

# **Joyce, Heidegger and the Material World of *Ulysses*: “Ithaca” as Inventory<sup>1</sup>**

“Ithaca,” in which Leopold Bloom finally returns home at two am after his odyssey around Dublin, is both the most comfortingly familiar episode of *Ulysses* and the most disconcertingly bizarre. “Ithaca”’s representation of objects contributes much to the episode’s paradoxical mingling of domesticity and strangeness. This article juxtaposes Martin Heidegger’s evolving theories of objects and things with “Ithaca” in order to understand the “objective” style of the episode, and its role in this paradox. The narrator’s scientific scrutiny of the material world transforms the familiar objects of 7 Eccles Street into bizarre, esoteric devices. At first, this technical account of Bloom’s material world seems to do no justice to the familiarity with which he inhabits his own home. This calls to mind Heidegger’s later conviction that post-Cartesian science had estranged humans from their habitats by framing things as objects, alienated by our rational modes of enquiry. On closer reading, it becomes clear that the narrator’s alienation of the material world mimics Bloom’s own alienation from a home whose surfaces bear the material evidence of his wife, Molly’s, adultery. Overall, however, beyond alienation, “Ithaca”’s relentless search for relations presents a world in which every thing owes its existence to everything else. This was the kind of unity that Heidegger later gestured towards when he declared that “poetically man dwells on this earth.”<sup>2</sup> For Heidegger, to dwell is to live among “things,” which reveal everything to which they are indebted for their existence, unlike the “objects” of science or mass technology which disguise this conditionality. Yet, in “Ithaca,” I will argue, Joyce gestures towards such a unified act of dwelling through the very scientific discourse and technology that Heidegger believes undermines it. The episode also forges connections with the rest of *Ulysses* and between its narrator and its protagonist such that Bloom’s famous provisional acceptance of his wife’s disloyalty seems to be indebted to the episode’s own sense of interrelatedness.

My conclusion that Bloom discovers both a dependency and a connection with the world of objects and people that he inhabits may seem like a return to humanist readings of the past, such as Richard Ellmann’s, which might be unwise given that, for more recent critics, “Ithaca” “blow[s] up the ‘humanist’ novel.”<sup>3</sup> But the dependence and connection I trace is not one which places humanity at the centre. Rather – and the analogies offered by the phenomenology of Heidegger help to show this – Bloom conceives of the world not as something adapted for him to use, but as something with its own vast history. This is ultimately a kind of materialist concern for the world, not a humanist one, a concern which also coexists with its apparent opposite, the “apathy of the stars” (*U* 17.2226).

Phenomenological approaches to literature have been renewed in the last two decades or so by a turn towards the material. This hermeneutic shift, variously called the “new materialism,” “thing theory,” or “material culture studies,” has been identified as a “striv[ing] to reattach literary studies to the world of things and the life of the senses.”<sup>4</sup> While few “thing theorists” have focused on Joyce, critics have looked at Joycean objects within the context of commodity culture and of everyday studies, while “Ithaca”’s objects in particular have been the focus of Marxist and historicist work over the last thirty years.<sup>5</sup> A characteristic manoeuvre of thing theorists, and one which I will adopt here, is to apply the models offered by nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental philosophy, sociology or political theory to literary texts in order to understand modernism’s representations of humans within their material environments.

But whereas such critics often adopt a “defiantly miscellaneous” approach, mine is a more sustained investigation of the possible intersections between one continental philosopher and a section of one modernist text.<sup>6</sup> Heuristic rather than historicist in its terms of reference, this essay doesn’t argue that Heidegger’s thought influenced Joyce as he wrote *Ulysses* – this is very unlikely. But there are striking similarities between the two. As Cheryl Temple Herr observes in the first extended discussion of Joyce and Heidegger, both were born within a decade of each other, both were educated by Jesuits and might have become priests, but both later turned away from formal religion.<sup>7</sup> Both represented modern man as spiritually homeless but in search of a home, symbolised for Joyce in *Ulysses*’ long journey towards Ithaca. Both wanted to unmask the hidden presuppositions in any perspective or style. And both demonstrated that the ordinary, and above all the ordinary object, could be revelatory.<sup>8</sup>

*Ulysses*, like *The Waste Land*, has sometimes been treated as a metonym for modernism. “Ithaca” itself can seem metonymic of Joyce’s novel: although the penultimate episode, it is in a sense the climactic end, and even index or inventory, of *Ulysses* (and sometimes it reads like one of Joyce’s schemata for *Ulysses*). It was the last episode Joyce finished, it marks the end of Bloom’s odyssey, and it presents the “leavetaking” of the novel’s two main characters.<sup>9</sup> So analyses of “Ithaca”’s objects might show how it offers a powerful example in a range of characterizations of modernism: modernism as hyper-rational system building, or as resistance to rational functionalism, as formal crisis, as impersonal, objective or classical, as defamiliarizing the ordinary, as glimpse of the technological or scientific sublime, or as resistance to modernity’s alienating mass production. Looking at its mixture of the familiar and the strange, I will address a wider modernist manoeuvre of “Ithaca”, its transformative repetition of the past. While “Ithaca” floods the novel with new objects and makes familiar objects seem strange, it also presents objects encountered earlier in the book in ways which familiarize and tame them, making them more ordinary, and ultimately domesticating the book as a whole. This is perhaps the most powerful sense in which reading Heidegger may help us to make sense of reading “Ithaca” and *Ulysses*.

### **i. The narrative voice of “catechism (impersonal)”**

“Ithaca”’s narrative voice is broadly scientific, as Joyce acknowledged when he referred to its “mathematico-astronomico-physico-mechanico-geometrico-chemico sublimation”, and when, in the Gilbert schema, he specified “Ithaca”’s “art” as “science.”<sup>10</sup> This scientific sublimation is undertaken by a narrator who tells the story through a relentless series of questions and answers, which represent the world in measurements, sequences and ratios, in binary categories and in closed systems. I will use “catechiser” and “reporter” to distinguish, respectively, the voice that poses the questions from the voice that answers them, and “narrator” to refer to both. In its relentless search for explanation, “Ithaca”’s catechism mimics the tenacity of modern science, though it clearly has other models, too.<sup>11</sup> Critics, taking their cue from Joyce who explained “I am writing *Ithaca* in the form of a mathematical catechism” and who described “Ithaca”’s “technic” in the Gilbert schema as “catechism (impersonal),” have described its voice as catechism, and, as we will see, as a parodic attack on impersonal objectivity.<sup>12</sup> Leaving aside the question of parody, how might “Ithaca” be regarded as objective? “Objectivity” is cognate with “object” whose Latin etymology is something thrown (“-ject”) against (“ob-”). “Ithaca”’s narrative mode treats knowledge generally, and the objects in Bloom’s home specifically, as something to be held in opposition, to be scrutinised and framed by enquiry. It does this by insisting on distinctions: between questioner and questioned, between subject and object, between now and then, between

the focus of each question and that which is peripheral to it. But objectivity is also “the ability to consider or represent facts, information, etc., without being influenced by personal feelings or opinions.”<sup>13</sup> “Ithaca”’s narrator’s disinterested gaze demonstrates a uniformity of interest in everything, and an absence of preconceptions: he is as interested in Bloom’s cat as he is in Stephen or Bloom, scanning the apparently trivial object along with the profound.

Yet “Ithaca” of course parodies objectivity because it takes such disinterested scrutiny to an extreme, to a form of hyperobjectivity; and because objectivity is just one inflection in its narrative voice alongside others, such as poetry, which we are used to hearing as inimical to objectivity. For Andrew Gibson, “Joyce seems constantly inclined to thicken or obscure scientific discourse with what is radically other to it.”<sup>14</sup> The episode’s hyperobjective approach to Bloom’s life often seems to objectify what it would seek to explain, in other words, to reify and to dehumanize. These are charges which philosophers in the phenomenological tradition, such as Heidegger, levelled at modern science and philosophy. Yet the typographical orderliness of the narrative disguises a series of ambivalences in its tone: yes, the narrator is preoccupied with measurement, sequence, ratio, and spatial organisation, but he is also, by turns, speculative (“If he had smiled why would he have smiled?” (*U* 17.2126)), whimsical (“What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier, returning to the range, admire?” (*U* 17.183-4)), and tangential (“What anagrams had he made on his name in youth?” (*U* 17.404)). Similarly, the narrator’s fearsome powers of computation are matched by a tendency towards inaccuracy, omission, and irrelevance.<sup>15</sup> His prose is often poetic, structured around rhythm, rhyme and metaphor. And, as Karen Lawrence notes, unlike earlier episodes, Ithaca allows its lyrical passages “to stand without becoming parodic.”<sup>16</sup>

Phillip Herring suggests that “Ithaca” shatters “the illusion of objective reliability,” while Gibson writes that “occasionally, critics have wanted on some level to cling to a belief in the chapter’s objectivity.”<sup>17</sup> For Hugh Kenner, “there are gaps, there are evasions,” so that “though ‘objective’ is what we generally hear ‘Ithaca’ called, objective is exactly what it is not.”<sup>18</sup> Matthew Creasy has recently written that “the seemingly impersonal form of ‘Ithaca’ is riven by subjective influences that indicate the situatedness of the facts with which it deals.”<sup>19</sup> But rather than seeing objectivity as some spell that is broken by other antagonistic inflections in the narrator’s voice, we might wish to read it as qualified but still intact. Correcting the over-valuing of objectivity is not the same as discrediting it, as we can infer from Bernard Benstock’s claim that “Ithaca” is a “vital corrective” to any over-valuation of “computerized or scientific objectivity.”<sup>20</sup> Gibson is right to describe “Ithaca”’s non-scientific voices as “supplement[ing]” rather than “adulterating” its science, since they often work in tandem with objective discourse, and with science more generally, in their efforts to reveal the organicism of the material world, the notion that all parts are connected to a whole.<sup>21</sup> For example, “Ithaca” uses its poetic resources of metaphor, rhythm and rhyme to forge sometimes unexpected connections within the material and sensory world which it represents.

Other than its catechism, the most striking feature of “Ithaca”’s narrative voice is its deployment of lists, which allude to Homer’s catalogues of ships. Sometimes these are lists of objects in Bloom’s house, generated in response to questions such as, “Catalogue these books”, and, “What did the first drawer unlocked contain?” (*U* 17.1361, 1774). But “Ithaca”’s lists describe not just objects but topics of conversation, similarities and differences in attitude, analogous events in the past, sequences of actions, and so on. In fact, the longest lists of the episode describe *imaginary* objects of desire in Bloom’s dream home in Flowerville. But the listing style has important

consequences for “Ithaca”’s representation of objects. For now, we can note that the listing style has various effects in this episode reflecting the wider, if disguised, heterogeneity of the catechistical format. It is objectifying in the sense that lists seem to reify objects, to frame them in opposition. It is objective in the sense that the lists are unbiased, offering no hierarchy of importance, and presenting trivial details with as much prominence as significant ones, which means humans and objects are similarly flattened by the same disinterested gaze. The parataxis of the lists, the absence of posited causal, temporal, and, often spatial, relations between items, works against the poetic and scientific impulses of the episode, which, as we have seen, try to instil relationships between things and, in the case of science, to rationalize these relationships. The most that parataxis can do by way of forging relationships is to put items in apposition.

## ii. “What suddenly arrested his ingress?”: an attack by Heidegger’s object

Despite its capacity for forging connections scientifically and poetically within the material world, “Ithaca”’s narrative voice initially seems to estrange things by objectifying them. Five years after *Ulysses* was published, Heidegger offered two categories of object which help to explain this alienation. In *Being and Time* (1927) he distinguishes the ready-to-hand object (*Zeug*) from the present-to-hand object (*Ding*).<sup>22</sup> Objects are usually ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*); they are articles of use always ready to play so ritualised a part in daily life that they are not really perceived at all. But if, for example, they stop functioning, they suddenly become unusually “present-to-hand,” *vorhanden*.<sup>23</sup> The present-to-hand object exhibits “the modes of conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy.”<sup>24</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, one of Heidegger’s biographers, gives the example of the door to his study:

When I am attuned to it, I do not perceive it at all [...] it has its location in my living space, and also in my lifetime; [...] If unexpectedly it were to be locked one day, and I knocked my head against it, then I would painfully perceive the door as the hard wooden panel that in reality it is.<sup>25</sup>

“Ithaca” makes the same distinction between readiness-to-hand and presentness-to-hand and dramatizes it similarly, when, once Stephen has departed, and Bloom has returned into his house from the starlit garden, “the right temporal lobe of the hollow sphere of [Bloom’s] cranium came into contact with a solid timber angle where, an infinitesimal but sensible fraction of a second later, a painful sensation was located in consequence of antecedent sensations transmitted and registered” (*U* 17.1275-8). Unknown to Bloom, a rearrangement of furniture has been undertaken that day in the front room of 7 Eccles Street, prompted by the resiting of the piano, the instrument of Molly Bloom’s accompanist and lover, Hugh “Blazes” Boylan. “What suddenly arrested his ingress?” asks the catechiser: Bloom is virtually assaulted by his own furniture, which mimics the disturbance in his own intimate habitat brought about by Boylan’s presence (*U* 17.1274). The narrative withholds the source of the blow to Bloom’s head, the walnut sideboard, until the catechiser’s prompting, “Describe the alterations effected in the disposition of the articles of furniture?” (*U* 17.1279-80). This underlines the bewilderment of experiencing the present-to-hand object. (Compare Bloom’s earlier more ready-to-hand collision in “Aeolus”: “The doorknob hit Mr Bloom in the small of the back” (*U* 7.280)). So Bloom encounters, as Heidegger would put it, that kind of disturbance which occurs when we suddenly experience ready-to-hand objects as present-to-hand, when, for some reason, something previously ready-to-hand becomes

“unusable, not properly adapted for the use we have decided upon,” so that “the tool turns out to be damaged, or the material unsuitable.”<sup>26</sup>

This is only the most muscular instance of the disconcerting present-to-handness of the whole episode. From the very moment Bloom “inserted his hand *mechanically* into the back pocket of his trousers to obtain his latchkey” (*U* 17.72-3, emphasis added) and remembered it was in his other trousers, habit is disrupted. The disturbance prompting all this present-to-handness is of course Boylan’s adulterous visit that afternoon to the Blooms’ home, the central drama of *Ulysses*. “Ithaca” restages this central drama by confronting Bloom with the material evidence of the marriage breach: “an empty pot of Plumtree’s potted meat” (*U* 17.304) on the dresser shelf, in the bed “the imprint of a human form, male, not his, some crumbs, some flakes of potted meat, recooked” (*U* 17.2123-5), “four polygonal fragments of two lacerated scarlet betting tickets” (*U* 17.320). Samuel Beckett wrote of Proust: “habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment”; it is “the countless treaties concluded between the [...] individual and their countless correlative objects.”<sup>27</sup> When these anaesthetising treaties lapse, we are exposed to “the cruelties and enchantments of reality.”<sup>28</sup> So it is for Bloom.

Bloom’s most sustained effort of the day has been to try to arrest thoughts of his wife’s infidelity, even as he seems to encounter Boylan on every Dublin street corner. In “Ithaca” this compromise with reality is itself compromised, prompted by objects and registered in the narrative’s, and Bloom’s, perception of objects.

### iii. “Ithaca” recuperates Heidegger’s present-to-hand object

Despite these striking effects of the present-to-hand, Heidegger insists that the ready-to-hand is to be preserved from becoming the “mere present-to-hand.”<sup>29</sup> The ready-to-hand, unlike the present-to-hand has, in Heidegger’s lexicon, “the character of world”: it “worlds.”<sup>30</sup> He explains this neologism in a lecture in 1919 in which he describes his perception of the lectern at which he is lecturing as decidedly ready-to-hand, not present-to-hand:

Coming into the lecture-room, I see the lectern. [...] What do “I” see? Brown surfaces, at right angles to one another? No, I see something else. A largish box with another smaller one set upon it? Not at all. I see the lectern at which I am to speak. [...] In pure experience there is no “founding” interconnection, as if I first of all see intersecting brown surfaces, which then reveal themselves to me as a box, then as a desk, then as an academic lecturing desk, a lectern, so that I attach lecternhood to the box like a label [...] I see the lectern in one fell swoop, so to speak, and not in isolation, but as adjusted a bit too high for me.<sup>31</sup>

The lectern presents itself to Heidegger from an immediate environment: “living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, everything has the character of world. It is everywhere the case that ‘it worlds.’”<sup>32</sup> Ready-to-hand objects have a meaningful function within their particular environment, they evoke other co-operative objects in the room, they prompt memories, they assemble a world: “the Being of the ready-to-hand (involvement) is definable as a context of assignments or references, and that even worldhood may be so defined.”<sup>33</sup> It is the post hoc scientific or philosophical theorising of our perception that turns the lectern into a present-to-hand object and which, stripping it of the significance of its ready-to-handness, prevents it from worlding: “the theoretical attitude is [...] possible only as a destruction of the environmental experience.”<sup>34</sup> Heidegger argued that the Cartesian traditions of modern philosophy and science were mistaken in their separation of humans and world, subject

and object, and especially in postulating the encounter between subject and object as, what Safranski calls the “premise-free beginning of reflection and the ultimate certainty.”<sup>35</sup> Instead, present-to-handness is derivative of ready-to-handness; Descartes’s mistake was to take present-to-handness as the primary attitude towards objects, identifying the real as lumps of matter.<sup>36</sup>

In Heidegger’s “largish box with another smaller one set upon it” we might hear the narrative voice of “Ithaca”, one that is apparently wholly objectifying and scientific. “Ithaca” seems deliberately to introduce what Heidegger called the “progressively destructive theoretical infection of the environmental,” or “de-vivification.”<sup>37</sup> Joyce’s use of this narrative voice in a scene in which a man shares a cup of cocoa by the fire, and then joins his wife in bed, provides an extreme example of a collision between the worlding objects of the home environment and the potentially “de-vivifying” scientific attitude.

However, despite the apparent obstacles “Ithaca” seems to throw in its own path, the episode manages both to construct, what I will call, in shorthand, the “lived significance” of the Blooms’ home and the disturbance in this brought about by adultery. As we will see, it does this by complicating the ready-to-hand/present-to-hand distinction and, as a result rescues scientific discourse from the kind of attacks implicit in Heidegger’s thought: an objectifying attitude need not infect an environment with theory, or substitute disillusioned ideas in place of vivid perception. Instead, “Ithaca” shows how an approach to the material world estranged by theory from our habits of perception may be enchanting, poetic and enlightening. Heidegger argued that ready-to-hand objects have a connection of meaning with humans, but also with all other ready-to-hand objects with which they form a “referential totality,” “totality of involvements” or “context of assignments.”<sup>38</sup> In the transition from ready-to-hand to present-to-hand, the object’s connection of meaning with people and with other objects is lost. According to Heidegger, the object becomes isolated, the result of the “dimmed down” conception of the world as composed of senseless “world-stuff.”<sup>39</sup> Conversely, “Ithaca” illustrates how objects may enter into new webs of significance through their newly acquired present-to-handness. An apparently objectifying enquiry into the provenance, shape and material of an object may in fact unearth new connections, animating the object and our conception of the world and ourselves.

For example, the narrator’s digression on “what advantages attended shaving by night” (*U* 17.277), prompted by the thought of alternative uses for the water Bloom is boiling to make the cocoa, does not abstract Bloom’s kettle from its environment, or prevent it from worlding. It roots it in the environment of Bloom’s home by linking it to other objects, “a softer brush,” “a softer skin,” “a clattered milkcan,” “a paper read, reread while lathering” (*U* 17.278, 279, 283, 283-4), and to the other inhabitant of the house, Molly. Nocturnal shaving offers “a softer skin if unexpectedly encountering female acquaintances in remote places at incustomary hours” (*U* 17.279-80), indicating that for Bloom, at this time, everything in his house resonates with the anxiety prompted by his unfaithful wife. The present-to-handness of the rearranged furniture in Bloom’s living room means that, if anything, it “worlds” more now than previously through the new relations it contracts with new objects in the room:

What occupied the position originally occupied by the sideboard?

A vertical piano (Cadby) with exposed keyboard, its closed coffin supporting a pair of long yellow ladies’ gloves and an emerald ashtray containing four consumed matches, a partly consumed cigarette and two discoloured ends of cigarettes, its musicrest supporting the music in the key

of G natural for voice and piano of *Love’s Old Sweet Song* (words by G. Clifton Bingham, composed by J. L. Molloy, sung by Madam Antoinette Sterling) open at the last page with the final indications *ad libitum*, *forte*, pedal, *animato*, sustained pedal, *ritirando*, close. (*U* 17.1302-10)

Boylan’s resiting of the piano has prompted a chain reaction of furniture displacement, and a blurring of the ready-to-hand and present-to-hand distinction. In other words a disturbance in Bloom’s habitat – Boylan – means that the usually ready-to-hand furniture is suddenly present to hand. Far from rendering the furniture as isolated and lacking in context, as Heidegger might imagine, the furniture’s new presentness-to-hand emerges from the forging of a new set of relationships, which have their own significance for the Blooms’ habitat. The furniture has drawn around it a new Heideggerian “context of assignments”: the gloves invoke Molly’s social pretensions, the musicstand her professional ambition; the louche half-smoked cigarette conjures up her sexual appetites. It is precisely a scientific perspective that has unearthed these new significances, here a sort of geometric or ergonomic obsession with the layout of the room. So the same scientific narrative voice that rendered objects present-to-hand here begins to collapse the distinction between ready-to-hand and present-to-hand objects as it relentlessly forges new connections which bind objects into new contexts. The further displacement of an “easychair” and a “splayfoot chair” ramifies them with new meaning: they are “a squat stuffed easychair” and a “slender splayfoot chair of glossy cane curves” (*U* 17.1292, 1295-61), newly symbolic of the lovers. The present-to-handness of these two chairs is a function of the other material circumstantial evidence in the room, itself present-to-hand.

Similarly, in the most surreal moment of “Ithaca,” it is the very lived significance of objects that foregrounds them as estrangingly present-to-hand:

What homothetic objects, other than the candlestick, stood on the mantelpiece?

A timepiece of striated Connemara marble, stopped at the hour of 4.46 a.m. on the 21 March 1896, matrimonial gift of Matthew Dillon: a dwarf tree of glacial aborescence under a transparent bellshade, matrimonial gift of Luke and Caroline Doyle: an embalmed owl, matrimonial gift of Alderman John Hooper.

What interchanges of looks took place between these three objects and Bloom?

In the mirror of the giltbordered pierglass the undecorated back of the dwarf tree regarded the upright back of the emblamed owl. Before the mirror the matrimonial gift of Alderman John Hooper with a clear melancholy wise bright motionless compassionate gaze regarded Bloom while Bloom with obscure tranquil profound motionless compassionated gaze regarded the matrimonial gift of Luke and Caroline Doyle. (*U* 17.1333-47)

The compassionate gaze of the owl is presumably prompted by Bloom’s distress at the evidence of Boylan’s visit; it is peculiarly appropriate that this solace comes from a wedding present. Bloom’s communion with an owl that would otherwise go unnoticed, a tired ornament from a distant wedding, usually neglectedly ready-to-hand, places him in a new connection of meaning with a newly present-to-hand object, which also contracts similar connections with other objects: the present-to-handness of the traces of adultery is counterbalanced by the present-to-handness of these augurs of marital

happiness. That these objects are obliquely described as the “matrimonial gift[s]” of “Matthew Dillon,” “Luke and Caroline Doyle,” and “Alderman John Hooper” introduces into Bloom’s habitat figures from Dublin society during this crisis (*U* 17.1336, 1338, 1339). So the present-to-handness of the wedding gifts does not strip them of their place in the “referential totality” that is Bloom’s home, but rather foregrounds the way they help to constitute the home as emblems of society, friendship and marriage.

A Heideggerian response to this argument might concede that “Ithaca”’s interiors and objects “world,” even though the dominant narrative voice is a scientific one, but might go on to argue that it is precisely the narrator’s other, non-scientific voices that evoke the episode’s rich environmental atmosphere. But is it really only during those moments – when what Heidegger called the “primacy of the theoretical” lapses, when a stuffed owl looks meaningfully at Bloom, or when pathetic fallacy inhabits two armchairs – that “Ithaca” recovers a “referential totality” or “context of assignments?”<sup>40</sup> For Heidegger, “the context of assignments or references, which, as significance, is constitutive of worldhood, can be taken formally as a system of Relations.”<sup>41</sup> True, these non-scientific moments do establish occasional memorable “systems of relations,” but it is above all “Ithaca”’s scientific discourse which is relentless in doing this.

More prosaically, the narrator’s scientific predilection for measurement sets up multiple “systems of relations” between objects and people. Measurement of two entities in the same units immediately allows a mathematical connection to exist between the two of them in the form of a ratio, as when the catechiser asks, “What relation existed between their ages?” (*U* 17.446), a ratio offering more connection between two items through its colon than a paratactic comma in a list. The narrator likes to join things into their lowest common multiple – Bloom and Stephen are a “duumvirate” – or link them through their highest common factors – “Did Bloom discover common factors of similarity between their respective like and unlike reactions to experience?” (*U* 17.11, 18-19). In his efforts to make sense of the world the narrator is always trying to find difference within similarity, similarity within difference, but beneath this is a conviction that similarities underlie difference: “In other respects were their differences similar?” (*U* 17.893). Even when comparison seems to separate individuals, the identification of grounds of comparison, and the act of scrutiny itself, to some extent unify them: “Did he find four separating forces between his temporary guest and him? Name, age, race, creed” (*U* 17.402-3); although name, age, race and creed diverge, they are nevertheless attributes shared by both men.

So “Ithaca” uses its theoretical perspective to make the usually ready-to-hand objects of the home present-to-hand, though without “dimming down” or deadening such objects. But there is an important exception to this: it reverses this procedure for the hitherto present-to-hand objects of Bloom’s pockets, familiar to the reader from earlier episodes, since in “Ithaca” these “come home,” reunited, tidied, inventoried. Bloom has spent much of the day patting his pockets warily, moving objects between them: “Try all pockets. Handker. *Freeman*. Where did I? Ah, yes. Trousers. Potato. Purse [...] found in his hip pocket soap lotion have to call tepid paper stuck” (*U* 8.1188-9). He often checks for the letter from his erotic pen pal Martha Clifford, or his titillating novel *Sweets of Sin*, or, in “Circe”, tries to avoid pickpockets by exploratively inventorying his possessions: “*Bloom pats with parcelled hands watchfob, pocketbookpocket, pursepoke, sweets of sin, potatosoap*” (*U* 15.242-3). We might expect these apparently available objects in Bloom’s pockets to be literally ready-to-hand, but their present-to-handness in earlier episodes is clear: they cannot be relied on to be there, hence the anxious patting which makes them initially conspicuous by their



absence; and when Bloom is searching for one object, he inevitably finds another unexpected and obtrusive one. For example, he often finds the melting bar of lemon soap which, we presume, is on the verge of becoming, as Heidegger would term it, unusable. Forgetting it is there, he experiences it as obtrusively present-to-hand: in “Hades” he thinks, “I am sitting on something hard. Ah, that soap: in my hip pocket” (*U* 6.21-2). The soap becomes even more estrangingly present-to-hand when it appears as a character in “Circe” and exclaims, “We’re a capital couple are Bloom and I./He brightens the earth, I polish the sky” (*U* 15.338-9). Bloom’s latchkey, too, is present-to-hand by its conspicuous absence from his pocket (*U* 5.468). In “Ithaca” these objects are tamed and domesticated by being finally put to use, or added to collections, and inventoried: they attain the meaningful function of the ready-to-hand object. So Bloom finally uses the “partially consumed tablet of Barrington’s lemonflavoured soap” to wash his hands while making the cocoa, and uses the “Agendath of Netaim” advertisement he has been carrying around all day to light incense, and adds a “4<sup>th</sup> typewritten letter received by Henry Flower (let H. F. be L. B.) from Martha Clifford (find M. C.)” to the “collection of objects” in his “first drawer unlocked” (*U* 17.231-232, 1324-29, 1841-2, 1840, 1774). Perhaps it is only as part of a stash containing Bloom’s dirty postcards that Martha’s letter finds its true place, just as the soap is eventually allowed to fulfil its function rather than gumming up Bloom’s pocket. Similarly, the bottle of white port and the pears that Boylan bought for his assignation with Molly in “Wandering Rocks” find their resting place, also partially consumed, domesticated both by appearing in one of “Ithaca”’s lists and on the middle shelf of Bloom’s kitchen dresser (*U* 17.305-6).

*Ulysses*’ repeated references to these objects in Bloom’s pocket in earlier episodes are the kind of “superfluous” or “scandalous” concrete descriptive details that Roland Barthes’ famous “reality effect” tried to account for, scandalous since they do not contribute to the “general structure of narrative,” which is “essentially *predictive*”, involving choices and alternatives.<sup>42</sup> A famous example of an object that contributes predictively to the structure of a narrative (as opposed to its characterization or realism) is the Russian Formalist Boris Tomashevsky’s example of a pistol hanging on a wall, whose specification in Act 3 of a play may be “motivated” in a “compositional” sense if it is used to kill someone in Act 4.<sup>43</sup> Barthes’ distinction has analogies with the ready-to-hand object and the present-to-hand: the former works within the structure of the narrative, the latter is scandalously idle. But, paradoxically, Barthes explains that such details, although causing a reality effect, are not referential in the ordinary sense in which we understand this term, since “just when these [scandalous and superfluous] details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do – without saying so – is *signify* it [...] Flaubert’s barometer [...] says nothing but this: we are the real.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, the reality effect is associated with “the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone.”<sup>45</sup> “Ithaca”, by providing a functional terminus for some of the novel’s objects, in other words by making them, in Barthes’ terms, “predictive,” reverses this reality effect. As scandalous details in earlier episodes, Bloom’s objects have appeared as present-to-hand, have seemed more like words than things. But, put to use in “Ithaca”, the words become more transparent, their signified objects more material. The perennially present-to-hand soap is no longer scandalous or superfluous in “Ithaca”: whereas “Circe” foregrounded it as a referent, by animating the word into a speaking character, “Ithaca” reengages its signified by putting it to work, by making it “world” in Bloom’s home. As Liesl Olson implies, the listing style is the style which is most faithful to the Kantian “thing in itself,” to the signified to which the referent gestures:

the list ultimately becomes the style closest to the everyday – a style that is not quite the “something itself,” in Beckett’s phrase, but which introduces a tempered, more contingent kind of literary transformation in its refusal to decontextualize events and objects from their surroundings.<sup>46</sup>

If some critics have complained that Joyce had a “fetishism of word over world,” or that, in Lacan’s words, “the signifier stuffs the signified,” these parts of “Ithaca” show that Joyce is equally capable of the alternative.<sup>47</sup>

#### iv. Things not objects: the ethics of Joycean science

Yet “Ithaca”’s objects eventually become neither ready-to-hand nor present-to-hand but instead what Heidegger later called “things.” Paul Saint-Amour suggests that the “thing” in thing theory is, in effect the Heideggerian present-to-hand object, which is privileged over the ready-to-hand by thing theorists. He then argues that thing theorists’ lack of interest in *Ulysses* is a consequence of the fact that “*Ulysses*, for all its many objects, contains very few things,” since the material is always presented as instrumentalized by, or ancillary to, human concerns.<sup>48</sup> In Saint-Amour’s view, even when objects apparently lay claim to agency by malfunctioning or, as in “Circe,” speaking or singing, their particularity as things is occluded.<sup>49</sup> I broadly agree but I think “Ithaca” is an exception. Reading “Ithaca” alongside Heidegger shows, in my view, how this episode gets nearer than any other to what Amour calls “thingliness,” to a view of objects which looks beneath and beyond “the human social relations that subtend them.”<sup>50</sup>

In what has become known as Heidegger’s late phase, he implicitly criticised his earlier claim that entities are primarily experienced as ready-to-hand. As we have seen, he had earlier claimed that Cartesian science and philosophy contaminate our habitual environment of ready-to-hand objects by making them obtrusively present-to-hand. But he later argued that we more naturally experience objects as particular and visible things or, we can infer, in his earlier terms, as more present-to-hand than ready-to-hand. Science now, for Heidegger, seems to operate in the opposite direction: whereas scientific enquiry earlier made the ready-to-hand present-to-hand, the mass technology generated by science occludes the particularity of things by making them less visible and without apparent origin, making, to project forwards again his earlier terms, the present-to-hand ready-to-hand. In his famous lecture of 1950, “The Thing”, he advocates an appreciation of the “thing *qua* thing.”<sup>51</sup> This involves appreciating the thing as “gathering” the “fourfold” of earth and sky, mortals and divinities.<sup>52</sup> That things “gather” is emphasised by Heidegger’s assertion that “thing” is derived from the Old German for “assembly,” *Dinc*.<sup>53</sup> Each of the “fourfold” is a necessary condition for the existence of the life that brought to presence the thing itself. Heidegger’s example of a thing is a jug. The jug, brought to presence by humanity that depends on each of the four, gathers the four in a variety of ways: for example, the earth has produced the clay of which the jug is made; the sky holds the sun which nourishes the grapes whose wine the jug is destined to carry.<sup>54</sup> These, therefore, are all aspects of the conditionality of the jug: the jug depends on them. This conditionality is a form of indebtedness: in his later essay, “The Question Concerning Technology” (1953), Heidegger describes a silver chalice in these terms: “the chalice is indebted to, i.e. owes thanks to, the silver for that of which it consists.”<sup>55</sup> Understanding things in this way allows humans to appreciate their own indebtedness and conditionality. James C. Edwards links Heidegger’s notion of this sense of indebtedness instilled by the Thing with his antipathy towards technology.<sup>56</sup> Edwards argues that this antipathy derives from technology’s lack of precisely this manifestation of indebtedness. For Heidegger technology is pernicious

because it effaces its own conditionality. This then deprives its users of a proper sense of their own conditionality: “modern technology keeps itself everywhere concealed to the last.”<sup>57</sup> It is a standing reserve (*Bestand*) “ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand [...] so that it may be on call for further ordering.”<sup>58</sup> The anonymity and interchangeability of mass-produced technologies is essential to their operation in that they do not distract us from our efficient use of them; instead, in Edwards’ words, these features allow them to “disappear into our use of them” with no sense of their contingency or indebtedness to anything else. By presenting itself to us as unconditional, technology encourages us to think of ourselves in the same way which may lead to an egoism in which we believe we have no responsibilities to anyone but ourselves.<sup>59</sup> In Heidegger’s eyes, “science’s knowledge [has] [...] annihilated things as things”; in other words, science destroys things by turning them into objects, a new version of his earlier theory that science makes the ready-to-hand object present-to-hand.<sup>60</sup>

If, on the other hand, claims Heidegger mystically, “we let the thing be present [...] we are called by the thing as the thing [...] we are the be-thinged ones [...] we have left behind the presumption of all unconditionedness.”<sup>61</sup> “Ithaca”’s narrative voice is be-thinged in its presumption of the conditionality of everything, a presumption that motivates its own “system of relations.” Ariela Freedman also notices this in “Ithaca” but attributes it more widely to Joyce’s “deeply historical – we might even say environmental – logic,” his rejection, despite modernity’s occlusion of origins, that anything (including the aesthetic object) is *ex nihilo*.<sup>62</sup> I see it rather under the sign of science which Heidegger saw as threatening to the environment. Perversely, it is a scientific means of understanding events in Bloom’s home that contributes most to this system of relations. “Ithaca”’s reflex of tracing connections instils a sense of organicism, the notion that all parts are connected to a whole. This is registered most clearly in its representation of objects, which are always being linked to other objects, processes and phenomena. “Ithaca”’s narrator uses scientific discourse to render objects as things, things which embody all the other entities on which they depend, and so remind us that we are all part of, and indebted to, something much greater than ourselves. Could such a perspective on the material world contribute to Bloom’s Stoic attitude towards adultery in “Ithaca”? We are used to the realist novel in which the narrator records rather than affects the protagonist’s state of mind; but perhaps it is Joyce’s novelistic innovation to suggest that Bloom’s sanguine state of mind is itself influenced by the narrator’s scientific enquiry into the objects and bodies in Bloom’s house.

When Bloom turns on the tap, early on in the episode, the catechiser asks “Did it flow?” (*U* 17.163).

Yes. From Roundwood reservoir in county Wicklow of a cubic capacity of 2400 million gallons, percolating through a subterranean aqueduct of filter mains of single and double pipeage constructed at an initial plant cost of £5 per linear yard by way of the Dargle, Rathdown, Glen of the Downs and Callowhill to the 26 acre reservoir at Stillorgan [...] (*U* 17.164-168)

The reporter’s answer takes in the source, route and means of conveyance of the water, as well as the prohibition of “the use of municipal water for purposes other than those of consumption” due to the “prolonged summer drouth” (*U* 17.174-5, 171). Instead of allowing the tap to disappear into its own use, the narrator here makes the tap flood itself in its own contingency: the availability of water in 7 Eccles Street is shown to depend on an array of geological, technical and legal apparatuses. A similar degree of

conditionality attaches to a later stage in the same process of making cocoa, the boiling of the kettle. The energy that heats the water is traced back to the coal, the source of whose energy in turn is followed back to the “foliated fossilised decidua of primeval forests which had in turn derived their vegetative existence from the sun, primal source of heat” (*U* 17.261-2). The convection of this heat from coal to water is then described, before the kettle finally announces its success with “a double falciform ejection of water vapour from under the kettlelid at both sides simultaneously” (*U* 17.273-4). In these examples two mass-produced objects, a tap and a kettle, have, in Heidegger’s terms, gathered the fourfold, and they have done so through the very scientific discourse that ought to have obliterated them as things (Heidegger’s examples of things, such as chalices and jugs, are handmade).<sup>63</sup>

Again, however, perhaps accounts of science and technology such as “Ithaca”’s are accounted for within Heidegger’s philosophy. Heidegger hints that “the essential unfolding of technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible rise of the saving power.”<sup>64</sup> He goes on, “everything [...] depends on this: that we ponder this rising and that [...] we watch over it.”<sup>65</sup> What might this watchfulness resemble? It is far from clear, but it is worth noting how Heidegger and Joyce conceive of the conditionality of technology in very similar ways. For example, Heidegger’s description of the transmission of the sun’s heat to water via coal is uncannily similar to Joyce’s description of Bloom’s kettle, quoted in the previous paragraph:

The coal that has been hauled out in some mining district [...] is on call, ready to deliver the sun’s warmth that is stored in it. The sun’s warmth is challenged forth for heat, which in turn is ordered to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep the factory running.<sup>66</sup>

“Ithaca” offers the kind of watchfulness over science and technology that may, in Heidegger’s view, hold the seeds of salvation from science and technology.

“Ithaca”’s conditionality and indebtedness are characteristics of more than just its material world, though. If “Ithaca” shows how the objects of Bloom’s home are indebted to all manner of objects and people outside his home, it also demonstrates that it is itself indebted to all the other seventeen episodes of *Ulysses*, that it shares with them, in Heidegger’s terms, a “referential totality,” a “totality of involvements,” or a “context of assignments.” True, its style may seem like a repudiation of the rest of the book and an insistence that it is sui generis (Joyce called “Ithaca” the “ugly duckling” of *Ulysses*), as may its pretensions to closure.<sup>67</sup> In Lawrence’s view, “don[ning] the antiliterary mask of science,” it deliberately abandons the “arsenal of literature’s weapons, like dramatic climax, tone, style, and linear narration,” but still manages to tell a story.<sup>68</sup> But the very absence of such literary features of the rest of the book puts “Ithaca” in dialogue and relationship with it. Stephen Sicari reads the novel’s later episodes, and particularly “Ithaca,” as “rereadings” of earlier episodes.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, “Ithaca”’s style of objectivity is clearly in dialogue with the subjectivity of its neighbouring episodes, “Penelope” and its unrelieved interior monologue, and “Eumaeus” and its presentation of “the centred but psychologized subject.”<sup>70</sup> In all these ways, “Ithaca”’s technological narrative style makes it analogous to one of those high-tech modernist buildings that seems to make no concession to its surrounding buildings and their history, but which, on closer inspection, is in subtle stylistic dialogue with them.

In addition to these stylistic links at the level of discourse, “Ithaca”’s purported closure, symbolized by the square-shaped period which concludes the episode in the 1922 text, is indebted to lacunae in the story in earlier episodes. As a “massive,

concerted attempt to fill in gaps” of the novel, it gives the impression of being the last chapter of a Victorian novel by offering revelations which change our view of the book as a whole.<sup>71</sup> (This impulse towards closure is of course famously resisted by “Penelope” which offers its own book-altering revelations, courtesy of Bloom’s wife, Molly.) “Ithaca” may be conspicuous, obtrusive and obstinate, like the present-to-hand object but, as a proposed summa of the book, it sends the reader leafing through the previous sixteen episodes, inviting us, for example, to reassess Bloom’s relationship with his dead father, his wife, daughter and rival. As a result, reading “Ithaca” makes the rest of the book increasingly familiar and available, increasingly ready-to-hand. And, as we have seen, it is often the frequent reappearance in “Ithaca” of objects already familiar to us that trigger this cross-referencing, for example to check the accuracy of its budget for the day which lists the objects Bloom has bought (*U* 17.1455-78). Acting sometimes, then, as a kind of index or inventory to the rest of the novel, “Ithaca” also domesticates *Ulysses* for us, for example by prompting us to group together various earlier motifs, as when “Ithaca”’s objects refer us not to their earlier appearances but to analogous objects in other episodes to whom they are indebted for their meaning. For example, the marble clock, stopped at 4.46am, is the final item in a series of motifs in the novel in which adulterous sex and clocks have been associated with each other. In this way, “Ithaca” binds the objects and events of the novel together into new contexts and makes them “world.” This is true of many of the episodes but “Ithaca” makes more explicit than any other the structural principle of the novel that all episodes are linked to each other, indebted to each other.

If objects “come home” in “Ithaca,” Bloom does so too, not just by simply returning to Eccles Street, but in the sense of finding an episode and a style in which he is most comfortably situated, most fully realized as a character. This realization is the result of a collaboration between Bloom and the narrative style which is hard to disentangle: both seem indebted to each other, just as the catechiser and reporter must collaborate to tell the story, neither having meaning on their own. The character of Bloom influences “Ithaca,” but “Ithaca” influences Bloom. This collaboration mitigates the sense that the episode objectifies and distances what it presents through its technological and scientific perspective. Heidegger’s name for the being that is a human being, *Dasein*, literally means “Being-there,” reflecting his phenomenological belief that humans cannot be abstracted from the environments in which they are involved and concerned; similarly, Bloom is inextricably engaged in his narrative environment in “Ithaca,” so that there is no polarity between narrator (subject) and narrated character (object). This convergence is particularly evident in both Bloom’s and “Ithaca”’s attitude to the material world. Other than interior monologue, “Ithaca”’s catechism is surely the narrative mode which most expresses Bloom’s attitude to the world around him: curious, cautious, whimsical, tidy, and engaged. “Ithaca” enacts at the level of narrative all these characteristics of Bloom, especially his tidiness. In “Calypso” and “Ithaca” Bloom tidies up Molly’s underwear and the bed, while in “Ithaca” Bloom thinks to himself, as he reorganizes two stray unalphabetized books, “a place for everything and everything in its place,” a sentiment shared by the episode as a whole (*U* 4.265-6, 308-9, 17.2109-10, 1410).

More than simply tidiness, Bloom’s attitude to the world around him is in keeping with Heidegger’s view of people as having, as we have seen, an attitude to their world which is engaged and involved, and not theoretical. Heidegger called one aspect of this engagement “concern” (*Besorgen*), an attentive involvement with our familiar objects: “what we mainly deal with in concern is equipment, the READY-TO-HAND”, “concern” having three main senses, to “acquire,” to “take care of,” and to “be concerned” about something.<sup>72</sup> Throughout *Ulysses*, Bloom shows a similarly wide

concern for the material world which also expresses his concern for humanity.<sup>73</sup> In “Calypso” his tenderness for Molly is expressed as a tenderness towards the front door which he closes quietly to avoid waking her, and then towards the blind which he lets up “by gentle tugs,” even once Molly is fully awake (*U* 4.74-5, 256). In “Lestrygonians” he notices with concern that his old flame Mrs Breen is wearing a shabby bleached dress, and in “Ithaca” he considers repairing a tear in Stephen’s jacket (*U* 8.265-6, 17.374-5).<sup>74</sup>

“Ithaca” shows the same concern for the material world as Bloom: it tries not to forget things, just as Bloom pats his pockets, and its lists are loving and discriminating – almost as reverential as the litany of Bloomian objects given by the Daughters of Erin in “Circe,” “Kidney of Bloom, pray for us/[...] /Wandering Soap, pray for us/ Sweets of sin, pray for us/[...]” (*U* 15.1940, 1945-6).<sup>75</sup> Sometimes “Ithaca” seeks to undo human interference with objects as when it restores the day’s milk to its original pre-breakfast quantity: a “quarter” of milk, “which added to the quantity subtracted for Mr Bloom’s and Mrs Fleming’s breakfasts, made one imperial pint” (*U* 17.315-6). And “Ithaca” is filled with adverbs which strain solicitously towards denotative accuracy as regards the treatment of objects (sometimes spilling over into comic tautology, or the comic deferral of verbs and hence actions). For Douglas Mao, “Ithaca”’s catechistical form evokes in the reader Bloom’s tender feelings for his objects, like those Walter Benjamin discerns in book collectors.<sup>76</sup> “Ithaca”’s and Bloom’s concern for the material converge when it describes, with concern, Bloom’s own concern: Bloom enters the bed “with circumspection, [...] with solicitude, [...] prudently, [...] lightly, [...] reverently” (*U* 17.2115-2119).

So “Ithaca”’s concern for the material seems to be influenced by Bloom’s own, but influence also seems to run in the other direction. In particular, Bloom’s famous provisional acceptance of his wife’s infidelity seems to be significantly indebted to “Ithaca”’s materialist vision, rather than only to Bloom’s innate humanity. Whereas many of the instances of Bloom’s concern for the material throughout *Ulysses* seem to be expressions of concern for others, the concern which helps him retire to bed without retribution in “Ithaca” is less humanist and more materialist, and has analogies with Heidegger’s concern for the “thing *qua* thing.” As we have seen, the fourfold which Heidegger’s thing gathers is three quarters non-human (comprising earth, sky, divinities, and mortals). If the Thing, making visible its conditions, forces an acknowledgement on our part of our own conditionality, “Ithaca” shows us that it is Bloom’s awareness of the organicism of life and hence his own conditionality, reliance on others and place within some larger entity, that means he overlooks Boylan’s and Molly’s liaison by not leaving home, confronting his wife or taking revenge:

What retribution, if any?

Assassination, never, as two wrongs did not make one right. Duel by combat, no. Divorce, not now. [...] (*U* 17.2200-02)

This state of mind is rendered, and perhaps influenced, by the narrator’s scientific enquiry into the objects and bodies in Bloom’s house. Influenced, because a mode of attention to the material can have ethical ramifications. Perversely, “Ithaca”’s ethical ramifications are the same as those implied by Heidegger’s essay on “The Thing,” despite “Ithaca”’s adoption of the very scientific discourse that Heidegger rejects.

Bloom, with the help of the narrator’s biology textbook, is imagined by the narrator as seeing Boylan as simply a link in a long chain of sexual predators who have admired Molly (*U* 17.2133-42) – each displaces a rival, and is in turn displaced:

If he had smiled why would he have smiled?

To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be the first, last, only and alone whereas he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity. (*U* 17.2126-31)

Bloom then experiences a range of conflicting emotions:

With what antagonistic sentiments were his subsequent reflections affected?

Envy, jealousy, abnegation, equanimity. (*U* 17.2154-5)

Bloom envies Boylan’s ability to satisfy Molly sexually and is jealous of their intimacy. But grounds for “abnegation,” or self-sacrifice, come when Bloom looks to the source of Boylan’s presence in the house, just as the narrator did to water’s emergence in the house, and finds his own friendship with Boylan, as well as their shared financial interests. Theirs is an “acquaintance initiated in September 1903 in the establishment of George Mesias, merchant tailor [...] hospitality extended and received in kind, reciprocated and reappropriated in person,” which has culminated in “an imminent provincial musical tour, common current expenses, net proceeds divided” (*U* 17.2170-2, 2175-6). Bloom is emotionally and financially connected to Boylan. His equanimity is grounded on an appreciation of “every natural act of a nature expressed or understood executed in nature by natural creatures in accordance with his, her and their natures” (*U* 17.2178-80). (Despite his “equanimity”, Bloom leaves open the option of several forms of “retribution”, including divorce, exposure, a lawsuit, the introduction of another rival, and the separation of the lovers (*U* 17.2200-2209)). Here organicism becomes the ultimate property of nature, whose proliferation and opacity is parodied. Then, “react[ing] against the void of incertitude” (*U* 17.2210-11), Bloom justifies his four sentiments by reflecting that the inexhaustible supply of potential cuckolders is as inevitable as the body’s own production of semen, reminding us of his emission six hours earlier, watching Gerty Macdowell on Sandymount Strand: “the continued product of seminators by generation: the continual production of semen by distillation: the futility of triumph or protest or vindication” (*U* 17.2223-5). Although life may be filled with futility, the life that sustains Bloom is the same life that sustains his rivals, and this offers him some consolation.

So much for a conclusion. Yet, as Gibson notes, “Joyce critics seem unusually drawn to paradox in their accounts of ‘Ithaca.’”<sup>77</sup> So it’s no surprise that my own conclusion here is subject to contradiction, as most conclusions about “Ithaca” are, a provisionality enforced by its Protean and paratactic logic of ever expanding lists. Two questions remain: does Bloom really have a change in attitude in “Ithaca” which constitutes a narrative event? And is it really a feeling of connection with the material world which motivates this?

The notion of a climactic event seems out of keeping with the fact that “Ithaca”’s “events are infinitely expansible into larger sequences of which they play a part.”<sup>78</sup> Both Marxist critics and those exploring literature’s engagement with the ordinary have challenged some humanist critics’ “project of making something decisive happen [in *Ulysses*] during this representative day, transforming it in other words into an Event.”<sup>79</sup> Olson sees “Ithaca” as an important articulation of Joyce’s commitment to the ordinary object and occurrence, untransformed by the literary (exemplified

especially, as we have seen, in its lists).<sup>80</sup> It is true that at any point where an object or event may seem central in “Ithaca,” it is liable to be decentered by the expansion of the series, especially since “Ithaca” reminds us that many of its own events are in fact only the latest in a series of such events. There is also a sense in which time, a medium necessary for narrative events to take place, has been suspended in “Ithaca,” since narrative suspense is dissipated by the fact the questioner already seems to know the story, narrative momentum is impeded by the questions, and the episode has a spatial rather than a temporal orientation. In this atemporal context, “Ithaca”’s lists do not imply consecution, so “envy, jealousy, abnegation, equanimity” are concurrent not successive states, as the questioner himself implies when he asks, “Why more abnegation than jealousy, less envy than equanimity?” (*U* 17.2195). This counteracts the idea of a single change in attitude on Bloom’s part.

So this consistent decentering of actions and objects, associated with “Ithaca”’s materialist and organicist concern for the world, resists the depiction of events. But it may also be what motivates Bloom’s lack of intervention or retaliation within his marriage. For it is not only with “the continued product of seminators by generation: the continual production of semen by distillation” that Bloom justifies his four sentiments, but also by “the futility of triumph or protest or vindication: the inanity of extolled virtue: the lethargy of nescient matter: the apathy of the stars” (*U* 17.2210-11, 2223-6). This “apathy” is surely a transferred epithet which more properly belongs to Bloom himself. At this moment, the expanding sequences and contexts which “Ithaca” unearths, rather than offering Bloom the equanimity of a connection with the rest of the material world, decenter him, provoking feelings of “futility,” “inanity,” “lethargy,” and, above all, “apathy.” “Ithaca”’s journey from materialist preoccupation to cosmic indifference might be summed up by a comment of Buck Mulligan’s during “Oxen of the Sun” when Bloom appears to be lost in contemplation of a bottle of Bass beer: “Any object, intensely regarded, may be a gate of access to the incorruptible eon of the gods” (*U* 14.1166-7). In the final analysis, the central ambiguity of “Ithaca” is that we cannot tell whether Bloom’s provisional acceptance of adultery is motivated by a quasi-Heideggerian concern for the material world, which he shares with the episode, or whether “Ithaca”’s exaggerated concern is so daunting for Bloom as to cause only apathy and lethargy. Such ambiguity is typical of “Ithaca”’s parataxis: concern and unconcern exist side by side, each connected to and decentered by the other.



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<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings from "Being and Time" (1927) to "the Task of Thinking" (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 16.

<sup>3</sup> John Rocco, "Time Travel on Wings of Excess: 'Ithaca' and a Message in a Bottle," in *Twenty-First Joyce*, ed. Ellen Carol Jones and Morris Beja (Gainesville: University Press of California, 2004), 113.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas J. Otten, *A Superficial Reading of Henry James: Preoccupations with the Material World* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 159, 155. Other examples of this work include Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Saikat Majumdar examines Bloom's bar of soap as a kind of postcolonial "banal object", whose very resistance to meaning is a blow against British imperialism (Saikat Majumdar, "A Pebblehard Soap: Objecthood, Banality, and Refusal in Ulysses," *James Joyce Quarterly* 42 & 43 (2004-2006)). Jennifer Wicke and Garry Leonard look at Joyce in the context of commodity culture, Liesl Olson of everyday studies (Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement & Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), Garry Leonard, *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), and Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)). As for "Ithaca", Fredric Jameson, "'Ulysses' in History," in *James Joyce and Modern Literature*, ed. W. J. McCormack and Alistair Stead (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), offers a Marxist approach. Historicist approaches include several of the essays in Andrew Gibson, ed. *Joyce's "Ithaca"* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996). Two recent articles, like mine, explore "Ithaca" and modernist continental theory: Catherine Flynn argues that "Ithaca"'s estrangement of familiar objects anticipates two other continental theories, Brecht's epic theatre and Walter Benjamin's descriptions of Brecht and of objects within history (Catherine Flynn, "A Brechtian Epic on Eccles Street: Matter, Meaning, and History in 'Ithaca'," *Éire-Ireland* (2011)); and Douglas Mao looks at "Ithaca" alongside Benjamin to explore the dynamics between utopianism and sentimentality (Douglas Mao, "Arcadian Ithaca," *European Joyce Studies* 21 (2011)).

<sup>6</sup> Otten, *A Superficial Reading of Henry James*, 165.

<sup>7</sup> Cheryl Temple Herr, *Joyce and the Art of Shaving* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 2004), 4. Herr argues that Joyce offers a "phenomenological reading of the everyday", illustrating this with the example of his attention to his male characters' shaving, a wordless, attentive, and habitual use of equipment (ibid., 17.). See also, Cheryl Temple Herr, "Being in Joyce's World," in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). In Herr's wake, Sam Slote and Paul K. Saint-Amour have also discussed Joyce and Heidegger. Slote looks at the technology of "Ithaca", particularly water as a technological resource, through the lens of Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" (Sam Slote, "Questioning Technology in 'Ithaca'," *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* 8, no. 2 (2007), [http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz/archives/v8\\_2/main/essays.php?essay=slote](http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz/archives/v8_2/main/essays.php?essay=slote).). Saint-Amour introduces Heidegger into his survey of the Joycean tension between symbols (representative) and things (particular, material) (Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Symbols and Things," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses*, ed. Sean Latham (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2014), 209-210). For alternative phenomenological readings of Joyce see AnnKatrin Jonsson, *Relations: Ethics and the Modernist Subject in James Joyce's Ulysses, Virginia Woolf's the Waves and Djuna Barnes's Nightwood* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), and Michael O'Sullivan, *The Incarnation of Language: Joyce, Proust and a Philosophy of the Flesh* (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Both rejected Cartesianism, if we accept Hugh Kenner's view that Joyce turned away from romanticism and its Cartesian belief that an object is "a piece of reified externality, dead, an affront to the mind until the mind has processed it" (Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), 135).

<sup>9</sup> Jon Hegglund, "Hard Facts and Fluid Spaces: 'Ithaca' and the Imperial Archive," in *Joyce, Imperialism, and Postcolonialism*, ed. Leonard Orr (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>10</sup> James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber, 1957), 164; Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's "Ulysses": A Study* (London: Faber, 1952), 356.

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Kenner links catechism to two powerful regulators of knowledge, religion and science (*Ulysses*, rev. ed. (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 134). A. Walton Litz endorses the view that "Ithaca"'s primary source is Richmal Mangnall's *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions*, a classroom textbook of the nineteenth century, "a compendium of undifferentiated "practical" knowledge, cast in the form of a familiar catechism" (A. Walton Litz, "Ithaca," in *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 394). For Lawrence, it is "the idea of a taxonomic system itself, not any particular system, that is parodied" (Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 195). For Gibson, "Ithaca" parodies the "imperial science" of Irish textbooks and popular science books (Andrew Gibson, "An Aberration of the Light of Reason": Science and Cultural Politics in "Ithaca," in *Joyce's "Ithaca"*, ed. Andrew Gibson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 160-1). While Jeffrey S. Drouin argues that "Ithaca"'s parody of traditional science is a privileging of the new physics of Einstein (Jeffrey S. Drouin, *James Joyce, Science, and Modernist Print Culture: "The Einstein of English Fiction"* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 92).

<sup>12</sup> Joyce, *Letters*, 164. Gilbert, *James Joyce's "Ulysses": A Study*, 356.

<sup>13</sup> "Objectivity, N," *OED online*, (September 2009), [http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00329114?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=objectivity&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00329114?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=objectivity&first=1&max_to_show=10).

<sup>14</sup> Gibson, "An Aberration of the Light of Reason": Science and Cultural Politics in "Ithaca," 162.

<sup>15</sup> Inaccuracies have been recently noted by, among others, Peter Hayes and Sam Slote (Peter Hayes, "The Overnight Temperature in "Ithaca," *James Joyce Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2007): 559, Slote, "Questioning Technology in "Ithaca," ).

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Andrew Gibson, "Introduction," in *Reading Joyce's "Ithaca"*, ed. Andrew Gibson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 18; *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices*, T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures (London: Faber, 1978), 96.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Creasy, "Inverted Volumes and Fantastic Libraries: *Ulysses* and *Bouvard Et Pécuchet*," in *James Joyce and the Nineteenth-Century French Novel*, ed. Finn Fordham and Rita Sakr (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 127

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Gibson, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 97-122.

- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 104.
- <sup>25</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 95.
- <sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 102.
- <sup>27</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999), 18, 19.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 101.
- <sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy: With a Transcript of the Lecture Course "on the Nature of the University and Academic Study"*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 61.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 59-60.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>33</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 121.
- <sup>34</sup> Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 72.
- <sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 122-34, 97. Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 97.
- <sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 101.
- <sup>37</sup> Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 75.
- <sup>38</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 99, 116, 121.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 118..
- <sup>40</sup> Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 73-4.
- <sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 121.
- <sup>42</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 143.
- <sup>43</sup> Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 78-9.
- <sup>44</sup> Barthes, "The Reality Effect," 148.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid..
- <sup>46</sup> Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 52.
- <sup>47</sup> Joseph Brooker, *Joyce's Critics: Transitions in Reading and Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 37, Jean-Michel Rabaté, "The Joyce of French Thought," in *A Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Richard Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 261.
- <sup>48</sup> Saint-Amour, "Symbols and Things," 209-210.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 210-211.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 209, 211.
- <sup>51</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (London: Perennial, 2001), 166.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 171-2.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 172.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 170-1.
- <sup>55</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 315.
- <sup>56</sup> James C. Edwards, "The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger's Later Work," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 456-67.
- <sup>57</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 327.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., 322..
- <sup>59</sup> Edwards, "The Thinging of the Thing," 459.
- <sup>60</sup> Heidegger, "The Thing," 168.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 178-9.

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<sup>62</sup> Ariela Freedman, "Did It Flow?: Bridging Aesthetics and History in Joyce's *Ulysses*," *Modernism/Modernity* 13, no. (13:1) (2006): 118, 108.

<sup>63</sup> From a Marxist perspective, Jameson argues that a dereification operates within the novel: "everything seemingly material and solid in Dublin itself can presumably be dissolved back into the underlying reality of human relations and praxis," for example, when "so strikingly reified a datum as the sandwichboard [advert] is once again effortlessly dereified and dissolved," once we hear about the waiting list of those wishing to carry it (Jameson, "'Ulysses' in History," 135, 136). But, in my view, the underlying reality uncovered by "Ithaca" is nearer to Heidegger's materialist vision than Jameson's human-centred one.

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 337.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid..

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>67</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1934), 258.

<sup>68</sup> Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, 180, 183.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Sicari, "Rereading *Ulysses*: 'Ithaca' and Modernist Allegory," *Twentieth Century Literature* 43, no. 3 (1997): 264, 266.

<sup>70</sup> Jameson, "'Ulysses' in History," 139. Critics have long argued that *Ulysses* deliberately contrasts the "subjective and objective poles of dualism" (Ian Watt quoted in Arnold Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox: Form and Freedom in His Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 117). For A. Walton Litz, it is in "Ithaca" that "the extremes of Joyce's art, and of fiction in general, are found in radical form: the tension between symbolism and realism" (Walton Litz, "Ithaca," 385). Jameson argues that, in the juxtaposition of "Eumaeus" and "Ithaca", which represent subjectivity and objectivity, Joyce means "to force us to work through in detail everything that is intolerable about this opposition [between the subject and the object]" which capitalism has brought about (Jameson, "'Ulysses' in History," 139).

<sup>71</sup> Gibson, "Introduction," 15, Kenner, *Ulysses*, 141.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 36, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Theodor Adorno writes that "granting the physical world its alterity is the very basis for accepting otherness as such" (quoted in Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 18). Joyce critics have also linked the material and the ethical: "one of Joyce's definitive judgemental criteria is the character's ability to return to and accept the physical world" (James H. Maddox, *Joyce's "Ulysses" and the Assault Upon Character* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), 12).

<sup>74</sup> Herr argues that "Ithaca"'s list of all the people who have kindled fires for Stephen (prior to Bloom's own kindling) with its materiality of "hobs, grates, irons and mantelpieces" "present[s] Joyce's world in terms of what Heidegger would call 'care'" (Herr, "Being in Joyce's World," 170).

<sup>75</sup> "Care" (*Sorge*), "concern" (*Besorgen*) and "solicitude" (*Fürsorge*) are "three concepts [that] enable Heidegger to distinguish his own view from the view that our attitude towards the world is primarily cognitive and theoretical" (Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 35).

<sup>76</sup> Mao, "Arcadian Ithaca," 39.

<sup>77</sup> Gibson, "Introduction," 5. My further provisional conclusions in the remainder of this article invoke ambiguity (that stock in trade of literary commentary since at least the New Criticism) as the best response to "Ithaca"'s proliferation of meaning. This proliferation has been consistently observed over the last forty years. In 1974 A. Walton Litz described "Ithaca"'s "constant shifts in tone, rhetoric, and quality of subject matter", and took on critics who are inclined "to press *Ulysses* – and especially the "Ithaca" chapter – into some easy equation of "either/or", either "a satire on the naturalistic writer's preoccupation with detail, or [...] a humourless exercise in the manner of classic naturalism", insisting on (Walton Litz, "Ithaca," 395, 391 ). In 1999, Vicki Mahaffey wrote that "the point of its

numerical variability is to remind readers near the end of their journey of the endless recombinations that are not only possible but always in progress” (Vicki Mahaffey, “Sidereal Writing: Male Refractions and Malefactions in “Ithaca,”” in *Ulysses: En-Gendered Perspectives: Eighteen New Essays on the Episodes*, ed. Kimberley J. Devlin and Marilyn Reizbaum (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), 264. Walton Litz, “Ithaca,” 391, 395). And, in 2011, Catherine Flynn found in “Ithaca”’s estrangement of the everyday, not a Brechtian attack on meaning per se, but a “plurality of signification” which “resists the understanding of the material world as fixed” (Flynn, “A Brechtian Epic on Eccles Street: Matter, Meaning, and History in 'Ithaca',” 77, 84-5).

<sup>78</sup> Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, 190.

<sup>79</sup> Jameson, ““Ulysses’ in History,” 127. Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 33-56. For a wider discussion of this, see Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>80</sup> Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 45.