation into a social framework. Classic dualisms like vision and fact, 'dreams and realities' (*VO*211),[12] produce widespread instances of the loneliness/things affect, where 'the substantial world' "slips" 'away' and characters are left asking, 'what reality is left to us?' (*ND*161). Notably, many of these dualities remain constitutive, unreconciled; likewise, Woolf's later visions of community remain brief, ambiguous, and contingent.[13] This may be explicable by the fact that the loneliness/things affect can tend towards fantasy or fear. The idea that psycho-sensory experience is unique and private can be debilitating, but it is also an advantage for the artist, especially the female artist.

As Fay Alberti remarks, loneliness has become 'part of the cultural iconography of the artist' (207). To some extent, Woolf subscribes to this tradition, remarking that 'solitude will be good for a new book' (*D*3:219). The artist needs a 'cloistered spot where he can contemplate his model or his apple in peace,' away from the utilitarian demands of commerce, didacticism, the state ("Why Art" *SE*215), as well as, in *A Room of One's Own*, the influence of tradition and the patriarchal family unit. While Woolf frequently expressed her need for literal and psychic aloneness, artistic loneliness maps onto the loneliness/things affect in a more direct way. For Woolf, the novelist's art involved detailing a host of unique and private impressions, but she was aware that the sentence is a 'spoon' that can only 'fish up' a limited number of impressions 'while

[12] A working title for *Night and Day* (Briggs *Virginia Woolf* ix, 35).
[13] Many critics have reflected on Woolf's 'dual vision' (Leaska "Introduction" *Passionate Apprentice* xxvii) of 'dual realities' (Banfield *Phantom Table* 53), finding that 'a law of polarity, of conflicts as irreconcilable, as endless as night and day, reverberates through all of Virginia Woolf's writing' (Gruber 124). However, as Rachel Crossland observes (2018), Woolf often introduces dualisms in order to 'reconsider the two within some form of complementary model' (38).

a million others leap and sizzle … and slip through my fingers' (*W*153-154). These impressions are profoundly resistant to linguistic description, and it is 'impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole' (*W*154). The unshareability of experience is a source of endless allure but it also undermines the communicative project of rendering this experience public. In this way, the loneliness/things affect is the artist's fantasy (her best resource) *and* the artist's fear.

Just as artistic loneliness offers emancipation from the literary plot, an elective, "outsider" position offers women an escape from the stultifying "social plot." In Woolf's early novels, loneliness is to some extent desirable: it connotes exclusion but also individuality, privacy, and independence. Loneliness is 'frighten[ing]' because it entails an 'immured life … within the ring of a thick stone wall,' but it also allows Woolf's heroines to 'keep something of [their] own' from the appropriation of patriarchal narratives and thus, 'loneliness' is 'dear' (*ND*287). Similarly, Woolf's call for spatial privacy in *A Room of One's Own* has proved a vital touchstone for later explorations of the positive, gendered dimensions of solitude, such as Jo Malin and Victoria Boynton's edited volume, *Herspace: Women, Writing, and Solitude* (2003). *Three Guineas* expands on the argument of *A Room of One's Own*, declaring that 'solitude' is a privilege denied to women (122), but this solitary position also results from violence, repression, and exclusion. As such, the motivating question of *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* – according to Hermione Lee, 'whether existence entails division or unification' (*Novels* 45) – is fundamentally tied to the risks of participating in existent, patriarchal communities, a problem that Woolf discusses extensively in *Three Guineas*.

As courtship novels written in the years framing Woolf's marriage to Leonard in 1912, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* examine whether gender conventions can allow for a 'marriage that is a tremendous living thing, always alive, always hot' (*L*1:497) or whether marriage entails

'entrapment within a masculine narrative plot' (Briggs *Reading* 50). Rachel, Katharine, and Mary's painful attempts to navigate relationships, while preserving privacy, are exacerbated by the difficulty of human connection: 'how much alike [people] were, and how distant, nobody feeling anything as she felt … distance, she thought, lay inevitably between the closest, and their intimacy was the worst pretence of all' (*ND*281). Leonard's semi-autobiographical *The Wise Virgins* (1914) offers a comparable analysis, framing a young Jewish man's entrapment in marriage as an existential parable of loneliness. *The Wise Virgins* was a failure upon publication, Leonard avoided commentary and reprinting and, since critics have focused on its 'outrageously autobiographical' portraits of Virginia in the character of Camilla, it is rarely discussed except as a titillating but trivial footnote in Bloomsbury history (Glendinning vii).[14] However, a thematic comparison of Leonard and Virginia's courtship novels fruitfully shows that, as Natania Rosenfeld argues in *Outsiders Together* (2000), both the Woolfs linked the problem of face-to-face intersubjectivity with 'larger sociopolitical questions about belonging and exclusion' (3). Leonard's autobiographical, fictional, and non-fictional works are also preoccupied with loneliness, the ways that 'isolated human atoms' are formed 'into a complex community […] an elaborate system of castes and classes' (*Growing* 2). Like Mark Hussey (1992) and Julia Briggs (2006), this section reads *The Wise Virgins* as a significant intertext for Woolf's early novels: through a shared imagistic vocabulary, all three novels interrogate gender values against a backdrop of ontological loneliness. In each novel, loneliness stems from the difficulty of interpersonal connection – 'so unsatisfactory, so fragmentary, so hazardous, and words so dangerous' – as well as from 'the unreality even of one's own sensations' (*VO*217-218), 'the mystery and unreality of human things' (*WV*87).

[14] See, for instance, Leon Edel's "Leonard Woolf and *The Wise Virgins*" (1986) and George Spater and Ian Parson's *A Marriage of True Minds* (1977).

While the social and ontological dimensions of loneliness are interlinked, Woolf tends to conceptualise community in metaphysical, or pre-political terms. An early conversation between Rachel and Richard Dalloway in *The Voyage Out* can be usefully contextualised by Jean-Luc Nancy's distinction between "worked" communities and the *communauté désœuvrée*, variously translated as the "unworked," "inoperative," or "unoccupied" community (1991). Nancy distinguishes between community as a shared oeuvre, produced by labour and the sacrifice of individual subjectivities to a transcendent, totalising principle, and community based upon 'exposure to things, to others … to an entire world' (137). Richard's argument that "'the whole of modern society is based upon co-operative effort'" (*VO*70) suggests that his community is a community of work, a utilitarian, collective enterprise wherein public interest stands for ultimate good. Just as Nancy emphasises the exclusionary and repressive practices of traditionally realised communities, Richard's unity is distinctly imperial, a "'[u]nity of aim, of dominions, of progress,'" under "'the English'" who are "'whiter than most men'" (ibid.67). Women are also excluded since, as Richard misogynistically states, "'no woman has what I may call the political instinct'" (ibid.). His smug reflections on women's ignorance are paired (as in *Three Guineas*) with patriotic delight in 'two sinister grey vessels,' warships 'with the look of eyeless beasts seeking their prey' (72). The power imbalances inherent in Richard's version of community contrast starkly with Rachel's tentative formulations, all of which extend towards human *and* non-human things. For Rachel, community emerges out of a recognition of finitude, the unknowability of other minds. This constitutes 'one enormous question which [Rachel] did not in the least know how to put into words,' yet 'the bubbles which swam and clustered' in her 'cup seemed to her like the union of their minds' (57-58). These bubbles resonate with earlier moments in Rachel's experience, 'when the eyes are intent upon a ball or a knob and the lips cease to move' and the 'mind' is 'delightfully expanded and combined with the spirit of the whitish boards on deck, with the spirit of the sea, with the spirit of Beethoven' (34-35). With this in mind, she interprets Richard's 'watchwords – Unity – Imagination' (88) as the basis for an originary, panpsychic

community, "'under the streets, in the sewers, in the wires, in the telephones, there is something alive; is that what you mean?'" (70). Of course, this is not what Richard means and their conversation dramatizes the differences between Richard's co-operative machine and Rachel's desire for organic community, between community built out of work and community built out of a world-oriented sense of finitude. Significantly, the underlying violence of Richard's communitarian ethos contextualises his later sexual assault, which reveals the reasons why Rachel cannot 'walk alone,' and must instead spend her life as 'a creeping hedged-in thing,' who cannot even articulate 'm-m-myself' without stammering (87, 90). Patriarchal communities demand the sacrifice of female identity.

The 'enormous question' of unity, emblematised by bubbles clustering in a teacup, continues to structure *The Voyage Out*. Deconstructing the dualistic separation of minds, Rachel's bubble image travels 'from one brain to another … as was natural, considering how thin the partitions were between them' (54), recurring in a later conversation between Terence Hewet and St John Hirst. The human condition is explained as

> "something about bubbles – auras – what d'you call 'em? You can't see my bubble; I can't see yours; all we see of each other is a speck, like a wick in the middle of that flame. The flame goes about with us everywhere; it's not ourselves exactly, but what we feel…"
> "A nice streaky bubble yours must be!" said Hirst.
> "And supposing my bubble could run into someone else's bubble –"
> "And they both burst?" put in Hirst.
> "Then – then – then […] it would be an e-nor-mous world…" (119-120).

Unlike Rachel and Richard's conversation, this conversation models community as a bubble pricked by interjections, ellipses, and inviting dashes. Like Nancy's account of the "unoccupied" community, this community is an event of 'interruption, fragmentation, suspension' (31). While each of our bubbles is inaccessible, our glimpse of (at least) a 'speck' of the other suggests that Woolf envisages community in Nancy's terms, as an exposure to finitude (1991).

At this stage, the bursting of the bubble exemplifies the possibility of face-to-face intersubjectivity but, as Woolf became increasingly preoccupied with rising militarism and patriarchal violence during the writing of *The Years*, she reintroduces *The Voyage Out*'s emblem of loneliness – the bubble – as a corrective to the tyranny of large-scale communities. For North Pargiter, 'a life modelled on the jet (he was watching the bubbles rise),' promises a community that protects the individual from erasure:

> Not halls and reverberating megaphones, not marching in step after leaders, in herds, groups, societies, caparisoned. No; to begin inwardly … To keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter … but at the same time spread out, make a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bubble and the stream, the stream and the bubble – myself and the world together – he raised his glass. (*Y*389-390).

While the bubble holds the potential for community, the Woolfs' early novels discuss loneliness through the polyvalent imagery of matches and flames. In *The Wise Virgins*, the flame represents 'the bitter hopelessness of ever knowing what another person is thinking about:' 'behind the mask of coloured skin were flickering the little tongues of thought and feeling … but she was cut off utterly from his as he was from hers, as they all were, the one from the other' (27). Camilla reiterates this picture of subjectivity as a lonely fire, reflecting that she and Harry are 'only two out of the millions of ridiculous little upright matches spattered over the revolving earth' (165). Similarly, Woolf's early novels maintain that "'we see each other only now and then – " "Like lights in a storm – "" (*ND*447). While '[i]n the eyes of every single person' lies 'a flame… a spark in the brain [that] ignited spontaneously at contact with the things they met and drove them on' (ibid.270), this 'little spark' is 'always trying to work through to other people, and [is] always being rebuffed' (*VO*292). In *The Wise Virgins*, the flame of subjectivity also has ominous, misogynistic connotations: 'the male wants … a flame that shall join and weld [males and females] together and isolate [them] from the rest of the world' (47). Likewise, in *Night and Day*, the flame of subjectivity encroaches upon women's independence. For Mary, the 'mystery

of [Ralph's] nature' is 'a kind of heavenly fire,' but one that she must resist lest she should end by 'passing her life before it for his sanction' (*ND*167). Katharine also associates Ralph with a rushing, roaring flame (530, 531), yet this connotation is rendered suspect through Katharine's earlier reflections that the flame is a 'light of illusion' (371) like the other illusions that drive the novel's plot. She uses the flame to broach the larger problem of subjectivism, the 'loneliness' that stems from '[t]he dream nature of our life … never had life been more certainly an affair of four walls, whose objects existed only within the range of lights of fires, beyond which lay nothing' (370-371). The loneliness/things affect registered here – objects existing only 'within the range' of the subjective flame – extends to subjects, as Ralph thinks of Katharine as both 'everything that exists' (311) and 'the thing I make up' (445). Ralph has no real qualms about subjectivism, but Katharine is suspicious of the 'rich though phantom light' that the imagination casts upon facts (107); Ralph's determination to conflate existence with his personal imagination is the chief impediment to their relationship. Mary and Katharine's responses to the flame reveal a central dilemma of *Night and Day* – voracious subjectivity reduces women's lives, and existence in general, to the scope of the patriarchal imagination.

Through comparisons and contrasts, *Night and Day* responds to *The Wise Virgins*. Ralph and Harry are both resentful, attractive, misogynistic, and inappropriate suitors to aloof women. However, while Harry (in a mixture of lust and anxiety) associates Camilla with 'hills like virgin snow' (*WV*94, 96), Woolf re-appropriates this image for Katharine, who pictures herself like a 'mountain in the North of England' (*ND*44).[15] Ralph is infuriated by Katharine's remoteness for it drives home the fact that 'she was only half attentive to him; only a section of her was exposed to him' and he is 'struck cold by her look of distance, her expression of intentness upon some far object' (445, 449). Similarly, in *The Wise Virgins*, Camilla's 'abandonment to something outside

[15] A letter from Virginia to Leonard indicates that this image belongs to the descriptive idiom of the loneliness/things affect: 'I sometimes feel that no one ever has or ever can share something – Its [*sic*] the thing that makes you call me like a hill, or a rock' (*L*1:49).

herself, something which seemed to belong not to the ordinary constituents of humanity and femininity, cause[s] fear' in Harry, for it threatens the only authorised form of community in an otherwise lonely text: "primordial," male-dominated monogamy (102, 2). In both texts, male characters seek to attract and direct attention, demanding an attentive synthesis that Camilla and Katharine continuously withhold. In a scene that illustrates 'the primeval struggle between man and woman,' Rodney responds to Katharine's indifference by desperately rattling the bars of a cage to get at least 'the animated attention of some half-dozen apes' (*ND*390).

This dynamic is clearly a commentary on gender relations, yet attentive synthesis has widespread urgency in novels that thematise the unknowability of other minds and the disparities between dreams and realities. Although *The Wise Virgins* suggests that Camilla is unable to differentiate between 'dreams' and 'realities' (118), ironically, it is *Harry*'s culpable obliviousness that is the source of his tragic downfall. *Night and Day* makes this point explicit, for it is predominantly Ralph who 'scarcely knew whether [he] beheld dreams or realities' and he avoids recognising the disparity 'between what he dreamt of [Katharine] and what she was' (*ND*149). His determined efforts to instate a 'phantom Katharine, who came to him when he sat alone, and answered him as he would have her answer, and was always beside him to crown [his] varying triumphs,' are symptomatic of an egoistic desire to 'nourish' subjectivism (ibid.92). Conversely, objects have the 'mute power' to disrupt subjectivism as, 'with the beat of his foot upon the pavement, and the glimpse which half-drawn curtains offered him of kitchens, dining-rooms, and drawing-rooms, [...] different scenes from different lives, his own experience lost its sharpness' (18). This blunting exposure to alterity temporarily rouses Ralph from his thoughts, which 'had consciously taken leave of the literal truth,' and he makes 'two or three taps, such as a blind man gives, upon the curb' (ibid.), as if to reinstate reality. Similarly, when Ralph claims that poetry is "'the only thing worth doing'" because "'it keeps an ideal alive,'" Katharine contradicts the supremacy of ideals by 'tapping her spoon two or three times against the side of her cup'

(150-151). Katharine's dissident tap echoes an earlier, barely registered tap in *Night and Day*. As Ralph, Katharine and Rodney walk home from Mary's apartment, Sandys (a 'solitary man' 'with a philosophic tendency' who is never encountered again) lays 'the tip of his stick upon one of the stones forming a time-worn arch, and struck it meditatively two or three times in order to illustrate something very obscure about the complex nature of one's apprehension of facts' (63). Sandys' Johnsonian act is peripheral, both to Ralph and to the text in general, but it has a strange, unsettling effect. Ralph 'stopped involuntarily in his sentence, and continued it with a sense of having lost something' (ibid.). Sandys' haptic endorsement of the object interrupts Ralph's verbal and mental meter with the contrasting rhythm of 'two or three' (ibid.).

Katharine's desire to substitute 'books of algebraic symbols, pages all speckled with dots and dashes and twisted bars' for the 'confusion, agitation, and vagueness of the finest prose' (*ND*314, 42) compresses a variety of concerns about private experience and public expression and instigates an alternative, non-verbal form of communication. For Katharine, algebra enables a sustaining loneliness as she is divided into 'two bodies, one walking by the river with Denham, the other concentrated to a silver globe aloft in the fine blue space above the scum of vapours that was covering the visible world' (314). In keeping with the Platonic resonances of this passage, she hides her 'sacred pages of symbols and figures' in her father's Greek dictionary. Pressed against one another, the algebraic symbol and Greek characters are deeply significant linguistic alternatives, both offering relief from 'the vagueness … the confusion […] of our own age' (Woolf "Greek" *E*4:51).

For late-nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophers of language, the algebraic symbol was used as an alternative to the public, or "blunt" nature of language, designating the "sharp" or private nature of sensory experience. For instance, William James uses 'the algebraic letter *q*' to name the private, direct form of 'knowledge which we have of a thing by [its] presentation to the

senses' (*Meaning of Truth* 8-12). Bertrand Russell also uses algebraic letters to denote direct acquaintance with sense-data and the difficulties of describing the intimacy and intensity of such experiences (*Problems* 83-85). In *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, written c. 1930-1940), Ludwig Wittgenstein tries to imagine a private language in which 'E' stands for *Empfindung*, 'a fundamentally private sensation or inner experience – a mental tickle or tingle – that remains epistemologically inaccessible to any second person' (LeMahieu 232). Katharine's algebraic symbols can be categorised amongst these various attempts to imagine a language that effects an impossible escape from publicity, retaining the psycho-sensory privacy of individual experience. If gestures like tapping, rapping, and knocking belong to the anxious theatre of *resisting* the loneliness/things affect, Katharine's 'twisted bars' simultaneously resist and endorse the loneliness/things affect. They are a vocabulary of 'star-like impersonality,' as well as a compressed symbol of privacy (*ND*42). After all, Katharine's love of algebra has nothing to do with expertise or professionalisation – when Ralph finally reads her figures, she does not fret over their accuracy but about 'the fact that someone [now] shared her loneliness' (518).

Just as Katharine's dots and dashes symbolise a fantasy of inaccessibility, the Greek dictionary in which they are contained codes the mixture of availability and inaccessibility which drives Woolf's lifelong fascination with Greek. As Kirk Ormand (2012), Emily Dalgarno (2007) and Rebecca Nagel (2002) point out, Woolf was keenly sensitive to the exclusionary connection between classical languages and masculine prerogative. The special provenance of institutions like Cambridge, Greek was a cultural and literary tradition to which the English male scholar considered himself heir presumptive. Despite her own proficiency in the language, Woolf identified with the amateur, or common reader, in her 1917 review of the new bilingual *Greek Anthology*, "The Perfect Language," and her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" (1925).[16] This latter

[16] Woolf began studying Greek at the age of 15 (Lee *Virginia Woolf* 141). Her diaries, letters, and notebooks evince continued close reading of major classics, particularly during the period in which she wrote *Night and Day* and *The Years* (see Ormond 462-467 and Dalgarno 33-66).

essay suggests that Greek appealed to Woolf's imagination because it was 'a trope of the forever untranslatable' difference between minds (Dalgarno 34) but also because it communicates by making meaning *visible* through 'something emphatic, familiar, brief that [carries] instantly and directly, to an audience' ("Greek" *E*4:40). On one hand, Greek is untranslatable, not only because of a difference of 'tongue' but because of a 'tremendous breach of tradition' and temperament; we are 'for ever drawn back to Greek' because it illuminates the difficulty of knowing other minds which 'remain in a fastness of their own' (ibid.38-39). Significantly, Woolf includes eight untranslated Greek lines in this essay. Her imagined audience, the reader who "does not know Greek," encounters these untranslated lines as hieroglyphs, 'clear,' 'hard,' 'intense' images not words (49). However, just because this encounter is epistemologically empty (we do not understand them as words), Woolf suggests that they are meaningful on another, sensory plane of reference. The keynote of the Greek grapheme seems to be recognition of a tactile entity, not understanding of linguistic import. In an early manuscript version of *The Pargiters*, even the initiated scholar retains the amateur's sense that 'Greek words had […] an indescribable combination of hardness & velocity,' and finds that exacting textual scholarship is at odds with 'the temptation to illustrate sensual feelings in images' (64). Woolf attributes this iconophilic temptation to the nature of Greek itself. She portrays Greek as linguistically private but visually and sensually public and intelligible: 'we know instantly and instinctively what [Aeschylus' metaphors] mean, but could not decant that meaning afresh into any other words… meaning is just on the far side of language … we perceive [it] in our minds without words' ("Greek" *E*4:44-45). Greek offers meaning through dramatic ostension, it 'leads us to [meaning] by some astonishing run up the scale of emotions and *points* at' it (ibid., emphasis added).

In the penultimate climax of *Night and Day*, Woolf employs another grapheme that similarly combines the unspeakably private with the visually public – the doodle. In this scene, Ralph tries to write a poem to Katharine, but remembers her contemptuous interdict on 'making

up phrases' (512). Next, he writes a letter. 'In an infinite number of half-obliterated scratches he tried to convey to her the possibility that although human beings are woefully ill-adapted for communication, still, such communion is the best we know;' through words, people find themselves 'sharing something, creating something, an ideal – a vision flung out in advance of our actual circumstances' (ibid.). While Ralph is certain that life is insupportable without words and ideals, he finally gives up on words and begins 'to draw little figures in the blank spaces, heads meant to resemble her head, blots fringed with flames meant to represent – perhaps the entire universe' (513). Ralph's doodle is intentionally representative but, unlike algebra or the Greek character, it is an unsanctioned, idiosyncratic image that is explicitly *non*-phonetic. We cannot say, or sound out, the private vernacular of the doodle. It is "meaningful" only through internal, subjective criteria and unassimilable to any received semantic economy. Ralph is 'convinced that it could mean nothing to another,' designating 'that encircling glow which for him surrounded, inexplicably, so many of the objects of life, softening their sharp outline' with 'a halo almost perceptible to the physical eye' (519). Just as the blot is a rendition of the subjectivist flame that colours all sensory experience, Ralph's doodle is the archetype of a private language – a more efficient code for the loneliness/things affect than James' *q* or Wittgenstein's *E* (which, in form if not in content, derive from a public alphabet).

However, Katharine's response to the doodle raises an important question – to whom does the doodle belong? Certainly, Ralph intends the doodle as 'the idiotic symbol of his most confused and emotional moments' (519) but, in reception, the doodle goes beyond his control. Katharine looks at the blot and says, "'Yes, the world looks something like that to me too'" (ibid.). Just as art elides the hand of the artist, the blot exceeds its private origins: it is not Ralph that Katharine sees (and agrees to) but a visually similar 'universe' (513). Woolf suggests that when even the most private of symbols becomes the object of shared attention, it gives a blunt, vague intimation of a world that exceeds the individual subject. Here, community is achieved by

acknowledging the other as other, differently shaded in his perspective, while recognizing perceptual similarities: *something* has been seen and acknowledged as the same 'something,' 'something […] has been stated and must eternally endure' ("Greek" *E*4:43). These are tentative gains, ambiguously presented, but in terms of the loneliness/things affect, they are significant advances. Moreover, this moment of shared attention causes the flames of subjectivity to merge and 'there rose up behind the whole aspect of life that soft edge of fire which gave its red tint to the atmosphere… Whether there was any correspondence between the two prospects now opening before them they shared the same sense of the impending future' (*ND*519-520). The blot with its circumference of flames prefigures the way that Woolf's later work uses objects rather than language to unify subjectivities.

As many critics observe, Ralph and Katharine's unity is partially undercut by the novel's ambiguous ending. Ralph and Katharine are 'absorbed in the flame' of their personal love but Mary has substituted the 'passionate flame' of romance for suffragette work accomplished alone, by lamplight (473). Gazing at her 'illuminated blinds,' Ralph and Katharine envision a 'procession' of minor characters, Sally Seal, Mrs. Hilbery, Rodney, Cassandra, and Joan who now appear as 'more than individuals; to be made up of many different things in cohesion; he had a vision of an orderly world [….] [and] she followed the track of his thought' (533-534). The procession that moves toward heterogeneity, tolerance, order, and wholeness vindicates Mary as the "wiser virgin" and offers a utopian picture of community. While Woolf suggests that Ralph and Katharine's future also 'swam miraculously in the golden light of a large steady lamp' (534), Mary and Katharine have very different futures, neither fully endorsed by the text. Ralph and Katharine do *not* join in the procession, toying with the idea of a pastoral retreat reminiscent of Bloomsbury communities like Garsington, Wissett and Charleston (*ND*502; see also J. Marcus 18-35 & Luftig 1993). The war, changed work conditions, and female suffrage remain peripheral to their courtship. While *Night and Day* follows a parallel trajectory to *The Wise Virgins*, it leaves

Harry's bitter invective against the Bloomsbury set, '[y]ou talk and you talk and you talk … You never *do* anything' (59, original emphasis) unanswered.[17]

Yet if, as Suzanne Raitt argues, Mary's professional activism 'dulls' Katharine's 'triumph' (41), Katharine is equally 'subversive of [Mary's] world' of committees and pamphlets (*ND*84). When asked "'why aren't you a member of our society?'" Katharine returns the same answer she gave to Ralph's "ideals:" she 'stirred her spoon round and round, stared into the swirl of the tea, and remained silent' (88). Reminiscent of Rachel toying with her teacup in *The Voyage Out*, the implication is that communities of work – based on shared enterprise, craft, and creation – are inadequate. *The Years* illuminates this issue, reintroducing Ralph's doodle to express a 'deeper' 'point' than that reached by committees and societies (170). Eleanor sits at a meeting, inattentively doodling. Drawn in counter-rhythm to the speakers' arguments, the doodle grows into a 'dot' 'now surrounded with strokes' (ibid.167-170), much like *Night and Day*'s doodle. While all the strident voices come 'to is: I'm right and you're wrong,' Eleanor enacts her desire to 'get at something, something deeper, deeper,' by 'prodding her pencil on the blotting paper. Suddenly she saw the only point that was of any importance. She had the words on the tip of her tongue,' but the 'point' is never spoken (169-170). In *The Years*, Woolf juxtaposes the doodle – which emblematises individual vision *and* the world – with social committees that are not only futile but foster an aggressive culture of the "I." In this way, *The Years* implies a connection between work, language, and egoism that roughly maps onto the guilt of artistic production that Mao detects in Woolf's oeuvre (1998). For both Ralph and Eleanor, doodling is an idle, irresolute, unstudied mode of creative activity that palliates artistic guilt by unhinging art from the artist's control. The doodle gradually yields an ambiguous revelation that is *seen* not *created*,

[17] While Harry repeatedly attributes the need to *do* with his Jewishness, this aspect leaves 'no more than a shadow' across *Night and Day* (Briggs *Reading* 47). As Julia Briggs notes, Ralph is vaguely "unsuitable," but for reasons that are never clarified. The "armchair" Bloomsberries continued to come under fire in following decades, as Ben Nicolson alleged that Woolf's set preferred to 'cultivate […] exquisite sensibilities' rather than engage in social activism (Letter 18 August 1940, qtd. Lee *Virginia Woolf* 738).

recognised but not *spoken*. These revelations are juxtaposed with rational forms of social organisation, producing the reluctance about "joining in" that complicates *Night and Day*'s final social vision. In the final analysis, the dot with its circumference of flames appears incommensurable with a procession by lamplight.

'he said "Look!" but Percival says "No"'[18]

The Voyage Out and *Night and Day* set a pattern for Woolf's subsequent depictions of community. They present the loneliness/things affect as the defining challenge for modernist subjects, offer shared attention to an object as a potential resolution, and suggest an alternative form of deictic communication wherein 'the lifting of a finger had effect, and one word spoke more than a sentence' (*ND*532). The disparity between social performance and private experience, the cycle of unity and estrangement, the anxiety about "phrases" and search for communicative substitutes – all are reiterated throughout Woolf's later work.

However, for many critics, *Night and Day* is unsatisfactory because it seems to evade key issues – the war and social engagement. Katherine Mansfield set the tone for subsequent scholarship, famously castigating *Night and Day* as a 'lie in the soul. The war has never been: that is what its message is … We have to face our war. They won't' (*Letters* 3:82). In "On Not Knowing Greek," Woolf sheds a retrospective light on *Night and Day*'s "failure" to openly 'face' the traumatic historical events that contextualised its writing. Not only is Mansfield's 'We' problematised by the fundamental difficulty of accessing other minds, but 'the vast catastrophe of the European war' has placed modern emotions 'at an angle' and produced a widespread tendency to look 'sidelong,' 'minutely and aslant' (*E*4:47). Here, Woolf suggests that sidelong

[18] Woolf *W*22

looking is therapeutic as well as inquisitive, a mode of investigating socio-political and affective communities in crisis. As we will see, Woolf's later works retain the "looking away" trope of *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* because shared attention risks compromising one's vision for the dominant, masculine point of view. Slanted (or withheld) attention becomes a crucial strategy for preserving women's unique perspectives.

The relative costs and value of shared attention structures the argument of *Three Guineas* and its companion text, *The Years*. Originally conceived as one 'Novel-Essay,' *The Pargiters* (*D*4:128, Leaska *Pargiters* xxvii), the complex evolution of these texts has been richly documented. Woolf's diaries proffer suggestive origins for *The Pargiters* and *Three Guineas*. On the 20th of January 1931, a day before her speech to the London and National Society for Women's Service, Woolf conceived 'an entire new book' in the bath (*D*4:6). She also retrospectively associates the 'outsider' position of *Three Guineas* with a 'spiritual conversion […] in the autumn of 1933 – or 4 – when I rushed through London, buying, I remember, a great magnifying glass, from sheer ecstasy, near Blackfriars: when I gave the man who played the harp half a crown for talking to me about his life in the Tube station' (*D*5:140-141). The bath, the magnifying glass, and the coin feature prominently in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. It is as if, just like loneliness breeds around certain object encounters, Woolf's communitarian thought adheres to, and is produced by, objects.

The "taughtened" (*D*5:17), material quality of Woolf's late, interwar output has been described as a 'crucial transformation' in her thought (Mepham 148). The critical idiom of "toughness" firstly refers to the inclusion of socio-political "facts" (for instance, the essay chapters of *The Pargiters*). In the early stages of writing *The Pargiters*, Woolf found herself 'infinitely delighting in facts for a change, & in possession of quantities beyond counting: though I feel now & then the tug to vision, but resist it;' 'there's a good deal of gold – more than I'd

thought – in externality;' 'what a liberation that gives one' (*D*4:129, 133, 142). Shortly afterward, Woolf became 'afraid of the didactic' connotations of "facts" and began to excise passages where 'too many "points" [were] made; too jerky; and as it were talking "at"' (*D*4:145, 353). Secondly, as Ruth Hoberman has noted, Woolf's late output shows increased investment in objects, rendered 'more entirely material than ever' ("Aesthetic Taste" 78). Yet critics have queried the efficacy, or desirability, of this "conversion" to externality. In his introduction to the seminal publication of *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of the Years* (1978), Mitchell Leaska influentially suggested that facts and objects were 'alien to [Woolf's] artistic temperament – the pressure of granite against rainbow' was ultimately insupportable and, consequently, *The Pargiters* was doomed from the start (vii). Certainly, a sense of failure continued to haunt *The Years*, even after the essay interchapters – according to Grace Radin and Anna Snaith, a 'clumsy device' (Radin 33; Snaith *Negotiations* 109) – were removed in February 1933. *The Years*' "realist" aspects have been considered offensive impedimenta or a retrogressive return to the style of *Night and Day* (Mepham 152).

While Woolf's late output can be characterised as some of the most socially engaged works of her oeuvre, Alice Wood and Anna Snaith have warned against teleological readings that divide Woolf's oeuvre into 'two distinct phases, the modernist 1920s and the socially engaged 1930s' (Wood 3).[19] This distinction has a correlate in the dual versioning of Woolf as a sturdy, public intellectual or a private, sheltered writer of consciousness, an idea that colours Leaska's assertion that *The Pargiters* was not in keeping with Woolf's 'temperament.' Rather than being caught up in the "contradictions" of periodisation, we should examine how *The Years* and *Three Guineas* extend pre-existing concerns – specifically, loneliness and the possibility of authentic relations between self and other (consisting of humans *and* the object world). As John Mepham

[19] See Snaith (2000), Pawlowski (2001), and Briggs (2006).

writes, the 'emotional centre' of *The Years* is 'the primal sadness of individuality, of apartness, and of our feeble and clumsy attempts to overcome it' (157) – the same preoccupations that govern *Night and Day*. Woolf herself suggests a parity between *The Years* and *Night and Day*. In *The Years*, Woolf returned to the task of reconciling dualities, 'facts, as well as the vision … The Waves going on simultaneously with Night & Day' (*D*4:151-152). According to her memoir, "A Sketch of the Past," she was trying to combine 'moments of being' with 'moments of non-being' in both '*Night and Day*; and in *The Years*' (*MOB*79). She toyed with the intergenerational format of *The Years* when writing *Night and Day*, reading up on the nineteenth-century 'for the sake of The Third Generation,' as it was then called (*D*1:19).

Despite the continuities between *The Years* and *Night and Day*, the political climate of the interwar period added urgency to the problem of loneliness and communitarian projects. The inevitable prospect of war lent visibility to a central dilemma in Woolf's thought – while gendered or artistic loneliness may be desirable, are they tenable in moments of communal crisis? The continuity between Woolf's responses to the first and second world wars became a source of contention, as the cold reception of *Three Guineas* attests. Despite *Three Guineas*' incisive analysis of the gender politics of fascism, Woolf's equation of 'the tyranny of the patriarchal state' and the 'tyranny of the Fascist state,' 'Jews' and 'women' (180), 'Holloway' (a women's prison where many suffragettes were interred) and 'a concentration camp' (214) seemed simplistic to her contemporaries. The ultimately pacifistic strategy proposed in *Three Guineas* seemed an inadequate response to the rapid rise of fascism, the patent anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime, and the growth of societies like the British Union of Fascists (founded by Oswald Mosley in 1932). Many in Woolf's circle were becoming increasingly disenchanted with pacifism. For instance, ever since the first world war, Leonard had worried that pacifism ran uncomfortably close to 'an iron fatalistic acquiescence in insecurity and barbarism' (*Downhill* 9), and his introduction to *The Intelligent Man's Way to Prevent War* (1933), *Quack! Quack!* (1935), and

The War for Peace (1940) widely argued that the only hope of preventing war lay in collective security systems like the League of Nations, which had been repeatedly undermined by British foreign policy. Woolf's nephew, Julian Bell, took up arms against fascism and died in Spain. In this context, Quentin Bell argues that *Three Guineas* adopts an outdated position, 'as though [Woolf] had to rebuke the passions of 1914. Under the circumstances her essay could hardly fail to be a political irrelevance' ("Bloomsbury" 256). *Three Guineas* is far from politically irrelevant, but it does demonstrate the equivocation that accompanied Woolf's response to the loneliness/things affect, occasionally lapsing into a kind of special pleading for gendered or artistic loneliness.

Woolf supported a number of anti-fascist organisations in the 1930s (see Snaith "Introduction" xxvii), yet she often implied a wish to withdraw from the political turmoil of the time:

> Now Leonard has turned on the wireless to listen to the news, and so I am flicked out of the world I like into the other. I wish one were allowed to live only in one world, but that's asking too much. (*L*5:429)

Here, Woolf expresses nostalgia for the dualism that, in earlier novels like *Night and Day*, had produced the loneliness/things affect. Even as she sought to turn 'private thinking, tea-table thinking' to the purpose of 'fighting for freedom without arms' ("Thoughts" *SE*216), she equivocated about the political duties of the artist (for instance, in "Why Art Today Follows Politics" [1936]). She recognised that the artist could 'no longer […] be isolated and exalted in solitary state upon their tower' ("Leaning Tower" *E*6:273) and it is notable that the sequel to *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, had the working titles of 'The Open Door' (*D*4:6), 'A Knock on the door' (*D*4:28) and 'tap at the door' (*D*4:80). The aural objection to the loneliness/things affect – occurring in *Night and Day* as a rhythm of 'two or three' taps – here serves as an interruption to the writer's solitary room. Nevertheless, Woolf feared that writers' efforts 'to

write the common speech of their kind, to share the emotions of their kind' might result in a 'loud speaker strain' all too close to propaganda ("Leaning Tower" *E*6:272-273). In "The Leaning Tower" (1940), Woolf distinguishes between the 'politician's poetry and [the] poet's poetry,' arguing that '[w]e listen to the one in company; to the other when we are alone' (*E*6:272). The dilemma of the contemporary artist is that (s)he lives in 'two worlds' of politics and art, social engagement and solitude, and is consequently prone to 'oblique, sidelong, squinting' visualities (ibid., 274).

In Woolf's earlier fiction and *Three Guineas*, slanted vision is a major rhetorical strategy for subverting patriarchal "facts." As Maggie Humm notes, *Three Guineas* is a 'composite image/text' (300) that explores the 'precipice' between gendered visual modalities, 'a gulf' 'deeply cut' by educational, social, and financial inequality (*TG*90). The reader's visual re-education is two-fold. Woolf *re*visions five photographs of traditional masculinity – "A General" (104), "Heralds" (106), "A University Procession" (108), "A Judge" (144), and "An Archbishop" (148) – while entreating her male interlocutor to 'look from [women's] angle, from our point of view … difficult though it is to twist your head in that direction' (165). Like an anthropologist, Woolf reinterprets the totemic power of the five photographs, redefining sartorial luxury as 'a ridiculous, a barbarous, a displeasing spectacle' akin to 'the rites of savages' (105). A sixth "photograph" of Spanish Civil War casualties represents the flipside of this theatre of the fetish. *Three Guineas* opens by proposing that shared attention to this photograph will release the narrator and her interlocutor from 'the minute span of actual experience' (93) and brings them into community.[20]

> When we look at these photographs some fusion takes place within us; however different the education, the traditions behind us, our sensations are the same … now at last we are

[20] On the 12th of November 1936, Woolf received 'a packet of photographs from Spain, all of dead children, killed by bombs' (*L*6:86). Woolf's scrapbooks contain a pamphlet by Louis Delaprée, *The Martyrdom of Madrid* (written c. 19.11.1938), that provides similar prose pictures of Spanish casualties (Silver *Reading Notebooks* 305).

> looking at the same picture; *we are seeing with you* the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses. (95, emphasis added)

However, readers are exposed to death as a *lacuna* – *Three Guineas* does not include the photograph of the Spanish dead that would, Woolf posits, facilitate 'fusion' through shared attention. Instead, Woolf's ekphrastic re-presentation foregrounds a form of community based upon exposure to an interruptive absence. Woolf displaces the patriarchal principle (figured in the five photographs) without making a visual substitution. Instead, the reader is asked to imagine the death underpinning the pomp, the absence underpinning the all-too-present spectacle, and to make connections between them: 'another picture has imposed itself upon the foreground [of the Spanish dead] … He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator' (214). The public 'ruined houses' of war are the same as the private houses where women have been interred. The figure of death is unrepresentable because we 'are ourselves that figure … A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life' (215). *Three Guineas* offers shared attention as a means 'to make unity out of multiplicity,' complicating the dominant point of view with a subversive, withheld visual cue (ibid.).

Three Guineas' rhetorical strategies are based on a gendered rehearsal of the loneliness/things affect. Men and women, differently trained in mind and body, 'look at the same things, [but] we see them differently' (91). For instance, since women's education has been denied for the sake of their brothers, 'Oxford or Cambridge' are transformed from 'noble courts and quadrangles' into 'petticoats with holes in them, cold legs of mutton, and the boat train starting for abroad while the guard slams the door in their faces' (ibid.). Conversely, women's newly-acquired right to earn in the professions enables 'that weapon of independent opinion which is still their most powerful weapon' (140). Financial independence affects visual modalities, for 'in every purse there was, or might be, one bright new sixpence in whose light every thought, every sight every action looks different' (100). The coin enables participation in a

market economy, yet the educated man's daughter does not *spend* it for goods and services. Rather, she keeps it as a possession or sacred gift, asking '[w]hat do I see with it?' (100). This phrase recalls Woolf 'buying … a great magnifying glass, from sheer ecstasy' (*D*5:141), an act spurred by jouissance not utilitarian need. As Kathryn Simpson observes, Woolf often transforms money from a commercial unit into an object in an alternative economy that runs 'counter to, but also contiguous with, capitalist systems' (57). For instance, Naomi Black observes that a significant connotation of the guinea is its link to the Guinea coast slave trade (176) but, after a long process of haggling, the final guinea is lifted from economies of exchange and given as a 'free gift, given without fear, without flattery, and without conditions' (*TG*179). The free gift counters the commercialisation of bodies, human relations, and art and is juxtaposed with money, which is all too "unchaste" in its promiscuous convertibility. For the female 'stand[ing] on the bridge' between the private house and the professions, the 'chaste sixpence' becomes 'an altar upon which she vowed never to side with the servile, the signers-on' (ibid.100). Woolf's argument implicitly depends on the *transformation* of the coin: complicit in patriarchal, capitalist communities, the coin must be emancipated from its commercial uses if it is to promote new ways of seeing.

Woolf intensifies the analogy between slavery ('the servile') and participation ('the signers-on') by figuring the professions as a 'procession, like a caravanserai crossing a desert' (142), an image that resonates with the closing image of *Night and Day*. For centuries, women have looked at the procession 'sidelong from an upper window,' 'ask[ing] ourselves certain questions,' but now '[w]e too can leave the house, can mount those steps, pass in and out of those doors, wear wigs and gowns, make money, administer justice' (ibid.). Woolf queries the desirability of joining in communities of work for, 'if we practise the professions in the same way' as men, 'shall we not be just as possessive, just as jealous, just as pugnacious, just as positive as to the verdict of God, Nature, Law and Property as these gentlemen are now?' (149). While

the private house 'shuts us up like slaves in a harem,' participation in the professions 'forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree of property' (156), whose inevitable fruit is violence. In the third chapter of *Three Guineas*, the enslavement of the professions is connected with the enslavement of the artist who is 'now kept hard at work piling words into books, piling words into articles, as the old slaves piled stones into pyramids,' and the mulberry tree of property is revealed as 'the poison tree of intellectual harlotry' (177). Gendered and artistic loneliness offer a respite from society which is like 'an ill-fitting form that distorts the truth; deforms the mind; fetters the will … sink[ing] the private brother … and inflat[ing] in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist' (182). The intertwined problems of patriarchy, fascism, and commercialism threaten to encroach upon the individual's privacy and independence. Thus, for the woman and the artist, the liminal, sidelong view from the bridge is posited as the best means 'to protect liberty, to prevent war' (181).

In addition to sidelong looking, Woolf promotes inattention as a negatory strategy, expressing the outsider's resistance to the communitarian demands of the 'our' (185). In each chapter, the letter peters off into ellipses as the female interlocutor turns her eyes away, 'turning, rather wearily, to the table' or to dissident 'facts' (119, 127; 203). Inattention is closely related to Woolf's strategy of indifference as a path to disinterested politics and the prevention of war. Inattention contests 'militant nationalism['s]' 'clarion call to the emotions' (L. Woolf *Quack* 71), to 'stupid mass feeling' (Woolf *D*4:311). Woolf advises 'the daughters of educated men' to 'shut the bright eyes that rain influence, or let those eyes look elsewhere when war is discussed – that is the duty to which outsiders will train themselves' (*TG*186). Consequently, *Three Guineas* is an ambivalent text because, although it is structured as an exercise in unifying gendered points of view, it does not finally endorse its ostensible pedagogical goal – shared attention. Instead, Woolf advocates *in*attention. Furthermore, despite its long exegesis on women's place in society, *Three Guineas* suggests that all social structures are, in themselves, damaging – 'is there not something

in the conglomeration of people into societies that releases what is most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves' (182)? Since *Three Guineas* equivocates about participation in communities of work, it finally endorses a 'Society of Outsiders,' conceptualising detachment as pacifistic "service" – 'those also serve who remain outside' (182, 194).

The Years is also fundamentally engaged with the problem of viable communities but shows a greater preoccupation with the negative aspects of loneliness. Rehearsing the imagery of earlier texts, characters frequently experience the anxieties of psycho-sensory privacy, feeling like 'two sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies' (317). This problem is compounded by communicative failure as, Rachel Duplessis notes, Woolf emphasises linguistic 'lapse, gap, space, tacitness, and repression' (166). The final dinner party is filled with unfinished perorations, incomplete epiphanies, and broken conversations. Woolf refuses to give 'a fillip, a finish' to '[t]he present; the future; [although] that was what was wanted' in a text that records the intergenerational concerns of 1880 to the present day (*Y*400). If, as Woolf suggests, talking is 'the only way we have of knowing each other' (ibid.163), then characters are doomed to an insoluble loneliness.

Alongside this theme of loneliness, Woolf offers recurrent glimpses of egalitarian community. For instance, Eleanor is moved by a quotation from Dante's *Purgatorio* (1472), 'For by so many more there are who say "ours"/So much the more of good doth each possess,' but 'the words did not give out their full meaning … seemed to hold something furled up in the hard shell' (*Y*202). Later, as the distant guns fire in 1917, Nicholas and Eleanor discuss this desire to 'say "ours,"' 'to expand; to adventure; to form – new combinations' and a 'New World' (ibid.281-282), a conversation that echoes Rachel's panpsychic communitarianism in *The Voyage Out*. Yet community is complicated by the fact that 'we live, screwed up into one hard little, tight

little – knot' (282). Eleanor revisits this image in the "Present Day" section, asking how to 'compose what people called a life?'

> She clenched her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre; and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper, digging little holes from which spokes radiated. (348)

In *Three Guineas*, the coins knotted up in Eleanor's handkerchief stand for an independent perspective but here the coin with "'I" at the middle of it' is a suspect summation because, a few pages earlier, Peggy considers that 'I, I, I … was like a vulture's beak pecking' (342-343). Identified with violent egoism, the coin is substituted by Eleanor's doodle which (like Ralph's doodle) simultaneously discloses subjective vision and '[m]illions of things:' '[o]ut and out [the spokes] went; thing followed thing, scene obliterated scene' (348). As Michael Whitworth writes, Eleanor's dot surrounded by strokes resembles a 'porous atom,' 'model[ling] a very different kind of individual, one without clear boundaries, and […] a very different kind of group relationship, one of invisible interfusion and interdependency' ("Porous Objects" 153). This reading is substantiated by the fact that, shortly after this passage, the sight of Eleanor stimulates North's vision of 'the bubble and the stream … myself and the world together,' discussed earlier (*Y*390). It is telling that, on the 17th of August 1934, Woolf imagined *The Years* ending 'with Elvira' (or Sara as she is called in the published version) 'going out of the house & saying What did I make this knot in my handkerchief for? & all the coppers rolling about…' (*D*4:237). This alternative ending radicalises the "free gift" economy of *Three Guineas* by literally emancipating the coin from any human ownership. In *Three Guineas*, the educated man's daughter must hold tight to the 'chaste sixpence' that enables and protects mental and physical privacy (100) but in *The Years*, she (Eleanor, not Elvira) spills the 'sixpenny' on the floor (373). First substituted by the doodle and then spilled on the floor, the sixpence rolls beyond the woman's possession just like the doodle

escapes the artist's intent, a pattern that follows through on *The Years*' 1917 conversation about the need to emerge from the 'hard knot' of subjectivity and make 'new combinations' (282).

The reworking of the coin across novel and essay suggest that Woolf used these two texts to explore questions of privacy and engagement – 'society or solitude, which is best' (*Y*299)? Another significant factor is that it is Eleanor who finally supplants Elvira as the spiller of coins. Karen Levenback suggests that Elvira and Eleanor are 'blurred,' interchangeable characters '[t]o Woolf's mind' (133), but I argue that they represent two alternate tendencies. Jane Marcus articulates the critical consensus that Elvira (or Sara) is an 'orphic,' 'sphinx-like,' poetic but distinctively asocial visionary (63-64) – she not only 'lives in dreams … alone' (*Y*352) but desires isolation, crying out '[b]ring up your children on a desert island' (ibid.181). Despite her denunciations of modern life ("'Pah! They stink!'" [180]), she seems acutely susceptible to the sordid, discordant environment into which, increasingly poverty-stricken, she descends. For instance, after observing a row outside a public house she is momentarily transformed, as if by uncanny contagion, into 'an old woman worn out by a life of childbirth, debauchery and crime' (ibid.). Further, Tina Oziewicz perceptively notes that Sara is continuously accompanied by aural discord, making 'the reader feel ill-at-ease in Sara's company' (51). By contrast, Eleanor possesses quiet, personal spaces of her own (notably, her apartment includes a new shower-bath [*Y*292]). She has a stronger social orientation, sitting on committees and speculating on the possibilities of a 'free' community (283; 315). Although there is no presiding genius in *The Years*, Eleanor accomplishes two of Woolf's goals for the novel – suggesting 'a recurrence of some pattern' and that 'the future was gradually to dawn' (*L6*:115-116). Eleanor is the character who envisions 'a pattern … half remembered, half foreseen? … a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?' (*Y*351) and *The Years* ends on a picture of her empty, reaching hands and a new dawn. The fact that Woolf opted for Eleanor as the pragmatic, tentative, non-visionary interlocutor of the future suggests that *The Years* adopts a more critical approach to the isolated, outsider artist. The

reasons for this are illuminated by a passage that contextualises the final dinner party. This offensive, controversial, and difficult passage focuses on how two 'outsider[s],' North (ibid.301; 306,383) and Sara, respond to a shared object.

Before the party, North visits Sara Pargiter's rooms. Increasingly poor and déclassé, she lives in a 'dirty,' 'sordid,' 'low-down' apartment (294-295), filled with a cacophony of competing noises that sounded 'like two people trying to express completely different views of the world in general at one and the same time' (300). The discordant hooting, singing, ringing, and rattling finally ebbs into a hallowed silence and Sara and North remember 'writing purple passages' in the growing darkness (306).[21] North recites Andrew Marvell's "The Garden:"

> … he heard a sound. Was it in the poem or outside of it, he wondered? Inside, he thought, and was about to go on, when she raised her hand. He stopped. He heard heavy footsteps outside the door. Was someone coming in? Her eyes were on the door.
> "The Jew," she murmured.
> "The Jew?" he said. They listened. … Somebody was turning on taps; somebody was having a bath in the room opposite.
> "The Jew having a bath," she said.
> "The Jew having a bath?" he repeated.
> "And tomorrow there'll be a line of grease round the bath," she said.
> "Damn the Jew!" he exclaimed. The thought of a line of grease from a strange man's body on the bath next door disgusted him.
> "Go on –" said Sara: "Society is all but rude," she repeated the last lines, "to this delicious solitude."
> "No," he said. (322)

It is tempting to read this scene "against the grain," as a condemnation of anti-Semitism rather than anti-Semitic. For instance, Grace Radin argues that Sara's reaction to the Jew 'may well have been Virginia Stephen's own attitude before she came to know Jews like Leonard Woolf' (94-95). However, Woolf's marriage to a Jew does nothing to indemnify this passage because there are many anti-Semitic passages in Woolf's fictional and autobiographical work,

[21] In "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" (1927), Woolf associates the 'purple patch' with poetry, figured as an art of 'seclusion,' 'so intense, so personal, and so limited' (*SE*82, 79, 74).

both before and after her marriage to Leonard.[22] It is also difficult to read this passage in terms of naïveté, as Alex Zwerdling does, speaking of 'the reflex antisemitism' of Woolf's 'set' (116). Not only was anti-Semitism, Nazism, and "the Jewish Question" frequently addressed in the media during the 1930s, but Leonard had been one of the first to recognise the Nazi regime as 'one of the most savage and senseless dictatorships […] for at least two centuries' ("Labour's" 507), and *Three Guineas* corroborates this position. Although Leonard was usually reluctant 'to shed his assimilationist carapace and to avow pride in his heritage,' in an appendix to the 1935 edition of *Quack! Quack!* Leonard wrote a piercing denunciation of the Nazis' 'scapegoat hunting' psychology (*Quack!* 103), positioning himself as 'not merely a cultivated Englishman or as an internationalist, but as a Jew' (Leventhal and Stansky 141). Nor can we draw a complete distinction between Sara and Woolf. While Sara is by no means the feminist protagonist that, Alice Wood suggests, Woolf originally intended her to be (45) – certainly, her lyrical outbursts sound discordant in this largely realist text – Woolf tended to identify with Elvira's denunciation of society. For example, in 1933, Woolf decided to reject an honorary doctorate from Manchester University 'in the person of Elvira Pargiter:' '[i]t is an utterly corrupt society […] I will take nothing that it can give me… I hardly know who I am, or where; Virginia or Elvira; in the Pargiters or outside' (*D*4:147-148). Furthermore, Tracy Hargreaves observes that while Elvira's misanthropy is generalised in the drafts, Woolf edited out many of these passages, leaving 'the revulsion towards the Jew' 'deliberate and provocative … it may also be strategic' (196). Hargreaves' emphasis on strategy is instructive. As Maren Tova Linett argues, Woolf scholarship is now less concerned with absolving Woolf of anti-Semitism than with examining 'the ways in which Jewishness was instrumental to early twentieth-century imaginings of […] sociopolitical categories and processes,' 'the ways it was conceived, the responses it elicited, all of the conflicting and impossible metaphoric burdens it bore' ("Introduction" 250).

[22] Hermione Lee's "Virginia Woolf and Offence" (2011) and Susan Wegener's "Bloomsbury and Jewishness" (2018) catalogue some of these remarks.

To discover how a shared object, like the bath, disrupts artistic solitude, is to uncover one of these 'impossible metaphoric burdens' (ibid.). As the sound of running taps leaches into Marvell's seminal celebration of solitude, Woolf's perplexing tonal cues make us wonder whether the shared bath makes solitude/art *impossible* or whether the shared bath signals the *refusal* of artistic solitude? The former interpretation suggests nostalgia, an elegy for solitude, the latter, a critique of solitude. Although North and Sara both respond virulently to the "Jew in the bath," their responses are differently oriented, aligning with this twin problematic.

Sara's anti-Semitism is contextualised by a scene in which she applies for a writing job in a newspaper office. She stands on a bridge looking at a 'servile innumerable army of workers:' "'[m]ust I join your conspiracy? Stain the hand, the unstained hand… and sign on, and serve a master; all because of a Jew in my bath, all because of a Jew?'" (*Y*323). In *Three Guineas*, this scene is re-imagined (with the exclusion of the Jew-in-the-bath motif) as the working woman's dilemma, who stands on a bridge above the procession (read, the professions) and chastely vows to never become one of 'the servile, the signers-on' (*TG*100). In the early drafts of this much revised scene, the Jew is explicitly blamed for Sara's need to exchange 'purple passages' (*Y*306) for the intellectual harlotry of professional writing. As a stereotypical emblem of the money motive, the Jew threatens disinterested art by capitalising on the (female) author's poverty: '[t]hat's how I earn my pay: the Jew being in my bath' (*Pargiters* 7:26). In a draft of July 1934, George (as North was then called) explains Sara's predicament more clearly: 'she was caught within some machine … the unstained hand […] meant, he supposed, that in some vague way she felt […] that it is better to give than to take; better to remain outside the patriarchy – that is, the hierarchy of organized society, than to accept membership' (ibid.). This is the argument of *Three Guineas* which, according to Linett's *Modernism, Feminism and Jewishness* (2007), follows the Woolfian trend of simultaneously identifying with the foreign, "outsider" Jew and repudiating him (10). Both women and Jews are victims of the 'iniquity of dictatorship;' the status of the

professional writer is that of the Hebraic slave toiling at the pyramids (*TG*180, 177). However, the female, literary slave repudiates herself and her Jewish counterpart because, as Woolf argues, slavish ideas enslave – they 'infect and corrupt' (ibid.172), 'put[ting] a ring on the natural expanse of the mind' (*Pargiters* 7:6) just like the Jew's body leaves a 'line of grease around the bath' (*Y*322). 'The problem, how to get rid of the line of grease,' is the problem of 'how to live decently expansively' (*Pargiters* 7:10), as Nicholas and Eleanor hope to do (*Y*281-282). However, as Elvira's job interview was pared back in the final version, eliminating references to the 'big wigs [who] all took pay; they had Jews in the bath' (*Pargiters* 7:9), Woolf inhibits the reader's ability to interpret the shared bath (and the Jew) as a symbol for the prostitution of literary culture. This reading would be problematic for its scapegoating rhetoric but, taken together with *Three Guineas*, it would somewhat validate Sara's violent desire to abject the Jew, with whom she is intimately, corporeally, and financially linked – 'Pah!' (*Y* 321). A draft of 1934 offers another rationale for Sara's anti-Semitism, and one which lies closer to the published version. Elvira accuses her lover, Nicholas – a 'wretched Polish Jew' – of 'breaking into the privacy of the mind; violating solitude' (*Pargiters* 6:75-76). As this 'specific and personal aversion is developed, through Woolf's revisions, into an abstraction, a metaphor for multiple pressures, anxieties and losses' (Linett "Jew in the Bath" 356), it becomes harder to exonerate. Instead, the published version presents sharing a bath with a Jew as an instance of undesired, impossible, but undeferrable intimacy by proxy. Moreover, it signals an end to the delights of *solitude*.

Linett suggests that 'the abandoned poem seems to represent the defeat of the imagination' (*Modernism* 50). While this is partly true, a new orientation emerges from the ground of defeat, as the shared bath deflates one *specific*, seminal version of artistic solitude. Since the 'sound' of the bath halts Marvell's poem from 'inside,' we must now look more closely at "The Garden" (*Y*322). In "The Garden," the speaker's chief desire is '[t]o live in paradise alone,' alone with the objects that the mind 'creates' (49). As Ryan Netzley has argued, "The Garden" rejects

society in favour of a 'poetics of nonrelation,' where the creative imagination does not work by relation to other people or to the given, 'brute datum' of the world (581, 585). The speaker's imagination is not 'additive' (it does not make more things or build relations) (Netzley 582). It is the obverse of William James' proposition that the world is a pluralist 'world of *additive* constitution,' not One and complete but 'eternally incomplete, and at all times subject to addition or liable to loss' (*Pragmatism* 112, original emphasis). By contrast, Marvell's speaker prefers to *subtract*, reduce, and homogenise, '[a]nnihilating all that's made/ To a green thought in a green shade' (49). In giving voice to the 'world is but a thought' tradition, Marvell's speaker demonstrates that his pleasure in solitude is fundamentally connected to the world-annihilating pleasures of solipsism. Remembering Woolf's sustained interest in a 'world seen without a self' (*W*171), without the shadow of the 'I' (*AROO*75), we can hypothesise that she was unlikely to share the speaker's complacency in his 'green shade.' As North and Sara rehearse Marvellian solitude in the twentieth-century, 'the play, the play they were creating together, which Elvira had been making, wore thin, collapsed' (*Pargiters* 6:113). It collapses because of acousmatic sounds, the Jew's footsteps and running water.

According to Pierre Schaeffer, acousmatic refers to 'sound as such,' sounds without a direct, visually locatable source of 'production' or 'transmission' (77). Acousmatic sounds are widely used in Woolf's work and have several features that are acutely pertinent to this episode. Firstly, they are a powerful representation of a sensory impact that cannot be attributed to the creative power of the 'I'/eye. Acousmatic sound reveals how we are entangled with, and subject to, a world that is not our own. As Melba Cuddy-Keane suggests, it enacts a 'drama' 'between silence (*suspension* of life) and sound (life's *activity*)' that is profoundly relevant to Woolf's regular meditations on the artist's status as both a passive recipient of "life" and "life's" (culpable?) creator (389, emphasis added). Secondly, the ambiguity and indeterminacy of acousmatic sounds demand attention, just as the complex multivocity of Woolf's work positively demands an Eliotic

community of interpretation. Thirdly, the street din that pervaded Sara's apartment before North's recitation has already primed the reader to think of acousmatic interruptions in terms of 'completely different views of the world,' clashing together 'at one and the same time' (*Y*300). According to Nora Lambrecht, such 'noise carries with it the possibility of intercourse between otherwise unbridgeable domains of experience' (ii), dismantling the dualism upon which both positive *and* negative accounts of the loneliness/things affect depend. Fourthly, acousmatic sounds effectively suggest the intrusion of the unobserved, evoking a sense of *present* absence. Indeed, in *The Years*, the body of the Jew is an unobserved object – absent, like the pipes and taps, yet aurally present. 'They could hear the Jew thudding in the bathroom … [t]he pipes began to give forth hollow gurgling sounds' (*Y*325). These noises resonate with the 'Knock on the door' (*D*4:28) titles that Woolf contemplated for *Three Guineas*, as well as the tapping and beating that, in *Night and Day*, signal dissident alterity. Finally, it is worth exploring how the acousmatic thud operates in Woolf's other works. For instance, in *Jacob's Room*, 'a thud, as if some heavy piece of furniture had fallen, unexpectedly, of its own accord,' presages the ominous recognition that 'there is no need to think of [these young men] as old,' for they will die in the coming war (54). In *To the Lighthouse*, 'the thud of something falling' is connected to Andrew Ramsay's death in World War 1 (109). In *The Waves*, Louis' soliloquies are 'always' permeated with 'the sullen thud of the waves,' and the ephemerality of human life (33). Repeatedly, the acousmatic thud signals the intrusion of an unobserved death. The reader familiar with this trend, as well as with the historical context of this section of *The Years*, will bring these associations to the Jew in the bath. Consequently, the Jew appears as the deathly, unobservable "outside" that defines, impinges on, and finally disables the pleasurable interior of the solitary artist.

Woolf could have chosen to rehearse the arguments of *Three Guineas* in this passage, advocating intellectual chastity and vindicating the socially detached outsider-artist. *The Pargiters* drafts suggest that she considered this tack. However, while her revisions make the shared bath

episode superficially more repellent and retrogressive than *Three Guineas*, they also fruitfully complicate the later text. By making solitude the focus of this passage, Woolf develops a counter-argument to *Three Guineas*, suggesting that the preservation of artistic solitude can be ethically limiting as well as liberating. As such, while *The Pargiters* uses the shared bath to confront an ongoing conflict between 'a transcendent aesthetic space and a politically responsive one' (Hargreaves 196), *The Years* finally narrows the field to a specific aesthetic of solipsistic solitude. Evoking Marvell's poetics, Woolf suggests that ethics should be based upon, at least, the bare admission that the world is *not* a thought, and people and things exist outside our constructs. If solitude *makes* its objects, it is contrasted with a community based on *exposure to* an object. While Sara and North refuse such community, the shared but (literally) unobserved bath exposes them to their vulnerability as beings that share the same objects. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes of the "unoccupied community," this community is a community without 'immanence,' for Sara and Abrahamson are not joined by mutual presence in place but by the proxy of the bath (15). The *proxy* function is here important, for it foregrounds the impossibility of our face-to-face encounter with death, suggested by Woolf's loaded use of the acousmatic thud to indicate deaths elsewhere. Just as Nancy argues that 'community is revealed in the death of others … the presentation to its members of their mortal truth' (ibid.), the bath emblematises our shared, unthinkable mortality. It offers an opportunity to say "No" to solipsistic solitude.

Although North finally refuses to be Marvell's spokesperson, he does seem to endorse Sara's position, both in the moment of the bath and later on at the party. However, when we examine North, and not Sara, as the framing device for the Jew in the bath, the episode is differently illuminated. After the bath episode, North's reflection, '[s]tillness and solitude … silence and solitude … that's the only element in which the mind is free now' (*Y*402) seems to vindicate Sara's refusal of the Jew who embodies the threat of intellectual slavery. However, as North imagines himself 'floating, and drifting, in a shallop, in a petal, down a river into silence,

into solitude,' in the space of an ellipsis, liberating solitude is redefined as 'the worst torture […] that human beings can inflict …' (ibid.403).[23] Even without an exegesis on Marvell, solitude begins to take on a guilty air. Furthermore, before the bath episode, North considers the difficulty of interpreting a smudge on Sara's face, '[t]hese little snapshot pictures of people left much to be desired, these little surface pictures that one made, like a fly crawling over a face' (300). The sense of contamination in the smudge anticipates the stain of grease and turns it into a problem of the other's inaccessibility. The fly, attracted to the uninterpretable smudge of dirt, conveys an undercurrent of desire that runs parallel to North's open exclamations of disgust about the greasy stain. Framed by desire at the beginning and guilt at the end, the shared bath begins to appear as a problem of responsibility. In the published version, Sara's story provokes North's disgust but also has the strange effect of 'creat[ing] yet another person; another semblance, which one *must* solidify into a whole' (325, emphasis added). This "other person" is left ambiguous; it may be another 'snapshot' of Sara or it may be the absent Jew. In either case, North feels a sense of responsibility towards this 'semblance,' an obligation to corporealize it – to make it real? Interestingly, the problem of solidity (not selling out) predominates in the published account of Sara's interview at the newspaper: she does not accuse and berate the editor like Elvira did, but asks 'what do *you* find insoluble' (324, original emphasis)? Insolubility returns in the question that ends North's aspirational vision of community, his desire to 'spread out, make a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bubble and the stream … myself and the word together … But how can I, he thought […] unless I know what's solid, what's true; in my life, in other people's lives?' (390). To find 'what's solid' becomes an obligatory step to the formation of community. This need for solidity is first referenced in respect to an (unwillingly) shared object that carries the stain of another's vulnerable, all too soluble existence.

[23] This passage refers to Rhoda, the lonely visionary of *The Waves*, who makes petals swim like ships in her basin (9-10).

Woolf decided to situate the Jew within the Archimedean bath in which she conceived *The Pargiters*, placing him as the origin of the text. The bath also serves as a locus for another inceptive "moment of being." In "A Sketch of the Past" (written c.1939), Woolf remembers a childhood 'moment when the idiot boy sprang up with his hand outstretched mewing, slit-eyed, red-rimmed… I poured into his hand a bag of Russian toffee' (*MOB*87). Even after her placatory gift, this moment haunts Woolf

> … as if I were passive under some sledge-hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that had heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected, with nothing to ward it off, so that I huddled up at my end of the bath, motionless. (ibid.).

The bath becomes a space of encounter with rejected others, the disabled child and the Jew, who Woolf repudiates but cannot expunge. It is the site of exposure to a 'blow' that, Woolf retrospectively notes, 'is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy' (81). Rather, the 'shock' reveals 'a pattern … we – I mean all human beings – are connected' (ibid.). The keynote of the Woolfian bath is not privacy but interconnection, however painful and undesired. We might read the unobserved Jew in the bath as Woolf's attempt to reimagine her own 'huddled' vulnerable body from the unsympathetic perspectives of those on the other side of the wall. After all, despite her anti-Semitic comments, she did occasionally identify as a Jew; when she and Leonard travelled to Germany in 1935, she expressed some anxiety about Nazi belligerence, because '*we* are Jews' (*L*5:388, emphasis added). This indirect identification may explain why Woolf chose, in 1936, to delete another 1914 bath episode from *The Years*. Like the bath of *Moments of Being*, Eleanor's bath is haunted by 'feeling[s] of guilt' about momentarily forgetting the war, about a young sailor on a list of casualties, about the Rigby Cottages that she has never been able to bring up to standard (*Y* Appendix 423, 427, 429). She stands looking at the bath in 'the dappled irridescence [*sic*]' of the moon, that 'polished silver coin' upon which *Three Guineas*' daughter swears to never "sign on" (ibid.423). This bath is 'whiter, cleaner, more

dazzling in its purity than ever;' its taps steam silently (428-429). It is telling that Woolf chose to excise this private, 'pure white bath' (428) – the one that remains has taps that gurgle noisily, a stain of grease around its rim. The Jew in the bath manifests an art that has a vital, if repudiated, origin in sharing, and all the connotations of constraint, guilt, intimacy, and responsibility that sharing brings.

'They all looked … Each of course saw something different'[24]

In Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), she continues to re-evaluate the artist's role alongside the cycle of '*Unity – Dispersity*' (*BA*181) that regulates her fiction. With the outbreak of World War II, she was increasingly preoccupied with 'community feeling: all England feeling the same thing – this horror of war … Then the lull & one lapses again into private separation' (*D*5:215). This global crisis drove home the fact that "'life in common" is an immense reality' and that, to engage this life, the writer might need to make use of '[t]he annal, not the novel' (ibid.216-217), history and not soliloquy. In 1940, she planned 'a Common History book' (ibid.318), which was meant to include her unfinished essays, "Anon" and "The Reader." It would examine (amongst other things) the role of the artist in the community and 'continuity – [*extension*] certain emotions always in being: felt by people always' (Silver "Last Essays" 374, original brackets and emphasis). The communal, 'anonymous world' (ibid.385) of early drama and folksong operates through 'dumb show …silence, or by flourishes and ornaments that amount to silence,' but is capable of 'great strides, of vast audacities beyond the reach of the solitary writer' (395). These planned essays contextualise Woolf's determination that, in *Between the Acts*, "'I'" should be 'rejected: "We" substituted… "We" […] a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole' (*D*5:135). The 'between' of Woolf's title refers to the intermissions of

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the country pageant, a nation suspended between wars, the emotional distance between characters, as well as (in Laura Doyle's words) an idea of 'art [as] *a thing between*, a threshold that creates ground for a frictional us' ("Introduction" 2, emphasis added). Brenda Silver suggests that, in this period, Woolf's purpose was to 'forge links in the realm of consciousness in the hope that through art the race will endure' (Silver "Virginia Woolf" 297); likewise, Emily Hinnov reads *Between the Acts* as a plea for 'the socially redemptive value of art' (144), and Galia Benziman sees Miss La Trobe 'as a great affirmation […] of the power of the artist in society' (63). However, such readings are complicated by characters' persistent feelings of loneliness and Woolf's ambiguous portrayal of the scene of shared attention *en masse*.

The emotional touchstone of *Between the Acts* is the cycle of isolation and unity. The text is characterised by 'scraps and fragments' (*BA*108), with characters repeating fragments of a refrain (sometimes attributed to La Trobe's play) like, '[*d*]*ispersed are we*' (ibid.86), '[s]ingle, separate on the shingle. Broken is the three-fold ply' (87), and 'condemned in solitude to pine' (104). Lucy and Bartholomew revolve around each other like antitheses – 'she belonged to the unifiers; he to the separatists' (106), 'what she saw he didn't, what he saw she didn't – and so on, *ad infinitum*' (23). Giles and Isa form another pair, locked into a pattern of love and enmity, war and sex (197). William Dodge and Miss La Trobe stand on the fringes of the village society, feeling 'the horror and the terror of being alone' (190). Even in scenes of shared attention, Woolf accentuates that '[e]ach, of course, saw something different' (192). While these lonely, embattled characters show evidence of communal psychology, what unites them is a shared feeling of loneliness. For instance, while watching the pageant, '[t]heir minds and bodies were too close and yet not close enough. We aren't free, each one of them felt separately, to feel or think separately' (61). Later on, Giles 'said (without words) "I'm damnably unhappy." "So am I," Dodge echoed. "And I too," Isa thought. They were all caught and caged; prisoners; watching a spectacle' (158). There is a sort of group consciousness at work in these passages, presenting a

pointedly bleak view of community as individuals who are lonely together. Woolf gathers up loose fragments of anonymous voices and sounds that indicate cacophony rather than harmony.

As we have seen, *Three Guineas*, "Why Art Today Follows Politics," and "The Leaning Tower" demonstrate anxiety about the relationship between artist and audience (figured in *Three Guineas* as a master/slave dynamic). While Woolf remained concerned about 'those innumerable influences that are to tug, to distort, to thwart' the artist, she added that there is a moment 'when the audience is no longer master of the playwright … A common life still unites them' (Silver "Last Essays" 390). Ostensibly, La Trobe's pageant of England's history ought to unify its audience, nurturing its connection to national heritage and enhancing its sense of belonging to a continuous community. However, when La Trobe moves from telling to showing, narrative to ostension – hoping to 'expose them, as it were, to douche them with present-time reality' – the 'experiment' goes wrong (*BA*161). In a somewhat cliché turn of events, her audience literally "sees itself" splintered and distorted across a myriad of polished surfaces, as the players hold up mirrors and reflective objects like tin cans and old jars. When the modern "We" looks to the object for its confirmation, it is instead forced to witness its distortion and fragmentation. This disorienting picture of collective identity is at once parodic and subversive, dissolving 'the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute' and reducing the literature of civilisation into an incoherent jumble (ibid.165-166). The audience cannot 'descry' its soul in these 'scraps, orts and fragments' (169). Further, La Trobe's 'megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking affirmation' (168) is akin to the Fascists' 'reverberating megaphones' in *The Years* (390) and the 'loud speaker strain' of propaganda in "The Leaning Tower" (*E*6:272-273). Reverend Streatfield's exegesis fares no better. He suggests that the play intended to show 'that we are all members one of another. Each is part of the whole,' and further, we ought not to 'limit life to ourselves[.] May we not hold that there is a spirit that inspires, pervades …"' (*BA*172-173). This positive summary is 'cut in two' by the roar of some aeroplanes, a sinister interruption in the

context of June 1939, only months before Britain declared war on Germany (ibid.174). This profoundly ambiguous scene suggests that Woolf remained dubious about whether large-scale shared attention to art can produce authentic, egalitarian community.

Although moments of unity are a mainstay of Woolf's fiction, she often recorded her suspicion of 'universal emotions,' and the patriotic 'appeal to feel together' (*D*1:5). The anxiety of *Between the Acts* is also evident in *Mrs Dalloway*, which begins with two troubling instances of shared attention, one instigated by a backfiring motor car (which a shell-shocked nation interprets as 'a pistol shot' [12]), and one by a skywriting aeroplane. The motor car induces a collective response, '[e]veryone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked,' yet unity is experienced as horror, 'this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes … terrified him' (13). The war veteran has reason for horror, for the car endows 'the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister no one knew,' the same breath of patriotism that engenders war (14).

> … something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional … strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire … they stood straighter, and removed their hands, and seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth … (15-16)

Individuals lose their specificity in their unified, affective response as citizens. This scene reiterates what are, for William McDougall in his study of *The Group Mind* (1920), the 'essential conditions of collective mental action:' 'a common object of mental activity, a common mode of feeling in regard to it, and some degree of reciprocal influence between the members of the group' (33). Fitting into other (more positively inflected) patterns of shared attention in Woolf's work, this episode demonstrates her awareness that shared attention to an object can ground positive as well as 'horrible' 'community' (*D*1:153).

Just as the motor-car has successfully immobilised the nationalist community, a skywriting aeroplane appears, producing a range of contesting interpretations. As in the motor car scene, '[e]verybody looked up' (*MD*17), yet (as in *Between the Acts*) each individual reads the letters differently. 'E,' 'G,' or 'L' are as indecipherable as the algebraic letters that symbolised William James, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's private *Empfindung* (ibid.). Some of the spectators associate the letters with advertising, Septimus associates them with beauty, 'inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness,' others with 'man's soul,' the final spectator with 'enter[ing] in' and kneeling before 'an altar' (18-24). Despite the sameness engendered by the motor-car, and the diversity engendered by the aeroplane, both scenes are inflected with religious overtones. Even though the aerial religion of science ('Einstein, speculation, mathematics, the Mendelian theory' [24]) or commerce (Glaxo or toffee) may be more fruitful than the terrestrial religion of nationalism, even though dissonance and poly-symbolism may seem better than mute veneration and communal feeling, this episode of shared attention is as ambiguous as the pageant's climax in *Between the Acts*.

Significantly, La Trobe rallies from the pageant's 'failure' by imagining a new play with 'two figures … The curtain would rise. What would the first words be? The words escaped her' (*BA*189). Perhaps, through the telepathic connections that Woolf creates in *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves*, La Trobe sees the novel's closing image of Giles and Isa – 'the curtain rose. They spoke' (197). Transformed into primordial figures, in a 'night before roads were made, or houses,' a 'night that dwellers in caves had watched,' husband and wife prepare for battle; 'after they fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born' (ibid.). Woolf's post-war future returns to the past, a cyclical vision that suggests that true reconciliation rests upon a heterosexual community of two. This may be a disappointing conclusion, but it fits in with a pattern set in *Night and Day*, where Ralph and Katharine avoid joining the procession. Since Woolf was concerned to preserve the specificity of the individual, she remained anxious

about 'the general intercourse of human beings,' which is 'all compromise – all safety' ("Evening Party" *CSF*99) or else, all dominance – all chaos. Instead, she prefers a more modest scene of shared attention, where the object remains relatively autonomous from its spectators – not, as in the pageant of *Between the Acts*, merely a reflective vessel for human beings.

Woolf's final novel does not settle Bartholomew's question, 'we act different parts but are the same?' (193). 'It was Yes, No. Yes, yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted. The old boot appeared on the shingle' (ibid.). What remains of this cycle of unity and dispersion is a resonant left-over from *Jacob's Room* (247), *To the Lighthouse* (127), and *The Waves* (86, 124). After a striking counterpoint to the epiphanic moments of shared attention in Woolf's earlier works, *Between the Acts* retains a fleeting picture of an object that, outlasting its human possessor, had tantalised the bereaved through its ability to simultaneously concretise loss and reconstitute human relations. In the aftermath of Jacob, Mrs Ramsay, and Percival's deaths, community must be built on material objects that have survived the human encounter, like a 'boot without laces stuck, black as iron, in the sand' (*W*86).

The "Vast Alleviation" of Pointing[25]

Mrs Dalloway proposes mutual looking as therapy for the post-war subject. Septimus' psychosis takes the shape of the loneliness/things affect – '[t]hat was the doom pronounced in Milan […] to be alone for ever … alone with the sideboard and the bananas' (123). There is 'a pane of glass' between Septimus and the world so that 'he could not feel,' a lack that seems to constitute Septimus' unspecified "crime" (74-75). Since the world has lost its haptic guarantees of solidity, tangibility, and stability, Septimus schizophrenically moves from the idea 'that the

[25] Woolf *W*105

world itself is without meaning' (75) to a world over-charged with significance in which everything is 'part of the pattern' (19) and 'real things were too exciting' (120). He is prone to symbolic overdrive (as in his reaction to the motor-car's blinds) wherein objects become holistic allegories, shimmering and vibrating with meaning. Septimus' insistence that 'trees were alive' is panpsychist, positing that 'leaves' are 'connected by millions of fibres with his own body,' so that 'when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement' (19). Yet Septimus implies that such panpsychism is a compensatory, neurotic revision of a fundamental incapacity to feel; his marriage to Rezia was catalysed by the fact that '[s]ilk, feathers, what not, were alive' to her fingers, not as maniacally existential shimmers, but as ordinary tangible objects.

> As he opened the door of the room where the Italian girls sat making hats, he could see them; could hear them; they were rubbing wires among coloured beads in saucers; they were turning buckram shapes this way and that; the table was all strewn with feathers, spangles, silks, ribbons; scissors were rapping on the table; but something failed him; he could not feel. Still, scissors rapping, girls laughing, hats being made protected him; he was assured of safety; he had a refuge. (74)

Septimus seems to be nostalgic for an uncomplicated continuity in one's haptic experience of objects. Whereas he is *alone* with his objects, the hatmakers can touch *together* ('*they* were rubbing,' '*they* were turning'). His anxiety ebbs as the world, 'calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now' (59). Safety lies in the pragmatic, public availability of feathers, spangles, and silks. Just as, in *The Waves*, Rhoda prevents herself from 'sink[ing]' through the bed by the midnight catechism '[t]hat is the corner of the cupboard; that is the nursery looking-glass' (15), when Septimus' 'bed was falling,' he cries out, 'Oh for the scissors and the lamplight and the buckram shapes!' (*MD*74).

As an antecedent to Rhoda, whom I have earlier characterised as a victim of empiricism, Septimus illuminates the hidden violence of the loneliness/things affect. This is most evident in the "solitary traveller" passage in *Mrs Dalloway*. Both Septimus and the solitary traveller are war

veterans whose visions 'ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of the actual thing … taking away from him the sense of the earth' (49). They experience a breakdown of particulars, as 'myriads of things [are] merged in one thing' (ibid.) in a 'gradual drawing together of everything to one centre' (14). They both insist that 'trees are alive' (57), 'dispens[ing] with a dark flutter of the leaves, charity, comprehension, absolution' (49). Most importantly, and in a manner that resonates with Marvellian solitude, the solitary traveller's feeling of companionate unity with trees depends on his exalted conviction that '[*n*]*othing exists outside us except a state of mind*' (48, emphasis added). It is this that makes the solitary traveller an ominous figure, a 'disturber of ferns, and devastator of great hemlock plants,' 'about to sweep' men and women and 'ordinary things, the cupboard, the table, the window-sill with its geraniums' 'into complete annihilation' (49). Likewise, because of Septimus' neglect, Rezia perceives him as her 'malignant torturer' (56).

A major symptom of Septimus' trauma is that he cannot or will not engage in shared attention. Repeatedly, Rezia entreats him to "Look:"

> "Look," she implored him, for Dr Holmes had told her to make him notice real things … Look, the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness. …
> "Oh, look," she implored him. But what was there to look at? A few sheep. That was all. (22)

Since noticing real things is Dr Holmes' prescription, and Dr Holmes is a votary of 'that Goddess whose lust is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself' (86), we may not be quick to endorse looking as therapy. Admittedly, there is a certain flatness in Rezia's efforts to rehabilitate Septimus' (and her own) loneliness via ostension,

'there was a brewer's cart; and the grey horses had upright bristles of straw in their tails; there were newspaper placards. It was a silly, silly dream, being unhappy' (71). However, it is not only Septimus who, as Kaley Joyes suggests, requires the therapy of 'witnessing,' the recognition of 'a traumatized individual's subjectivity' (69). The frustration in Rezia's tone implies that her own subjectivity has gone unrecognised for some time, a denial that can be traced to the claim '[n]othing exists outside us except a state of mind' (48). Rezia is also the victim of 'failed witnessing' (Joyes 70) – crucially, 'unseen' (*MD*22) – for Septimus' refusal to look where she points is analogous to his refusal to recognise that her loneliness is just as real, visible, and candid as anything "out there" in the world. Consequently, the pathos of the recurrent cry – 'this is what I see; this is what I see' (*TL*19) – "Look!" "Look!" (*MD*22) – lies in the fact that 'what I see' is my content, and to see what I see is to bear witness to my existence. To look at sheep, brewers' carts, and newspaper placards with Rezia is to take up the long-deferred burden of acknowledgment.

In an under-discussed passage, Septimus' rehabilitation takes the form of shared attention to an object.

> He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things – real things were too exciting … First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact. And so, gathering courage, he looked at the sideboard; the plate of bananas; the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort; at the mantelpiece, with the jar of roses. None of these things moved. All were still; all were real. (120)

Cautiously retrieving an environment that is not 'exciting,' not extraordinarily shimmering and trembling, a recouped reality is the first step in the coordination of attention. Next, Septimus parses Rezia's face through the same incremental looking, 'first the chin, then the nose' and it too looks 'perfectly natural' (121). Looking at objects, looking at Rezia, finally attention is triangulated by a third object: '[m]iracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness […] all were burnt out

[…] as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs Peters' (ibid.). As they work together, sorting out 'ribbons and beads, tassels, artificial flowers' and pinning them together, the hat becomes a mediator for community (122). Through shared attention, Septimus finds a recuperative relationship with materiality and with Rezia, peace and sobriety 'in this warm place, this pocket of still air' (ibid.). At last, 'he could follow her mind,' and likewise 'anything that struck her to say she would tell him, and he understood at once' (124).

> It was wonderful. Never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, it was substantial, Mrs Peters' hat. (ibid.)

Tragically, this is not enough to save Septimus from the doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, 'who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted' (126). The doctors not only enforce the laws of proportion and conversion, but also muddy the exactitude of the thing itself with subjective vision. Woolf does not picture Septimus' suicide as a final disintegration into madness, or an act of spite or evasion, for Septimus finally acknowledges that '[l]ife was good' (127). Immediately prior to his suicide, his attention is almost entirely taken up with material things, recognising that one of the primary gifts of the object is simply to *be*. This is also Clarissa's 'gift:' 'to be; to exist' (147). Can we, then, speculate that Septimus leaps from the window to save the 'screen, the coal-scuttle, the sideboard [that] remained to him,' that he has finally been able to 'face' (123)? His final, cryptic words are "'I'll give it you!'" (127), echoing those 'profound truths' which Septimus must 'giv[e] whole to … "to whom?"' (57). Can we interpret his "message" as the importance of embracing, and sharing, objects?

One obvious recipient of Septimus' "gift" is Clarissa who, by some mysterious affinity, re-enacts his suicide in 'her body' the 'thud, thud, thud, in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness' (156). Clarissa corroborates what Septimus implies – in his death, he has

simultaneously 'preserved' something and "given" or 'flung it away' (156), a dynamic that recurs in the spilled coins of *The Years*. Clarissa agrees that 'he plunged holding his treasure':

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (156)

Although the rhythms of this complex passage suggest that the fluctuation between closeness and loneliness is inevitable, it also implies that Septimus' death is 'an attempt to communicate' and 'embrace' (one of the writer's dual imperatives in "Modern Fiction" [*SE*10]). If Septimus' message is somehow linked to shareable sideboards and collaborative millinery, then he may not only be Clarissa's 'disgrace' (157) but also a vindication of that 'tinselly' (*D*3:32) "artist" 'of silver, of linen, of china' (*MD*33). His pleasure in the straw hat corroborates Clarissa's 'sense, as she laid the paper-knife on the inlaid table, of something achieved. Behold! Behold! she said' (ibid.). Since Woolf portrays mutual beholding as Septimus' best therapy, perhaps Clarissa's 'offering' (the party) is comparable to what Septimus "gives" (103).

Many readers find it difficult to empathise with the 'cloistered, exempt' Clarissa (103), who (perhaps glibly) analogises hostess and artist, party and art. Certainly, Woolf treats the recurrent party motif incisively, as a microcosmic demonstration of the law of conversion that threatens to incarcerate Septimus: 'all society is an attempt to seize and influence and coerce each thought as it appears and force it to yield to another' ("Melody" *CSF*206). Nevertheless, party sceptics like Peter Walsh are guilty of a certain selfishness. As Clarissa says, '[w]hy always take, never give? Why not risk one's one little point of view?' (*MD*142). Consequently, Clarissa's party parallels Septimus' rehabilitation: the success of both requires giving up subjectivism and making genuine connections through shared attention. If Clarissa is more than a humbug, it is because she possesses two exemplary qualities, love of 'all this' (7) (a feeling that comes to Septimus only

moments before his death) and a desire 'to combine, to create' (103). Combination with people and 'even trees, or barns,' is central to Clarissa's famous 'transcendental theory' of extended consciousness:

> she felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter – even trees, or barns […] the unseen part of us, which spreads wide […] might survive, be recovered somehow… (129-130)

While this passage seems mystical, it can be read in S.P. Rosenbaum's pragmatic terms, 'individual consciousnesses are related to one another through their perceptions of a common environment' (*Aspects* 19).[26] Clarissa suggests that immortality might be discovered in the intertwining of humans and the objects that 'completed them' (129), for instance, 'the drawing-room wallpaper; the smell of the mats. A part of this Sally must always be; Peter must always be' (154). If this is the case, then the hinge of community will not be language or enterprise or even compatibility but shared experience of objects. This is a minimal form of community as "exposure to:" some specific objects may be named but overall, Woolf makes few concrete claims about *what* we are being exposed to, instead relying upon the unmistakeable, sensible amplitude of *that*. 'They looked; that was all. *That* was enough' (150, emphasis added).

Like Clarissa, Mrs Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse* sees 'making a party' as making a 'common cause against the fluidity' and impermanence of human life (80). At the famous dinner-party in "The Window," she anxiously notices how '[t]hey all sat separate … the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her;' she feels responsible for 'sheltering and fostering the still feeble pulse' of the conversation 'as one might guard a weak flame with a newspaper' (ibid.). Lily, Mr Ramsay, Charles Tansley, and Mr Bankes criticise Mrs Ramsay's efforts. The social

[26] Lady Bruton also feels that her friends are 'attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her)' (95).

performance of community is 'rigid and barren, like a pair of boots that had been soaked and gone dry so that you can hardly force your feet into them. Yet he must force his feet into them. He must make himself talk' (73-74). In particular, Lily is reluctant to adopt the feminine role of supporting 'the young man's desire to impress himself,' but feels compelled to bow to Mrs Ramsay's authority and 'renounce the experiment – what happens if one is not nice to that young man there' (74-75). Lily is "nice," but at the cost of sincerity. Mrs Ramsay gets her conversational flow but 'ah, [Lily] thought, but what haven't I paid to get it for you?' (76). Moving from one mind to another, Woolf portrays the conflicting desires beneath the social veneer as symptomatic of the loneliness/things affect – 'She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that' (76), plagued by the disparity between 'what you feel' and 'what I feel' (83).

Significantly, when moments of community do arise it is through spontaneous shared attention and not through the social "work" of conversation. Woolf relies upon the obsolete definition of "conversation" as habitus and not language, 'living or having one's being *in* a place' (OED 2020, emphasis added). As Erin Greer explains, this definition is still visible in its roots *con* and *vertere*: 'a relation of "turning together"' (1). Mrs Ramsay and Augustus Carmichael turn towards a 'yellow and purple dish of fruit' in the centre of the table.

> … it seemed possessed of great size and depth, was like a world in which one could take one's staff and climb up hills, she thought, and go down valleys, and to her pleasure (for it brough them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. *That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them.* (79, emphasis added)

The centrepiece becomes the ground of shared attention, exercising an 'affective allure […] solicitation or pull to attentiveness' (Steinbock 24). The power shifts from the intentional, active viewers to the object itself, a move that is key to the elimination of conflict from perspectival

difference. While earlier perspectival differences, in the context of face-to-face encounters at the dinner party, gave rise to the loneliness/things affect, here the object takes precedence as an inviting 'world,' hosting diverse ways of looking. This new dynamic has, as A.J. Steinbock argues, the consequence of reframing 'consciousness' from the solitary creative ego to a situated, 'affective openness' to objects (26).

In one of the final scenes of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf proposes that shared attention is an alternative ethos to traditional models of feminine sympathy. Recently bereaved, Mr Ramsay seeks out Lily, unconsciously desiring 'to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy' (125). Mr Ramsay's sorrow is pictured as artifice, '[he] sighed significantly […] he was acting […] this great man was dramatizing himself […] he had assumed a pose of extreme decrepitude; he even tottered a little as he stood there' (126). As many critics note, Lily reads Mr Ramsay's behaviour as a rehearsal of male egoism gorging itself on feminine sympathy, 'the fatal sterility of the male plung[ing] itself' into Lily's 'delicious fecundity' in the absence of Mrs Ramsay (33) – in short, the gender dynamic of *To the Lighthouse* writ small. Yet Lily's reading is unnerving, not because it is untrue, but because it raises scepticism about the sincerity of Mr Ramsay's grief. This is a deeply uncomfortable position for me, the other reader of Mr Ramsay as text – as forgery? What circumstances cause us to deny (even if we do not want to deny) that Mr Ramsay is in pain? Why are we being made to read the bodying forth of grief, the totter and the sigh, as false symptoms?

Leslie Stephen's "What is Materialism?" (1893) provides a pertinent clue to Lily's reading of his supposed alias: because 'existence' consists in what is 'perceptible to the senses[,] I infer that the man is afraid, but I can never directly perceive his fear' (140). Any 'judgment of "reality" implies […] a bundle of inferences. I assume, to justify the inference, that we live in the same world, or that certain general formulae are true both for you and me' (141). Woolf repeatedly

troubles these 'formulae' by emphasising the disjuncture between speech, behaviour, and environment and a character's inner discourse; any inference must be tentative, since people are opaque, 'sealed,' 'dome-shaped hive[s]' (*TL*44). The problem here emerges as a material objects scepticism now directed at subjects, revealing the extent to which, in the final analysis, we are all objects to one another. Believing in the fear of 'a man with a trembling hand' or a tottering stance, is an act of faith equivalent to believing in 'the existence of the chair and the table' (Stephen "WM?" 141). The unobserved object is the correlate for those unperceived psychological and emotional states that can never be *proved* to have a direct, causal link to observable behaviour. For affect cannot be proved upon the body. There are no indisputable, verifiable, gestural criteria for grief, and if there were – say, 'his bleeding hands, his lacerated heart' (*TL*127) – then fulfilling them could surely be interpreted as insincerity or conventionality. Although affects come in full panoply of signifying behaviours and expressive strategies, it is this public "face" that makes them interpretable as a façade. Mr Ramsay's unspoken plea, 'look at me … [t]hink of me, think of me,' echoes Rezia's entreaties, as they both try to perform, corporealize, and draw attention to their pain, while their interlocutors stand sceptically by. Lily's subsequent questions – '[w]ho knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy?' (141) – take on a darker, more selfish connotation, for surely knowledge is not as important here as acknowledgement. As Lily tries to skirt the obligation of sympathy, she reduces Mr Ramsay to a dramatic surface of 'heavy draperies' just as surely as he demands that she, a woman, bear 'the immense pressure of his concentrated woe' (126-127). The reduction goes both ways, 'immensely to her discredit' and to his (126).

What is needed in this drama of insincerity, desire, and doubt is something solid, something to say, 'we live in the same world' (Stephen "WM?" 140). "'What beautiful boots!'" Lily says (*TL*127). Suddenly '[h]is pall, his draperies, his infirmities fell from him. Ah yes, he said, holding his foot up for her to look at, they were first-rate boots' (ibid.). As an object, the boot is

relatively unencumbered by personal, gendered codes and anxieties. Where acknowledgment of a subject "costs" too much in terms of emotional proximity, shared attention to something manifestly present but distal – *there* – counters Mr Ramsay's determination to fix all attention to himself, to *here*. Shared attention allows Lily to act in faith and not scepticism and Ramsay to transcend his egoistic suffering, both of which constituted a denial of the other. Recalling the story of how Peter, having denied Christ three times, gets the redemptive opportunity to acknowledge him three times, '[t]hree times [Mr Ramsay] knotted her shoe; three times he unknotted it' (127). This moment of shared attention equips Mr Ramsay for his own redemptive journey, the long-delayed journey to the Lighthouse.

This chapter has sought to account for the privilege Woolf gives to moments of shared attention. Shared attention is a pragmatic function of everyday life; similarly, we tacitly assume that objects are the coordinates of our common environment. However, Woolf's work is replete with instances where one is 'unspeakably lonely' not only because one cannot access other people but because ordinary objects like a 'sideboard covered with cruets; a basket full of rolls; a plate of bananas' have become strangely unavailable (*W*160). It is not enough to experience things subjectively, for 'life withers when there are things we cannot share' (158). In *The Waves*, Bernard says, 'I see sights that make me weep. For they cannot be imparted. Hence our loneliness; hence our desolation' (91). Since the loneliness/things affect denotes nostalgia for shareable objects, Woolf returns again and again to the scene of shared attention.

Yet, as we have seen, widespread pleas to "look" often go unanswered. Woolf tallies the costs of shared attention for "'[h]ow strange," said Bernard, "the willow looks seen together'" (ibid.58). To look together is often 'to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another' (ibid.). While the shared bath of *The Years* details this reluctance, I have suggested that the bath can also be read as Woolf's critique of artistic solitude

and a sounding-board for a new ethos of artistic attention. As in *The Waves*, '[o]ne must have patience and infinite care and let the light sound […] [of] the chuckle of water in some irrelevant drain-pipe, unfold too. … when the door opens accept absolutely' (117). Through the noisy drain-pipes of the unobserved bath, Woolf subverts the solitary spaces that were so nurturing and necessary for her creative output.

The "pointing toward" character of Woolf's work sheds further light on her conception of the artist's role. While Woolf is certainly distinctive for verbal dexterity, her preferred strategies of deixis and ostension serve to elide the artist's controlling hand. Although Bernard is the chief narrator of *The Waves*, he ends by suggesting that this story is not his own but belongs to the 'nurse,' the interlocutor of the house of the interludes. The stories of *The Waves*' lonely sextet can only attain 'a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification' by being situated in the "picture-book" of the interludes, the world of the unobserved 'house, the garden, and the waves breaking' (175, 172). Inasmuch as this is a book of pictures, not phrases, the nurse "tells" by ostension, 'pointing: "That's a cow. That's a boat"' – "'Look. *This* is the truth.'" (144, 172). Such pointing avoids visionary ardour, elevated diction, and even the enumeration of qualia, preferring 'bare things, this coffee-cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself' (ibid.). Renouncing simile – "'like" and "like" and "like"' – and verging on tautology, such passages denote an ethical concern to avoid re-fashioning the object *qua* object into the 'semblance' of the creator (95). As Douglas Mao notes, ostension is a 'gesture' in which 'the pointing subject withdraws even as it brings the object into view […] an artlike action that cooperates with life instead of displacing it' (81).

Finally, since "this," "that," and "there," are ambiguous in terms of content they compensate for semantic deficiency with distal and proximal cues of nothing more or less than simple existence. As Stephen Levinson explains, deixis claims a crucial 'link between utterance

and context so that the context can be used as an affordance to find the intended reference' (110). Of course, in a text, no context can be substantiated outside of utterance, leading to a sense of *presence* in absence, a something without epistemological or semantic content. Repeatedly, Woolf establishes this sense through pointing gestures, which Stanley Cavell describes as 'the common coin of abbreviation,' a shorthand for intimacy that includes a plea for acceptance and recognition (*Claim of Reason* 362). Almost all of the novels discussed in this chapter end by asking the reader to recognise something, a request that is the bedrock of shared attention. When plotting the end of *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf wanted to say 'something to sum up *Clarissa*' but she could do little better to describe 'that astounding fact' except to say 'For there she was' (*D*3:312, original emphasis). *To the Lighthouse* ends with a simple, '[t]here it was – her picture' (170). Before the quixotically futile charge at Death, *The Waves*' summation consists of 'this, that and the other' (175). *The Years* ends with "'There!'" the sun rising and 'extraordinary beauty, simplicity, and peace' (413). As variants of the recurrent plea to "look!" such terms operate as if the characters' first-hand experience really were available. I have tried to foreground the extent to which these terms are acts of faith, a point abundantly clear in a phrase from Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" (1956): 'For me the facts are unimportant. But what men mean when they say that "The world exists" lies close to my heart' (16). Ostensive affirmations of objects mean that the world exists, and because it exists, intersubjectivity is possible.

Conclusion: In Miniature

In 1928, Woolf recorded a meeting with Edward Sackville-West in her diary, asking:

> … why is not human intercourse more definite, tangible: why aren't I left holding a small round substance, say the size of a pea, in my hand; something I can put in a box & look at? There is so little left. … Our meeting is – but the thread of this idea slips perpetually; constantly though it recurs, with sadness, to my mind: how little our relationships matter; & yet they are so important: in him, in me, something to him, to me, infinitely sentient, of the highest vividness, reality. (*D*3:188)

This passage registers a desire to objectify an interpersonal experience, transposing feeling into a solid miniature that can be held and looked at – implicitly, by *both* Edward and Virginia. Woolf frequently speaks of the need to add 'a surface,' 'a round and solidity' to the fluid, variegated self (*O*181); in a 1929 letter to Hugh Walpole, she adds that she also wants to 'consolidate my friends and embed them in their own tables and chairs … it is of the highest importance that I should be able to make you exist there, somehow, tangibly, visibly' (*L4*:84). Why is it necessary to turn a conversation with Edward into 'something I can put in a box,' or to embed Hugh in his table? This is not "objectification" as we have come to use it in contemporary parlance, as a degradation of complex subjectivity into a "mere object;" nor is it objectification in the sense of an a-perspectival truth, purged of all emotion and idiosyncrasy. Rather, this objectification integrates affect and expression in a public medium, explicating what is alluring about the object in the first place: objects are definite, tangible, vivid, and, most importantly, 'something to him, [something] to me' (*D*3:188). The imperative to objectify is not even, in the last analysis, about securing permanence, 'for,' as Woolf writes in *The Waves*, 'what endures?' (74). Rather, the goal is 'to make one thing, not enduring,' 'but *seen by many eyes* simultaneously' (ibid., emphases added).

One of the object's primary, most taken for granted, gifts is its shareability. This idea also underpins artistic production: we paint, or sculpt, or write, or arrange furniture in order to concretize, and thereby communicate, a vision. But Woolf's work elucidates the feeling that

objects are not always shareable; they do not lend themselves to mutual looking, or at least, not easily. Often, characters feel that they "see alone," even in company. This thesis has identified the subjectivist bent of eighteenth-century empiricism as one reason for this feeling, which I call the loneliness/things affect. I have lingered on the negative side of this affect because it explains the pathos of scenes of joint attention in Woolf's work, but I have also tried to show the modularity of empiricism and the ways it intersects with related schools of thought like literary impressionism, idealism, and phenomenology. Empiricism's scepticism about the object *qua* object has longevity and ubiquity not only because it is as irrefutable as it is un-livable, but because the consequent weaving and un-weaving of subjectivity that accompanies it can be interpreted both positively and negatively. Wordsworth, Pater, and Lee would attest to subjectivism's efficacy in the aesthetic and social sphere for they used it to bolster the individual's autonomy from the baleful restrictions of society, while aspiring to a better (often, apparently panpsychist) version of subject/object intimacy. Woolf was equally interested in the restless fluidity of our affective lives, the idiosyncrasies of perception, the value of the imaginary, the complexity of psychology, the impact of social conventions, the de-construction of reality and subjectivity, and the creative exploitation of ambiguity. Empiricism lends itself to all of these projects, and all of these projects can be conceived as modernist. Nevertheless, as Max Saunders writes of Pater's impressionistic subjectivism, empiricism always offered a 'vista of infinite regress,' where we travel inexorably towards our own sensations (45); its rejection of the mind-independent object always enabled some degree of solipsism. Hence, Leslie Stephen's complex negotiation of empiricism in *The History of English Thought*, Bergson's reaction to idealism in *Matter and Memory*, and the ambivalent tone in much of Pater and Wordsworth's writings. Hence, in the middle of William James' account of the 'voluminous' richness of a world conceived as 'nothing but clusters of qualities,' he suddenly quotes Tennyson's "'Lost and gone and lost and gone!"

(*Principles of Psychology* 556).[1] Empiricism generates new assessments of the subject *and* bereaves us of the object. Woolf's thought offers a fascinating nexus for the varying trajectories of empiricism, strikingly illuminated in her portrayal of the subject-object encounter.

Woolf is preoccupied with the curious ripple that human affect casts on objects – *The Waves* details how the subject 'makes the daisy change; and everything runs like streaks of fire when she carves the beef' (26); '[s]he seems to centre everything; round her tables, lines of doors, windows, ceilings, ray themselves' (70); the very 'cups and saucers changed when you came in' (104). Our environments are 'soaked' in 'private being' (*MOB*130). Many scholars have focused on the diaphanous, prismatic qualities of Woolf's objects, which show 'all the traces of the mind's passage through the world' (Woolf *Passionate Apprentice* 392), reading them as Woolf's artistic redemption of the brute, normative solidity of the material world. This thesis has hoped to demonstrate the other side of Woolf's fascination with objects, her emphasis on 'bare things' (*W*176) that obdurately contradict fantasies of possession. For instance, in *To the Lighthouse*, Nancy 'change[s] the pool into the sea and ma[kes] the minnows into sharks and whales, and cast vast clouds over his tiny world by holding her hand against the sun […] like God himself' (63). Moments later, her miniature world is contrasted with the actual sea 'and the two senses of that vastness and this tininess […] flowering within it made her feel that she was bound hand and foot and unable to move' (ibid.). Similarly, when Sara tries to enact Berkeley's thesis in *The Years*, '"the world is nothing but …" […] Nothing but thought was it?,' she sees an 'actual tree standing out there in the garden. Far from being dappled with sunlight, it had no leaves at all. She felt for a moment as if she had been contradicted' (127-128). Throughout Woolf's fiction, the object confronts the subject with her own ephemerality, revealing that the human exists 'in a space as big as the eye of a needle' ("Orchard" *CSF*150). Against the rhetoric of expanse (master-

[1] Tennyson's *The Ancient Sage* (1885) records the sceptic's dilemma, 'Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in … Thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,/Am not thyself in converse with thyself' (3:140).

narratives, heroic sagas, imaginative mastery), the object leads to a recognition of human limitation.

My exploration of how objects command, moderate, and lull attention in Woolf's oeuvre contributes to current investigations of attentiveness as the basis for modernism's 'reinvention of representational practices' (van Alphen 88), such as Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception* (1990), Tim Armstrong's *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (1998), Ernst van Alphen's "Attention for Distraction" (2017), and Claudia Tobin's *Modernism and Still Life* (2020). Each of these texts moves away from an idea of attention as 'will to possession' (P. North 3) to its intersections with the sensory field, with distraction, automatism, and fragmentation. In chapter 1, I have delineated how Woolf adopts an aesthetics of rapt, vibrating absorption to describe our posture before the mysterious, unknowable object. In chapter 2, this absorption sinks below the level of consciousness and approximates reverie, hypnosis, or trance, an openness to the tacit suggestions of the material world. In such moments, the subject relinquishes intentional focus and become "untethered" from the 'single mind' ("Street Haunting" *SE*187), an experience of receptivity that is artistically generative but also strikes hard 'upon the raw, the white, the unprotected fibre,' making us recognise our painfully passive position in the world (*W*127). In chapter 4, I explicated some of the tensions and pleasures of shared attention, which can veer between a paralysed herd mentality and moments of exquisite self-forgetting and cooperative perception. These three variants of attentiveness show how the material field solicits certain dispositions, physical and mental modes of being-towards that bind us to each other and to our physical context. Most importantly, shared attention allows for a minimal verification of another's perspective and the thing looked at, an act discussed as acknowledgment, gesturing towards *and* across the 'divide of nonknowing' (Mao 222) that is so central to Woolf's work. The object becomes the hinge for communality in a world that seems constitutionally marked by 'eternal loneliness' (*MD*22).

What does Woolf's habitual reliance on ostension tell us about her understanding of the artist's role? Firstly, it suggests that we should modify our emphasis on the heroic, 'agile and ubiquitous mind of the narrator,' who 'encloses all in a reconciling embrace' (J. Miller 183, 170). J. Hillis Miller suggests that Woolf favours a literary model of *esse est percipi* in *Mrs Dalloway*, wherein the 'continued existence' of characters and things depends on the narrator: '[t]hey exist only within the embrace of that reconciling spirit and though the power of her words' (182-183).[2] While he acknowledges that 'solid existing things of the external world unify the minds of separate persons,' this function has a 'deeper meaning' (which happens to undermine it) – more accurately, the *writer* unifies minds because she is the ultimate container of all existence, like the deleted narrator of draft 1 of *The Waves* (171). In Miller's account, Woolf is a writer for whom it is minds within minds and words within words, forever and ever, all the way down. The moments of suspension in Woolf's oeuvre, where language is arrested 'but what he saw *was there*' (*Fry* 263, emphasis added) and trees contradict the Berkeleyan thesis (*Y*128), should make us suspicious of accounts that define the Woolfian "embrace" as an (somewhat oxymoronically) 'one-way interpersonal relation' (J. Miller 170).

I suggest that Woolf's emphasis on ostension implies that the artist discovers the external world rather than making it, and that "embrace" must be understood as a *mutual* enclosing – I hold and am held, I do and am done to. This re-statement of the author's position is significant because, as Jeanette Winterson writes, ever since Romanticism, it has been characterised by the celebrated ability to bring 'the exquisiteness of his/her emotional range […] to bear on hard objects' (56), stabilising chaos through pattern, or drawing truth from insignificant sense-data. Michael Levenson's account of Woolf's understanding of artistry resonates with Miller's, suggesting that Woolf exemplifies 'solitary aesthetic heroism … triumphant loneliness:' '[t]he

[2] The anteriority of the narrating subject accounts for Miller's preference for the 'was' in *Mrs Dalloway*'s closing sentence, 'For there she was' (165).

vulnerable but resilient artist suffers shocks, puts the severed parts together, discovers order … makes the whole' (*Individuality* 214). Yet none of Woolf's artists (or quasi-artist society hostesses like Mrs Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay) are heroic. The narrator of "An Unwritten Novel" tries to chase Minnie 'over the waterfall' (*CSF*116), Louis' 'eye turns white as he lies in the palm of [Bernard, the phrasemaker's] hand' (*W*147), and Miss La Trobe's aggressive stage directions in *Between the Acts* come close to incarcerating her audience (158). Woolf gauged the fine lines between authorship and violence throughout her career. Further, while Woolf's emphasis on unity, 'achiev[ing] a symmetry by means of infinite discords' (*Passionate Apprentice* 392), and her verbal brilliance are undeniable, this thesis has tried to show that she is also interested in clutter and silence, two things that seem to mark artistic failure. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf's estimate of the writer's role is fairly conservative: 'in writing I am discovering what belongs to what,' not creating scintillating Wholes. Often, she lists a myriad of events and sensations, 'an incongruous miscellaneous catalogue, little corks that mark a sunken net;' often she 'pull[s] that net, leaving its contents unsorted, to shore' (*MOB*148). In *The Waves* and *The Years*, the net of meaning remains submerged in silence, broken sentences bobbing above the wave; *Orlando* contains literal blanks that are nevertheless 'filled to repletion' (147); *Mrs Dalloway* ends with an ostensive gesture, indicating that bare existence has its own peculiar power to satiate. In the end, Woolf is less concerned with following 'perfection through the sand' (*W*106) than with

> Some spray in a hedge, […] a sunset over a flat winter field, or […] the way some old woman sits, arms akimbo, in an omnibus with a basket – those we point at for the other to look at. It is so vast an alleviation to be able to point for another to look at. And then not to talk. (*W*105)

Here, the collaborative pleasures of pointing outweigh the 'perfection' of a highly-wrought description. This thesis has suggested that Woolf's ostensive silences, her ambiguous "thisses" and "thats," are an homage to the mystery of things and a recognition of the incompatibility of word and object, no matter how meticulous or virtuosic the description. Moments of epiphany

or rehabilitative community are not obtained through effort, but through the serendipitous revelation of a shareable object. This is not to say that Woolf did not work at her writing, or that it was all a spontaneous overflow of feeling. The hint is that the material world does not so much need redemptive re-presentation, as provide the intricate conditions of being and communication.

This places subjectivity itself on a different footing, not *homo faber* but someone who is crucially *made* by the object context. As Woolf adds in "A Sketch," her fundamental 'philosophy' is 'so instinctive that it seems given to me, not made by me' (*MOB*81). The view of body and mind advanced throughout this thesis has been that they are only intermittently or superficially private, or "mine" (as opposed to "not-mine"). Despite the deep feeling of psycho-sensory privacy in Woolf's oeuvre, she implies that this is not our fundamental state, even though it often feels that this is the case. The widespread occurrence of telepathic connections in Woolf's oeuvre – for instance, Mrs Dalloway's famous 'odd affinities' (*MD*130), the curious merging of *The Waves*' sextet, the hopeful proposition in *Between the Acts* that 'perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same' (180) – suggests that a deep connectedness obtains below our surface individuation. This raises the question of how or why we come to think of ourselves as individuals, how we 'disentangle one footstep from other footsteps,' gain 'some particular mark of identification,' '[s]o concentrated a passion' that it expels 'others like foreign matter from a still, sparkling fluid' (*W*164). Ironically, the body and the object – both figured as what we have in common with others – become the reason why our worlds split off from each other. As Bernard becomes 'aware of my own vague and cloudy nature,' the 'folds of the curtain became still, statuesque; the paperweight on the table hardened; the threads on the curtain sparkled; everything became definite, external, a scene in which I had no part' (ibid.). Woolf's recognition of the hard object, possessing a structural integrity that humans peculiarly lack, should be taken into account in analyses of embodiment in her work. As we have seen, embodiment can lend

itself to feelings of solitude as well as to feelings of entanglement and holism. The alternate solubility and solidity of objects and the human body is constantly in play across her oeuvre, accounting for the parallel affective cycle of intimacy and isolation that is also a key characteristic of Woolf's thought. As this thesis shows, solidity evokes responses of fear and alienation as well as admiration and dependence.

Although the human can never extricate herself from what Elaine Scarry calls our 'reciprocal jostling with the world' (91), Woolf relies upon a fundamental distance between self and object. This is important because dismantling the subject/object divide is often implied to be a self-evident good. For instance, Theodor Lipps and Vernon Lee named this project empathy but, as it turned out, both theorists were ultimately antipathetic to objects. Distance becomes a key feature of Woolf's thinking on objects, connoting respectful relation rather than aloofness or detachment, critical thinking rather than emotional collapse. Occasionally, this distance can seem like an ethical failing (as in the bath episode of *The Years*), but we have also seen Woolf making ethical use of the distance between art and reality, between perspectives, between past and present, between things, strategically utilising the gaps in language, fiction, and history. It speaks to her rejection of epistemological ascendancy and her conception of art as a suspended waiting on, and dwelling with, the non-human world.

In miniature, then, this thesis has explored the aesthetic logic of objectification, examining how ontological and affective dilemmas have been condensed in object form. Small objects have articulated long, cross-century dialogues. Details have abbreviated biographical complexes, swathes of feeling, and cultural hierarchies. Clutter has compressed multiple concerns about heritage, literary innovation, and the thing itself. Everyday rhythms are the fecund ground of being. Minimally informative words like "this," "that," and "something," have held nothing less than sheer existence. Boots, hats, and centrepieces have become a synecdoche

for community, encapsulating the promise of a shareable world. Woolf meditated on the extraordinary satisfactions of a pea in a box till her death in 1941. Her very last diary entry speaks fondly of her sister Vanessa, 'imagining how it wd be if we could infuse souls … Could I englobe it somehow?' (*D*5:359)

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