‘FOLDED IN THIS TRIPLE MELODY’: INTERCORPOREALITY IN THE WORK OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Marieke Krynauw

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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

DECLARATION

Full name:	Marieke Krynauw
Student Number:	13024826
Degree/Qualification:	PhD
Title of thesis:	'Folded in this triple melody': intercorporeality in the work of Virginia Woolf

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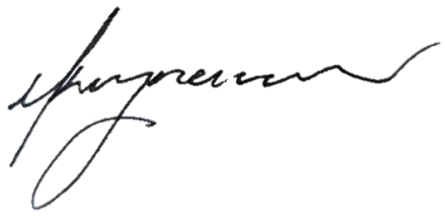

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To Kirsten, Marguerite, and Stef—

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To my parents—

My mother, for teaching me care, and my father, for believing in the power of words.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores representations of intercorporeality in a selection of Virginia Woolf's fiction and non-fiction, in conversation with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology and ontology. This study offers a counter to readings of Woolf as a writer who prioritises interiority, and instead considers underlying patterns of relationality that are grounded in embodied experience. I discuss three main areas of focus: visual perception in an interpersonal world, the grounding of artistic creation in an openness to the human and nonhuman world, and an intercorporeal relationality expressed through narrative and textual kinships. The study provides a brief overview of connections which may be drawn between Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and Woolf's writing in Chapter 1. The main spheres of discussion are then investigated in three further chapters: through close readings of some of Woolf's short stories and *Mrs Dalloway* alongside Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (Chapter 2); both writers' essays on aesthetics and Lily Briscoe and Mrs Ramsay's relationships with each other and the environments they inhabit in *To the Lighthouse* (Chapter 3); and finally, Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* and Woolf's *The Waves* (Chapter 4). Although the chapters of this study are delimited by textual focus, they trace an evolution and gradual intensification of the three thematic threads. In doing so, I highlight an enduring interest in the conceptualisation of intercorporeality as an open and evolving interweaving of perception and expression that may enable an ethical framework celebrating a simultaneous unity and difference of all beings.

Key Terms

Virginia Woolf, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, aesthetics, embodiment, ethics, intercorporeality, perception, phenomenology, relationality.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Virginia Woolf

AROO	*A Room of One's Own*
CSF	*The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*
D1-5	*The Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Vols 1-5*
E1-6	*The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vols 1-6*
L1-6	*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vols 1-6*
MB	*Moments of Being*
MD	*Mrs Dalloway*
TL	*To the Lighthouse*
TW	*The Waves*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

CD	"Cézanne's Doubt"
EM	"Eye and Mind"
PP	*Phenomenology of Perception*
VI	*The Visible and the Invisible*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

> For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (She was looking at the drawing-room steps; they looked extraordinarily empty.) It was one's body feeling, not one's mind. The physical sensations that went with the bare look of the steps had become suddenly extremely unpleasant. To want and not to have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and not to have—to want and want—how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again!
>
> To the Lighthouse (146)

An overwhelming sense of grief makes Lily Briscoe pause as she gazes at the now empty drawing-room steps, emblematic of Mrs Ramsay's absence. Her emotions are captured in the sudden shifts in her body's posture and gesture: "a hardness, a hollowness, a strain." At that moment, the visual and emotional "emptiness" that Lily experiences dissolves the apparent boundaries between the mental and the sensory so that her seeing of the vacant steps corresponds with an affective vision of Mrs Ramsay's significance and Lily's "want" for her renewed presence.

This intertwining of what is traditionally considered mental and bodily – and the reversal or revision of these categories – is often found in Virginia Woolf's fiction and non-fiction. Her essay, "On Being Ill" (*E4*:317-329), presents possibly her most sustained discussion of embodied existence in her non-fiction and the connections between what is commonly divided into either mental or bodily. From the outset, she asserts that

> [l]iterature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and, save for one or two passions such as desire and greed, is null, negligible and non-existent (*E4*:317-318).

This statement implies a series of prejudices or tendencies in literature: the adoption of the empiricist notion that perception is merely a mental exercise where the soul (or mind) "looks straight and clear" through the body; the dismissal of the body in all but those "passions" most associated with physical behaviour; and the implication that the body interferes with the clarity of the mind during such states. In contrast, Woolf argues that the opposite is true, as

> [a]ll day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane—smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant; it must go through the whole unending procession of changes, heat and cold, comfort and discomfort, hunger and satisfaction, health and illness, until there comes the inevitable catastrophe; the body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes (*E4*:318).

Although Woolf's description of "[t]he creature within" does still suggest some sense of dualism, she counters this with her description of the inability of consciousness to "separate off from the body" and the doubtful statement about the soul's "escape" after death. Instead, consciousness faces "the whole unending procession of changes", incapable of experiencing life as separate from the body.

This study offers a counter to readings of Woolf as a writer who prioritises representations of consciousness and thought separated from bodily concerns, that is, mind-body dualism,[1] and instead argues that her writing highlights underlying patterns of relationality that are grounded in embodied experience. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides an alternative to dualist approaches in his argument that "the perceiving mind is an incarnated mind" (([1962] 1964:3), thereby positing that consciousness is inherently embodied. His approach to lived

[1] While I acknowledge that Woolf studies has seen a shift from readings of her work as praising interiority, I refer here more specifically to approaches which separate that which might be termed mental (knowledge, language, creativity, thought patterns) from the physical (bodily states, expressions of affective responses).

experience as a perceptual engagement with the world highlights the possibility that a return to the pre-reflective acknowledges that the perceptual life is a precondition for knowledge rather than a product of pure abstraction or reflection. In turn, the acknowledgement and support of such a return to the pre-reflective reframes language as signifying systems that offer a proliferation of meanings which are held in tension with each other in their contexts, connotations, and individual usage. The sight of the colour red, for example, may in his terms be considered as an ever-expanding web of associations sparked by affective responses, contexts, or histories which is mediated through present and past perceptions of both the colour and the specific object perceived. Such generative meaning-making is similar to Woolf's assertion that the body "intervenes", not merely because one's physical or mental state might have a debilitating effect on perceptual ability, but because of the endless array of both latent and manifested meanings that the "atoms" (E4:160) of bodily, sensory perception provide.

The thesis turns to selections from her fiction and non-fiction to argue that Woolf represents lived experience as embodied and relational. The positing of the body acting as the point of contact and mediation between what might be viewed as "purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable" allows one to "rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and other" (Grosz, 1994:20). Furthermore, it proposes that Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the perceptual life as the starting point for the gathering and expression of knowledge which prioritises an openness to human and nonhuman worlds may be productively linked to Woolf's focus on the constitution and representation of reality in art and literature, and that both thinkers celebrate the role of the artist and artwork as sites of betweenness, as corporeal and material spaces or incarnations that enable an understanding

of intercorporeal relations between subject, other and world via artistic process and the work produced.

Modernism and Phenomenology

Various scholars have acknowledged commonalities in approaches and concerns between modernism and phenomenology,[2] evident in comments such as Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg's editorial introduction to *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond*:

> Both modernism and phenomenology steadfastly crystallize the same preoccupations concerning subjectivity: dislodging it from the hegemony of rationalism, realism and objectivity, they bespeak a crisis of values and scientific foundations that lead to a reappraisal of the self (2010:5).

This claim clearly iterates that both modernism and phenomenology prioritise an individual viewpoint, not in any sense of extreme introspection but rather as a means of contesting and complicating these notions of "rationalism, realism and objectivity". In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges phenomenology's commonality with the concerns and approaches of modernist art:

> [T]he same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to seize the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being. In this way it merges into the general effort of modern thought (*PP*:xxiv).

Phenomenology marks a return to "the pre-reflective and therefore taken-for-granted dimension of experience [which] suspends objective or theoretical notions about the world" (Mildenberg,

[2] See, in particular, the essays in Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg's (2010) edited volume, *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond*; Mildenberg's (2017) monograph *Modernism and Phenomenology: Literature, Philosophy, Art* and Mildenberg (2019) *Understanding Merleau-Ponty, Understanding Modernism*. For a more general engagement with the connections between Merleau-Ponty and modernist art see Kaushik (2011) *Art and Institution: Aesthetics in the Late Works of Merleau-Ponty* and Wiskus (2013) *The Rhythm of Thought: Art, Literature and Music after Merleau-Ponty*.

2017:3) in favour of "[starting] from that which *antedates* all standpoints: from the totality of the intuitively self-given which is prior to any theorizing reflection" (2017:3, n.16, original emphasis). Mildenberg argues that this return to the pre-reflective, also known as the phenomenological reduction, aims to

> test[ ] our pre-reflective experience and reflective expression of the world against one another. It suspends any notions of the world 'as a pregiven source of validities' not to reject those validities but to refuse 'to use them as premises, or modes of explanation, in philosophical reflection' (Husserl, cited in Mildenberg, 2017:3).

The reduction, therefore, is not an abandonment of those "conventional preconceptions and expectations" (2017:4); rather, it contests the notion that these preconceptions are the only starting point for any form of philosophical engagement with the self and the world. The return to the pre-reflective is an acknowledgement of what lies prior to any theory: that is, lived experience.

Although phenomenology prioritises lived experience, the return to the pre-reflective or pre-theoretical should not be seen as abandoning spatiotemporal context or scientific understanding. The reduction does not, as Terry Eagleton claims, ignore "the actual historical context of the literary work, its authors, conditions of production and readership", nor does it try to achieve an "'immanent' reading of the text, totally unaffected by anything outside it" ([1983] 2008:51). Eagleton's argument against phenomenology wholly misunderstands the nature of the reduction in that he believes it is "an idealist, essentialist, anti-historical, formalist and organicist type of criticism" ([1983] 2008:51) which ignores the existence or meaningfulness of the external world. On the contrary, Husserl writes that "[o]ur phenomenological idealism does *not* deny the positive existence of the real…world and of Nature…Its sole take and service is to clarify the meaning of

this world" (Husserl, cited in Mildenberg,2017:5, original emphasis). Merleau-Ponty, in a similar vein, argues that his work does not deny scientific thinking, but that

> a thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the 'there is' which precedes it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and humanly modified world such as it is in our lives and for our bodies (EM:122).

He counters stances such as Eagleton's in his insistence that philosophy and science should "return…to the site…of the sensible and humanly modified world" as doing so would consider subjectivity in perpetual negotiation with its context.

Eagleton's criticism of modernist artwork makes similar claims to those rendered against phenomenology:

> The modernist work brackets off the reference or real historical world, thickens its textures and deranges its form to forestall instant consumability, and draw its own language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object, free of all contaminating truck with the real. Brooding self-reflexively on its own being, it distances itself through irony from the shame of being no more than a brute self-identical thing (cited in Butler, 1994:273).

Interestingly, his mention of "bracketing" has been used in a more positive sense to refer to the process of the phenomenological reduction, as Husserl argues that phenomenology does not "abandon" conventional preconceptions about the world but "[sets] it as it were 'out of action,' we 'disconnect it,' 'bracket it.' It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket" (Husserl, [1931] 2012:57). Therefore, one might argue that both phenomenology and modernism do not abandon these preconceptions but instead bracket them, thereby "[restoring] openness to this world, bringing to light the condition that underlies experience and affirming the intrinsic *relation* between subject and object, art work and world" (Bourne-Taylor & Mildenberg, 2010:7, original emphasis).

This study draws on existing scholarship focused on Woolf's potential ties to phenomenology,[3] such as Jo Ann Circosta's (2006) doctoral thesis "Witness to Consciousness: Virginia Woolf and Phenomenology" and Emma Simone's *Virginia Woolf and Being-in-the-world: A Heideggerian Study* (2017). Circosta's extensive exploration of the nature and structure of consciousness in Woolf's writing draws particularly on Husserlian phenomenology. She demonstrates that while Woolf's claim about her own "philosophy" or "constant idea" in "A Sketch of the Past" (*MB*:61-159) may not seem formally tied to any stream of philosophy, her fiction and non-fiction can most convincingly be linked to phenomenological approaches. Simone explores facets of Heidegger's Being-in-the-world as evident in Woolf's writing, particularly with the aim to demonstrate the intersubjective, embodied nature of being. She also cites Woolf's "philosophy" but does not develop this much beyond attributing it to a "state of mind that is defined by an openness to Being-in-the-world, thereby allowing for the possibility that the extraordinary nature of the ordinary might show forth in the midst of average everydayness" (Simone, 2017:225). However, it focuses on Merleau-Ponty (who is mentioned, though not treated as an essential element in either scholar's work) in order to demonstrate how Woolf's notions of consciousness may further be considered as embodied, and her depictions of relationships between self, others, and world as intercorporeal.

More specifically, I also follow on from and hope to expand other scholars' work on Woolf and Merleau-Ponty, particularly that of Ariane Mildenberg, Kelly Sultzbach, and Louise Westling.

[3] While the most significant scholarship is discussed broadly in the main body of the text, the following provides a preliminary list of specific textual foci that complements the overarching thematic strands discussed above. Further references to scholarship are also included in relevant later chapters. For a reading of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reduction in Woolf's short story "The Mark on the Wall", see Mildenberg (2010). For analyses of various elements of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in relation to Woolf's writing: for *Mrs Dalloway* see Foo (2017), for *To the Lighthouse*, see Doyle (1994), Mazis (2019), Moise (2011) and Sultzbach (2016); for *The Waves* see Mildenberg (2017).

Mildenberg has published extensively on intersections between modernist and phenomenological thought, such as *Modernism and Phenomenology: Literature, Philosophy, Art* (2017), and the edited volume *Understanding Merleau-Ponty, Understanding Modernism* (2019) in which she is also a contributor. Although she follows a broader textual focus, often drawing on various writers, artists, and critics in the modernist period, she has specifically worked with a selection of Woolf's texts. Her work is grounded in the tracing of shared approaches to creative expression in both fields, and argues that modernism, much like phenomenology, calls for a return to "primordial faith" which allows for embodied artistic engagement with the world. These embodied connections are taken further by both Kelly Sultzbach and Louise Westling who incorporate Merleau-Ponty in a variety of ecophenomenological readings. Westling's "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World" (1999) reads *Between the Acts* alongside Merleau-Ponty's work as demonstrating a new humanism that argues for a non-hierarchical ecological worldview that stands counter to the fascism of the approaching war. These arguments are further developed in *The Logos of the Living World Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language* (2014) where she explores more fully the connections between his philosophy and conceptualisations of the biosphere in relation to a wide range of texts from various periods. Sultzbach's *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination: Forster, Woolf, and Auden* (2016) follows similar ecocritical arguments as Westling but her chapter on Woolf expands Westling's discussions of relationality as ethically driven and considers how Merleau-Ponty's celebration of literary language may be connected to his, and others', ecocritical approaches. These three scholars' work provide three main theoretical starting-points for this study: 1) overlapping in approaches to generative and creative meaning-making between phenomenology and modernism, 2) the possibility of reading modernist texts, particularly Woolf, as challenging anthropocentric views in their depictions of human and nonhuman relationships, and 3) the importance of language and

expression as underpinning the above. This thesis aims to extend some of the argumentative threads present in these and other related studies, specifically the overlapping between the fields in their celebration of generative, open-ended meaning-creation, the emphasis on the relational and intercorporeal systems in Woolf's writing, and the possibility that both writers' approach to language demonstrates a shared interest in betweenness where animals, ideas, people, and things are held in productive tension that enables affective, ethical, and ecocritical responses to the world.

Although there is no evidence that Merleau-Ponty read Woolf, Louise Westling argues that Woolf should be considered in the same philosophical and literary context as Merleau-Ponty:

> Woolf's dynamic, participatory vision of the real is very close to the thinking of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was responding from within the same modernist intellectual milieu as Virginia Woolf, to the same developments in physics, and the same twentieth century impulse to overthrow or move beyond the Cartesian separation of subject and object, and its complicity with the Newtonian mechanistic metaphors of the cosmos (1999:856).

Similarly, Mildenberg argues:

> [M]odernist literature and art…present us with new artistic models embodied in a shift of perspective, uncovering what Merleau-Ponty thought of as a 'primordial faith ' […] that is, a faith in a prereflective contact with the world as the foundation for artistic inquiry (2017:2).

While Mildenberg's comment is quite general, her discussion of *The Waves* later in the same monograph indicates that the statement may be applied more specifically to Woolf's writing. There is certainly an overlap between the two thinkers in terms of the arts,[4] with both reading Proust[5]

[4] Further discussion about both thinkers' engagement with the arts will feature in later chapters, though some references to other studies on this topic are given in the notes below.

[5] Woolf mentions Proust frequently, see for instance "On Being Ill" (*E4*:317-329), "Pictures" (*E4*:243-247), "The Psychologists", *D3*:7, *L2*:525. Shore's 1979 article "Virginia Woolf, Proust, and *Orlando*" as well as Mares' (1989) "Reading Proust: Woolf and the Painter's Perspective" provide overviews of Woolf's engagement with and interpretations of Proust's writing. Proust features extensively in Merleau-Ponty's writing, especially *The Visible and*

and Mallarmé[6] and writing about Cézanne.[7] While this study does not intend to impose any direct influence of Woolf on Merleau-Ponty or phenomenology on Woolf, the clear indications of a shared artistic context assist in bringing their writing into conversation with each other. In doing so, this study aims not only to acknowledge and interrogate this shared context but also to consider how Woolf's writing articulates an embodied connectedness which encompasses the human and nonhuman worlds.

Mind and Body

The body has been a contentious entity for philosophers throughout the ages, often placed "in the position of being somehow subordinate to and dependent for all that is interesting about it on animating intentions" (Grosz, 1994:vii). Although a historical overview of conceptions of the body is not the focus of my research, some important milestones in Western philosophy should be noted due to their lasting effects on the conceptualisation of the body in contemporary theory. Perhaps most (in)famously, Descartes's separation of the soul from nature – that is, the division between *res cogitans* (the thinking substance, mind) and *res extensa* (an extended substance, body) – finalised the distinction between mind and body already made since Plato's notion of the Forms, thereby

the Invisible and *The Phenomenology of Perception*. See also Kaushik's analysis of Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Proust (2011:91-111) and various chapters from Wiskus's (2013) *The Rhythm of Thought: Art, Music, Literature after Merleau-Ponty*.

[6] Woolf briefly includes Mallarmé in "On Being Ill" (*E4*:324) and discusses Fry's engagement with and translation of his poetry in *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940:239, 244, 279, 288, 297). There are also various other references to his work in her writing (*E3*:119; *L2*:439, 565). Merleau-Ponty includes Mallarmé in "Cézanne's Doubt" (CD:68). The links between them are further analysed by Wiskus (2013:1-12).

[7] The Hogarth Press published Fry's *Cézanne: A Study of his Development* and Woolf was familiar with his work through the post-impressionist exhibitions and other viewings of his art among friends (*D1*:140-1; *L2*:230; *L3*:29). Connections have also been drawn between Woolf's and Merleau-Ponty's understandings of Cézanne, such as in Moise's (2011) interpretation of Lily Briscoe's artistic process in light of Merleau-Ponty's writings on aesthetics and painting.

declaring that the soul or mind may be regarded as having no place in the natural world, existing instead in a "position of hierarchical superiority" as the substance capable of reflecting on "the world of the body, objects, qualities" (Grosz, 1994:6).

The notion of objective thought stems from the underlying dualistic prioritisation of the mind. This line of thinking suggests that the world can and should be understood from a detached point of view that ignores individual perspectives. Such an account is presented without any links to a particular position in space or time, a view from "nowhere". While such objective understandings have been fruitfully applied to scientific or mathematical truths – Newton's laws do not exist based on subjective experience or desire – dualism's prioritisation of the mind suggests that all knowledge of the world and its objects should be understood as a purely mental exercise done by a transcendental consciousness which is not tied to any particularity of bodily experience.

Two variants of objective thought – empiricism and intellectualism – enforce the primacy of the mental and regard the body as a physical object "which is answerable to causal laws [and which] does not differ in any significant respect from other physical objects" (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011:62). While empiricism holds that consciousness is "the result of causal going-on in the body" (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011:62), intellectualism views consciousness as lying outside of the world of things, and as wholly different from it. Although intellectualism views consciousness as a subject, unlike empiricism's view of it as an object, it upholds the claim that the body is still an object, thereby separating the non-physical consciousness (subject) from the physical body (object).

Phenomenology and the Body-Subject

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology presents a counter to the types of objective thought described above. Rather than present a philosophical theory which outlines the nature of existence as a finite, knowable system where consciousness is either a result of a neuroscientific process or a transcendental Ego, he argues that phenomenology "seeks to describe our existence in the world" (Matthews, 2010:20) as a constant engagement between the subjective experiences of an individual and an independent world of things and other subjects. The phenomenological world, for Merleau-Ponty,

> is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage with each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own (*PP*:xxii).

In *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1962] 2005), Merleau-Ponty posits that this intersection is found in the lived experience of the embodied subject. The body, rather than a physical object in the world of things, is a subject; it is the means of "communication with [the world]…the world no longer conceived as a collection of determinate objects, but as the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought" (*PP*:92). Thus, the body is both a tangible object and a subject or form of consciousness. This conceptualisation of the body means that there is "no ontological separation between the experiencing 'I' and the body as one lives it" (Morris, [2008] 2014:111). His claim that "I am my body" (*PP*:231) expresses how he intertwines the notions of embodiment, consciousness, and being-in-the-world so that the experiencing "I" is equitable to the lived body as "one's intentional opening to the world, through which alone one experiences meaningful things in the first place" (Morris, [2008] 2014:111).

The lived body's "intentional opening to the world" is found in the act of perception, a "direct contact with the world…[which] takes the form of active engagement with the things around us" (Matthews, 2010:35) rather than a passive reception of representations or sensations from an external objective world, and the subsequent interpretation of these. In his overview of phenomenological perception, Eric Matthews argues that phenomenology, contrary to the philosophical views that either posit perception as a purely mental activity separated from the object-based world or as a passive response to external stimuli, is grounded in a necessarily subjective gaze:

> [W]e perceive the world always from a certain individual point of view that embodies not only our literal spatial position but our active purposes and emotions; the objects of our awareness are thus experienced by us in their relation to those goals and feelings, and in that sense as having a meaning for us (Matthews, 2002:68).

The attachment of meaning is firstly subjective prior to any movement towards an objective, abstracted, scientific conclusion. Things – tangible or not – hold the meanings and values that they do "because of our interest in them, which shapes the character of our engagement with them" (Matthews, 2010:35). These meanings may be purely personal to an individual – emotional attachment, aesthetic preference – or shared with others – practical use associations, economic value. That is not to say that facts about the world cannot exist – the strength of my desk is not dependent on my personal choice, for example, but on scientific calculations – but rather that the world is constituted by collections of personal meanings which I *create*, and shared meanings which I *find* in my interaction with the world. The perceiver both "acts on the world as well as being acted upon by it" (Matthews, 2010:37), thereby engaging in a continuous creation and reproduction of individual and collective meaning. As Alcoff describes, "[t]he world is laden with a depth of meaning without total closure or consistency […] because the temporal texture of

experience folds the absent and the past into the present moment" (2000:258). The lived experience of the world is "an open totality the synthesis of which is inexhaustible" (*PP*:255). Although this claim seems to pre-empt poststructuralism's insistence on the inevitable deferral of linguistic meaning, phenomenology situates this lack of certainty instead in reflections of lived, embodied experience.

Temporality

Merleau-Ponty's notion of a perpetual (un)folding of temporal experience is grounded in the doubled definition of the French *sens*. *Sens* can be translated into English as both "direction" and "meaning". In his explication of the first definition, he uses the analogy of a flowing stream to demonstrate the seeming succession of past, present, and future. While the analogy of flowing water (passing time) may seem to present a logical understanding of a linear chronology, it implies that one can observe these distinctive points of past, present, and future from an external vantage point – a stance completely contradictory to beliefs grounded in the embodied nature of existence. Instead, he argues, one may still use the analogy with some alterations:

> If the observer sits in a boat and is carried by the current, we may say that he is moving downstream towards his future, but the future lies in the new landscapes which await him at the estuary, and the course of time is no longer the stream itself: it is the landscape as it rolls by for the moving observer (*PP*:478).

The embodied subject observes the flow of time as a perpetually moving relationship between the figure moving and being moved through the water and the landscape to the side of the stream. Time, in this "abstract" sense, may be external to one's existence, but the experience thereof is necessarily embodied in the direction of one's life.

The experience of time is an integral part of embodiment as it relates to the (re)production of meaning, as indicated in the quotation Merleau-Ponty offers at the start of his chapter on "Temporality": "Time is the sense of life [as in] the sense of a sentence" (cited in Toadvine, 2009:218).[8] Perception, that "intentional opening to the world" (Matthews, 2010:35), is understood through the ways in which we make contact with the world, perhaps most notably in the sense that these interactions take place over time. Present perceptions are not solely causally related to past perceptions, but present and past form a "continuing life history" (Mathews, 2002:60) in which perception and action confer meaning.

Meaning, as I have previously suggested, is both conceived in individually subjective terms and as the intersubjectivity[9] of my body as a body-subject in a world populated with other embodied subjects. Thus, the "life history" of temporally experienced perceptions also refers "to a world that is always already there before I come upon it and yet a world in which I live" (Alcoff, 2000:259):

> We therefore recognize, around our initiatives and around that strictly individual project which is oneself, a zone of generalized existence and of projects already formed, significances which trail between ourselves and things […] Already generality intervenes, already our presence to ourselves is mediated by it and we cease to be pure consciousness, as soon as the natural or social constellation […] crystallizes into a situation, as soon as it has a meaning—in short, as soon as we exist (*PP*:523).

The world is "the background from which all acts stand out […] the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions" (*PP*:xi-xii). This means that the lived body "has culture and meaning inscribed in its habits, in its specific forms of perception and

[8] Translated by Toadvine, originally presented as an epigraph from Paul Claudel's *Art Poétique* in French: "Le temps est le sens de la vie (sens: comme on dit […] le sens d'une phrase […]" (PP:476).

[9] Intersubjectivity is used here in light of Merleau-Ponty's preference for the term in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I shift in later chapters toward "intercorporeality", in line with his reappraisal of subjectivity.

comportment" (Young, cited in Alcoff, 1997:22) – collective meanings produced and continued by other embodied subjects prior to an individual's life and possibly also thereafter.

The Imaginal Lining of the Perceptual

A vital aspect of Merleau-Ponty's approach to perception, and one which has, until recently, received little attention,[10] is his view of imagination. Glen Mazis argues that Merleau-Ponty's focus on the relationship between perception and imagination was a gradual process but that there are clues throughout his writing that "demonstrate how perception's fuller sense is only possible as thoroughly wedded to imagination, how the imaginal is as central to being as is the perceptual" (2016:175). This differs from most approaches to imagination in Western philosophy, as it has often been regarded as wholly different from the perception of the real or as mere mental fantasy:

> [T]he imaginal has been…disregarded by most Western philosophical and cultural traditions as being part of our access to meaning and truth. For empiricism, at least important factual value is given to sensations, but imagination is taken to be merely their decaying sense, revived and recombined, which by itself offers no key insight into the nature of existence. The imagination has often been portrayed by idealism as the mind's fanciful contents unfettered by any necessary fidelity to the world […] Culturally, the imagination has often been linked to 'make believe,' a childish foolishness suited to entertain at best, at worst perhaps the mark of decadence or malfunctioning of mental capacity in hallucinations (Mazis, 2016:176).

Contrary to this, Merleau-Ponty's writing regards the imaginal as an essential part of the perception of the real. His early writing, specifically the *Phenomenology of Perception*, does not provide a sustained discussion of it but does "[employ] abundantly a set of terms associated with the imaginal, not to challenge the particular kind of representations and behaviour that one currently calls the imagination, but to describe perception, the lived body and the life-world" (Dufourcq,

[10] Possible reasons for these are explored and countered in James Morley's chapter "The Texture of the Real: Merleau-Ponty on Imagination and Psychopathology" (2003).

cited in Mazis, 2016:177, cf. n7). From the start of the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty includes the imaginal in his discussion of prereflective experience:

> Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things whose presence is not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of the imaginary (*PP*:xi).

Mazis argues that Merleau-Ponty's notion of imagination can be seen as "poles on a continuum" where one extreme is "those pure figments of imagination that are utterly at odds with the perceived world and point to what is 'pure fantasy'" while the other encompasses "those images, sounds, and feelings that seem to line percepts and give them sense, vitality, and depth" (2016:179). Moments which lean closer to "pure fantasy" add little to our perceptions of the real as these have "no depth, and [do] not respond to our efforts to vary our points of view" (*PP*:377). In Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the imaginal the former sense is grounded in his belief that "[t]he real lends itself to unending exploration; it is inexhaustible" (*PP*:378), so there "are always more facets and more senses to uncover"; in the latter definition, the phantasm remains a creation "at odds with the real world" (Mazis, 2016:181) which does not inform any prereflective process of perception such as the phenomenological reduction.

Mazis summarises the characteristics of the imaginal (in the former sense) as: "movements toward intensification, making more present, bringing into connection with other qualities, having the context infiltrate the focus, creating a felt intimacy in one's embodying being" (2016:191-2). This may, for example, be seen in the perceptions and effects of some of the elements of art, such as line, colour, or texture. Each of these elements includes both perceived and felt meanings – one might perceive a particular colour as such but also experience an affective response to it, for example, the tranquillity often associated with blues or the vitality of reds and oranges while a series

of diagonal lines might evoke dynamism or movement. The relationship between the perceived and the affective or the imaginal in these examples – and the perceptions of other more tangible objects – forms the basis for Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the imaginal in the arts and literature.

The Flesh of the World

Merleau-Ponty's unfinished and posthumously published work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, presents the culmination of his interrogation into the seeming subject/object divide. While he has previously dismissed the separation between the consciousness-subject and body-object, he further revises the arguments presented in the *Phenomenology of Perception* in his later writing.

The beginnings of his understanding of the inherent connections between subject and object are presented in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> This subject-object dialogue, this drawing together, by the subject, of the meaning diffused through the object, and, by the object, of the subject's intentions—a process which is physiognomic perception—arranges round the subject a world which speaks to him of himself, and gives his own thoughts their place in the world (*PP*:152).

This description of perception is presented as simultaneous interlacing where "like a dialogue, perception leads the subject to draw together the sense diffused throughout the object while, simultaneously, the object solicits and unifies the intentions of the subject" (Evans & Lawlor, 2000:4). Although this appears highly abstract, Merleau-Ponty's example of two hands touching demonstrates the simultaneity and doubling of invitation and response, sentient being and sensed thing:

> This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them… (*VI*:133).

In the moment of two hands touching, they are both sentient (an active limb consciously moved) and sensed (a thing which can be touched). That is not to say that Merleau-Ponty would believe that touching a table would confer sentience upon the object but that there is an "invitation" on the part of the world of things, and a response, or meaning-creation in the body-subject's engagement with this.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he strives to move beyond the dichotomies created in the implicit positioning of the consciousness/body as subject and the "external" world as object. His last work attempts to capture the "intimacy" between the "visible" and the "seer", which is "as close as [that] between the sea and the strand" (*VI*:130-31). Neither the body nor the world is subsumed by the other, for to do so would deny the simultaneity of both seeing and being seen; instead, the body, other bodies, and the world are all aspects of a single reality – "flesh". The potentiality for the seer also to be seen, or the toucher to be touched, creates a sense of crossing over, a *chiasm*, where we are "at once seeing/sensing subjects and seen/sensed objects in a world of others just like ourselves" (Mildenberg, 2017:2).

Merleau-Ponty defines this crossing over as a "sort of dehiscence" which, in the act of perception, does not fully result in a "fusion or coinciding of me with [the world]" but an "overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things" (*VI*:123). Perception, therefore, is constituted by both a "dehiscence" or separation between the seer and the seen and a "folding over" (*VI*:126) or overlapping of these parts – it is an interlacing of both commonality and difference which has no finalised definitions and which rests in the relationality of these ideas.

Experiences of this dehiscence and reversibility[11] are "lived in the *flesh*" (Hass, 2008:137, original emphasis). Merleau-Ponty presents the "flesh" as "an ultimate notion" and argues that "there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it" (*VI*:139-140). He uses the term in various ways, but each connects to the descriptions of perception offered above. Perhaps most simplistically, the flesh refers to the "carnality and physicality of ourselves and our relations in the world" (Hass, 2008:138). In "Eye and Mind", he describes how

> [the] body…is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body" (EM:125).

This is not merely a reference to the idea that we are "flesh and bone" but rather a nod to an intercorporeality[12] of enmeshed things.

Secondly, flesh may refer to the reversibility of the paradoxical overlapping and interlacing of things that are "different but not opposite" (Hass, 2008:139). In one of his iterations of the "folding over" of the seeing/seen or touching/touched, he explains:

> There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself *surrounded* by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed

[11] Hass summarises these as: "In brief, *écart* [dehiscence] is a difference-spacing-openness at the heart of perceptual experience which is not opposition. Reversibility is the overlapping perceptual relation that folds around *écart*— the 'intertwining' or 'cohesion' of what is radically different." (2008:137).

[12] Although Merleau-Ponty uses this term ([1953] 1988:150; *VI*:143; [1960] 1977:19, 168, 173; [2003] 2010:188) and its possible synonym, intercorporeity (*VI*:141, 162, 172; [1995] 2003:273, 277; [1996] 2022:103, 312, 314) in various texts, he does not supply a definition for either. The term might be defined by examining its two parts: inter + corporeality. Inter, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "Between or among other things or persons; between the parts of, in the intervals of, or in the midst of, something; together with; between times or places, at intervals, here and there" (2022), while "corporeality" refers to "The quality or state of being corporeal; bodily form or nature; materiality" (n.d.). Together, they gesture in Merleau-Ponty's writing not only to a shared tangibility of the human and nonhuman but importantly to the relationality between bodies, parts of one flesh, or times and places, and the intervals or gaps between these.

> a Visibility, a Tangible in itself . . . It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself . . . that we have previously called flesh (*VI*:139, original emphasis).

The dehiscence lies in that moment of "turn[ing] back", the realisation of the necessary difference between seeing/seen. Simultaneously, however, there is an interlacing of the "generality of the Sensible in itself" so that the vision and the visible are inherently connected, folded back upon each other in the overarching notion of the flesh.

Finally, Merleau-Ponty argues that "to designate [flesh], we should need the old term 'element,' […] in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea" (*VI*:139, original emphasis). In this sense, the flesh becomes a principle that "has countless, heterogeneous instantiations, and is presupposed in the life of anyone who offers an ontology" (Hass, 2008:140).

While the above has implicitly focused on "the visible" – the act of seeing, the sensation of being touched, the carnality of the flesh – Merleau-Ponty's final text also considers "the invisible" – ideas, language, knowledge – and how this might relate to the visible, that is, the "bond between the flesh and the idea" (*VI*:149). His account of "the invisible" is rooted in what he terms "expression" so that the invisible is that which makes the visibility of something possible. He demonstrates this by referring to Swann's fascination with the "little phrase" of Vinteuil's violin sonata in Proust's *Swann's Way*:

> No one has gone further than Proust in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible, in describing an idea that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth […] Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are…the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas. The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity (*VI*:149).

Merleau-Ponty's focus lies in Proust's descriptions of Swann's inability to recapture the true character of the "little phrase", even after acquiring a copy of the score, and in the transformative quality it holds for his life. The "invisible", therefore, does not refer to the technical musicality of the notes but to what lies "*behind* or *between* the sounds as rhythm" (Wiskus, 2013:95), that is, the thing which "*sustains the world*…illuminates phenomena…[and] *renders visible*" (Wiskus, 2013:93-4, original emphasis). Although Merleau-Ponty's example above focuses on music, his description may more generally be attributed to what he has called the "bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals" (*VI*:149):

> [The little phrases] could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart (*VI*:150, original emphasis).

This bond is seen in the moment of expression, the "heart" of sensible (sensory) experiences. As Wiskus (2013:93) elaborates, "the realm of the senses offers the chance of their articulation [and] their very power of affectivity…springs from performative, dynamic realization." Importantly, expression is not depicted as the imposition of "an artificial order on things in a detached way" (Adams, [2008] 2014:160) – Swann is never truly capable of capturing the "invisible" of the musical idea by studying its orchestration. Instead, Merleau-Ponty suggests that expression is at its most creative and meaningful in an acknowledgement of the interlacing of world and self:

> It is not enough […] to create and express an idea; [one] must also awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others. If a work is successful, it has the strange power of being self-teaching (CD:70).

This is not a call for all art to be morally founded, but it suggests that the creative act should both "allow meaningful discourse" to be expressed, and "[give] birth to…meaning or beauty" (Adams, [2008] 2014:161) that enables us to connect with the embodied experience of "the things themselves" (*VI*:4).

Woolf's "Philosophy"

Woolf's writings about the artistic process reflect this thinking quite closely, particularly in her memoir, "A Sketch of the Past" (*MB*:64-159). In a digression from her accounts of her childhood, she attempts to explain her troubles with understanding why some experiences seem to be remembered as "exceptional" (*MB*:69) while others fade from memory. In particular, what puzzles her is why one may "[forget] so many things that must have been…more memorable than what [one does] remember" (*MB*:70).

Her following discussion details her struggles in describing what she terms "non-being" (*MB*:70) when writing and, in contrast, her gradual refinement of the artistic rendering of "moments of being" (*MB*:70). "Non-being", for Woolf, encompasses any lived experience which is "not lived consciously", a "kind of nondescript cotton wool" (*MB*:70) which seems to be lost in memory. The experiences of "non-being" she lists are not all necessarily unpleasant, but they can be summarised as "deal[ing] with what has to be done" (*MB*:70). Her childhood was similarly filled with a "large proportion of this cotton wool" (*MB*:71), yet three particular instances stand out in her memories. Her accounts of sudden shock and horror, experienced when fighting with her brother and when overhearing her father speak of a family acquaintance's suicide, are both clearly embodied experiences. In the first, she involuntarily lets her fist that she had raised to hit Thoby fall, feels a "hopeless sadness" at the thought that someone might hurt another, and "[slinks] off

alone, feeling horribly depressed" (*MB*:71). Her body seems to act even more involuntarily in the second memory. She remembers overhearing her father speak of the man's suicide, and then, with no clear memory of the time-lapse, recalls that later that evening she wandered in the garden "on the path by the apple tree" (*MB*:71). Although the apple tree has no connection with the suicide, she remembers thinking that somehow it "was connected with the horror" and that she "could not pass it" (*MB*:71). Similarly to the previous example, there is a clear link between the involuntary action – or statis in this case – and an extreme feeling of "some pit of absolute despair" (*MB*:71).

In comparison, her memory of another such sudden revelation ends "in a state of satisfaction" (*MB*:71). This memory is of seeing a flower and coming to the sudden recognition that the flower was "a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower" (*MB*:71). The difference, she argues, was that she "was conscious – if only at a distance—that [she] should in time explain [the moment]" (*MB*:72). Woolf describes how her response to these moments of shock, positive or negative, increasingly became focused on "putting it into words" as in doing so she believes that she brings forward "a revelation of some order…a token of some real thing behind appearances" (*MB*:72).

This writing process of "putting [the sensation] into words" means that she is able to "put the severed parts together" and "make it whole" (*MB*:72). Much like Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that Proust's "little phrase" is not so much the series of notes or the technical ability of the musician but rather the embodied experience of both artist and listener, Woolf argues that "behind the cotton wool" of everyday embodied experiences "is hidden a pattern" (*MB*:72). This pattern is not some abstracted, transcendental force but a sense of connection that "the whole world is a work of art" which dissolves the individualities of self and other, subject and object, until "we are the words;

we are the music; we are the thing itself" (*MB*:72). The origin of this sensation of wholeness implicitly remains in the sensory as she indicates that she "sees this when [she has] a shock" (*MB*:72), thereby reiterating connections between her "philosophy" and the affective and physical responses she has experienced (*MB*:71-2) during these moments.

Her moment in front of the flower during her childhood captures this balance between the specificity of embodied experience – there is a clear "I" subject looking at the plant and consciously perceiving its various parts – and the possibility that the flower, the earth, and herself might all be "parts of the work of art" (MB:72). At this moment an interlacing, or perhaps in Merleau-Ponty's words, "a folding over" (*VI*:126), occurs between the sensing "I" and the sensed flora. While Woolf draws a "ring" around the earth and the flower, thereby possibly excluding the viewing self, her later conceptualisation of her writing process as "put[ting] the severed parts together [and] discovering what belongs to what" (*MB*:722) suggests an understanding of that "dehiscence" or interlacing which acknowledges simultaneous unity and difference in the world. Therefore, her conclusion that the "world [as] a work of art" is the "pattern" presents an artistic approach in line with Merleau-Ponty's call for a philosophical return "to the things themselves" (*VI*:4), centred in authentic embodied experience:

> It is the body and it alone…that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world (*VI*:136).

Woolf's assertion, then, that "we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself" presents an openness to the world, an implicit coexistence which seeks to express the patterns of existence hidden behind the cotton wool of "not [consciously lived]" life.

Chapter Outline

The chapters are structured around varying textual foci for both writers, bringing these into dialogue with each other to explore iterations of the perceptual life present in their work. Rather than forming a strict theoretical background for this study, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is placed in conversation with Woolf's writing in an attempt to illustrate how both thinkers' "philosophy is…inseparable from all that [they] write[ ]" (*E2*:246) and that, rather than having philosophy or literature become "objects of study" for one another's discipline, "the literary writer [becomes] a partner of the phenomenologist" (Johnson, 2020:2) and vice versa.

Chapter Two focuses on a selection of Woolf's shorter fiction ("The Mark on the Wall", "Solid Objects", and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection") and *Mrs Dalloway* alongside Merleau-Ponty's earlier work, *The Phenomenology of Perception* ([1962] 2002). Together, these texts demonstrate close attention to embodied perception and perspective that return to and rely upon pre-reflective existence as the point of contact with an intercorporeal world. This conceptualisation of perception is highlighted in the intricate web of narrative perspectives and multivocality in *Mrs Dalloway,* where notions of self, other, and world are kept in a productive state of negotiation with one another.

The next chapter further develops the implications of such negotiable meaning systems, specifically in relation to literary or visual artists' engagement with the perceptual world as part of the creative process. Here Merleau-Ponty's essays on aesthetics are paired with Woolf's non-fiction on this topic ("Pictures" (*E4*:243-7), "Foreword to *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*" (*E5*:137-42) and "Walter Sickert: A Conversation" (*E6*:36-51), as well as selected sections from *To the Lighthouse*. The chapter explores notions of creative processes where the artist acts within an intercorporeal

web as a site of betweenness – particularly between perception and expression – and how these may be translated for art, literature, and philosophy. Finally, it proposes that the prioritisation given to embodied perception as underpinning knowledge and creativity may present an ethics of intimacy.

Chapter Four turns to Merleau-Ponty's final work in *The Visible and the Invisible* ([1964] 1968) and the course notes from *Institution and Passivity* ([2003] 2010) and *Nature* ([1995] 2003) alongside *The Waves*. It discusses his central ontology of the chiasm as an intertwining of elements which are grounded in a shared flesh of the world in connection with Woolf's relational narrative and textual strategies in *The Waves*, suggesting that Woolf's depiction of the characters within a larger entanglement of the human and nonhuman reaches similar ecological conclusions as those of Merleau-Ponty. Specifically, their treatments of relational poetic language, such as metaphor, are similar in that they valorise asymmetrical kinships where non-coincidence acts as an ethical counter to homogenising systems.

Together, the chapters present detailed textual analyses of both writers' work and demonstrate the independently reached but still similarly-minded approaches to embodied perception as the originary point for an attentive openness to the expression of an ethical relationality through the literary or philosophical text.

CHAPTER 2
LOOKING AT THIS OR THAT

> The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. [...] Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.
>
> "Modern Fiction" (*E*4:160)

The statement above is a familiar one, often associated with Woolf's desire to depict the mental processes of her characters. However, what is less remarked upon is the interplay of mental and physical: the implicit understanding that these "impressions" are first experienced as part of an embodied existence and subsequently internalised or "score[d] upon the consciousness". While Woolf's focus arguably lies more in the latter part of the process than the former, her writing does not seek an interiority at the expense of any engagement with that which might be considered external: the body, objects, others, the world. The claims in "Modern Fiction" (*E*4:157-165) that the materialists "are concerned not with the spirit but with the body" (*E*4:158) and that they "write of unimportant things [and] spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (*E*4:159) highlight her derision of a particular *attitude* towards lived experience. These writers, she argues, painstakingly aim to prove "the solidity, the likeness to life" (*E*4:160) in fiction, and yet in doing so, "more often miss[ ] than secure[ ]…life or spirit, truth or reality [as] the essential thing, has moved off, or on" (*E*4:160). Her seeming disregard for the body may, therefore, be seen not as a privileging of interiority but rather a refusal

to depict the body according to a particular "design" (*E*4:160) which provides little, if any, insight into the nature of the consciousness and experiences of a character.

Evidence for Woolf's acknowledgement of, and interest in, matters of embodied perception is clearly outlined in a comment in "How it Strikes a Contemporary" (*E*4:233-242), which contemplates the notion of "contemporary" literature in relation to an overarching literary history. In her discussion of works by Wordsworth, Scott and Austen, in contrast to those of the "moderns" (*E*4:239), she claims that the moderns are "stimulated by 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" (*E*4:239). These descriptors suggest a consideration of the human subject as both mind and body and that those "senses" which might more commonly be considered bodily – sight, hearing, touch – are intertwined with the mental – depth, complexity, self.

The following discussion of a selection of Woolf's short stories, as well as extracts from *Mrs Dalloway,* considers how Woolf's focus on consciousness may be conceived as embodied and how perception, particularly visual,[13] is used in representations of the connections between subjects, objects, and world.[14]

Perspectivism in Woolf's Shorter Fiction

Woolf frequently employs specific perceptual fields as narrative devices which examine "life" in new and unexpected ways, disregarding the mimetic style of the realists in favour of considering

[13] For further sources on the visual in Woolf's works see Claudia Olk's *Virginia Woolf and the Aesthetics of Vision* (2014) and Savina Stevanato, *Visuality and Spatiality in Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (2012).

[14] My discussion of embodiment is grounded in Molly Hite's reminder that "point of view [in Woolf's fiction] is always *someone's* point of view" (2010:252, original emphasis).

how sensory perception may influence one's reflections and engagement with the world. This is clearly seen in stories such as "The Mark on the Wall", "Solid Objects", and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection".[15] These stories challenge notions of objective perception and manipulate the visual to demonstrate how sensory perception, particularly the visual, may encourage or limit mental reflection.

"The Mark on the Wall"

"The Mark on the Wall" (*CSF*:83-89) is an early example of Woolf's continued interest in perspective and the depictions of the mind reflecting on specific visual perceptions. It follows the speaker's reflections on various topics sparked by her visual perceptions of an unknown mark on the facing wall. The narrative begins by clearly outlining the lived experience of the space as she argues, "[i]n order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one *saw*" (*CSF*:83, emphasis added). Memories of her physical surroundings are built up bit by perceived bit: the "steady film of yellow light" from the fire and the smoked cigarette together convince the speaker that it was "winter time, and we had just finished our tea" (*CSF*:83). She semi-automatically adjusts her gaze, looking "through the smoke of [her] cigarette" away from the fire's embers and focusing instead on the mark on the wall which "[is] a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantlepiece" (*CSF*:83). These observations, together with her decision to remain seated in her "chair" (*CSF*:83-4, 85) and perhaps smoke the cigarette, suggest that although she is close enough to notice the mark on the facing wall, she is too far away immediately to deduce

[15] While "Kew Gardens" and *Flush* are also notable examples where Woolf extends this experimentation to include nonhuman perspectives, this diverges somewhat from the focus of this study. See Derek Ryan's chapter "The Question of the Animal in *Flush*" in his monograph *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (2013:132-70) and Kelly Sultzbach's exploration of Merleau-Ponty's "ecophenomenology" in conjunction with readings of "Kew Gardens", *Flush*, and "Thunder at Wembley" (2008:98-124; 2016:82-145).

its nature. Her decision to avoid the easy answers which might be provided by closely examining the mark is driven by a prioritisation of the *how* rather than the *what* – that is, the speaker's interest lies not in the facts she may gain from viewing it from a closer position, but in the mental stimulation this forced lack of visual clarity may produce. She deliberates whether or not to "get up" but decides against it since if she "got up and looked at [the mark], ten to one [she] shouldn't be able to say for certain" what its nature is as "once a thing's done, no one ever knows how it happened" (*CSF*:83-4). The self-imposed physical limitations act as a means of continuing the mental exercise, thereby not only suggesting the primacy of embodied perception as prior to abstract reflection – the inability to see renders the reflection possible – but also presenting these limitations as a means by which to engage with the world without presuppositions or predetermined facts. This decision mirrors the phenomenological reduction, so her limited visual field temporarily facilitates her decision to disregard commonplace knowledge in favour of engaging with the world anew.

This "perceptual undecidability", as Laura Marcus describes it, also allows "the mind to wander freely, into and through history, prehistory, and post-history" ([1997] 2004:19). The speaker's imagination jumps from one possibility to the next: the mark is a hole from a nail, a "small rose leaf left over from the summer" (*CSF*:84) but instead of confirming either she remains seated, wanting "to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts" (*CSF*:85). While there is a clear acknowledgement of the primacy of perception, and of the interconnectedness between the speaker's position and her prioritisation of the reflective process, Mildenberg presents a persuasive argument that this narrative's use of lived experience as a starting point for an exploration of free-flowing thoughts aligns more closely to fellow phenomenologist

Husserl's notion of "free variation" (2010:53). "Free variation", Mildenberg argues, marks "the shift of standpoint from the world of fact to the world of essence…When the mind deals with essence, there is a concern with the possible rather than the actual" (2010:53). The narrator's focus on the possibilities of the past and present of the mark rather than a fixed sense of origin and current purpose remains at the centre of the narrative, and her embodied perspective acts more as a starting point for these thoughts than a decisive element of these "free variations". Therefore, attention is given to, and joy derived from, the innumerable possibilities of the mark's state and the imaginative journeys such contemplation provides.

"Solid Objects"

Woolf's "Solid Objects" (*CSF*:102-107) continues this focus on the intertwining of visual stimuli with a character or speaker's reflections. The story follows the perceptions of two characters – John and Charles – as well as an unnamed narrator, and tracks John's growing lack of interest in politics coupled with his increasing obsession with finding objects that he considers mysterious or valuable. The objects are, in fact, broken pieces of china and glass, but his fascination with them gives them symbolic value – a value his friend Charles cannot understand or accept. The narrative opens with the gradual focusing in on two figures, thereby implying that the narrator gazes at them from a particular vantage point:

> The only thing that moved upon the vast semicircle of the beach was one small black spot. As it came nearer to the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat, it became apparent from a certain tenuity in its blackness that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakable that it was composed of the persons of two young men (*CSF*:102).

The opening descriptions of the two figures gradually coming into focus foreshadow the later prioritisation given to visual perception – specifically the act of focusing on something –

throughout the narrative. As the two men approach, the narrator immediately characterises them by their gestures and body language. Their argument is first seen in the "indescribable vigour in the approach and withdrawal of [their] bodies" and the "repeated lunging of a walking-stick" (*CSF*:102). The first speech-act is, in fact, inaudible to the narrator; rather, the right-hand man's exclamation: "You mean to tell me….You actually believe…" is an interpretation of the "asserti[ons]" of the walking-stick "as it cut[s] long straight stripes upon the sand" (*CSF*:102, original ellipses). The first statement heard ("Politics be damned!") clarifies the argument and sets the tone for the pair's continued differences of opinion regarding their civic responsibilities. As soon "as these words [are] uttered", the figures "bec[o]me clearer and clearer" and their "mouths, noses, chins, little moustaches, tweed caps, rough boots, shooting coats, and check stockings" (*CSF*:102) are fully in focus. The coinciding of speech act and bodily gestures suggests that the two men become truly "solid" when the mental and physical overlap – consciousness (including one's opinions or desires) is embodied in speech and gesture. There is, at this moment, "nothing…so solid, so living […] as these two bodies for miles and miles of sea and sandhill" (*CSF*:102).

While it might be argued that John's dismissal of politics is the physical expression of a completely separate mental process, the pair's actions after this statement demonstrate subconscious gestural habits which do not follow the pattern of the mental as primary and the physical as consequential acts. Similar to the reliance on bodily descriptions of their argument, here the narrator notices how both of their bodies

> [s]eem[ ] to shake [themselves] free from [the] argument, and…apologise for a mood of exaltation; flinging [themselves] down and expressing in the looseness of its attitude a readiness to take up with something new – whatever it may be that comes next to hand (*CSF*:102).

Charles begins "skimming flat pieces of slate over the water" while John burrows his hand in the sand (*CSF*:102). John's actions are particularly mindless at first, and "the background of thought and experience which gives an inscrutable depth to the eyes of grown people disappear[s], leaving "nothing but wonder" (*CSF*:102-3) at the physical sensation of digging fingers into wet sand and watching the water flow into the holes created. Only once he has begun reliving this childlike pleasure does he consciously "remember" and contemplate which imaginary structure this network of sand and water might become. The narrator's suggestions for what the lump of glass might have been or become in the future mirror this type of imagining. The glass may have been a "bottle, tumbler or window-pane", but it could "almost" have been "a precious stone", a jewel "worn by a dark Princess", or an emerald from a sunken "Elizabethan treasure-chest" (*CSF*:103). John is not able consciously to discern its origin, nor does he immediately assign a new meaning or purpose to it, instead revelling in the sensory perceptions it offers: the weight, lustre, and the way "the green thinned and thickened slightly as it was held against the sky or against the body" (*CSF*:103). This scene is filled with sensory descriptions coupled with a continual sense of John's pre-reflective wonder at the mysterious nature of the sand and the glass, specifically in his suspension of what might otherwise be a logical conclusion that the glass is debris. The embodied, lived experience is prioritised in each instance, especially through the descriptions of John's physical (almost unconscious) actions and the focus on sensations of touch and sight during his discoveries.

Charles and John's differences of opinion regarding their political aspirations are demonstrated in visual terms, with Charles dismissing and devaluing any of the objects which John discovers and collects with such delight. Charles's belief that his views are correct seemingly renders him incapable of focusing on any of John's discoveries: he dismisses the glass as he "immediately"

notices "that it was not flat" – therefore, not appropriate for his rock skipping – and the narrator confesses that even had he seen John pocketing it, he "would hardly have noticed" (*CSF*:103). This attitude continues until the end of the story when Charles visits John in an attempt to persuade him to reconsider his political career. Much like his emphatic gesticulations with his walking stick in the opening scene, he periodically picks up the stones on John's mantlepiece "a dozen times and put[s] them down emphatically to mark what he [says] about the conduct of the Government, without once noticing their existence" (*CSF*:106). In both instances, Charles's bodily interactions with the objects demonstrate his emotions and opinions even before he has verbalised them. Furthermore, his immediate dismissal of the value John places on the objects on the mantlepiece means that he does not consciously engage with any of them, using them merely as props to emphasise his irritation, or commenting distractedly about the "pretty stones" (*CSF*:107) before leaving. His inability to understand John's views renders him symbolically incapable of focusing on those things which John treats as rare treasures so that his emotive response to his once-friend is bound to his visual perceptions of the objects in his surroundings.

In contrast to Charles's immediate dismissal of the objects as useless junk, John seems driven by a fascination with those items which he cannot clearly define at first glance but which seem alien or different from their surrounds. His initial sense of wonder and dejection that any objects he finds might merely be rubbish seems to echo the phenomenological reduction in its return to pre-reflective or pre-theoretical experience. However, John's collecting differs from the phenomenological reduction as his suspension of those pre-conceived notions is not wholly conscious. For Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists, the reduction marks a clear decision to ignore, if not disbelieve, certain accepted ideas about the world in favour of experiencing the

world and reflecting upon it with a pre-theoretical perspective. John's lack of purpose – beyond the desire to possess more mysterious objects – is implied by the narrator's statement that he does not actively think about or reflect on the objects themselves; instead, they remain fascinating because they are "[l]ooked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else" (*CSF*:104). In doing so, John seems to mix the objects subconsciously "with the stuff of thought" until they "lose[s] [their] actual form and recompose[ ] [themselves] a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain" (*CSF*:104). This activity of "recomposition", as Bill Brown calls it, "moves John's encounter from the sensuous and material to the phenomenal and the psychological" before "return[ing] to the material by granting him a different mode of engagement with the city" (2015:62). The glass object seems to transform his perceptions of the urban spaces of the city, and his relationship to those routines which he would have previously upheld such as work and social engagements. He "keep[s] his eyes upon the ground" and "[finds] himself attracted to the windows of curiosity shops" (*CSF*:104), gradually abandoning his responsibilities in favour of searching for other objects that spark a similar sense of wonder and mystery. His next great find, the starfish-shaped china fragment, is described as "look[ing] like a creature from another world – freakish and fantastic as a harlequin" (*CSF*:105), while a later discovery, a "very remarkable piece of iron" fascinates him because it is "so cold and heavy, so black and metallic, that it [is] evidently alien to the earth" (*CSF*:106). John's "[haunting of] the places which are most prolific of broken china" (*CSF*:105) and his searching and digging in "all deposits of earth…matted tangles of scrub…alleys and spaces between walls" (*CSF*:106) indicate his change in perspective; he no longer follows those methods and plans which others may have considered right for him and is instead consumed by the desire to uncover hidden mysteries in this everyday junk.

Charles's and John's perceptions of these "solid" objects present contrasts between vision and blindness due mainly to the extreme opposites of their views in both literal and figurative senses. Charles's lack of interest seems to cause a lack of focus and prioritisation of surface qualities – he calls John's collections "stones" because the word presents a handy collective term which does not require any further definition (or depth). John, in contrast, becomes obsessed with depth and mystery. Therefore, the objects he collects remain malleable and undefined in his desire for a depth of meaning without any precise end. These contrasts highlight a fundamental phenomenological insight: that perception (both bodily sensation and mental reflection), circumstance, and meaning are inextricably intertwined. The two characters' perceptions do not automatically lead to a shared meaning, as might be expected if perception were merely a mental activity of identifying or analysing external objects, and their circumstances and responses to the objects differ wildly based on both the initial perceptions they had, and the subsequent meanings attributed. Finally, while there is still a reasonably clear distinction between John and Charles as subjects and the things collected as objects, the presumed hierarchy between these groups is subtly destabilised. The narrator's initial presentation of the two men as bodies which are "so solid" (*CSF*:102) is contrasted by the ability of the glass to haunt John's brain to the extent that it alters his everyday engagement with his surroundings. Thus, the seemingly distinct differences between subject and object become more malleable, and any notion of "solidity" is destroyed by the interconnected systems of perception, meaning, and circumstance.

"The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection"

The effects of this interplay of perspectives and perceptions are continued in some of Woolf's later fiction, such as "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" (*CSF*:221-225)[16] "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", much like the earlier "The Mark on the Wall", begins with the narrator describing the physical surroundings before delving into mental reflection. However, unlike the earlier story's depictions of a mind wandering freely from one topic to the next, here the narrator stays focused on the task of understanding Isabella Tyson, the owner of the house, and uncovering her inner self. The narrator, although unnamed, is once again implicitly embodied as s/he gazes at the surroundings "from the depths of the sofa in the drawing-room" (*CSF*:221). The narrator's visual field – that of the drawing-room and adjacent hallway – is extended by "the long glass that [hangs] outside in the hall", which reflects "the marble-topped table opposite, [and] a stretch of the garden beyond" (*CSF*:221). The narrator's visual perceptions of the house seem divided between two different versions of reality. The house, empty apart from the narrator, seems in a constant state of flux, as is seen in the descriptions of

> shy creatures, lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling […] nocturnal creatures [who] came pirouetting across the floor […] obscure flushes and darkenings too, as if a cuttlefish had suddenly suffused the air with purple; and the room had its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being (*CSF*:221).

The images in the mirror are, in comparison, reflected "so accurately and so fixedly that [the reflected objects] seemed held there in their reality unescapably" in a "trance of immortality" (*CSF*:221-2). The direct visual perceptions highlight a world "all changing", while the looking-glass presents the world as "all stillness" (*CSF*:221).

[16] The version of the text used here is from *The Complete Shorter Fiction*. This version is from the initial publication in *Harper's Magazine* in December 1929 and not the reprinted edition in *A Haunted House and Other Stories*.

The sharp contrast between vision and reflection begins to cast into doubt the seeming objectivity of the mirror and its ability to present a truthful or factual image. Although it acts as an extension of the narrator's visual field, the vision it produces is fundamentally different from natural eyesight. The "gilt rim" "slice[s] off" the image and does not have any sense of periphery, creating a sharp delineation between what is included in the mirror's reflection and what is not. Furthermore, the reflection lacks "the voice of the transient and the perishing" (*CSF*:222), seemingly crystallising the reflected world into a static, lifeless image. These delineations are further emphasised in how the mirror "[slices]" and "[cuts off]" the reflected scene at the edge of the frame:

> The mirror's frame […] holds a static world, a world already fixed and finished. It also suggests the way in which paintings differ from writing. The story sets up a series of binary opposites: life and art; room and garden; inside and outside (the frame); words and pictures; imagination and reality; change and stillness; light and shadow; convolvulus and aster; convolvulus and wall (or fantasy and truth) (Briggs, 2004:176).

In the above, Briggs reads the mirror as a clear symbol for the artistic product, an idea reinforced by how later intrusions into the mirror's frame are seemingly integrated into a cohesive pattern. However, the crucial element that Briggs ignores in this clear bifurcation between the mirror and physical surroundings is that the descriptions provided of the reflections are those seen by the narrator. The narrator confesses that "one could not help looking" (*CSF*:221) at both the ever-changing surroundings and the stillness within the mirror. The narrator's stance is not only aimed at watching the transience of the room but also the stillness of the reflection, with an implied interest in both free-flowing thought and circumstance and the crystallisation thereof in aesthetic patterns.

Most of the story focuses on the narrator's reflections on Isabella's true character. She has "gone down the grass path in her thin summer dress…and had vanished, sliced off by the gilt rim of the

looking-glass" (*CSF*:222), remaining out of sight until right at the end. The narrator begins to reflect on "how very little, after all these years, one [knows] about her" and judges the initial comparison of Isabella to a "[spray] of convolvulus that twine[s] round ugly walls" to be unenlightening and "cruel even, for [such comparisons] come like the convolvulus itself trembling between one's eyes and the truth" (*CSF*:222). The attitude of the naturalist continues, albeit by using the imagination, as the narrator attempts to find the fact or idea which will uncover "truth" (*CSF*:222).

The postman's sudden appearance as he delivers Isabella's letters disrupts both the looking-glass and the narrator's reflections. As with the previous acts of puzzling out the truth about Isabella, the narrator's gaze works to bring order and understanding back to the frame. The reflection is initially "unrecognisable and irrational and entirely out of focus", but gradually bodily perception and mental reflection work in tandem to decipher the "packet of marble tablets veined with pink and grey" (*CSF*:223), a "logical process" which "order[s] and arrange[s] them and bring[s] them into the fold of common experience" (*CSF*:223). This process of recognition is not only an act of physically focusing on the new visual elements but also an act of "draw[ing] in and arrang[ing] and compos[ing] and [making them] part of the picture" (*CSF*:223) so that the viewer's eye recognises their purpose and endows them with an aesthetic significance as part of the reflection's composition. The mission to understand Isabella is not abandoned for long, however, for as soon as the letters are visually recognised and fitted into an imagined pattern, the narrator insists that "if one could read them, one would know everything there was to be known about Isabella, yes, and about life, too" (*CSF*:223).

The narrator denies the impossibility of *not* discovering some hidden truth about her, for "[t]here must be truth; there must be a wall" (*CSF*:222). The reference to the "ugly wall" that the convolvulus conceals suggests that the cruelty of the comparison of Isabella with flowers is actually directed at the one gazing at her, in that these figurative flowers, the shallow facts of her life, the "sayings and doings such as the moment [brings] forth" (*CSF*:224), obscure the viewer's vision and hide "the profounder state of being" (*CSF*:224). The desire to know, to understand, becomes increasingly insistent, with the narrator exclaiming that "one must prize her open with the first tool that came to hand – the imagination. One must fix one's mind upon her at that very moment. One must fasten her down there" (*CSF*:223). The reflection of Isabella is indistinct to the narrator, with only "the indeterminate outline of her rather faded, fine face looking at the sky" (*CSF*:224) visible in the mirror. Despite the lack of visual clarity, the narrator enthusiastically calls up possible thoughts, emotions, and views that Isabella might have. Her mind is described like the earlier descriptions of the drawing-room where

> lights advanced and retreated, came pirouetting and stepping delicately, spread their tails, pecked their way; and then her whole being was suffused, like the room again, with a cloud of some profound knowledge, some unspoken regret, and then she was full of locked drawers, stuffed with letters, like her cabinets (*CSF*:225).

The narrator, who had previously examined these mysterious changes in the drawing room with patience and curiosity "like one of those naturalists" (*CSF*:221), treats the imagined Isabella in the same way in an attempt to "surely…penetrate a little farther into her being" (*CSF*:224).

Isabella returns to the house and, in turn, to the looking-glass's reflection. The narrator watches her becoming "larger and larger…more and more completely the person into whose mind one had been trying to penetrate" (*CSF*:225). Isabella's true self is not, as the narrator's previous focus on

her imagined thoughts might suggest, found in the mental, but is instead captured in the reflection of her body. She is "verified…by degrees" with each imagined quality "fitted…into this visible body" (*CSF*:225). Her reflection seems to become enmeshed into the pattern of the objects previously captured by the mirror, transforming the aestheticized vision without truly disrupting it. The mirror, bearer of a reality "so [accurate] and so [fixed]" (*CSF*:221), begins "to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth" (*CSF*:225).

Isabella's reflection, stripped of "the creeper and convolvulus", is supposedly "the hard wall…the woman herself" (*CSF*:225):

> She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills. Look, as she stood there, old and angular, veined and lined, with her high nose and her wrinkled neck, she did not even trouble to open them (*CSF*:225).

But this is not "the ugly wall" (*CSF*:222) of her true self, which, in fact, has not been revealed once throughout the narrative. Instead, this final extreme contrast to the fanciful imaginings previously offered by the narrator does not disclose anything except the judgement of the narrator's gaze. Her reflection is "an enthralling spectacle" (*CSF*:225), another object which the narrator, much like when the letters arrived, must catalogue and integrate into the perceived whole of the looking-glass so that Isabella too can be "granted that stillness and immortality […] invested with a new reality and significance" (*CSF*:223).

These claims seem, at first, to mirror the artistic process that Woolf describes in "A Sketch of the Past" as bringing to light "a revelation of some order…a token of some real thing behind appearances" (*MB*:72). However, unlike the positive vision provided in her memoir where "the

whole world is a work of art" (*MB*:72) including, most importantly, the artist herself, the narrator of this short story aims to dissect, to "penetrate" (*CSF*:224) and "bite off" (*CSF*:225) that which s/he considers to be false in favour of the assumed vision of Isabella, countering the free-flowing considerations of the speaker in "The Mark on the Wall" and the positive associations with the discovery of "some real thing behind appearances". The narrator's insistence that s/he "*could not help* looking" and "*must* imagine" (*CSF*:221, 225, emphasis added) seems defensive as if these statements might absolve her or him of the judgements heaped upon Isabella. Woolf's constant focus on the narrator's perspective in her or his imagination and visual perceptions renders Isabella mute and unknowable, a form to be gazed at, gone over with both eyes and mind, and deduced as "perfectly empty" (*CSF*:225).

The short stories discussed above may be seen as examples of Woolf's continual experimentation with perception and thought, specifically how an individual perspective relates to another person or an object within the visual field. There is, however, little overlap in perspectives as "The Mark on the Wall" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" both privilege the viewpoint of the narrator, while John's and Charles's opinions in "Solid Objects" are so radically different that they seem unable to form any common ground, instead interpreting each other's speech and gestures solely from their own position. These stories hint at an intercorporeal world in their descriptions of reciprocal vision but do not explicitly explore these, leaving each character largely unknowable to another.

Looking Together

Unlike the singular or limited perspectives presented in the short stories above, Woolf employs a far more multifocal approach in *Mrs Dalloway*, with a diverse network of characters and objects

perpetually drawn into each other's perceptual fields. In the novel, unlike the short stories, perception and consciousness become integral to understanding one's connections with other human beings and not only to a world of objects and ideas.

The novel's use of objects and circumstances as a narrative device to switch the focus between different characters has been well documented,[17] but the aspect of this process which has received little attention is the implicit negotiations between the embodied perceptions of characters. While the narrator in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" uses the mirror as an extension of the visual field, thereby allowing a glimpse of Isabella outside the bounds of the room, the privileging of the narrator's gaze means that this act of looking/being looked at is never truly reciprocal. In *Mrs Dalloway*, however, the focus shifts almost seamlessly from one character to another, with very little textual fanfare to announce this change in perspective. As Clarissa exits her home right at the start of the novel, Scrope Purvis's flyaway thought blends in between the accounts of her memories and actions:

> She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster), a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright (*MD*:3).

The distinction between Clarissa's memories of Bourton (captured in the preceding paragraph) and the external description of her appearance is clearly indicated in the introduction of Scrope Purvis, but the focal points are layered in such a way that, despite being read linearly (that is,

[17] Cf. Gilian Beer (1996:52-3), Susan Dick (2000:52-4), Michael North (1999:84). Ben Hagen points out that, although this idea has been well established, comparatively little has been done to move beyond the technical and "to make sense of the car, the plane, and the clock tower as sites/sights of convergence for many subjective gazes, objects-turned-image that certainly *do*, but also *want*" (2009:538, original emphasis).

Clarissa thinking of Bourton and Peter's return, followed by the above description), there is an implicit temporal simultaneity. The opening paragraphs, therefore, present a web of perceptions: the sound of the "little squeak of the hinges" (*MD*:3), which triggers memories of Bourton and Peter, Clarissa's implied awareness of her surroundings while walking in Westminster, and her neighbour's description of her. This is not to suggest that all of these things occur at precisely the same moment, but rather that they can be classified as simultaneous events in our everyday, lived perception of time.

The introduction of an entire cast of characters rather than the singular perspectives in the short stories discussed above is accompanied by an increased reliance on multivocality and "a disjointed picture of consciousness, often constructed through the technique of free indirect discourse" (Mildenberg, 2019:66). In free indirect discourse, "the voice of a third-person narrator subtly dips in and out of the experiential field of a character" (Mildenberg, 2019:66) – or in this case, a host of characters – in order to facilitate the sense of simultaneously witnessed events presented from a host of different voices. Importantly, many of these events "both stay[ ] on the outside of the character and catch[ ] the essence of the character's immediate subjective experience" (Mildenberg, 2019:66), thereby creating a subtle movement and tension between the subjectivity of interior monologue or even first-person narration, and the expected objectivity of a third-person narrator. In her discussion of Woolf's narrative strategies, Anna Snaith argues that Woolf's choice to use free indirect discourse,[18] with its continued use of third-person pronouns as a narrative reminder of the narrator's presence,

[18] Snaith includes a detailed overview of scholars' definitions of Woolf's narrative style and presents a compelling argument for viewing Woolf's narrative strategies in her novels as largely reliant on free indirect discourse rather than stream of consciousness or interior monologue (2000:63-87). She defines free indirect discourse as the intertwining of

> stem[s] from the ability it gave her to represent difference, to give a voice to a wide array of major and minor characters. Sudden and frequent shifts in direct interior monologue would have been jarring, whereas with free indirect discourse the narrator can move the focus swiftly and smoothly from voice to voice. This shifting of perspective allows Woolf to undercut the dominance of the narrator without replacing it by what she saw as the tyranny of the first person monologue (2000:70-1).

This is demonstrated clearly in the previous excerpt from the novel: the sentence "she stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass" (*MD*:3) is the clear reported speech of the narrator, which functions as a connector between the preceding free indirect discourse (Clarissa's musings about Peter Walsh) and the free indirect discourse immediately thereafter – the momentary glance which Scrope Purvis gives her.

The use of free indirect discourse may seem at odds with Merleau-Ponty's "[defiance of] the God's-eye view of the natural (objectivistic) attitude and [thrusting of] the body-subject back into the fabric of things" (Mildenberg, 2019:66, cf. Merleau-Ponty, [1948] 2004:44-5). However, in contrast to the externalised reporting of third-person narrator's descriptions of an event, thoughts, or speech, free indirect discourse "[shares] the characters' thoughts, in the characters' own words, although they are presented by the voice of the narrator. The reader is not *told* about them, but *shown* them" (Snaith, 2000:70, emphasis added). Although free indirect discourse does not necessarily achieve the individual subjectivity and sense of unmediated lived experience presented in, for example, first-person narration,[19] the slippage between the voices of characters and narrator

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the voices of narrator and characters, where "the narrator enters the mind of the character and reports his or her thoughts verbatim" (2000:63). Grammatically in Woolf's work, free indirect discourse is marked by the use of third person and past tense narration, in contrast to the first- and second-person pronouns in interior monologue, while narratively, the voices of narrator and characters coexist as a "bivocal construction" (2000:65) with no clear hierarchical delineation.

[19] See "Literary Description and Phenomenological Method" by Edward S. Casey (1981) for a discussion of first-person narration and description in sections from Merleau-Ponty's writing alongside that of Marcel Proust.

"contribute[s], as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes" (CD:65).

Woolf builds on this network of shared experiences in the scene where the sound of a backfiring car draws the attention of various characters. This time, rather than a clear interchange of looking/looked at, various subjects focus on an object within a shared perceptual field: the car. Their fascination is marked by what Vera Tobin terms "joint attention", where different subjects' focus is drawn to an external object, a moment during which "two (or more) people engage in an interaction that is mediated by some object, while both participants continually monitor one another's attention to both the object and to themselves" (2012:46). All of the people in the surroundings are drawn into the moment, and the shared nature of the "joint attention", that is, the mystery of the vehicle, seems to endow them with a "sudden sobriety and stillness" instead of the "utterly disorderly" (*MD*:12) crowd prior to the event. Although the focus remains mainly on the object of their joint attention, the varying perspectives and opinions offered by the characters, as well as Septimus and Lucrezia's anxiety that they might become the focus of attention, highlight the idea that such an instance is not merely a connection between an individual subject and the external, objective world, but is, instead, an acknowledgement of the interconnected system of subjects, objects, and world.

The car and its mystery occupant function both as a textual device highlighting the shift from one consciousness to the next – thereby demonstrating the subjective views of some in the crowd – and as "[a] gradual drawing together of everything" (*MD*:13) where meaning and significance are shared throughout the group. Had the car been noticed by only a few individuals, the narrator claims, its presence would be "something so trifling…that no mathematical instrument…could

register the vibration" (*MD*:15). However, the significance of the object lies in the shared attention of London shoppers. It is, in this "fullness" of joint attention, "rather formidable" as the sight of it creates a "common appeal" (*MD*:15) among the onlookers. This "common appeal" not only refers to the shared visual attention but, more importantly, to the way that "strangers look[ ] at each other" after noticing the car and, when doing so, "[think] of the dead; of the flag; of Empire" (*MD*:15). Specifically, the collective reminder of World War I and the British Empire occurs when individuals look at the motor car and then at each other, marking a recognition of a "vast intersubjective…field of…shared and sedimented meanings" (Adams, [2008] 2014:157).[20] While the intricacies of the symbolism depicted here are not the focus of the study, it is important to note that this shared understanding of symbolic meaning is triggered by the embodied perceptions of the individuals in the crowd. Meaning, therefore, is not merely an abstracted reflective process but is directly experienced.

The scene following this one, where scattered individuals look up at the skywriting aeroplane, continues the narrative strategy of shifting perspectives juxtaposed with a single object of joint attention. However, while the flashes of free indirect discourse in the preceding scene (Septimus, Lucrezia, Clarissa, Moll Pratt, Sarah Bletchley, Mr Bowley and Emily Coates) are subsumed into a moment of communal free indirect discourse, here the narrative voice continues to shift from one character to another and never draws these to a unified conclusion. The lack of conclusive information – the letters remain unconnected and lack signification – and the physical distance of the aeroplane's height "dissolves bonds and flattens hierarchies" (Beer, 1996:162). These strategies,

[20] See, in particular, Benjamin Hagen's exploration of the ways in which the motor-car, the aeroplane and Big Ben may illuminate "the relationship [of things] with the animate, the living, the collective of subjective gazes that frame them" (2009:538).

along with an "anti-authoritative" narrator who "relinquishes the narrative voice to various characters [and who] although omniscient and anonymous, and therefore public […] is not party to inside knowledge regarding car or plane" (Snaith, 2000:75) foreground an overall narrative structure which relies on ambiguous relationships between the narrator and the characters and highlights interconnectivity.

Iris Marion Young describes the body as having "culture and meaning inscribed" (cited in Alcoff, 1997:22); these are not only present on a large scale, as seen in the crowd's momentary shared patriotism, but are also prevalent in interactions between individuals. Merleau-Ponty considers these underlying meanings that are not created in the present moment but which have become "sedimented" in our mental processes and memories in that they are familiar concepts and ones which may inform our experience and actions in the present moment:

> When I chat with a friend whom I know well, each of his remarks and each of mine contains, in addition to the meaning it carries for everybody else, a host of references to the main dimensions of his character and mine, without our needing to recall previous conversations with each other. […] there is a 'world of thoughts', or a sediment left by our mental processes, which enables us to rely on our concepts and acquired judgements as we might on things there in front of us…without there being any need for us to resynthesize them (*PP*:149-50).

This sediment underpins and informs much of Clarissa and Peter's interactions in the novel. Peter's visit and their conversation in the drawing-room are particularly emblematic of this, as their thoughts and dialogue rely on these sediments of their previous interactions at Bourton. Their interactions in this scene demonstrate both subjects as simultaneously perceiving and being perceived, while the sediments of their shared history underpin their perceptions and thoughts:

> 'And how are you?' said Peter Walsh, positively trembling; taking both her hands; kissing both her hands. She's grown older, he thought, sitting down. I shan't tell her anything about it, he thought, for she's grown older. She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden

> embarrassment coming over him, though he had kissed her hands. Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out a large pocket-knife and half opened the blade.
> Exactly the same, thought Clarissa; the same queer look; the same check suit; a little out of the straight his face is, a little thinner, dryer, perhaps, but he looks awfully well, and just the same (*MD*:34).

The first impressions quoted above demonstrate their underlying familiarity with each other and their recognition of the jarring differences between their memories and the present moment. Their bodies have "grown older", yet they are "exactly the same" (*MD*:34), a dichotomy continually reinforced by both their spoken and unspoken acknowledgement of their shared past, the sediment of which informs their current interactions. The dialogue alternates between direct and reported speech, highlighting the different levels of speaking, hearing, and thinking presented.

In a discussion of the role which language plays in the perception of the other, Merleau-Ponty describes dialogue as an interweaving of thoughts and expression:

> In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator […] we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world. In the present dialogue, I am freed from myself, for the other person's thoughts are certainly his; they are not of my making, though I do grasp them the moment they come into being, or even anticipate them. And indeed, the objection which my interlocutor raises to what I say draws from me thoughts which I had no idea I possessed, so that at the same time that I lend him thoughts, he reciprocates by making me think too (*PP*:413).

He suggests that dialogue is an "inter-woven…fabric" where two embodied subjects' shared history affects their perceptions, speech, and gestures, and where these too may influence the flow of their conversations. Significantly, he conceives of this "reciprocity" as including an emergence of *new* meanings rather than merely a recycling of the sedimented language which acts as a background to the present dialogue. These new insights and meanings are formed in the interplay between the

anticipation of already sedimented meanings and spontaneous alterations to these where the dialoguers' interactions "anticipate" one another's responses. In so doing, individuals "introduce novel and surprising elements into [their] discourse" (Adams, [2008] 2014:157).

Clarissa and Peter's conversation mirror many of the ideas expressed by Merleau-Ponty, but this scene's interrogation of the possibilities for intimacy between the friends also complicates his description, implicitly questioning whether or not a "common ground" is easily achievable. At the start they seem to hold "a common ground"; [her] thought and his are intert-woven into a single fabric" (*PP*:413) in their shared joy at seeing the other and their mental cataloguing of the similarities and differences which time has wrought. Clarissa's questions about the blinds and the lake at Bourton bring this "common ground" to the fore, using memory as an acknowledgement of the "shared operation" of that time in their lives that they spent together, but the differences between their perceptions of these memories – Peter's embarrassment at his failed courtship and Clarissa's feelings of inadequacy – mean that these sedimented memories and feelings overwhelm any possibility of expressing new contributions to their friendship. Peter's declaration that he is "in love with a girl in India" (*MD*:38) marks the first proper movement towards new possibilities, but this is swiftly repressed, first by Clarissa's aborted imaginings of a life with Peter – "it was as if…she had lived a lifetime…had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over" (*MD*:40) – and then as Peter's earnest questioning of her happiness is interrupted by Elizabeth's arrival.

Clarissa's interactions with Peter, and her recollections of their shared past, are bound up in his disparagement of her possible future where "she would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase […] she had the makings of the perfect hostess" (*MD*:6), and, in contrast, Clarissa's belief that they "would have been destroyed, both of them ruined" due to his insistence

that "everything had to be shared; everything gone into" (*MD*:7). These impressions, apart from bitterness they cause between the two characters, are suggestive of the reservations Clarissa holds about her sense of self and her interactions with others. Her claim that Peter would have demanded that "everything…be shared" may seem to echo the "consummate reciprocity" which Merleau-Ponty supports in his descriptions of dialogue and expression, but her desire for "a little licence, a little independence" (*MD*:6) indicates that she does not view their relationship as truly reciprocal. Her strong memories of Peter's comments more closely fit Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of a relationship where reciprocity is absent and where "the world of the one then takes in completely that of the other, so that one feels disinherited in favour of the other" (*PP*:416). This is not to say that Peter would have purposefully "disinherited" an opportunity for a "common world" (*PP*:416), but it is emblematic of Clarissa's perpetual fear that her selfhood may be confined to one aspect.

The Malleable Surface of the Body

A sense of containment is particularly evident in Clarissa's reflections on her body:

> [S]he had a narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's. That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well, considering that she spent little. But often now this body she wore…this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more, this being Mrs Richard Dalloway (*MD*:9).

Clarissa describes her body as simply another garment of clothing, something she "[wears]" rather than an integral aspect of herself. The sense of disembodiment is grounded in her musing about whether she "could have looked even differently" (*MD*:9) if she could redo her life and her daydream of looking – and acting – like Lady Bexborough. Her body as a garment she might put on and take off is specifically those aspects of bodily existence tied to the societal expectations of

women: marriage and children. Furthermore, it is disregarded and becomes "nothing at all" now that there is "no more having of children", thereby suggesting that a woman's body may be discarded as an item of clothing which is now out of fashion. The links she draws between her dissatisfaction with her body and the state of being "Mrs Richard Dalloway" rather than "Clarissa" suggest the sediment of the expectations of womanhood might overwhelm the possibility of an authentic lived existence.

The scene in Clarissa's attic bedroom further demonstrates her ambivalence towards her ageing body. The ascent to the attic, the methodical disrobing of her hat and coat, and the unpinning of her hair all seem to strip away the outer shell of her body to reveal the "nothing" (*MD*:9) beneath it, the "emptiness about the heart of life" (*MD*:26). However, her thoughts and actions while in her attic bedroom do not suggest gradual disembodiment or transcendence of the self beyond the body. The descriptions of "yielding to the charm of a woman" (*MD*:27) acknowledge the power of the memories of her sensory perceptions in this process, as she gives in due to either emotion or because of "some accident—like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments)" (*MD*:27). Similarly, her memories of Sally are filled with the sensory: the sight of Sally sitting on the floor, the tingling of Clarissa's scalp as she did her hair, and the sound of Sally's voice "like a caress" (*MD*:30). These perceptions are not entirely separated from the present, however, as the "kind of ecstasy" which she felt while doing her hair at Bourton "come[s] back to her, as she [takes] out her hairpins, [lays] them on the dressing-table, [begins] to do her hair" (*MD*:29) in her attic bedroom. Rather than placing Clarissa's memories as a temporary divergence in a linear development towards the heteronormative goals of marriage and children,

this scene, as Kate Haffey claims, acts as a reliving and renegotiating of Clarissa's views of her body and sexuality:

> These moments that Clarissa describes are ones in which Clarissa is able to break through the temporal divides between past and present in order to experience pleasure and desire across them. When we examine such moments it is hard to create stiff divisions between the adolescent Clarissa who fell in love with and desired Sally Seton and the adult for whom that 'phase' has passed (2010:141-2).

Haffey's argument that Clarissa does not view her relationship with Sally as a "triumph of youth" which has now passed is a persuasive one, though it can be expanded beyond her brief mentions of the interplays between narrative and lyric time (2010:142-3). The interweaving of past and present while Clarissa does her hair is, I agree, an example of "the moment [as] a presence that continues to make itself known throughout the course of the narrative" (Haffey, 2010:143), but what Haffey neglects is the focus on the tingling sensations she feels as she arranges her hair as a fluid bridge between past and present. The reliving of these memories does not mark a shift back in time to Clarissa's youth; despite the thirty-year discrepancy, the details of that summer at Bourton are revised and transformed by the passing of time. The recollections cannot, therefore, be seen as objective retellings of the past but are, instead, infused with the thirty years of life Clarissa has lived in the interim.[21]

It is this "life history" (Mathews, 2002:60), the continuous (re)production of meaning and significance, which provides the final layer of complexity in Clarissa's attitudes to her embodied self. Her thoughts about her sense of self, and her views of her body, are presented in a series of images which allow and resist permeability. She vacillates between drawing closer and shying away

[21] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's later comments on memory: "there is indeed a past, but no coinciding with it— I am separated from it by the whole thickness of my present; it is mine only by finding in some way a place in my present, in making itself present anew" (*VI*:122).

from a sense of physical and emotional intimacy, confessing that she "resented it" (*MD*:27) and insisting that Peter's need for community drove her away from a possible relationship with him. Conversely, the feeling of intimacy is a "pressure of rapture, which split[s] its thin skin and gushe[s] and pour[s] with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores" (*MD*:27). The image of a surface breaking open is one which has appeared twice before in Clarissa's ruminations about the dwindling intimacy between herself and others:

> [Y]ear by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that [remains is] capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often…an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl (*MD*:26).

> [S]uddenly there came a moment…when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed [Richard]…It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together (*MD*:27).

In both cases, Clarissa equates the sense of connection, the surface disturbed between people, with her lost youth. In the first quotation, her younger years are described according to the elasticity of her skin, a malleability which allows her, conversely, to act as the diver which breaks open the "cold contact" between people. However, although she had been "lovely in girlhood", she feels as if, over the years, she has largely lost this ability to permeate others' surfaces. Her gradual ageing and seeming loss of this earlier elasticity of both her skin and interpersonal relations are marked by a subtle shift in imagery. The younger Clarissa is described as a diver who "gently split [the waves'] surface" between people and who both reveals and hides private notions of the self as the waves "roll and conceal and encrust" (*MD*:26). Now, however, she retreats from the possibility that these depths might be visible, instead "collecting the whole of her at one point" (*MD*:31), "[drawing]

the parts together" so that the evidence of "how different, how incompatible […] the other sides of her" (*MD*:32) are remains hidden. The act of selective concealment and revelation, the interpolation of disparate parts, is figured as a mental process and also as a physical adjustment of her physique:

> How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self—pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives (*MD*:31-2).

In comparison to the earlier elasticity – and her ability to permeate others' figurative skin and surface – Clarissa's shift in focus from her memories to the present is accompanied by a shift from the image of a diver who breaks open and ripples surfaces towards a diamond whose radiance refracts the surroundings rather than truly revealing any depth. Similar to the gradual indications given about the effects of ageing on Clarissa's skin, the shift in imagery suggests that she rarely partakes of the easy intimacy of her youth, instead only showing specific aspects of herself to other people.

However, if one applies the same layering of past and present which was previously discussed in relation to Clarissa's memories of Sally, then it could be argued that the neat progression of the facets of selfhood in her from past to present is disturbed at the moment when she gazes at herself in the mirror, "plung[ing] into the very heart of the moment…the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings" (*MD*:31). Her earlier confession that she still finds herself "yielding to the charm of a woman" (*MD*:27) as well as the subsequent memories of Sally, transforms the face which had "turned almost white" due to her illness into "the delicate

pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party" (*MD*:31). Clarissa's face and skin, despite ageing and illness, are expressions of her vacillating desire for and rejection of interpersonal connections, a bodily surface which is by turns impenetrable and porous.

Septimus Warren Smith, Clarissa's "double" in Woolf's words, is commonly associated with "modernism's 'inward turn' and interest in psychology" (Joyes, 2008:73); however, his body, "macerated until only the nerve fibres were left…spread like a veil upon a rock" (*MD*:58) comes to the fore in descriptions of distress or trauma. His body and private sense of self, like Clarissa's involuntary blush, are presented as penetrable surfaces; however, while Clarissa's "yielding" may begin involuntarily, it is clear that she holds agency over the situation – an intimacy achieved on her own terms. Septimus, in comparison, seems to lack, if not agency, the willpower to be intimate, frequently becoming overwhelmed by both the thought of close interpersonal contact ("Their marriage was over he thought, with agony, with relief" (*MD*:57)) and the sense that the universe wants to use him as a communicative conduit to other people:

> Heaven was divinely merciful, infinitely benignant. It spared him, pardoned his weakness […] He lay back in his chair, exhausted but upheld. He lay resting, waiting, before he again interpreted, with effort, with agony, to mankind. He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head (*MD*:58).

Here the malleability of the flesh, which for Clarissa meant a voluntary yielding, is transformed into an almost violent invasion which forcibly bridges the gap between his embodied self and the natural world.[22]

[22] This section is discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Merleau-Ponty, in a discussion of the ways in which the imaginal manifests with particular intensity, such as in childhood, myth, dreams, and hallucinations, describes the relationship between subject and world as one where "things are taken for the incarnation of what they expressed, and because their human significance is compressed into them and presents itself literally as what they mean" (*PP*:338). A child who sees the shadows of branches or hears them creaking in the wind does not only perceive these as the natural phenomenon of light/shadow or wind but may conceive of these as the presence of a shadowy being, a seemingly inherent fear of the unknown made physical. Importantly, these experiences should not be split into what is real versus what is false:

> [In] certain imaginal experiences…the world becomes an amplification of sense that directly touches us, approaches us, and presents itself face-to-face […] these experiences belong to a primordial level of space and the world that are present in all our experience, but for most of us in contemporary culture are pushed into the background (Mazis, 2016:200).

The imaginal is usually less "present" to us on a day-to-day level, pushed into the background largely as a protective measure: "What protects the sane man against delirium or hallucination is not his critical powers, but the structure of his space: objects remain before him, keeping their distance" (*PP*:339). This act of distancing distinguishes subject from object and world, which means that most adults "[lose] this intensified relation to the world in their expanding involvement in so many projects – having a 'widened' but 'flattened' vision" (Mazis, 2016:201).

In contrast to this almost unconscious balancing act of the imaginal versus the sensorily perceived, Merleau-Ponty argues that hallucinations mark "a shrinkage in the space directly experienced, the overwhelming proximity of the object, the oneness of man and world" (*PP*:339). He discusses the recorded experiences and descriptions of a schizophrenic patient who had walked in the mountains:

> After a short time he feels a threat hanging over him. There arises within him a special interest in everything surrounding him, as if a question were being put to him from outside to which he could find no answer. Suddenly the landscape is snatched away from him by some alien force. It is as if a second sky, black and boundless, were penetrating the blue sky of evening. This new sky is empty, 'subtle, invisible and terrifying'. Sometimes it moves in the autumn landscape and at other times the landscape too moves (*PP*:334).

Specifically, this second sky is not a phantasm which exists solely for the patient. Instead, if, as Merleau-Ponty argues, the hallucinatory is merely an intensified experience of the imaginal, the second sky may be experienced by any other person similar to the way one might endow any other landscape with symbolic or affective significance. The difference between a sane person's experience and someone who experiences "heightened psychological states of various altered perceptions that we deem pathological" (Mazis, 2016:200) is, as stated above, the balancing of the imaginal with the perceived so that the imaginal "is made to correlate with the larger perceptual expanse in its unfolding that 'fills out' the perceptual sense and pushes such phantasms to the margins" (Mazis, 2016:200).

That Merleau-Ponty draws on the experiences of schizophrenic hallucinations is not to say that Septimus should automatically be read as schizophrenic. Throughout the critical history of *Mrs Dalloway*, scholars have made various helpful suggestions of how one might interpret Septimus as suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (Henke, 2000), or schizophrenia (Henke, 1981). Thomas (1987) has also discussed Woolf's portrayal of Septimus in connection with descriptions given of shell shock at the time, while Levenback (1999) proposes that Septimus's suicide is founded on rational judgement and an attempt to escape his controlling doctors.

Out of the various diagnoses offered, Cathy Caruth's description of posttraumatic stress as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of

repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience" (1995:4) is a broad but useful definition as it gives credence to possible origins of his suffering and emphasises that both perceived and imaginal elements should be understood as part of his lived perspective. Despite this, I would argue that it remains difficult, or perhaps even inaccurate, to describe him solely according to contemporary analyses due to both the contextual gap between any current understanding of trauma and those of the 1920s and the often symbolic or mythic quality given to descriptions of his perspective. In this, I agree with Bonikowski's questioning of the purpose of such diagnoses:

> But what do we gain by labeling Septimus shell-shocked […] paranoid, schizophrenic, or any other officially approved psychiatric term whose symptoms can be checked off in the DSM, if not a small satisfaction that we have solved him? What we risk losing in diagnosing and explaining Septimus is an internal logic, and even beauty, to his madness, that insists on a meaning beyond the conventions and frameworks of Woolf's time and our own (2016:147).

The following analyses of those scenes of the novel presented from Septimus's perspective do not, therefore, attempt to hold to any more specific understandings of trauma and its symptoms as explanations for his altered perspective. Instead, my focus lies in the ways in which Woolf presents his lived perspective and how this may contribute to an overall understanding of the intersubjective relationships and connections in the novel.

The first glimpse of Septimus is of a man "aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed…with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too" (*MD*:12). Watchers' sense of apprehension follows him and Rezia over the course of the novel, with Maisie Johnson finding the couple "very queer" (*MD*:22), and Peter Walsh imagining that their "awful scene" (*MD*:60) means they had argued or found out bad news. Even when Septimus

is not gazed at and evaluated by Holmes or Bradshaw, his mannerisms seem instinctually to alert others that there is something strange about him. This apprehension is mirrored in Septimus's interpretations of other people around him, such as in the first scene when he "[finds] himself unable to pass" (*MD*:12) and feels, even if this is not true, that he is an object of others' gaze: "was he not being looked at and pointed at" (*MD*:13). The free indirect discourse from Septimus' perspective fluctuates between the real and the hallucinatory and is contrasted with the parenthetical anxiety-laden comments from Rezia's perspective as well as other characters' underlying confusion about or worry for him.

Septimus's most extensive vision occurs while he and Rezia sit in Regent's Park, with the real and the hallucinatory blending together in harmony. The scene begins with him "[lying] back in his chair…very high, on the back of the world" (*MD*:58), implicitly layering his physical surroundings of the park with an imaginary space high up on the rocks. The perceived and the imaginal are intertwined at this moment as the sounds of motor-car horns "cannon[ ] from rock to rock" (*MD*:58), infiltrating both his bodily field via his hearing and the fantastical space in which he seems to reside. The rocks "on the back of the world" (*MD*:58) are not topographically real in Regent's Park but instead allude, along with the description that his body has been "macerated" and lies spread "like a veil upon a rock" (*MD*:58), to a mythic space with links to either Odysseus or Prometheus. Anne Fernald, editor of the Cambridge University Press's scholarly edition of *Mrs Dalloway*, footnotes this phrase as including possible allusions to the veil that the goddess Ino gives Odysseus to protect his body from Poseidon's storms or to Prometheus bound to a rock in punishment for gifting fire to humans (2017:251). Both allusions have merit – Odysseus as war-torn soldier and Prometheus as the bearer of divine knowledge – and underlie Septimus's visions

as not only moments of psychic confusion but as the sense of the "hidden pattern" which Woolf identifies as lying behind everyday reality. The music of the car horns, soon joined by what might have been either a penny whistle or a shepherd boy's pipe, further enmeshes the far past with a possible present so that the rising music "visible" as "smooth columns" becomes an "anthem", a "plaint" and an "elegy" (*MD*:58) which seem to transcend space and time.

The entanglement of the imaginal and the perceived is echoed in the scene's movements between free indirect discourse and indirect or reported speech. Septimus's simultaneous awareness of his physical surroundings and the visionary experience defies attempts to separate the mythic and unreal from the present and concrete perceptions, with the shifting narrative perspectives further complicating the relationships between temporal and spatial loci:

> Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still, came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him—the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house (*MD*:58).

The divisions between free indirect discourse (written in the third-person past tense) and indirect speech (written in the third-person present tense) seem clear-cut at first, as in the difference between the music which "began clanging against the rocks up here" (free indirect discourse due to the combination of the past tense verb and the direct adverb of place) followed by "It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered" (indirect speech in the present tense with a speech tag). The perceived motor horn "down" below and the music "up here" create a locational split between the

perceptual and the imaginal, which seems echoed in the shifts in narrative voice. The second instance of indirect speech is even placed in parentheses, further demarcating his reasoning that the music is actually "an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house" (*MD*:58) from the incongruous presence of a "shepherd's boy" in London. The distinctions between perceptual and imaginal moments, as well as their associated narrative voices, become muddled, however, as the indirect speech, previously used for *sensorily* perceived moments, is used to report Septimus's thought that the shepherd's boy plays his "elegy…among the traffic" (*MD*:58). As the boy's music seems to be drawn downwards towards the tangible London scene, Septimus "withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him". Unlike the previous free indirect discourse, this remains in the present, thereby further tangling both narrative perspectives and perceptual/imaginal descriptions. Despite refuting the seemingly tangled perceptions of roses and snow by "remind[ing] himself" that he has seen roses on his bedroom wallpaper and implicitly choosing the old man with the penny whistle as the actual source of the music, a clear progression from the unreal to the real remains tenuous.

Septimus seems reluctant to return to his tangible surroundings, preferring to remain "high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock" (*MD*:58). The image echoes previous allusions to Odysseus, which may imply that his interjection following this description demonstrates his desire to remain apart from the world around him. He seems to take on the identity of the "drowned sailor", exclaiming: "I went under the sea. I have been dead, and am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged" (*MD*:58). The narrator makes it clear that, despite his efforts, Septimus finds "himself drawing towards life" (*MD*:59) as a sleeper unconsciously reacts to "the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chim[ing] and chatter[ing] in a queer harmony" (*MD*:58). Unlike the frequent

images of height and water or coldness – often in relation to drowning – he returns to "the shores of life" while "the sun [grows] hotter" (*MD*:59). The collapse of the height and distance described during his vision is, once again, not a complete abandonment of the imaginal aspect of his perspective, as his feeling that "something tremendous [is] about to happen" (*MD*:59) is suggestive of the weight or significance which those experiences otherwise marked as the background to daily life still hold, and thereby, a continuing of the imaginal as underlying and enriching his sensory perceptions.

Any engagement with his tangible, perceivable surroundings seems draining: "he [has] only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him" (*MD*:59). The sense of rapture p0

resent in descriptions of his vision continues as he gazes at the park around him. He feels "beauty [springing] instantly" as the world seems to speak to him, saying, "We welcome…we accept; we create" (*MD*:59). There is "an exquisite joy" in watching the rhythmical patterns of the swallows, and the "chime" he hears "tinkl[es] divinely on the grass stalks" (*MD*:59), thereby reiterating the hints of the mythic or fantastical previously expressed. Importantly, however, Septimus's perceptions of Regent's Park are not a complete return to the isolated vision on the rocks. In turning his physical gaze to his surroundings, he encounters everyday objects and sensations "made out of ordinary things" (*MD*:59). His focus on the ordinary and his ability to consider it in a new light demonstrate a similar attitude to that of the phenomenological reduction discussed in the short stories above, with his parenthetical appeals to science and reason remaining bracketed from his lived experience of the space. In doing so, he focuses on the patterns he sees – the swallows which fly "with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun

"spotting now this leaf, now that" – and deduces that "all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere" (*MD*:59). His conclusion may be similar to Woolf's declaration in "A Sketch of the Past" that "the whole world is a work of art" (*MB*:72), which would shift the focus from the enfolding of mythic and present spatiotemporal markers towards a more wholistic aesthetic vision which, although incorporating elements of the previous mythic allusions, focuses on the everyday lived perceptions.[23]

(No) Common World

Septimus's perspective remains an ambiguous intertwining of the perceived and the imaginal, so it is unclear to what extent he feels autonomously engaged in it as opposed to feeling controlled by the seeming closeness he experiences in relation to his surroundings. While the breakdown of his relationship with Rezia and elements of his vision seem to privilege a withdrawal from an active engagement with life, the sense of obligation he feels from some primordial force looms over him and gives him no respite. His simultaneous feelings of privileged and overwhelming closeness with the natural world, along with his concerns that he might become the object of scrutiny – "Was he not being looked at and pointed at" (*MD*:13) – underlie the links between self and other with the possible threat of invasion and the loss of privacy and autonomy.

Septimus's breakdown is underscored by a series of obligations: his vague desire to halt Rezia's increasing hopelessness at his lack of engagement or feeling, and by the end of the novel, his desire to escape Holmes' callous downplaying of his distress as being "in a funk" (*MD*:78) and Bradshaw's

[23] It is, however, uncertain to what degree this is actively considered, in comparison to Woolf's focus on conscious deliberation in "A Sketch of the Past".

control borne of a seeming obligation to remove him from the public. These obligations are structured using two instances of miscommunication, both framed using the sense that one character "must" do something. The narrator comments that, in light of his initial collapse, "he had surrendered; now other people must help him. People must be sent for" (*MD*:77). His moment of "surrender" is translated into the future obligation of his doctors who "must help him" (*MD*:77). In contrast, just before he commits suicide Septimus questions Bradshaw's control: "'Must', 'must', why 'must'?[24] What power had Bradshaw over him? 'What right has Bradshaw to say "must" to me?'" (*MD*:125). Rezia's unhesitating response – that 'it is because [he] talked of killing [himself]" (*MD*:125) – demonstrates that the doctors' help is accompanied by an understanding that they may hold power over his movements and decisions.[25]

Yet this exchange of obligation and expected action fails because the nature of what "help" might mean differs so dramatically for Septimus and his doctors. Although both uses of "must" suggest a clear translation – the narrator ties his collapse to future medical help, while Rezia connects Bradshaw's control to his suicidal ideation – there is no shared language which enables communication between him and his doctors. Issues of communication in the novel have been the focus of various previous studies, but of particular significance are those which discuss the intersection of trauma and expression. Kaley Joyes connects Septimus's recognition of his breakdown with a desire to "narrate his trauma" (2008:73), which goes unfulfilled due to his chosen witnesses' tendency to dismiss him, and Karen DeMeester argues that his suicide is "a

[24] Although Holmes's contrasting diagnosis is underpinned by an assumption that "there was nothing whatever the matter with him" (*MD*:78), he too instills a sense of obligation grounded in "right" action: "Didn't [talking of suicide] give [Rezia] a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed?" (*MD*:78)

[25] This is echoed in Bradshaw's claim that it is a "question of law" (*MD*:82) since suicide was illegal in England until 1961 (cf. *Suicide Act of 1961*).

desperate but futile last attempt to communicate […] It is caused by society's refusal to let him give meaning to that pain" (1998:365).[26] These arguments capture the elements of both desire and dismissal outlined above, a disconnect which reaches far deeper than a momentary misunderstanding of roles.

While I hesitate to classify Septimus's experiences as those of one suffering from trauma, at least according to a purely contemporary understanding of trauma and PTSD, Joyes's focus on witnessing complements Septimus's desire to communicate, to be heard: "Communication is health; communication is happiness" (*MD*:79). Witnessing, as trauma theorist Cathy Caruth explains, is a process by which the traumatised individual attempts to express this experience to another in the hope that doing so will help transform what s/he "cannot fully know" (Caruth,1996:3) into an understandable and interpretable form. Caruth presents the traumatic experience as "unassimilated […] it is precisely *not known* in the first instance [but] returns to haunt the survivor later on" (1996:4, original emphasis). Expression, particularly a successful act of witnessing, may assist in assimilating the experience and moving toward recovery. While DeMeester and Joyes both acknowledge the issues which Septimus faces in bearing witness to his experiences and translating these to others, they focus primarily on the individual's relationships with others in his or her community – in this case, Septimus's doctors and Rezia – to highlight "[the] individual experiences of trauma that necessarily oscillate between private and public meanings, personal and political paradigms" (Balaev, 2008:156).

[26] See also Sue Thomas's "Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shell shock" (1987) for links to real-life responses to post-war trauma in England.

The contrasts between the individual and his/her community, represented by groups or specific individuals, may lead to an implied split between the mind of the individual and the external world of other subjects. Joyes, for example, states that Woolf's "representation of his trauma is an obvious example of the modernist 'inward turn' and interest in psychology" (2008:73). DeMeester, despite acknowledging the frequent instances of "traditional, socially inscribed modes of expression such as analogy, metaphor, or myth" (1998:655) present in Septimus's sections of the novel, treats these as representational and figurative modes of expression used to highlight the gap between "the intensity of experience and emotion the veteran wishes to convey and [that which] the listener can imagine and feel" (1998:655). Both these claims, intentionally or not, separate the physical from the mental and present the mythopoetic language as second-order representations or interpretations of his mental state as part of a cathartic process. However, if one acknowledges that most of those passages, as discussed in depth earlier in this chapter, are an entanglement of reported speech and free indirect discourse with no clear sense that Septimus views either the perceived or the visionary as a division of real versus metaphor, then it becomes evident that regarding the figurative merely as a literary embellishment or self-reflective interpretations problematically simplifies his lived experience.

There is some evidence of Septimus's attempts to translate his worries about his "[descent]…into the pit" (*MD*:77) into terms which are sure to evoke a response. The performative nature of his initial collapse does not rule out his mental ill health, but it does suggest that he is at least partially aware of *how* to communicate his distress:

> At last, with a melodramatic gesture which he assumed mechanically and with complete consciousness of its insincerity, he dropped his head on his hands. Now he had surrendered; now other people must help him. People must be sent for. He gave in (*MD*:77).

Holmes does not, in fact, provide any help, arguing that "health is largely a matter in [his] own control" and that Septimus need only "throw [himself] into outside interests" (*MD*:78). Following a series of ineffectual suggestions of hobbies and activities, he prescribes bromide, a particularly ironic choice, as "bromide" may be defined as both a sedative and "a trite remark" (Fernald, 2017:269). Holmes's dismissal of a possible mental illness destroys any hope that Septimus might have had that someone else could help him. He believes, shortly after Holmes's first consultation, that "there [is] no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death" (*MD*:77).

Holmes's inexperience with or outright dismissal of Septimus's mental illness is followed by Bradshaw's extreme self-confidence in his diagnosis. He ascertains, with his "lightning skill and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis", that "it [is] a case of complete breakdown—complete physical and nervous breakdown" (*MD*:81). His consultation with the Warren Smiths is directed mainly at Rezia, implicitly seeking a more objective or rational perspective than he thinks Septimus would offer. Bradshaw's disregard for his opinion and experiences is seen most acutely during the few moments when he tries to express himself. Understandably intimidated by Bradshaw's presence, he stammers and repeats phrases aloud as if doing so allows him to focus. His halting "I—I——" Bradshaw interprets as egotism, encouraging him "to think as little about [himself] as possible" (*MD*:83). He continuously disregards any possibility of engaging with Septimus, instead finding a plethora of evidence for his diagnosis at every point of the consultation:

> 'You served with great distinction in the War?'
> The patient repeated the word 'war' interrogatively.
> He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom to be noted on the card (*MD*:81).

This is perhaps Bradshaw's most disturbing conclusion as it suggests that attaching implicitly personal symbolism to a word is a marker of mental unbalance. Although Bradshaw cannot be aware of his movements prior to the consultation, this condemnation serves as a reminder of Septimus's earlier vacillation between the real and the imaginal. It could be argued, therefore, that Bradshaw's statement more broadly applies to the seemingly visionary aspects of Septimus's lived experience, thereby condemning his perspective as a "symptom" of his "not having a sense of proportion" (*MD*:82) and violently separating aspects of lived experience into truth and falsity.

Although Septimus's breakdown may have included a sense of future obligation to his doctors, their responses result in a clear exacerbation of his mental illness. Holmes and Bradshaw, despite their divergent diagnoses, share a disregard for his experiences, implying that he has made insufficient effort to "control" (*MD*:78) his health (according to Holmes) or reach a sense of Bradshaw's "proportion". The suggested treatments – taking up hobbies and paying attention to his surroundings (Holmes) and social and intellectual isolation (Bradshaw) – are founded on the assumption that Septimus's current perspective of and engagement with the world and other people need to be addressed. Difference is acknowledged only as deviance, and the denial of his lived perspective is aimed at removal from social life Bradshaw's remedy through the threat that "these unsocial impulses… [are to be] held in control" (*MD*:86) rather than trying to combat aspects of this perspective that negatively affect his mental health.

The reciprocity evident in communication, previously discussed concerning Peter and Clarissa's relationship, is even less evident in Septimus's interactions with both Holmes and Bradshaw. Although Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a couple where "there is more love felt on one side than on the other" (*PP*:416) to illustrate the issues which arise in the absence of reciprocity, his

comments could be taken further to encompass other intersubjective interactions. To summarise, an "absence of reciprocity" results in "the world of the one tak[ing] in completely that of the other, so that one feels disinherited in favour of the other" (*PP*:416):

> I…share no common ground with another, for the positing of the other with his world, and the positing of myself with mine are mutually exclusive. Once the other is posited, once the other's gaze fixed upon me has, by inserting me into his field, stripped me of part of my being, it will readily be understood that I can recover it only by establishing relations with him, by bringing about his clear recognition of me, and that my freedom requires the same freedom (*PP*:416).

I would argue that Merleau-Ponty's comments, despite originally forming part of a systematic interrogation of the possibilities and limitations of solipsism, include a clear ethical stance. If one considers the "consummate reciprocity" of intersubjective interactions to be the full recognition of another individual as a subject of a shared inter-world,[27] then the absence of reciprocity denies the other access to this shared existence and invalidates their perspective. "Co-existence", Merleau-Ponty argues, "must in all cases be experienced on both sides" (*PP*:416).

These comments are especially in line with Bradshaw's attitude as he acknowledges the possibility of Septimus's mental illness only to vilify it. Septimus tries to maintain some sense of privacy during his consultation with Bradshaw, refusing to answer his query about his suicidal ideation, but Bradshaw rebuffs this, arguing that "[n]obody lives for himself alone" (*MD*:83). The plea to community is, as becomes evident in the descriptions of Proportion and Conversion, contingent

[27] The nature of this reciprocity is critiqued by Emmanuel Levinas, who claims that Merleau-Ponty's work does not account for the alterity inherent to intersubjectivity. He contends that Merleau-Ponty's allowance for reciprocity creates a loop of symmetrical exchange "thus reabsorbed into the unity of the system, destroying the radical alterity of the other" ([1961] 2007:35-6) which reduces otherness to an extension of the self/same. Cf. *Totality and Infinity* ([1961] 2007) and "Intersubjectivity: Notes on Merleau-Ponty" ([1983] 1990:55-60), both by Levinas, and Luce Irigaray's "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm'" ([1984] 1993:151-184, see in particular 154-7).

on an individual following his "understanding of the human soul" (*MD*:81). Lady Bradshaw, for example, is described as having "gone under", her "submission" similar to Merleau-Ponty's description of the gaze of another which lacks reciprocity: "there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his" (*MD*:85). Her lack of agency is described by her body as, in contrast to the "freedom" with which she used to fish, she "cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, [and] peeped through" (*MD*:85), effectively shaping her habits and actions according to her husband's desire "for dominion" (*MD*:85).

The absence of reciprocity, Merleau-Ponty suggests, can only be overcome "by establishing relations with [another]" and a "clear recognition" of both the individual as subject and the individual freedoms and agency of both parties. Despite this failing in his interactions with Holmes or Bradshaw – "Human nature…the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils" (*MD*:78) remains a persistent threat – he does achieve a modicum of communication with Rezia, and in a transcendent sense, with Clarissa.[28]

Rezia seems to be an unsympathetic, or even detrimental, presence for part of the novel, alternately worrying that "[p]eople must notice; people must see" (*MD*:13) her husband's odd behaviour and following Holmes's suggestions to "make him notice real things" (*MD*:22) by repeatedly telling Septimus to "look" (*MD*:18, 22). She seems to cling to the assurance that "nothing whatever seriously [was] the matter with him" (*MD*:18) and wonders why, if "she had done nothing wrong", she should "suffer" in her marriage (*MD*:55). The consultation with Bradshaw marks a change in

[28] Joyes argues that both Rezia and Clarissa fail to become witnesses for Septimus, due to the fact that they "remain enmeshed within the repressive subject hierarchies that impede recovery": Rezia is "marginalized by both patriarchal and national hierarchies" due to her position as a foreign woman and Clarissa's "gender and her class privilege limit her witnessing ability" (2008:70-1).

her attitude, however, as she acknowledges that despite her request for "help" she and Septimus have been "deserted" (*MD*:84). In the process of trying to separate them, Bradshaw has, in fact, succeeded in renewing her bond with her husband.

The couple's final moments in their flat highlight this as they make a hat together and Rezia promises to "go with him…They could not separate them against their wills" (*MD*:125). This scene echoes Merleau-Ponty's notion that in spoken or gestural dialogue two people may be "collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity" (*PP*:143). Their "thoughts" are presented in their collaborative design and construction of Mrs Peters's hat, with Septimus "putting odd colours together" and Rezia "[stitching] it together" (*MD*:122). Their sense of reciprocity is captured in Rezia's declaration that "she could say anything to him now" (*MD*:124), as if their moment of shared creation has broken down her belief that "failure one conceals" (*MD*:14). Septimus, in turn, is far more in tune with his wife's thoughts and emotions than his earlier sense of hopelessness at his inability to communicate with her.[29] As he watches her try on the hat, he imagines her mind:

> [Like] a bird, falling from branch to branch, and always alighting, quite rightly; he could follow her mind, as she sat there in one of those loose lax poses that came to her naturally, and, if he should say anything, at once she smiled, like a bird alighting with all its claws firm upon the bough (*MD*:124-5).

The descriptions of her "alighting" on a new branch capture the reciprocity of their interchange, with her "[grasping his thoughts] the moment they come into being" and even "[anticipating] them" (*PP*:143), interpreting his frenzied requests to "burn" his papers as a need to retain his

[29] Kirsty Martin further suggests that this realisation of Rezia's feelings is discovered "through her body […] he understands her because of something in her posture, in her glance" and that their collaboration on Mrs Peters's hat "conveys and prompts a form of sympathy based on energy infused in the body" (2013:100).

privacy against the "snuffling" of his doctors, and responding by promising that "[n]o one could separate them" (*MD*:126). That Rezia would be unable to fulfil this promise is quite possible since, in the general sense, Bradshaw has "to support him police and the good of society" (*MD*:86), and more immediately, Holmes "[is] a powerfully built man" who "[puts] her aside" (*MD*:126) when she tries to block his way. Joyes renders Rezia's recognition of Septimus's suicide as an instance of failed witnessing since, despite the initial moment when "[she] ran to the window, she saw; she understood" (*MD*:127), she is swiftly silenced by Holmes's sedating her: "[d]espite her brief alliance with Septimus, Rezia is unable to stop Holmes, and she is unable to save Septimus from the consequences of his trauma" (Joyes, 2008:78). But such a conclusion conflates individual interaction and understanding with communal change and implies that witnessing can only be successful if the individual witness has enough agency. Instead, I would argue, Rezia's efforts to shift her focus from that of a somewhat exasperated caregiver to an empathic spouse, to rebuild the reciprocity he has lost in his interactions with Holmes and Bradshaw, are successful.[30] Septimus, who has previously felt that "Rezia could not understand him" and "he was deserted" (*MD*:78), recognises both her inability to change their circumstances due to her lack of societal agency and her individual witnessing: "She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest." (*MD*:125-6). Despite her inability to prevent the future "forcing [of his] soul" (*MD*:157) in the form of Bradshaw's rest-cure, her attempts to engage with his creations through transcribing and later reflecting on his papers as well as their shared making of the hat assure him that "she was with him" (*MD*:126).

[30] Fowler notes that Rezia's previous "language of isolation" is transformed "into the plural solidary pronouns of *they, them, their*" (2017:30, original emphasis).

Rezia is able, through active conversation and creative pursuits, to foster a sense of community and empathy which allow her to witness her husband's life. This process is enacted again when Clarissa hears that "[a] young man had killed himself" (*MD*:156) and seems to know instinctively how he had done it:

> He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it […] He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it (*MD*:156).

The description offers a mix of transcendent experience and spectatorship as Clarissa seems to understand the circumstances of Septimus's suicide instinctively; her body "went through it", reliving the fall and impalement as if it were her own.[31] In contrast, the description ends with the narrator claiming: "So she saw it", a stance which situates her as a spectator to the scene, able to empathise but not live out his suicide. This combination of apparent transcendence and spectatorship continues as she asks: "But why had he done it?" and then answers the question with a proposed scenario: "Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw […] might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?" (*MD*:157) However, Clarissa's rather astute observation can only be an assumption of the events since she was not there to witness them. The text seems to merge the knowledge of the reader with that of Clarissa so that the impossibility of factual accuracy evident

[31] Martin suggests that in the transcendent connectivity of the novel Woolf depicts the "transmission of affect" through "the infused energy of London" which, in turn, "suggests how feeling might not be purely individual, but might, inevitably, give rise to sympathetic connections" (2013:105). Although I do not disagree with Martin that there seems to be an affectual bond connecting the two characters, I hesitate to focus solely on the overlaps of their experiences rather than on how subjective perception enables an empathy which leaves room for unknowability.

in the "[s]uppose he had […] might he not then have" formulation is conflated with Clarissa's affective response that "indeed she felt it now" (*MD*:157).

These tensions between Clarissa's feelings of connectedness and the inaccessible nature of Septimus's lived experience have much in common with Merleau-Ponty's discussions of communication and intersubjectivity:

> But then, the behaviour of another, and even his words, are not that other. The grief and the anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed. Or in so far as I can, by some friendly gesture, become part of that grief or that anger, they still remain the grief and anger of my friend […] whereas I suffer because [he] is grieved, or I am angry because he is angry, and our situations cannot be superimposed on each other (*PP*:415).

Found in-between Merleau-Ponty's description of the "consummate reciprocity" of expressive conversation and his comments on an absence of such a reciprocity, this tension between a desire to display empathy and the "solipsism rooted in living experience" (*PP*:417) echoes Woolf's claim that "[w]e do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others" (*E4*:320). Clarissa, despite her vision of Septimus's death and its apparent empathic revelation of his reasoning, can only reflect upon the scene in light of her own experiences and desires and frames his death according to her earlier reminiscing about her youth. She contrasts the shilling "[s]he had once thrown…into the Serpentine" with the life "he had flung…away", claims that there is a mystical "thing…that mattered" which he has been able to preserve yet which is "wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life" and connects her musings about whether "he [had] plunged holding his treasure" (*MD*:156) with her memories of ecstasy at the thought of seeing Sally (cf. *MD*:29). Each contrast both affirms the novel's sustained representation of the nature of lived experience as an interconnected web of self, others, and world, and reinforces the idea that Clarissa's "witnessing"

of Septimus's death does not bring *his* experience "into language and [give it] a more manageable, comprehensible dimension" (Fowler, 2017:30). Rather, her affective response to the news reorients it according to her assemblage of memories and present views.

This is not to say that her search for personal significance should be judged as unsympathetic or self-centred. Instead, these moments enact again Clarissa's gathering together of elements of her self and question the possibility of her earlier claim that she was "part of people she had never met" (*MD*:8). Her call to "assemble" (*MD*:158) has previously been discussed in relation to the contraction of the self "into one centre, one diamond" (*MD*:32), particularly in light of her sense of a loss of social permeability or intimacy. In contrast to her earlier insistence that she "had tried to be the same always" (*MD*:32), her final recollection of the line from *Cymbeline* is placed alongside her search for intersubjective connections, first to Septimus and then to "the old lady" in the room opposite" (*MD*:157), suggesting that she has come to view her life as "an interrogation of time as flux in the search for an emergence of sense" (Wiskus, 2019:148). This is particularly evident in the imagery of her previous recollection of the phrase while she mends her dress:

> Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt. So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall […] Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall (*MD*:33-4).

The "flux" of which Wiskus (2019:148) writes about in relation to Merleau-Ponty is similar to "this having done with the triumphs of youth…the process of living" (*MD*:157), figured both according to Clarissa's experiences and her crystallisation of the older woman next door's life into her process of going to bed; her repeated interrogation of the significance of the phrase "Fear no more the heat of the sun" (*MD*:158; cf. 25, 34) may be seen as a structuring mechanism for her

"search for an emergence of sense" (Mildenberg, 2019:148). The imagery of the mending process is superimposed with the rhythm of the waves, which suggests that although the stitching of an existing dress might only serve to restore what is original, the process of "collect[ing] the…folds together and attach[ing] them" is an open-ended cyclical movement, building up and falling apart like waves on the shore.

Clarissa's time in "the little room" becomes, like her transformation in front of her mirror and her sewing, not only a demonstration of her intersubjective connections to those around her but, more specifically, to the ways in which intersubjectivity is necessarily temporal:

> In every focusing movement my body unites present, past and future, it secretes time, or rather it becomes that location in nature where, for the first time, events, instead of pushing each other into the realm of being, project round the present a double horizon of past and future and acquire a historical orientation (*PP*:278-9).

Woolf's oft-quoted explanations of her treatment of memory in *Mrs Dalloway* as a "tunnelling process, by which [she tells] the past by instalments" (*D2*:272), "[digs] out beautiful caves behind [her] characters" and makes these "connect & each [come] to daylight at the present moment" (*D2*:263) implicitly acknowledge that memory is experienced in and shaped by the embodied present. Embodied experience is necessarily temporal, not merely as a linear succession of moments but as a perpetual "[secretion]" or "[projection] round the present" of events, perceptions, and imaginings which together form an openness to the world which "takes the form of active engagement with the things around us" (Matthews, 2010:35). Clarissa's recognition that the "ashen pale [sky], raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds" is "new to her" (*MD*:158), recalls the past horizon of "[m]any a time had she gone…to look at the sky" (*MD*:157) and "collect[s]

the…folds together and attache[s] them" (*MD*:33-4) to both the present and the horizon of the future.

This final summation of the memories that have haunted her throughout the novel and her subsequent decision that "she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter" (*MD*:158) together suggest an opening-up of her embodied selfhood. It demonstrates that, as Merleau-Ponty explains in relation to how an idea "line[s]" (*VI*:150) the perceptible, "inhabit[ing] this world, sustain[ing] it, and render[ing] it visible" (*VI*:151), "the first vision, the first contact [between perceiver and idea], the first pleasure" marks "the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated" (*VI*:151). In Woolf's terms, the drawing together of her memories becomes a significant idea that "sustains" Clarissa's perceptions and engagement with the material world around her. It does not signal a revelation of finite subjectivity but highlights the open-ended horizon of her embodiment. The final sentences of the novel demonstrate this in the shift to Peter's perspective:

> What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
> It is Clarissa, he said.
> For there she was (*MD*:165).

Here she is presented not through the free indirect discourse or reported speech of her perspective but from another's view. Rendering Clarissa from Peter's perspective reinitiates the elements of Clarissa's identity, connecting, folding, and contracting these alongside his old taunt that she would "stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess" (*MD*:6). Furthermore, in the blurring of the lines between the free indirect discourse and reported speech (or thought), the final vision

of Clarissa hints again at Woolf's deliberate textual interlacing or patterning to denote complex webs of perception and perspective – a notion of intersubjectivity which rests in the intersections of self, others, and world and which may be affectively experienced through the vision of the characters and textual markers. Just as "[t]he world is laden with a depth of meaning without total closure or consistency […] because the temporal texture of experience folds the absent and the past into the present moment" (Alcoff, 2000:258), so too does Woolf's writing "fold" together the experiential and the represented.

This chapter has aimed to demonstrate some of the ways in which Woolf employs perception in her writing, and how this is often, despite the seeming primacy given to the characters' interority, clearly embodied. The introductory analyses of the short stories demonstrate various strands which are expanded upon with more complexity in *Mrs Dalloway*. Perception in the shorter fiction is an intertwining of sensory experience and imaginative meaning-making as the characters and speakers explore their worlds. This is taken further in the multifocality of the novel where "looking together" is figured not only as a physical act of joint attention but as an openness toward other people's views – in the literal and figurative senses – or a sharing thereof. This is countered by moments where visual perception becomes a tool to interrogate another's selfhood (for example the narrator in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" and Sir William Bradshaw's consultation with Septimus) or is isolated or disregarded to the point of rendering it as a fantasy (Charles toward John and Septimus versus his doctors). In moments of collaboration where multifocality – and the divergent selves of these embodied perceivers – folds together past and present, similarities and differences, experience and reflection, Woolf suggests that intercorporeality may form spaces of empathy that acknowledge the multifaceted and ever-changing embodied nature of the self.

CHAPTER 3
THE CANVAS OF LIFE

> Although it is certain that a person's life does not *explain* his work, it is equally certain that the two are connected. The truth is that *that work to be done called for that life.*
>
> "Cézanne's Doubt" (70, original emphasis)

> These were two of the adventures of my professional life. The first—killing the Angel in the House—I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved.
>
> "Professions for Women" (*E6*:483)

The "adventures of [the] professional life", and in particular those of an artist, are intimately connected to the lived experiences and circumstances of the artist, as suggested in both Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the elements which shaped Cézanne's artistic practice, and Woolf's reflection on the struggles and achievements she faced as a writer. The above excerpt from "Cézanne's Doubt" presents an intertwining of artwork and artist's life that does not attempt to match art with biographical details, explicitly stating that while one might find hints of "the work to come" in the facts of his life, "it would be wrong to take these hints for causes" (CD:70). Specifically, Merleau-Ponty argues that the search for cause and effect may lead to viewing biographical details as "absurd fact and destiny" (CD:71), treating them as directly causing, influencing, or resulting in either art works or artistic style. "If", he postulates, "I am a certain project from birth, the given and the created are indistinguishable in me", and it becomes impossible to pinpoint what "is merely hereditary or innate", "spontaneous", or "absolutely new in regard to that way of being in the world which, from the very beginning, is myself" (CD:71).

How, then, might one define the bond between artist and work? Merleau-Ponty proposes a rebuttal to determinism:

> Two things are certain about freedom: that we are never determined and yet that we never change, since, looking back on what we were, we can always find hints of what we have become. It is up to us to understand both these things simultaneously, as well as the way freedom dawns in us without breaking our bonds with the world (CD:72).

This is an admittedly existentially framed argument, but one which I believe may generate a sense of productive engagement and involvement. The individual's life, for Merleau-Ponty, is never wholly pre-determined since it could be argued that "the 'hereditary traits,' the 'influences'—the accidents in Cézanne's life – are the text which nature and history gave him to decipher" (CD:70), a context which both grounds an individual's life and does not necessarily define it. Similarly, his claim that "we never change" is not a signalling of stagnation but a recognition that, upon reflection, these changes may be fluidly incorporated as part of the person's lived experience. For the artist in particular, his/her creations act as "a man's free decisions, [imposing] on this given a figurative sense which did not pre-exist them":

> [I]t is because we get to know his work first and see the circumstances of his life through it, charging them with a meaning borrowed from that work. If the givens for Cézanne which we have been enumerating […] were to figure in the web of projects which he was, they could have done so only by presenting themselves to him as *what* he had to live, leaving *how* to live it undetermined. An imposed theme at the start, they become, when replaced in the existence of which they are part, the monogram and the symbol of a life which freely interpreted itself (CD:70, original emphasis).

However, Merleau-Ponty's emphatic belief in the "life which freely interpret[s] itself" should be challenged by Woolf's explications of the sheer weight of the "accidents" of women's lives and the effects which these "givens" have on women as artists. The short analysis of a poem by Lady Winchilsea offered in Chapter IV of *A Room of One's Own*, for example, describes the poet's mind

as "harassed and distracted with hates and grievances" toward the "opposing faction" who "bar her way to what she wants to do…to write" (*AROO*:50). The triumphant call for self-determinism in "Cézanne's Doubt" may be countered by the narrator's sympathy for Lady Winchilsea's anger. Her circumstances have "grown about with weeds and bound with briars", choking any attempts at artistry. It is only when the narrator reaches "a very important corner on the road", that is, the financial independence which Aphra Bern reached through writing (*AROO*:54), that the balance between a woman's circumstances and her talent for art or writing begins to be evened out. The essay insists upon two necessary conditions: payment – since "[m]oney dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for" (*AROO*:55) – and privacy, the opportunity that women might "go about alone" (*AROO*:58), thereby creating space for creative and social pursuits on their terms. Taken together, the examples of the obstacles women writers and artists more generally have faced over the centuries point toward an uneven starting point for Merleau-Ponty's "*how* to live [one's life] undetermined" (CD:70). The ability to live out the "life which freely interprets itself" is, in Woolf's famous phrase, dependent on "money and a room of her own" (*AROO*:2). The opening hurdle must, therefore, first be overcome before a woman as artist may craft "the monogram and the symbol" (CD:70) of her life.

Woolf's later speech-turned-essay, "Professions for Women" (*E6*:479-84), may be read as the process of crafting circumstances into art. The speech, initially delivered in 1931 to The Women's Service League, focuses on the "professional experiences" (*E6*:479) of women, grounding these in narrativized accounts of Woolf's professional history since her initial book reviews. The most common obstacle to the realisation of such "professional experiences" occurred in the *process* of writing: that of "The Angel in the House" (*E6*:480). The term has become emblematic of a

stereotype of womanhood in Woolf's writing – Mrs Ramsay, for example, or even her mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen – and was first defined by Woolf as a "phantom", "a woman" who "was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own but preferred to sympathize always with the minds of others" (*E6*:480). This "phantom" is an obstruction to the woman writer, continuously interfering with the possibility of self-expression:

> And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room […] she slipped behind me and whispered: "My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." And she made as if to guide my pen (*E6*:480-1).

The Angel acts not only as a trait or influence – as Cézanne's circumstances were described by Merleau-Ponty – but as a tangible presence which looms as a deterministic shadow over the writer and thwarts the freedom of the creative process. The death of the Angel is also described in a combination of figurative and tangible processes: Woolf "[takes] up the inkpot and [flings] it at her", but as she is "a phantom" and not "a reality", she "[is] always creeping back when [Woolf] thought [she] had despatched her" (*E6*:481). The Angel's death is dated here to the very start of Woolf's career, though most scholars argue that if one associates the Angel with her idealised memories of her mother, the "despatch" can better be linked to the completion of *To the Lighthouse* and Woolf's confession that she has laid to rest her memories.[32]

If the Angel marks a woman's struggle to "freely interpret" her interactions with others – particularly men – then the second challenge posed in "Professions for Women" is an issue of

[32] See Kate Adams, "Root and Branch: Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*" (1983:94), Beth Rigel Daugherty, "'There she sat': The Power of the Feminist Imagination in *To the Lighthouse*" (1991:300-1) and Shannon Forbes, "'When Sometimes she Imagined herself like her Mother': The Contrasting Responses of Cam and Mrs. Ramsay to the Role of the Angel in the House" (2000:464).

interpreting the self. In another fictionalised account of her writing process, Woolf recalls how, when she began to write novels, she was disturbed from her "state of trance" by a new obstacle:

> And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused from her dream. She was indeed in a state of the most acute and difficult distress. To speak without figure she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say (*E6*:482).

Although the Angel's presence has been killed when discussing the works of others, her notions of respectability remain, silencing the woman who wishes to write "about the body", to "[speak] the truth about her passions" (*E6*:483). Even more obstructive than the Angel, the anxiety at the thought of writing of those experiences "peculiar to women" (*E6*:479) violently destroys the moment of creative production as the fisherman's boat of Woolf's image of the sea of the creative process is "dashed…against" (*E6*:482) these rocks of decency and decorum. In response to this, Woolf claims that she "[does] not think [she] solved" the possibility of "telling the truth about [her] own experiences as a body" (*E6*:483), leaving the issue of "a life which freely interpret[s] itself" through creative pursuits seemingly unresolved.

Although both of Woolf's essays above have focused on writing, this chapter shifts toward the visual arts to draw together the thematic foci of the artistic process and production found in both Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics essays discussed below and Woolf's rendering of visual artistry in *To the Lighthouse*.

Woolf and Painting

The epigraphs have joined together not only two authors but also two art forms: painting and writing. The influence of the visual arts in Woolf's writing is well-documented, such as in Jane

Goldman's *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* ([1998] 2001), Diane F. Gillespie's *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (1991), and various entries in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, edited by Maggie Humm (2010). The making and criticism of the visual arts are a constant in Woolf's life, such as in her friendships with Clive Bell and Roger Fry, and the close relationship with her sister, Vanessa Bell. Scholarship has vacillated over the years regarding the level of influence from any of these confidants, with prioritisation given to Woolf's possible ties to the formalism of Clive Bell and Roger Fry or the feminist projects of Vanessa and Virginia.

Woolf was hesitant to conflate the visual and the verbal,[33] a stance shared by both Roger Fry and Clive Bell, especially in the earlier days of formalism.[34] Woolf states in her eulogy of Fry that despite "his understanding of art [owing] much to his understanding of life… he disliked the mixing and mingling of different things. He wanted art to be art; literature to be literature; and life to be life" (*E6*:61). Although he acknowledged that "the arts of painting and writing lay close together" (1940:239) and frequently "[made] raids across the boundaries" (1940:239-40), Woolf's biography describes his "[displeasure at finding] flaws in the art of writing" (1940:240): in "England…literature…had done so much to turn the artist into a mere illustrator […] How far…could literature be considered an art? Writers lacked conscience; they lacked objectivity, they did not treat words as painters treat paint" (1940:240). As Högberg summarises:

[33] This is discussed in further detail below, in an overview of Woolf's essays on aesthetics and painting.

[34] For a succinct overview of the tensions between literature and art in early formalism see Christopher Reed's "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics" (1992). Reed notes that much of the criticism lobbed at literature can be found in earlier formalist writings and that Fry seems to have revised some of his disdain in later works.

> [t]hroughout his essays, Fry associates the 'sensations of ordinary life' with what he terms photographic, illustrational or naturalistic modes of representation, all of which, he argues, are inherently literary rather than painterly. While conceding, in *Transformations*, that literature may well have painterly characteristics and vice versa, he nonetheless maintains that 'we must regard illustration as more closely akin in its essence to literature than it is to plastic art' (Fry, cited in Högberg, 2020:118).

Woolf recalls that, in the early days of his fervent exploration of post-impressionism, Fry attempted to expand his theory's reach to include literature, but instead of new applications, "found glaring examples in Shakespeare, in Shelley, of the writer's vice of distorting reality, of importing impure associations, of contaminating the stream with adjectives and metaphors" (1940:172). Much like his belief that impressionism could be connected to "a deep-rooted conviction…that the aim of painting is the descriptive imitation of natural forms" (Fry, cited in Högberg 2020:118), but which, due to this prioritisation of visual sensation, lacked "design and formal coordination…architectural framework or structural coherence" (Fry, cited in Högberg, 2020:118), English literature at the turn of the century "was suffering from a plethora of old clothes" (1940:172), stitched together by similar representational characteristics and prey to the "sensations of ordinary life" that interfere with the impersonal aesthetics of structure and form.

The sought-after impersonality in painting prioritises form as separate from the daily rhythms of life:

> Form is the talisman. By form the vague, uneasy, and unearthly emotions are transmuted into something definite, logical, and above the earth (Bell, quoted in Medalie, 2002:113).

Importantly, Bell's acknowledgement of emotion is not sparked by representational content, but rather the arrangement of specific elements such as line, shape, and space which together create an

emotive response in the viewer divorced from mimesis or morality.[35] As Adrianne Rubin notes in her discussion of the divergent thinking of Ruskin and Fry, the latter firmly held that emotion inspired by art is separate from moral concerns:[36]

> [A] successful visual composition results from a pleasing organization of formal compositional attributes that inspire 'aesthetic emotion', a feeling akin to religious exaltation, which one experiences when affected by form. While this feeling can be likened in quality to spiritual stimulation, it is not grounded in morality, but valued in and of itself (2013:66).

The desired amorality and recognition of the artwork as a thing in itself rather than as an object conveying a particular didactic or mimetic stance due to "the absence of responsive action [which] implies in actual life moral responsibility" (Fry, quoted in Medalie, 2002:114), are complicated at various points in Woolf's writing, where she alternatively seems to support and diverge from such ideas. Her review of Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, "The Art of Fiction" (*E4*:599-603), interrogates the split of aesthetic and literary concerns raised by Fry and, as she argues, by Forster.[37] She questions his apparent preference for "life" or "the humane" in comparison to "patterns which, though beautiful in themselves, are hostile to humanity": "What is this 'life' that keeps on cropping up so mysteriously and so complacently in books about fiction? Why is it absent in a pattern and present in a tea party?" (*E4*:601) In contrast, Woolf's writing demonstrates an abiding concern with both form and content and a recognition of the complexity of the relationship between the

[35] Adrianne Rubin (2013:52-3) notes that similar comments in Fry's work, especially "An Essay in Aesthetics", demonstrate that "his connection of sensory perception to emotional response coincides with, and indicates an understanding of, principles of physiological psychology, which proposes that such physical reactions lead, if not directly equate, to psychological responses, or emotions".

[36] See Rubin (2013:64-70) for a detailed discussion of the two thinkers' preferences in relation to morality versus emotion.

[37] Whether this critique is wholly valid is beyond the scope of this discussion. Here I only focus on her reworking of the apparently divergent concerns of art and literature as a further example of her concern that one may be inclined to choose one side or the other rather than mediating or balancing between them.

two. Her challenging of the "ideal of purely aesthetic experience" (Reed, 1992:24) is indicative of her reservations about the formalist project, as striving for this results in the loss "of all but the most solipsistic critical criteria" as "Bloomsbury could never justify its judgments beyond subjective assertions of harmony, balance, and right relations" (Reed, 1992:32-3), and, on the other hand, "the resignation of art's claim to social relevance" (Reed, 1992:34). Woolf's views, therefore, may be summarised as a desire to "cut adrift from the…formulas which are supposed to represent the whole of our human adventure" so that the novel "might become a work of art" (*E4*:603) and, more broadly, an aim to balance the subjective and individual with the collective – "who are the judges of reality?", she asks in "Character in Fiction" (*E4*:426) – and the aesthetic with the social or political.[38]

Woolf's various essays on the visual arts demonstrate her continual negotiation with definitions of aesthetic experience and the relationships between the literary and the visual.[39] "Pictures" (*E4*:243-7), published in April 1925, mere months before she began working on *To the Lighthouse* in earnest,[40] is still reasonably entrenched in post-war formalism with its discussion of the irreconcilable differences between painting and literature, and artists' and writers' attempts to cross these. The narrator derides many writers' attempts to capture the visual through pure description; they are, due to the incompatibility of words, "cripples…who paint apples, roses, china, pomegranates, tamarinds, and glass jars as well as words can paint them, which is, of course, not

[38] The struggle to make art and politics coincide may perhaps most memorably be seen in her attempted "novel-essay", *The Pargiters*, which she subsequently split into *The Years* and *Three Guineas*.

[39] Woolf's collection of essays which explore aspects of the visual is much larger than those directly relating to the visual arts; Humm (2016:295) counts just over forty essays, and lists three main features: firstly, a wide "variety of visual topics and subjects", secondly, "a strong focus on the art and work of family and friends", and thirdly, a "continuing need to capture the visual features of specific places (particularly London)".

[40] See, for example, several diary entries for May 1925 onwards (*D3*:18, 29, 34, 36, 38, etc.)

very well" (*E4*:243). These "cripples" are those writers who rely on the visual "[to infer]… ideas, motives, impulses, and emotions" and do not use their "medium for the purposes for which it was created" (*E4*:243). The nature of this purpose is not fully clarified, but the contrasting statements made about "Proust, Hardy, Flaubert, or Conrad" (*E4*:243) suggest that the concern lies in an overreliance on the visual as a source of inferred meaning. These writers are not "cripples" or "victims of the art of painting" because "their eyes" do not "in the least imped[e] their pens" (*E4*:243). The narrator argues that such writers are able to endow a scene with figurative or inferred meaning in a different manner:

> The whole scene, however solidly and pictorially built up, is always dominated by an emotion which has nothing to do with the eye. But it is the eye that has fertilised their thought; it is the eye, in Proust above all, that has come to the help of the other senses, combined with them, and produced effects of extreme beauty, and of a subtlety hitherto unknown (*E4*:244).

The writer's focus shifts from a reliance on the visual as sole descriptor of meaning to a blended use of the sensory descriptions, with the eye's function relegated to "[helping] out the other senses when they flag" (*E4*:244). That is not to say that the visual has no place in Woolf's work; indeed, it is often the starting point for free-flowing reflection, such as the visual aspects of the mark in "The Mark on the Wall" (*CSF*:83-9) or the watery distortions of reflected images on the surface of the pond in "The Fascination of the Pool" (*CSF*:226-7). For both these short stories, the eye "fertilise[s]…thought" (*E4*:244), neither dismissing the power of sensory, embodied perception nor equating it to the mental or the literary. Furthermore, as is evident in her description of a scene from Proust, figurative language, "flash after flash, metaphor after metaphor", is able, alongside "the eye" to "light]] up" the "cave of darkness" (*E4*:244) of the tunnelling progression into the

inner life of a character. Metaphor is not synonymous with mimesis; instead, it is only through the aesthetic that the psychological, emotional, or ethical emerges.

The essay frames the discussion of painting's influence on writing around the opinions of unnamed writers walking through an art gallery:

> If we accost them in picture galleries, disarm their suspicions and get them to tell us honestly what it is that pleases them in pictures, they will confess that it is not the art of painting in the least. […] They are after something that may be helpful to themselves (*E4*:244).

Paintings are raw source materials for writers, stimulating and revitalising the senses. But the distance between the mediums must be maintained so that as much as writers might borrow from visual art, it is the "silent painters" whose works are "so audaciously and provocatively content to be paint" (*E4*:244) who provide the richest sources of inspiration. It is a painting's very lack of language-bound expression which "seems to challenge…to press on some nerve, to stimulate, to excite" (*E4*:245). The unnamed writers in Woolf's narrativized account echo formalist arguments against representational art, disparaging "story-telling picture[s]…as pathetic and ludicrous as a trick played by a dog" (*E4*:245) and arguing that painters should, at most, "tap on the wall of the room" (*E4*:246) to signal some shared meaning. "Pictures" suggests that both writing and painting must "weave their spells like mackerel behind the glass at the aquarium, mutely, mysteriously" (*E4*:245), and though the essay focuses in more depth on writing's debt to painting, there is a sense that these two incompatible mediums, the visual and language, exist most harmoniously when they do not attempt to mimic each other's forms of expression in full, working through suggestion rather than direct association.

Woolf's "Foreword to *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*" (*E5*:137-42) returns the reader to the gallery scene, this time reviewing the experience of entering her sister's most recent exhibition on Bond Street. Bell is a successful and well-known artist by this point, a status Woolf suggests makes her both "the theme of argument at dinner tables" and allows her to "[look] on nakedness with a brush" (*E5*:138). Just as Woolf's prioritisation of Lily Briscoe's circumstances highlights the tenuous connections between artistry and womanhood, Vanessa Bell's status as both a woman and artist is debated by the exhibition attendees, but each claim – "[s]he is interested in children…But she is equally interested in rocks…Does she show any special knowledge of clothes?" (*E5*:139) – seems to spawn further questions rather than providing answers. They hope, therefore, that by "[coming] at some idea of Mrs Bell herself" they will "crack the kernel of her art" (*E5*:139). As justification for this method, the attendees argue that reading as many novels by one author as Bell has paintings in the exhibition would surely yield "the features of the writer" (*E5*:139). Similar to the "silent painters" of "Pictures" (*E4*:245), however, Bell's "pictures are immensely expressive [but] their expressiveness has no truck with words" (*E5*:139). The visual arts, in a painter such as Bell or Cézanne, presents for Woolf an elusive expressivity that "escapes" (*E5*:140) attempts to describe or analyse using language. Although the viewers' inability to describe her work in a narrative fashion may suggest that Bell's work is born from a mental, abstracted vision, she is "somebody to whom the visible world has given a shock of emotion" (*E5*:140). Much like the descriptions of writers whose eyes "fertilised their thought" (*E4*:244), Bell is a painter whose work is grounded in the visible world without falling into illustration, as decried by both Fry and Woolf. She "transmits it and makes us share it; but it is always by her means, in her language, with her susceptibility and not ours" (*E5*:140). Despite the essay's more specific focus on her sister's recent exhibition, the emphasis on the inadequacy of language and the mute expression of paint overlaps

with the earlier "Pictures" (*E4*:243-7), together gesturing to a connection between painter and the visible world which emerges from "the back of appearances" (*TL*:131) and results in an emotive, but inexplicable form of expression.

Woolf returns to the (im)possibility of an overlap between literature and painting in her 1934 essay, "Walter Sickert: A Conversation" (*E6*:36-51), which Sickert prompted her to write in response to her admiration of his work.[41] The essay is framed as a dinner conversation which skips from one topic to another, broadly connected by an overarching interest in the visual perception of colour. The group splits in two: the painters and critics off to one side, communicating without words in a seemingly deeper or truer level. The other diners, "like most English people" (*E6*:39), must rely on fallible language to express their ideas. Unlike earlier essays, "Walter Sickert" presents Woolf's greatest revision of formalism in her suggestion that there might be different types of artists, thereby blurring the literary and the aesthetic.

This group begins debating the apparently literary nature of Walter Sickert's work, with one diner arguing that Sickert is "among the best of biographers" and another claiming that "Sickert always seems more of a novelist" (*E6*:39). Woolf suggests that these hypothetical biographies or novels are not "tripped up by those miserable impediments called facts", and instead rely on Sickert's ability to "[see] the whole of the life that has been lived to make that face", or his ability to capture a "motionless" figure "in a moment of crisis" (*E6*:39-40). Unlike the disdain for "story-telling" in "Pictures", these descriptions acknowledge the appeal of visual narrative and complicate the sharp divide presented in the earlier essay. However, in the discussion of the potential drama unfolding on the canvas, a key distinction in method is highlighted: the suggestion of narrative is achieved

[41] Hermione Lee outlines the context of the essay in her biography of Woolf (1996:632-3). Cf. *D4*:190, *L5*:253.

not through "explanation" (*E6*:40) but by the careful application of formal aspects. His painting of a young woman, therefore, does not convey "the mixture of innocence and sordidity, pity and squalor" (*E6*:40) through objects with clear symbolic associations. Instead, "Sickert merely takes his brush and paints a tender green light on the faded wallpaper. Light is beautiful falling through green leaves" (*E6*:40). Much like the elusiveness of clear narrative elements, the talkative "outsiders" (*E6*:39) are also forced to acknowledge that, despite their best efforts to interpret the circumstances of each of the paintings in the exhibition, these stories do not reflect their entire viewing experience. They, like the muteness of the paintings they admire, "[fall] silent" (*E6*:43) and find something inexplicably "beautiful…satisfactory; complete in some way" (*E6*:40) in the compositional elements of the painting, an admission which lends some credence to the formalists' insistence on the autotelic nature of art.

In the final moments of "dally[ing] a little on the verge" of the "vast distance" between literature and art, one speaker suggests that the two mediums share a common goal in "want[ing] to make us see" (*E6*:43). While the painter might achieve his or her vision through an underlying green light on the canvas, the novelist must solve the question of "how [to] bring the sun on [the] page" by using "one word, or with one word in skilful contrast with another" (*E6*:43). As Anthony Uhlmann summarises: "the writer cannot succeed in 'painting' by pure description; rather, metaphors hidden at the heart of individual words are brought into contact to suggest rather than describe visual effects" (2010:71). The literary painter, therefore, is aware that "[a] light here required a shadow there" (*TL*:45) so that words "both speak at once, striking two notes to make one chord, stimulating the eye of the mind and of the body" (*E6*:43-4).

The essay moves beyond the boundaries of the argument in "Pictures", which insisted on upholding the "vast distance" (*E6*:43) between the mediums. The speakers agree that "the arts are closely united" (*E6*:44), citing an array of overlaps between visual art, poetry, music, and prose. However, the "silent territory" of painting remains in their inability to express in words "the effect of those combinations of line and colour" as doing so would rely on language which seems "so formal so superficial […] while the emotion is distinct, powerful and satisfactory" (*E6*:45). The critics, who might have been able to translate this emotion, have "gone much farther into the forest" (*E6*:45) of silent interpretation, thereby perpetuating not only the distance between language and art, but also "the complete failure to communicate…between the experts and the talkers" (Humm, 2010:71). This is resolved to some degree when one diner – modelled after Sickert's communication with Woolf – suggests that "[a]mong the many kinds of artists, it may be that there are some who are hybrid [who] are always making raids into the lands of others" (*E6*:45), This final claim not only broadens the horizon of aesthetic projects beyond that of pure formalism; it echoes Woolf's advocacy for the "common reader" (*E4*:19) and a communality of spirit in the discussion of and debate about all the arts.

Considered together, Woolf's essays on painting demonstrate an ongoing negotiation between the visual and the literary, especially the possibilities and complexities of representing "this other thing, this truth, this reality…emerg[ing] stark at the back of appearances" (*TL*:131). That is not to say that she is unconcerned with or dismissive of "appearances" – painting, after all, necessarily engages with these – but that she seeks ways in which to give meaning "to familiar things that makes them strange" (*E6*:29), to transmit the visible world with brush or pen in fresh ways. Lacourarie suggests that "[t]he metaphorical process enables Woolf to grapple that silent world which is easily captured

by painting" (2002:71) so that the plurality of her images and descriptions resists "a formal railway line of sentence" or writing which "never reflect[s] that people don't and never did feel or think or dream for a second in that way" (*L3*:135-6). Woolf's painters in her essays, and by extension her writing itself, are examples of "artists…who [arrest] the spectacle in which most men take part without really seeing it and who [make] it visible" (CD:69)

Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetic Essays

Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre includes three essays on modern art, published at various points in his career: "Cézanne's Doubt" ([1945] 1993), "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" ([1952] 1993), and "Eye and Mind" ([1961] 1993). The first and the third focus explicitly on the philosopher's incorporation of painting and sculpture in his discussions of perception and the nature of reality, with the goals of the philosopher and painter aligning as two sides "working on the same problem: to give expression to existence, to give form to the formless, or to give new form to old forms" (Johnson, 2010:18). "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind" form the basis of this chapter's exploration of the artistic experience in Woolf's writing.

"Cézanne's Doubt"

Merleau-Ponty's first extensive discussion of aesthetics, and in particular visual art, is found in "Cézanne's Doubt". Although the *Phenomenology of Perception* had already included several references to various artists and writers, this essay explores primary accounts of Cézanne's artistic process[42] and offers an extension of the phenomenological stance on embodied perception found

[42] Merleau-Ponty also comments on Leonardo da Vinci's life, particularly in response to Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci: A Study in Psychosexuality* (1910) and Paul Valery's essay, "Introduction to the Method of Leonard da Vinci" (1895, 1924). Cf. Johnson, 1993:376n5 for an overview of Merleau-Ponty's sources. These aspects are not discussed in this

in his previous work. The philosopher and the painter engage with the same issue – "expressing what *exists*" (CD:66, original emphasis) – an issue which, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is captured by Cézanne's painting of "the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive" (CD:64) in contrast to the linear perspective developed since the Italian Renaissance. His analysis of Cézanne's process and artworks emphasises the "primacy of the solidity and constancy of the secondary, lived qualities of the visible world, especially color and tangibility" (Johnson, 1993:13) and ultimately views the nature of artistic creation as "the fusion of self and world" (Johnson, 1993:13). In this early essay, Merleau-Ponty still draws on Husserl's notion of *epoché*, the phenomenological reduction described in Chapter 2, paying particular attention to accounts of Cézanne's connection with the perceived landscape as indicative of the artist's openness to the world.

The essay is concerned with two forms of doubt, as suggested by its title: Cézanne's personal doubts and the importance of cultivating doubt or uncertainty as part of the artistic process. Cézanne's reputation as an artist, perhaps less famously than van Gogh's, differs greatly if one considers the critical reviews written during his lifetime – Merleau-Ponty references an unnamed critic as declaring Cézanne's work "[t]he painting of a drunken privy cleaner" (CD:59) – and the posthumous appreciation and regard heaped upon his work.[43] Coupled with the public's negative views of his work, the artist was often beset by doubts regarding his artistic approach, wondering if the "novelty of his painting might not come from trouble with his eyes" (CD:59),[44] and fits of

chapter, due to the contextual differences between Renaissance Italy and the early twentieth-century worlds of both Cézanne and the characters of *To the Lighthouse*.

[43] Johnson (1993:5) cites a number of other vitriolic reviews, including Huysmans' estimation that Cézanne was "an artist with diseased eyes" and Lecomte's view that he "has no other guide than his instincts […] His meagre knowledge betrays him".

[44] Merleau-Ponty does not always cite the origins of his claims, blurring the lines between his sources and interpretations of these. I read the essay not as an attempt at biography but for its interpretations of Cézanne, and more generally, modern art.

temper or despair, turning away friends and living a reasonably solitary existence in Aix. Despite these anxieties, doubt also becomes the framework for Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of his art. He draws on conversations between Cézanne and Emile Bernard wherein the former describes his work in similar terms to Husserl's "natural attitude", the sense of openness and interrogation on which Merleau-Ponty based his phenomenological reduction. Cézanne's artistic approach does not abandon science or tradition but wishes "to put intelligence, ideas, sciences, perspective, and tradition back into touch with the world of nature which they were intended to comprehend" (CD 64). The interrogative approach does not merely seek to challenge earlier practices in order to assure intellectual superiority; rather, the *epoché* fosters a productive form of doubt and uncertainty:

> Because he has returned to the source of silent and solitary experience on which culture and the exchange of ideas have been built in order to take cognizance of it, the artist launches his work just as a man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout, whether it can detach itself from the flow of individual life in which it was born and give the independent existence of an identifiable *meaning* (CD 69, original emphasis).

The attitude of the *epoché* is, in artistic creation, transformed into action which attempts "to portray the world, to change it completely into a spectacle, to make *visible* how the world *touches* us" (CD 70, original emphasis). Although "Cézanne's Doubt" focuses more directly on the fusion of the artist's self with nature during the creative process, Merleau-Ponty's comments regarding the communicative nature of artistic expression anticipate his more extensive exploration of the reversibility of seer and seen, the artist and the world, or perhaps even the work and the viewer.

"Eye and Mind"

"Eye and Mind" (*AR*:121-149), published nearly two decades later, broadens the scope of artistic styles to include less representational artists such as the abstract works of Paul Klee, Nicholas de

Staël, Auguste Rodin, and others. The essay begins with the painter's "thinking eye" (Johnson, 1993:47) and details "a theory of vision" which is grounded in Valéry's statement that "[t]he painter 'takes his body with him'" (quoted in EM:123) and which presupposes that the artist's lived experience is that of both mind and body together. "Immersed" in the visible, the tangible, "the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself to the world" (EM:124). This suggests that the individual who sees is also enmeshed in the world of other subjects and objects, that he/she is "caught up in things" (EM:124), unlike "scientific thinking" – or other presuppositions of objective thought – which "looks on from above" (EM:122). The essay's opening rally is a "return to the 'there is'…to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened such as it is in our life and for our body…that actual body I call mine" (EM:122). The individual, and in particular the artist, opens her- or himself to the world and to "*associated bodies*" of others who act not "merely as…congeners…but the others who haunt me and whom I haunt; the 'others' along with whom I haunt a single, present, and actual Being" (EM:123, original emphasis). This configuration collapses strict boundaries between self, other, and world, not intending to nullify these differences, but to highlight that there might be some "ontological monism of underlying substance that envelops painter and world" (Johnson, 1993:46) or as Merleau-Ponty calls it, "Being" or "Flesh".

"Eye and Mind" shares many of the main philosophical ideas of *The Visible and the Invisible*, particularly the notion of reversibility, that is, the individual as enveloped by Being or Flesh, and therefore both one who sees and who is seen. In this essay, Merleau-Ponty refers to this reversibility in conjunction with statements made by artists suggesting that they express a vision as if it comes from the landscape itself, such as Klee's claim that "it was not I who looked at the forest…I felt

that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me" (EM:129) or Cézanne's "Nature is on the inside" (EM:125). The reciprocal relationship does not impute consciousness to inanimate objects; it does not suggest that they "see" humans as we might see them but implies a reciprocal relationship which does not treat vision as an autocratic imposition upon the world.

In rejecting the representation of vision in Renaissance art, he shifts away from "[t]he window model" of artistic vision which would "[make] us believe we could fix the visible 'in its place'" (Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Carbone, 2015:3) and supports a vision of images which Carbone (2015:4) argues, "[fill] our perception as well as our imaginary". Such a nodal conception treats the lived perspective of the artist as a network of impressions which are not easily fragmented into disparate elements such as colour, shape, or texture. This is evident in his account of viewing the paintings on the walls of France's Lascaux Cave, wherein he describes the paintings as "not there in the same way as the fissures and limestone formations" – they are an alteration of the space – "But they are not elsewhere […] they spread around the wall without ever breaking from their elusive moorings in it". He is unable to view the paintings and the cave walls as disparate objects, to "fix [them] in [their] place". Instead, it is this separate yet connected vision which transfixes him: "My gaze wanders in it as in the halos of Being. It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or with it, than that I see it" (EM:126). The vision proposed by "Eye and Mind" calls for a sense of radiance which strikingly echoes both Woolf's famous assertion that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" ("Modern Fiction") and her later "philosophy" in "A Sketch of the Past": "that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we…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" (*MB*:72). For both Merleau-Ponty

and Woolf, the artist's project is an acknowledgement of and dwelling within Being which relies "upon [her/his] own feeling and not upon convention" ("Modern Fiction").

These connections, or reversibility as Merleau-Ponty calls it, bring into contact elements of an enmeshed Being, not as a consuming unity, but of asymmetrical alignments, of a discovery of "what belongs to what…a pattern" (*MB*:72)of mirrorings which balance both unity and difference. As part of an exploration of the practical instances of such reversibility in painting, Merleau-Ponty discusses two painting traditions, namely the incorporation of mirrors into the composition as a visual reversing of the painted elements – for example, Jan van Eyck's "Arnolfini Portrait" (date), and artists' self-portraits depicting the act of painting. Mirrors "are instruments of a universal magic that converts things into spectacle, spectacle into things, myself into another, and another into myself" (EM:13), demonstrating through their asymmetrical doubling the reversible relationship of the one who sees and the one/thing seen. Similarly, self-portraiture such as Matisse's "Self Portrait" (1918) which depicts him in the process of painting, suggests a multiplicity of perspectives as Matisse is rendered as both looking at his subject material in the painting and looked at by someone viewing the painting. Although seemingly an infinite mirroring, such as when one stands between two parallel mirrors, art signals further difference as the "strife and rivalry among colors, shadings and lines" mark both the "bond and [the] separation" (Johnson, 1993:49) between self and world.

Preliminary Asymmetries

The extensive meditations on the intersections of phenomenology and painting in "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind" have made them valuable sources for research and discussions of artistic creation, including literary representations of the visual and plastic arts. Several scholars

have drawn comparisons between Lily Briscoe's painting process in *To the Lighthouse* and Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics (Mazis, 2019:73-85; Mildenberg, 2019:59-72; Moise, 2011:34-56)[45] While these forays have definitely contributed to an understanding of how Woolf may have developed a phenomenological understanding of artistic creation, there has been little acknowledgement of the differences in circumstance between the artists cited in "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind" and Lily Briscoe, as well as more generally the positions of Merleau-Ponty and Woolf. A glaring difference is Merleau-Ponty's reliance on male artists, all of whom had achieved at least some acclaim by the time of the essays' publications, versus the amateur Lily Briscoe. Furthermore, I freely acknowledge that Woolf was, if not wholly influenced by then definitely aware of the formalist interpretations of post-impressionist art – including that of Cézanne – and that comparisons between the novel and formalist sources are highly prevalent in Woolf studies. This has been tempered by the surging interest in the relationship between Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, herself a successful painter and illustrator of the first Hogarth editions of Woolf's works. Feminist scholarship has helped to complicate previous assumptions about Woolf's similarity in method and philosophy to her male counterparts and contemporaries,[46] a practice which I hope to extend to the intersections of modernism and phenomenology. Woolf's sources for Lily Briscoe's painting practice are somewhat ambiguous, and I do not intend to establish strict links to the formalist criticism offered by Clive Bell and Roger Fry, or the painting style of Vanessa Bell, as

[45] Laura Doyle's "'These Emotions of the Body': Intercorporeal Narrative in *To the Lighthouse*" (1994:42-71) draws on *The Visible and the Invisible* in its discussion of corporeality as a counter to patriarchal silencing in the novel, while Kelly Sultzbach's (2008:124-156) section of her dissertation also uses *The Visible and the Invisible* but expands the intercorporeal narrative into ecocritical directions. Groover (2014:217-229) also approaches *To the Lighthouse*'s depiction of corporeality, and particularly of the possibility of intimacy and knowledge of the other, though her incorporation of Merleau-Ponty's work is limited. Imola Nagy-Seres (2019:149-166) also draws on both of the aesthetics essays, but in relation to *Jacob's Room* and some of Woolf's diaries.

[46] For a detailed summation of publications that have critically engaged with Woolf's artistic ties see Gillespie's article "Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Painting" (2010:122-123)

regarding any of these as a direct inspiration disregards the extra node of referentiality created in Woolf's novelised account of a fictional artist. The following analysis draws primarily on "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind" for information about the artistic process while also acknowledging some of the formalist influences familiar to Woolf. It focuses on the ways in which she has translated the visual arts into literary form (we do not, after all, have a precise idea of what Lily's painting might have looked like)[47] and considers to what extent the feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, often raised in relation to his longer works, might also apply to his discussions of aesthetics.

Compositions of Intimacy

Lily's initial painting is shaped by her struggles with issues of style, notably her attempted breakaway from impressionism and the balancing of compositional elements. She resists what is "fashionable" at the time: an impressionistic use of colour and form which "see[s] everything pale, elegant, semi-transparent" (*TL*:19). Her descriptions strongly echo Merleau-Ponty's own summation of Impressionistic style:

> Impressionism was trying to capture, in the painting, the very way in which objects strike our eyes and attack our senses. Objects were depicted as they appear to instantaneous perception, without fixed contours, bound together by light and air (CD:61).
>
> The result of these procedures was that the canvas—which no longer corresponded point by point to nature—afforded a generally true impression through the action of the separate parts upon one another. But at the same time, depicting the atmosphere and breaking up the tones submerged the object and caused it to lose its proper weight (CD:62).

[47] Some attempts at reconstructing the composition have been made in Henry R. Harrington's article, "The Central Line down the Middle of *To the Lighthouse*" (1980), though this too is in written and diagram form.

Both Lily Briscoe and Merleau-Ponty deride the diaphanous quality of impressionism as fleeting representations which do not hold enough depth or "weight". In contrast to the approach described above, Lily wishes to "[see] the colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral" (*TL*:42); in short, to return the "proper weight" (CD:62) and "to find [the object] again behind the atmosphere" (CD:62). Her renouncement of the impressionistic use of colour and form is based, at least in part, on her belief that to follow such a style would not be "honest", that doing so would "tamper with the bright violet [and] staring white" (*TL*:19) of the jacmanna flowers and the wall of the house and would not be true to her vision. Cézanne is once again similarly described as "not [wanting] to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear; [wanting] to depict matter as it takes on form" (CD:63). Lily's painting practice may be seen as both grounded in her lived experience, and in her desire to find the cathedral or the steel framework underpinning the colour and light of the shifting day. Importantly, this is not a call to representational realism or naturalism that produces a likeness of reality: Mrs Ramsay and James are abstracted to "a triangular purple shape" (*TL*:45) on her canvas. The triangular shape exists because "[a] light here required a shadow there" (*TL*:45), thereby suggesting that her vision does not rely on the comprehension of either of the subjects as distinct human beings but as a vision of colour and form. Her abstraction acknowledges the visual sensation of the brightness in one corner and "the need of darkness" in the other but does not dwell on realising a realist or symbolic representation of "Mother and child…objects of universal veneration" (*TL*:45). Lily's viewing of Mrs Ramsay and James balances the stability of her vision of the two figures with the "shifting way in which they appear" (CD:63) as part of a composition of light and colour. While her focus on the composition and form of her painting might lean toward the formalist's appreciation for the un-representational elements of an artwork, she

combines these with a colourist's eye, as her vision, if not her product, is one which echoes Cézanne's claim that "[t]he outline and the colors are no longer distinct from each other. As you paint, you outline; the more the colors harmonize, the more the outline becomes precise…. When the color is at its richest, the form has reached plenitude" (quoted in CD:65). In reality, she feels that "only a few random marks scrawled upon the canvas remain[ ]" (*TL*:42), that her attempt to restore depth, in significance if not traditional visual perspective, has failed.

The descriptions of Lily's process further emphasise the embodied experience of the artist and the relationship between the artist's body and his/her surroundings. While painting in "The Window" section of the novel, she stares at her surroundings, "all her senses quickened as they were, looking, straining, till the colour of the wall and the jacmanna beyond burn[s] into her eyes" (*TL*:18). When Mr Bankes asks her about the composition, she finds that "[s]he could not show him what she wished to make of it, could not see it even herself, without a brush in her hand" (*TL*:45). Her immediate reaction is to resume "once more her old painting position" (*TL*:45), as if a change in her bodily stance, a reminder of the physical movement of her body while painting, might better jog her memory. However, as much as she strains to hold on to this sense of perceptual immersion, she loses her focus "in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas" (*TL*:19) and later between the moment of attention and the desire to translate or explain it to another.

Lily's desire for perceptual immersion is similar to Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of Cézanne's painting process:

> He would start by discovering the geological foundations of the landscape; then, according to Mme Cézanne, he would halt and look at everything with widened eyes, 'germinating' with the countryside […] His meditation would suddenly be consummated: 'I have a hold on my *motif*,' Cézanne would say […] Then he began to paint all parts of the painting at the same time, using patches of color to surround his original sketch of the geological

> skeleton. The picture took on fullness and density; it grew in structure and balance; it came to maturity all at once. 'The landscape thinks itself in me,' he would say, 'and I am its consciousness' (CD:67, original emphasis).

Cézanne's "widened eyes" mirror the physical tension of Lily's senses in the moments wherein she tries to capture the artistic vision of her surroundings. Where they differ – and where Cézanne seems to succeed while Lily fails – is his ability to sustain this state, described in his movement from his sketched framework to his overlay of colour as he "'germinat[ed]' with the countryside". The sense of communion between Cézanne and the landscape marks "the moment of felt reversibility where it was as if the landscape became able to return the painter's regard and move Cézanne's hand with its vitality to express itself through him" (Mazis, 2019:81). Laura Doyle (1994:64) highlights a similar reversibility in *To the Lighthouse* when she argues that "the narrator/painter must discover herself as both inhabiter of objects and inhabitant – beside those objects – of an intercorporeal world". Lily's initial feelings of failure may be described as the result of a partial acknowledgement of this reversibility. Although she displays a strong desire to foster the intense focus of her artistic vision, the moment she becomes aware of herself as an "inhabitant…of an intercorporeal world" she is beset by doubt so that "when she [takes] her brush in hand…the whole thing change[s] […] the demons set on her" (*TL*:19). She is hyperaware of the possibility that "someone should creep up, and suddenly she should find her picture looked at" (*TL*:18).[48] The productive flow of this intercorporeal relationship is broken by Lily's moments of realisation that she exists not only as the subject of her lived experience but also as an object of another's gaze, a realisation which proves debilitating to her painting practice. She is reminded, in

[48] The description of someone "creep[ing] up" is also reminiscent of the narrator's plight in "Professions for Women". There, as mentioned earlier, the narrator describes how at the moment she picks up her pen to write, the Angel "slip[s] behind [her]" (*E6*:480) and attempts to guide her toward sympathy for and reverence toward men.

these moments, of various specifics of her life which seem incongruous or contrary to her desired profession: "her own inadequacy, her insignificance, keeping house for her father off the Brompton Road" (*TL*:19), and the ever-present refrain that "women can't paint, women can't write" (*TL*:42, cf. 71, 74, 131, 132, 161). These draw her back from her absorption in the landscape, stressing elements of her life that disrupt both possible opportunities to paint and her confidence in her abilities. The moment of reversibility, therefore, highlights her intercorporeal existence but also immediately reinforces her anxieties about the seemingly irreconcilable separation between other aspects of her life and her pursuit of artmaking.

Reversibility requires an acknowledgement of one's intercorporeal existence, not as an obstacle in the path of artmaking but in service thereof. Although the descriptions of reversibility offered in "Cézanne's Doubt" do not directly consider the ethical implications of the artist's "germination" with the surroundings, Woolf's enmeshing of feminist concerns with the interruption or destruction of the artist's attention calls for a revision of Merleau-Ponty's ideas of the interconnectedness of the artist's life and work. In light of this, I aim to build upon the work by Jessica Schiff Berman (2004:151-172) and Elsa Högberg (2020), who both usefully consider Woolf's aesthetics and ethics as connected by a core desire for "unity…intimacy itself" (*TL*:44).[49] In particular, this next section considers how the myth of the Angel in the House both facilitates and hinders moments of communion in the first section of the novel, and how the boundaries of the definition of "artist" might be refashioned in light of the overlapping or folds between the aesthetic and the ethical.

[49] I am informed by Berman's (2004:151) description of Woolf's ethical project as the "inhabit[ance of a] fold between beings that brings them into relation, though not necessarily into a realm of familiarity, normativity, or consensus".

Lily's sense of being under observation – both within and without – mirrors the struggle posed in "Professions for Women" (*E6*:479-84), where, as discussed earlier, the woman writer confronts the figure of the Angel in the House and the values she espouses. Mrs Ramsay's status as an authority on womanhood places her as both a mentor and a contrast to Lily as an unmarried, aspiring artist. While the Angel leans over the writer's shoulder to persuade her to desist from presenting her genuine opinions in reviews of men's work, here it is well-meaning Mr Bankes' characterisation of her subject of Mrs Ramsay reading to James as the venerated "Mother and child" (*TL*:45) and the comments (at various points in the novel) about how "famous" she is "for her beauty" (*TL*:45). In highlighting these, Mr Bankes indirectly causes Lily to shift the focus of her contemplative gaze from detached, aesthetic consideration of the scene toward one which questions the nature of Lily's "reverence" in terms of composition and form as well as her views of Mrs Ramsay as a person. She attempts to explain her approach to her subject matter to him:

> But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form, if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute. A mother and child might be reduced to a shadow without irreverence. A light here required a shadow there (*TL*:45).

Her summary divulges two important points: she views her sense of vision in entirely different terms from Mr Bankes' implicitly representational design of "Mother and child", and she is concerned with the compositional "unity" (*TL*:46) of her painting by means of a careful juxtaposition of light and shadow. In admitting that her painting does not follow "his sense" in its lack of representational qualities and the "worship" (*TL*:42) he affords Mrs Ramsay, Lily seeks out "her different ray" (*TL*:42) which might illuminate the "triangular purple shape" (*TL*:45).

Her search for "the spirit in [Mrs Ramsay], the essential thing" (*TL*:42) is framed in both material and painterly terms as she considers character or identity as "shape" (*TL*:42). Her confusion regarding Mrs Ramsay is juxtaposed with her discontentment with her paints: she wonders how and why Mrs Ramsay might be "different…from the perfect shape which one saw" (*TL*:42) while she "scrap[es] her palette of all those mounds of blue and green which seemed to her like clods with no life in them now" (*TL*:42). The aesthetics of the shape on her canvas is conflated with the material too as she suggests that she might know Mrs Ramsay intimately from the shape of the "twisted finger" of a glove. As Berman (2004:165) argues: "[t]he twisting of the glove…marks not only the particularity of a singular being […] but also the experience of otherness tinged with the desire for intimacy". The moment of reflection, therefore, joins together her difficulties at realising the vision she has of her painting with her desire to know the "spirit…the essential thing" of Mrs Ramsay's character.

Lily's struggle lies not in the dichotomisation of potential private and public personae for Mrs Ramsay; it is in attempting to negotiate the notion that she could embody both the representative beauty and values of "Mother and child" (*TL*:45) as well as seem ultimately unknowable, with mental "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions which […] would never be offered openly, never made public" (*TL*:44) for analysis. Lily longs for unity in not only the compositional aspects of her painting but also in her relationship with the woman whose ideals so frustrate her:

> What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired […] intimacy itself…

> […] she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored in Mrs Ramsay's heart. How then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were? (*TL*:44)

Rather than follow the connotations of "Mother and child" she seeks a new creative system, an "art" or "device" through which she might better understand Mrs Ramsay. Her search interrogates the ontological boundaries between individuals – could these become malleable, "like waters poured into one jar" or would they remain distinct, leaving each person "sealed" off to another – and asks, should knowledge of another be possible, whether it is achieved through the "body", the "mind", or the "heart". The increasingly desperate questions mirror the momentary closeness between Lily and her canvas or between Cézanne and the mountains of Aix. Not because she views Mrs Ramsay and James solely as objects – for all that she denies Mr Bankes' configuration, she maintains that she has "reduced [them] to a shadow without irreverence" (*TL*:45). Instead, her questions seek both to know and to be known, to reach beyond the "simple certainty…that her…little Brisk, was a fool" (*TL*:43). The hope, therefore, is that if Lily could reach such an intimate understanding of Mrs Ramsay, she might better understand both the compositional balance which she seeks for her canvas and the balance between her and Mrs Ramsay's views.

The conundrum of how Lily might both "reverence" her subject matter and believe Mrs Ramsay to be somehow different in shape or character from what is captured on her canvas echoes other seemingly disparate descriptions of Mrs Ramsay. Unnamed people have asked, according to the narrator, if there was "nothing but looks" (*TL*:26) to Mrs Ramsay, if there was merely "nothing but an incomparable beauty which she lived behind, and could do nothing to disturb" (*TL*:27), their disbelief implicitly presenting her as an immutable and somewhat shallow figure. However, in an earlier scene, Mr Bankes thinks to himself that there "was something incongruous to be

worked into the harmony of her face […] if it was her beauty merely that one thought of, one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing […] and work it into the picture" (*TL*:27). Mrs Ramsay's beauty, that aspect which is most often "reverence[d]" (*TL*:45) in the novel, might be considered similar to the "perfect shape" (*TL*:42) which Lily sees depicted on her canvas. The shape is not, therefore, a *false* depiction, but it is somewhat incomplete.[50] Just as Lily has struggled with drawing together both the stillness and beauty of the "perfect shape" (*TL*:42) alongside the implied movement and vitality of "the glove's twisted finger" (*TL*:43), Mr Bankes insists that the "quivering" energy of her movements must be incorporated in a mental, or physical, picture of her person. Pictorial abstraction becomes a question not of a reduction of the subject matter to stasis or perfection but an understanding of the essential elements of its vitality.

The unity she seeks in the "past tense" scene with Mrs Ramsay fails, as Lily despairs: "Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing! as she leant her head against Mrs Ramsay's knee" (*TL*:44). Although she feels as though "there hung about her […] the sound of murmuring and… [Mrs Ramsay wears] … an august shape, the shape of a dome" (*TL*:44), there is no indication that the level of intimacy which she desired to share with Mrs Ramsay has been achieved. It is only in the "present tense" section of the text, while she and Mr Bankes stand together on the lawn, that such a moment is potentially reached. Lily's acknowledgement of this "profoundly intimate" (*TL*:46) moment draws the two characters into a sense of community, if not complete unity. In an earlier description of the viewing of her painting she declares that having it seen by another would not merely encompass the physical object of her canvas and a shared gaze of her subject matter but also "the residue of

[50] Jane de Gay (1999:6) rebuts the notion that pictorial abstraction could signal "irreverence" by exploring the similarities which the triangular shape holds to both the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (*TL*:52) and religious iconography of the Madonna and Child, thereby substantiating Lily's claims that this abstraction or reduction could not be construed as derisive.

her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living, mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown in the course of all those days" (*TL*:45). Once he has seen, commented on, and questioned her about the painting, "it [has] been taken from her. This man [has] shared with her something profoundly intimate" (*TL*:46). Mr Bankes is depicted in the interest he shows as both an invasion of private thoughts or views which Lily feels have been captured in the painting, and a "less alarming" (*TL*:45) viewer than the others present such as Mr Ramsay or Charles Tansley in his sincere, if somewhat confused, appreciation of her art. The moment together on the lawn has fostered a sense of community – the feeling that "one could walk away down that long gallery not alone any more but arm in arm with somebody" (*TL*:46) – but the expected unity – at least for Mrs Ramsay – of man and woman together remains contested by Lily's feelings of a largely one-sided possession of her self.

The momentary unity that relies on the careful balancing of disparate, perhaps even contradictory, parts is evident in both Lily's conclusion to this scene and during the later dinner party. Lily feels that this moment on the lawn has "some common feeling which held the whole together" (*TL*:157):

> And, thanking Mr Ramsay for it and Mrs Ramsay for it and the hour and the place, crediting the world with a power which she had not suspected, that one could walk away down that long gallery not alone any more but arm in arm with somebody—the strangest feeling in the world, and the most exhilarating—she nicked the catch of her paint-box to…and the nick seemed to surround in a circle for ever the paint-box, the lawn, Mr Bankes, and that wild villain, Cam, dashing past (*TL*:46).

Her gratitude "nicks to" the various influences: Mr and Mrs Ramsay's involvement (despite her reservations about both of them) and their invitation for the summer which catalysed her friendship with Mr Bankes, as well as the "hour and place", the temporal and spatial elements of

her lived experience. Although she views connection somewhat hesitantly as "the strangest feeling in the world, and the most exhilarating", the unification suggested by the "circle" balances out the "dissonances and contradictions" (Doyle, 1994:57) of her character, much as she has tried to harmonise the elements of her painting.

As Cam's dash through the end of scene nine and into scene ten suggests, this harmony is fleeting, and any fixity achieved is momentary. The entanglement of aesthetic and interpersonal intimacy continues into the dinner party later that evening, with both Mrs Ramsay and Lily striving for the fleeting sensation of balance and unity. Similarly to Lily's despairing thoughts when viewing her painting, Mrs Ramsay feels at the start of the party that "[n]othing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (*TL*:69) with the uneasy disconnection between the dinner guests lingering throughout the first course. Social communion meets an aesthetical desire for compositional unity, so that her actions as hostess are figured as an artistic process which men are unwilling, or perhaps even unable, to achieve: "Again she felt, as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it, and so […] the old familiar pulse began beating" (*TL*:69) as she begins to draw in the detached diners.[51] Her perception that the possibility of a cohesive group rests solely on her efforts may, as Beth Daughtery (1991:291) argues, be seen as an example of the "self-sacrifice" that the role of the "The Angel" demands. Her increasingly successful efforts, in turn, entangle the seemingly incompatible aims of the self-sacrificial Angel with those of artist,

[51] Although she feels that this task rests on her shoulders, she sometimes relies on the other women round the table. Lily, for example, is forced to "renounce the experiment—what happens if one is not nice to that young man there" (*TL*:75) so that she might draw Mr Tansley into conversation and "relieve" him of his "egotism", while Minta habitually "[makes] herself out even more ignorant than she [is]" (*TL*:80) so that she might not be "frightened" by Mr Ramsay's intellectuality. Lily's experience of such efforts as tiresome situates the aesthetic concerns of such engagements with Mrs Ramsay, rather than generally conflating the aims of a hostess with that of an artist.

complicating what might have been a dualistic opposition between Lily's desire for artistic autonomy and Mrs Ramsay's for domestic communion.

The success of Mrs Ramsay's stitched-together composition is felt gradually, especially once the night steals in until the separation of the candlelight and the darkness outside seems to act as Lily's balancing of light and shadow in her painting:

> Some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against the fluidity out there. […] Lily Briscoe, trying to analyse the cause of the sudden exhilaration, compared it with that moment on the tennis lawn, when solidity suddenly vanished, and such vast spaces lay between them; and now the same effect was got by the many candles in the sparely furnished room, and the uncurtained windows, and the bright mask-like look of faces seen by candlelight (*TL*:80).

The composition of the room is reminiscent of formalist concerns with shape and structure, as the guests seem to lean into a shared circular space, "a hollow…an island". Here, it is the interplay of light and shadow which provides "order and dry land" in comparison to the night-time darkness "in which things wavered and vanished, waterily" (*TL*:80). The process of "merging and flowing and creating" (*TL*:69) suggests that Mrs Ramsay, by drawing her guests into community, might enable them all to become, as Merleau-Ponty describes in his discussion of dialogue, people may become "collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity…and…coexist through a common world" (*PP*:143). The aesthetics of the scene, therefore, merge with her desire for community and harmony: the "coherence in things [the] stability" (*TL*:85) of the figures round the candlelit table and the carefully arranged bowl of fruit all contribute to a feeling of "profound stillness" (*TL*:85) until something in the moment seems "immune from change, and shines out…in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral" (*TL*:85).

Mrs Ramsay's perceptions of the dinner party join together aesthetic concerns of coherence and structure with the desire for coexistence in "a common world" (*PP*:143). There is "an element of joy which fill[s] every nerve of her body fully and sweetly" and then stretches to accommodate the others round the table until "like a fume rising upwards" it "hold[s] them safe together" in a "profound stillness" (*TL*:85). The kinship she experiences is grounded in stability and stillness, so that, much like the formalists' appreciation for compositional structure and sense in visual art, the dinner party has drawn together individuals as compositional elements so that "there is a coherence in things" (*TL*:85). Just as the candles encircle the diners together in a ring of light, the connections she has fostered throughout the meal "shine[ ] out […] in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby" (*TL*:85). Ann Banfield (2003:493) describes this process as the "metaphor of crystallization", by which "something enduring is made out of the moment's impressions", which, much like formalism's approach to art, "joins the ephemeralness of sense-data to the timelessness of universals; it gives in retrospect a necessity to the contingent moment" (Banfield, 2003:496). However, conversely to the disinterested gaze which the formalists might favour toward art, this moment of coherence is one of perceived intimacy, of psychological and emotional connections between people.

Although Mrs Ramsay's efforts lie, more often than not, in community and connection between people, her private meditations highlight her desire "[t]o be silent; to be alone" (*TL*:52). Similar to the distractions which Lily attempts to banish in order to achieve the moment of painterly fascination, Mrs Ramsay "[shrinks], with a sense of solemnity, to being [her]self" once "[a]ll the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporate[s]" (*TL*:52). The descriptions of solitude echo those of the painter's relationship with the landscape offered in both the novel and

"Cézanne's Doubt" as she experiences a simultaneous loss of circumstantial detail – "the fret, the hurry, the stir" – and "a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability" (*TL*:53) which seems to connect her more intimately with her surroundings. This connection is mediated by the window through which the stroke of the lighthouse beam penetrates the house; such a threshold, Mildenberg (2017:150) argues, allows "a certain double vision of Woolf's creative selves [to unfold], where the perceiver moves towards and yet self-consciously withdraws from the world, standing neither quite inside nor outside their own position." The rhythmic "double vision" juxtaposes solitude and community through its descriptions as a "meet[ing]", an "attach[ment]" between the "core of darkness" and the "long steady stroke" (*TL*:53) of light. Their coming together is one of "sitting and looking…until [one] become[s] the thing [one] looked at" (*TL*:53); it echoes the intimacy Lily desired but recentres it between Mrs Ramsay's perceiving body and the light from the lighthouse.

The notion of a meeting or overlapping of states is remarkably similar to one of Merleau-Ponty's most famous descriptions of reversibility and *écart*, wherein he describes the simultaneous connection and difference of the body within its surroundings:

> When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts. But this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things (*VI*:123).

Écart, that understanding of irreducible difference[52] between one object and another, is accompanied paradoxically by "encroachment", much as when Mrs Ramsay "[meets] the third stroke and it seem[s] to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes" (*TL*:53). The repeated instances of *écart* and reversibility – "the opening-divergence and the accompanying overlap" – are "lived in *the flesh*" (Hass, 2008:132, 137, original emphasis), the term used frequently in Merleau-Ponty's later writing to refer, among other overall ideas, to "the carnality and physicality of ourselves and our relations in the world" (Hass, 2008:138).[53] A shared corporeality which emerges from a simultaneous sense of difference and sameness is evident in the meeting between Mrs Ramsay and the third stroke of light:

> It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, 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 (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's own being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover (*TL*:53-4).

She feels that she "lean[s]" into "inanimate things" to the extent that they "express[ ]" her thoughts and emotions, they "kn[o]w" her intimately. Here she echoes Lily's search for intimacy, knowledge, and unity but seems to succeed where Lily failed. However, in contrast to Lily's descriptions of "press[ing] through into those secret chambers" (*TL*:44) and her desire to find some "art" or "device" (*TL*:44) to achieve such intimacy, Mrs Ramsay seems to accomplish this through gentler gestures: she "lean[s]" in, and into, solitude, and in doing so draws close to the quiet nonhuman

[52] Merleau-Ponty describes *écart* as the necessary split between one who sees and anything seen: "vision is a ubiquitous presence to the world itself…and at the same time irremediably distinct from what it sees, from which it is separated" (*VI*:76). *Écart*, then, denotes that separation and difference which make perception possible.

[53] Cf.: "Things are an annex or prolongation of [one's body]; they are incrusted into its flesh; they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body" (EM:125).

world like "a bride to meet her lover". This moment suggests that, even when human intimacy seems impossible, one might withdraw and revel in a deepened understanding "that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women" (*AROO*:98).

The final stroke of the lighthouse marks a different relationship, however, as she has already begun to "[help herself] out of solitude…by laying hold of some little odd or end, some sound, some sight" (*TL*:54). While the third stroke of light initially emphasised a connection borne of shared corporeality, the focus shifts back to her emotions when she looks at it again. The tension between her desire for order and happiness, and her belief in the futility thereof due to the inevitability of change, is broken when she gazes at the light a final time "with some irony in her interrogation, for when one woke at all, one's relations changed":

> [S]he looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her, which had her at its beck and call […] but for all that she thought, watching it with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (*TL*:54-5)

Here, despite the continued state similar to that of Cézanne's "widened eyes" and the suggestion of shared corporeality between her and the waves of the sea, the relationship between the parts and the whole is not one of folding back or over, of reversibility. The ecstasy described acknowledges the relations between parts, but the result is disruption and excess rather than balance. Hass, building on Deleuze's critique[54] that Merleau-Ponty's formulation of the flesh as reversibility may include some homogenisation of experience into patterns of difference and enfolding, argues that

[54] See Hass, 2008:141-3 for further details of this critique, and links to Deleuze on Merleau-Ponty.

some relations "do not seem properly conceived in terms of…the folding over and back of things; in fact they seem to disrupt or explode such forms […] Consider bursts of joy…the experience of profound desire or the differentiating dissolution of orgasm" (2008:143). In these moments difference or *écart* is not figured as a harmonious tension; instead the *gestalt* "structure gets discombobulated; background breaks up through the figure but without blurring into utter non-distinction" (Hass, 2008:143). This is demonstrated in the complementary relation between the blue that goes "out of the sea" and shifts into "waves of pure lemon".[55] The contrast between the colours is not held in balance, as Lily attempts in her painting; the yellow waves "[curve] and [swell] and [break] upon the beach", overtaking the blue of the sea. Similarly, feelings of despair are overtaken by "pure delight". Her final exclamation indicates, however, that ecstasy has not "blurr[ed]" her worries "into utter non-distinction": the delight felt "is enough" but a power imbalance between "the pitiless, the remorseless" light and herself remains.[56] The symbolism of the light which "[is] so much her, yet so little her, which [has] her at its beck and call" is never fully articulated; it might, as Doyle suggests, echo her relationship with Mr Ramsay (1994:53), or it may more broadly be a representation of an intercorporeality which stands as counter to the sociality of her everyday life and which, when contemplated half-in, half-out of solitude, causes simultaneous dissonance and delight.

[55] The colours are, in terms of pigment, near complements. However, they are naturally complementary light colours.

[56] Doyle suggests that this exchange points to an inability for "intercorporeality [to] transcend heterosexual structures and struggles" (1994:53), based on the earlier description of the light beam as a "lover". While I concede that Merleau-Ponty's work on reversibility and the flesh is potentially problematic in its lack of gendering (suggesting universalism), Doyle's account does not engage with the critique offered by Luce Irigaray ([1984] 1993:151-184) on this topic and reconceptualises intercorporeality – a notion both universal and subjective – as feminine without any discussion of how Merleau-Ponty's ideas might connect or clash with the feminism espoused in Woolf's novel.

The novel's first section may be considered an exploration of the intermingling of aesthetics and alterity. It proposes – through both Lily's and Mrs Ramsay's compositional projects and their senses of self – various configurations of harmony, balance, and tension, which in turn negotiate the characters' desire for both connectivity and autonomy. Intercorporeality is figured in relations not only between people but between the perceiving body and the material world; a connection heightened during the artistic process. Both artistic or compositional projects in this section use this reflexive connection between artist and world in order to grasp a more profound sense of interpersonal intimacy.

The negotiations between ideas, people, and objects may be demonstrated by the problem of Lily's painting: "connect[ing] this mass on the right hand with that on the left" by means of "break[ing] the vacancy" (*TL*:46) between them, and without losing "the unity of the whole" (*TL*:46). In this compositional struggle Woolf highlights an "interworld" (*PP*:415) which relies on reversibility in the form of an acknowledgement that separation and difference are necessary, not only for perception but to maintain a necessary interiority and autonomy within community. The problem of compositional unity and balance is potentially solved: she can "put the tree further in the middle", thereby "avoid[ing] that awkward space" (*TL*:70), while Mrs Ramsay relies on the persona of the Angel to draw in the other diners and create a sense of endurance and cohesion to be sustained through the guests' memories of the event. If unity, as Lily contemplates it, might also be a form of "intimacy", then both characters' artistic projects have succeeded in reaching a sense of intimacy through understanding the relationships between people as compositional elements which move in perpetual negotiation.

Despite Lily's despair that Mrs Ramsay would always view her work as an artist as a second-rate existence, the roles of artist and Angel are not easily polarised between them. The sustained compositional metaphors throughout the dinner scene demonstrate Mrs Ramsay's keen aesthetic eye and suggest that artistry might be extended beyond traditional pursuits such as painting. Therefore, the tension between their ideals lies not simply in whether women should be artists but in how they view the relationship between their material circumstances and their art. While Mrs Ramsay's artmaking is grounded in the social roles she takes on as wife and hostess, Lily experiences these as obstacles in the path to autonomy. The distinction highlights that the contrasts presented in the novel are not natural dualisms, nor a dialectical relationship resolved by a seeming synthesis.

The negotiation between Lily's desire for intimacy which makes one "inextricably the same, one with the object one adore[s]" (*TL*:44), and her longing to hold on to the "treasure" (*TL*:70) of her art and autonomy is left, therefore, in a state of partial resolution – much as she resolves the "awkward space" of her composition only in her thoughts and not through the finalisation of her painting. She bridges their alterity – the "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions [which] would never be offered openly, never made public" (*TL*:44) – through her intuitive comprehension of Mrs Ramsay's selfhood as the painted purple triangle which resonates clearly with the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (*TL*:52). The expression of this intuition is incomplete, however, as the connection is only experienced by the reader's notice of the textual similarities. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance" (*VI*:8); knowledge, unity, or intimacy are momentary expressions of proximity which, like the horizon, seem to "recede as we approach it" (Mildenberg, 2017:142). Connection, therefore, in terms of both aesthetical composition and

intercorporeality, is not a "dichotom[y] or a process of reconciliation of polarised terms in dialectical tension" (Mildenberg, 2017:143) – no polarisation is without overlapping, and no proposed resolution is final. It is, conversely, in "there where…two movements cross, there where 'there is' something" (*VI*:95), a chiasmatic process which Merleau-Ponty terms "hyperdialectic" (*VI*:94) and which *"arises from* continual questioning" (Mildenberg, 2017:143, original emphasis). Intercorporeality, in both aesthetic and ethical terms, follows a wave-like motion of convergence and separation, intimacy and alterity.

"Time Passes"

The middle section of the novel provides a temporal and textual corridor between the two character-focused days in parts one and three, a decade apart. Woolf describes the section as "this impersonal thing, which I'm dared to do by my friends, the flight of time, & the consequent break of unity in my design" (*D3*:36) and "the most difficult abstract piece of writing…all eyeless and featureless" (*D3*:76). The reference to "Time Passes" as a "corridor" in the holograph[57] provides a sense of continuity beyond the progression of narrative time over the intervening decade. In comparison, it also represents a "break of unity" in the novel's design. This juxtaposition of functions echoes Merleau-Ponty's *écart* in that "The Window" and "The Lighthouse" become folded or overlapped together by "Time Passes" that acts as "the opening-divergence" (Hass, 2008:132) necessary for the recollection of themes begun in part one, in part three.

David Sherman's Levinasian reading of "Time Passes" argues that contrary to the intimations of formalism and aesthetic objectivity found in Woolf's diary entries, this section of the novel "speaks

[57] Noted in Bradshaw's (2006:xlii) "Introduction" to the edition of *To the Lighthouse* used throughout this study. Cf. *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft* transcribed and edited by Susan Dick (cf. Bradshaw, 2006:xlii, n.52).

with the ethically-inflected voice of selfhood bound to the other more than to its own being, a self for whom the fullness of autonomous identity is not a sufficient meaning of the human" (2007:160). Sherman's reading of the narration as "non-subjective narration…because it dislocates its idiosyncratic perspectives from a discrete mind that might contain them" (2007:161) rather than constituting an abstract, objective perspective highlights Woolf's experimentation with narrative perspective and of an interworld which reaches beyond the subjectivity of interior experience.

The narration holds traces of the free indirect discourse used in the other sections' mediated movement between different characters' perspectives, but here the voices expressed are the nonhuman surroundings, as if the other side of the communion between Mrs Ramsay and the "inanimate things" (*TL*:53) is now voiced:

> Only through the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork certain airs, detached from the body of the wind…crept round corners and ventured indoors. Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wallpaper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall? Then smoothly brushing the walls, they passed on musingly as if asking the red and yellow roses on the wallpaper whether they would fade, and questioning…the torn letters in the wastepaper basket, the flowers, the books, all of which were now open to them and asking, Were they allies? Were they enemies? How long would they endure? (*TL*:103-4)

The passage above intertwines a narrating consciousness which "imagine[s]" and interprets ("as if asking") the interrogations of the "airs" which travel through the drawing-room. Although the questions of allegiances may be seen merely as a figurative account of the inevitable decay of material life over time, the personification suggests an intercorporeality of the narrator, surroundings, and the absent human inhabitants. At the same time, although the passing of time is textually mediated through the use of figurative language, this section seems to return to the "pre-predicative dimension of experience, which is 'always…in advance'" (Husserl, quoted in

Mildenberg, 2017:108) and which forms the ground of any interrogative or reflective action. This relationship is presented in textual terms, as the natural world seems, in retrospect, to have anticipated each of the bracketed events of Mrs Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew's deaths, and the figurative deaths of family and nation:

> [T]he sea tosses itself and breaks itself, and should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts […] no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul (*TL*:105).

> Moreover, softened and acquiescent, the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind (*TL*:108).

> Now and again 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. Then again silence fell; and then…there seemed to drop into this silence this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling (*TL*:109).

The narratorial voice lingers on various instances where established definitions and systems are broken down.[58] The "sleeper [who fancies] that he might find…an answer to his doubts" discovers "no image" and is, instead, confronted with an almost primordial "night" which resists "order" and provides no "compass [for] the soul". The personification of spring, who has "seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind" remains "veiled" and uncommunicative. Finally, the glassware in the cupboards shakes "as if a giant voice" had sounded through the air to signal a violent rent in the status quo. An interplay of unmet expectations and accompanying disappointment is evident throughout these three excerpts as the "image[s]" of the pre-war and pre-"Time Passes" eras lose their influence. Although the "sleeper" might have sought "divine

[58] Mildenberg (2017:108) interprets the brackets as a form of the phenomenological reduction or Husserl's bracketing. While the comment acknowledges that these do not "close off subjective experience from the external world", there is little mention made of the significance of the stylisation of the relationship between natural description and reportage.

promptitude" through an encounter with the natural world of the nighttime beach, the nonhuman is unresponsive, either avoiding sharing "knowledge" or rendering it in inarticulate terms as if marking an irreparable change to the contexts from which such knowledge or expression might arise.

If one considers "Time Passes" to be similar to the *écart* in that the section marks a divergence or opening between the social systems and expectations of the first and third sections – both due to the violent disruptions of war and the effects of the Ramsay family deaths (particularly Mrs Ramsay) – then it could be argued that the section moves toward dismantling the organising mechanisms presented in "The Window". This is evident not only in the shift from the imagined order of nature declaring "that good triumphs, happiness prevails" (*TL*:108) toward "something out of harmony" (*TL*:109) as the "dream…of sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer" (*TL*:110) falters, but more particularly in the disruptions which loosen the tucked folds of Mrs Ramsay's shawl. The unfolding of the green cashmere shawl she had wrapped around the boar's skull to appease Cam's nightmares is compared to "a rupture" (*TL*:106) which gradually illuminates the *memento mori* she had disguised. The covered skull, which was once imaginatively transformed into something "lovely" such as "a mountain, a bird's nest, a garden" (*TL*:93), becomes visible once more due to the relentless pacing of time and gravity. The loosened folds which swing "aimlessly" (*TL*:109) echo Mrs Ramsay's belief that "there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor" (*TL*:54) and become a valediction for a world made strange. Ultimately, "Time Passes" questions whether the compositional negotiations, the folds and structures that had provided some sense of intercorporeality on which the artists' efforts might be grounded, will remain relevant due to the radical changes which have unfolded them.

Living in Fascination

Lily's return to the Ramsays ten years later is marked by a sense of disconnection. The first morning of her return is enveloped in a vaguely uncanny feeling as the inhabitants seem stilted or clumsy, and she struggles to turn her observations into coherent thoughts:

> [T]his morning everything seemed so extraordinarily queer that a question like Nancy's—What does one send to the Lighthouse?—opened doors in one's mind that went banging and swinging to and fro and made one keep asking, in a stupefied gape, What does one send? What does one do? Why is one sitting here after all? (*TL*:121)

Mrs Ramsay's death, and the time which has passed between the two visits, mean that familiarity and "the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow" (*TL*:122). The disjointed impressions of the morning and the lack of Mrs Ramsay as aesthetic and emotional connector who had "bound things together" echo the compositional frustrations Lily had a decade ago, and she muses that, much like the colours and shapes of her painting, "If only she could put them together, she felt, write them out in some sentence, then she would have got at the truth of things" (*TL*:122). However, a central part of her composition – Mrs Ramsay and James – is no longer present, and her memories of the vision are modulated by time and reflection so that, although triggered by the familiar sights, the "doors in [her] mind…bang[ ] and swing[ ] to and fro", seeming without purpose. Her vision lacks, if not the physical centreline of the tree, which she thought she would use to tie the painting's parts together, certainly the emotional centre – the purple shadow of Mrs Ramsay. Furthermore, the impressions, the "parts"– "But what does one send to the Lighthouse? Perished. Alone. The grey-green light on the wall opposite. The empty places" (*TL*:122) – have become "symbols" (*TL*:122) which add a new dimension to her painting's composition as she not only attempts to balance the

representations of disparate parts of the visual perspective, but also the now silent influence of Mrs Ramsay and the way her absence has altered the space and its inhabitants.

"You will find us much changed" (*TL*:123) is Mr Ramsay's abrupt and dramatic summation of the family's circumstances. His wife's absence shifts household dynamics, and his overbearing nature – of which Mrs Ramsay had largely borne the brunt – refocuses on Lily, James, and Cam. Lily suggests that rather than marking the "tragedy" with familiar symbols of grief – "palls, dust, and the shroud" – the deepest effect is marked by his demands which leave "children coerced, their spirits subdued" (*TL*:123). An intimacy which acknowledges alterity has, therefore, been exchanged for the way "he permeate[s], he prevail[s], he impose[s] himself. He change[s] everything" (*TL*:124). Mrs Ramsay's absence also alters Lily's relationship with the family as, unlike a decade ago when she was primarily a bystander to the ups and downs of their marriage, she now feels drawn into this possessive circle of control.

Lily and Mr Ramsay's exchange demonstrates an unhealthily possessive intimacy. She feels that, as he "bear[s] down on her" (*TL*:123), she "would be forced to give" (*TL*:124) until she has satisfied his greed for "sympathy" (*TL*:128). Unlike the intimacy Lily sought with Mrs Ramsay, where she wanted to "haunt[ ] the dome-shaped hive" (*TL*:44) of the other woman's private self without ever taking possession of it, Mr Ramsay's presence is "this enormous flood of grief, this insatiable hunger for sympathy, this demand that she should surrender herself up to him entirely" (*TL*:126). The emphasis on his proximity as an engulfing force suggests that closeness may, contradictorily, deny intimacy rather than foster it. Groover argues a similar point in her discussion of Mr and Mrs Ramsay's relationship, noting that their exchange is one where her "sympathetic response forms a physical effusion filling the space between herself and her husband" (2014:220), but that Mr

Ramsay's nourishment, in turn, leaves Mrs Ramsay "depleted", so that while the body may be "a vehicle for intimate connection…it also renders [Woolf's] female characters vulnerable to the demands of the male ego" (2014:220). This is echoed in the language used when he approaches Lily, as his "immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy pour[s] and spread[s] itself in pools at her feet" (*TL*:126). Although his desire for intimacy has stretched out between them, much as Mrs Ramsay did for him earlier, this is an imposed closeness which "threatens autonomy" (Groover, 2014:220). Lily's metaphorical "draw[ing] her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet" (*TL*:127) is an insistence on autonomy, and her praise of his boots and allowing him to demonstrate his knowledge of both cobbling and knots do not provide sympathy so much as recentre their conversation around his knowledge rather than an exchange between man and woman.

The physical act of preparing to paint, of "fetch[ing]…a chair…pitch[ing] her easel" (*TL*:123) and then "set[ting] her clean canvas firmly upon the easel" (*TL*:124) all anticipate the level of focused attention Lily associates with translating her vision to her canvas. The sense of "[living] in fascination" (EM:129), the reversibility toward which she reached during "The Window", returns in these scenes. The first moments alone with her canvas after Mr Ramsay leaves have her feeling "curiously divided, as if one part of her were drawn out there—it was a still day, hazy; the Lighthouse looked this morning at an immense distance; the other had fixed itself doggedly, solidly, here on the lawn" (*TL*:129). This is not a mere splitting of visual focus; instead, the division hints at a need for perspective which is reached through the "fascination" of perceptual attention both Lily and Mrs Ramsay demonstrate during "The Window". Glen Mazis, in "The Artist's Gestures of Fascination in 'Eye and Mind'" (2019:73), argues that "fascination" for Merleau-Ponty

"marks the life of an artist as a way of living one's embodiment and connection to the depths of the natural and social world."[59] The artist's perceptual gaze acknowledges these connections, including the "enigma…that [one's] body simultaneously sees and is seen" (EM:124), which Woolf translates into an almost tangible gaze:

> She saw her canvas as if it had floated up and placed itself white and uncompromising directly before. It seemed to rebuke her with its cold stare for all this hurry and agitation; this folly and waste of emotion; it drastically recalled her and spread through her mind first a peace, as her disorderly sensations…trooped off the field; and then, emptiness. She looked blankly at the canvas, with its uncompromising white stare; from the canvas to the garden (*TL*:129-30).

The canvas's "cold" and "uncompromising white stare" calls her to "peace…and then emptiness", a hollow to be filled just as, in turn, she fills her canvas. Mazis describes the artist's fascination or moment of felt reversibility further as a process by which one "[loses] the firm grasp of the self as core of self-subsistent identity" (2019:77) much as Lily consciously "subdue[s] the impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person" (*TL*:130) before making the first mark on her canvas.

Her preparations and first marks are described in terms of movement within a space: the painter is a swimmer faced with unpredictable waters once in the process, no matter how "symmetrically" the waves of her vision might "shape themselves…from the cliff top" (*TL*:130). Mark-making takes on a rhythmical quality, a push and pull "as if she were urged forward and at the same time must

[59] Mazis also draws parallels between Woolf's presentation of perception in the characters of Lily and Mrs Ramsay, and the artist as described in Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind". His argument focuses on the nature of this perceptual attention, however, and does not explore, as I aim to do, the elegiac purpose of Lily's artistic project in "The Lighthouse" section of the novel.

hold herself back" (*TL*:130). As much as the recollections of her composition may have relied on mental contemplation, the realisation of it relies on the body:

> [S]he made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it—a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her (*TL*:130-1).

The descriptions of the sense of depth in her "brown running nervous lines" seem to reach out from the flat surface of the canvas and create a shared space between artist and work that "enclose[s]" them together through repetitive action. The following phrases reinforce this in their grounding of the artistic activity in the movement of Lily's body through "a space" through moments of action and rest, as in "the hollow of one wave she [sees] the next wave towering higher and higher above her". Painting gains an almost wave-like rhythm where "the pauses [are] one part…and the strokes another", enveloping her in a meditative, creative bubble. Her feelings of gradual disassociation from the rest of the world echo the painting scenes of "The Window" and heighten the sense of reversibility. As she steps back to look at her canvas and the surrounding landscape behind it, she is drawn "into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention" (*TL*:131). However, as much as her bodily movements actively create her work, the rhythms of the process are presented as both internal and external forces, with her body moving in connection to her "ancient enemy['s]" demands for attention and a rhythm "which [is] dictated to her" (*TL*:131) from her visual field. Koppen argues that "natural-form-as aesthetic form" – in this case, Lily's reflection on the "white lamp-shade

looming on a wicker table" (*TL*:131) – "has a strong physical presence which is experienced physically by the body. A physical process is set in motion in the body, which coincides with artistic activity and releases a creative and anamnesic process" (2001:383). While I agree with Koppen's assessment regarding the power of the connection between the visual field and the artist's body, I would extend her network of connectors from "physical objects, body, and memory" to include a larger abstracted sense of the corporeal world in line with the descriptors Woolf uses throughout this scene. The notion of depth appears frequently: the artist navigates the swells and hollows of inspirational waves, a space with a volume which threatens to engulf her; later on, she connects space and weight together in a series of contrasts:

> Heaven be praised for it, the problem of space remained, she thought, taking up her brush again. It glared at her. The whole mass of the picture was poised upon that weight. Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses (*TL*:141).

Although this can be read as mere metaphor for Lily's desired brushstrokes and colour usage, that is, as a continuation of her distaste for the "feathery and evanescent" impressionistic style, it nevertheless conveys a magnitude onto both the landscape and her composition through the incorporation of underlying "bolts of iron" that cannot be "dislodge[d] with a team of horses". This, along with the notion that both her canvas and the surroundings are looking back at her, moves the focus from specific objects which might spark a memory or aesthetic inspiration to a more complex reflexive relationship.

Lily's attention to her canvas and her memories is frequently described as the movement through some watery space. While moments of fascination may be similar to a swimmer moving through

deep sea waves, comments and viewpoints which have become sedimented in one's memory act as "habitual currents", familiar paths of thinking which are reinforced slowly and, "after a certain time form[ ] experience" (*TL*:131) and which threaten to draw one out of those depths. One such current into which Lily swims is Charles Tansley's old refrain that women "can't paint, can't write" (*TL*:132, cf. 42, 71, 74). Such phrases act similarly to the "hooks" (CD:60) against which Cézanne rails. In her discussion of overlaps between conceptions of "doubt" in modernism and Merleau-Ponty's essay, "Cézanne's Doubt", Ariane Mildenberg generalises these "hooks" as "preconceived, objective notions about experience" (2019:60), thereby expanding their usage from Cézanne's purported shout that "he wouldn't let anybody 'get his hooks into [him]'" (CD:60), to a notion echoing the issue of uninterrogated preconceptions posed by phenomenology. In contrast to the "hooks" which imply uninterrogated ideas or perspectives, the essay emphasises the necessity of the artist's anchoring in her/his environment:

> Cézanne did not think he had to choose between feeling and thought, as if he were deciding between chaos and order. […] He makes a basic distinction not between 'the senses' and 'the understanding' but rather between the spontaneous organization of the things we perceive and the human organization of ideas and sciences. We see things; we agree about them; we are anchored in them; and it is with 'nature' as our base that we construct our sciences (CD:63-64).

This view repositions the suppositions of science alongside nature and art and does not treat any of these as more authentic than another. Although the quotation above focuses on Cézanne's rejection of rationalist artistic traditions, Taylor Carman usefully explains that "[w]e have a perceptual perspective on the world, but we also have intellectual, social, personal, cultural, and historical perspectives, which are themselves no less anchored in our bodies than sense experience itself" (2008:9, thereby defining anchorage as the embodied position and perspective of an individual, joining together physical, mental, emotional, and other influences.

Lily's moments of doubt present an overlapping of these hooks and anchors, as the habitual currents of the expectations of women – or lack thereof – run conversely to that of her desire to create. Her thoughts, depicted in free indirect discourse amidst the narrator's descriptions of her brushstrokes, highlight the paradox of the hooks she wishes to escape and their seeming similarity to aspects of her lived perspective, particularly as a woman:

> Always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt (*TL*:131).

Doubt, here, signals both Lily's uncertainty and perhaps occasional reluctance to "always be drawn out and haled away" (*TL*:131), as well as a sense of openness felt as when "coming back from a journey, or after an illness, before habits had spun themselves across the surface […] that same unreality, which was so startling […] Life was most vivid then" (*TL*:157). Lily's "attack" (*TL*:131) against the habitual currents is similar to Merleau-Ponty's counterargument to interpreting an artist's trajectory in a deterministic manner: "to say that we are from the start our way of aiming at a particular future would be to say that our project has already been determined with our first ways of being" (CD:71). Her loss of "consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance" (*TL*:132) once inspiration strikes is indicative of a growing understanding that her past and present, despite being centre-stage in her reflections in the following sections, are not the determinate factors of her art.

Once Lily begins painting in "The Lighthouse" section, there is a perpetual intertwining of her physical stance and movement with the free-flowing memories upon which she reflects. Just as she "dip[s] among the blues and umbers" (*TL*:131), "move[s] her brush hither and thither" (*TL*:131),

and "[keeps] looking at the hedge, at the canvas" (*TL*:131), "her mind [keeps] throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she model[s] it with greens and blues" (*TL*:132). In doing so, the narration continually associates the physicality of her gaze toward the house or out toward the bay with the process of reflecting upon her experiences from a decade past. Importantly, although the memories might "spurt" unexpectedly into her consciousness, her canvas remains a space where these ideas and memories are "re-fashion[ed]" (*TL*:133) into art. Her painting process may, therefore, be described as threefold: her perceptions of the physical surroundings, such as the house and the boat's progress to the lighthouse, spontaneous memories of the previous summer, and her active transformation of these elements into a cohesive vision.

Lily's recollections negotiate the possibility of memory's permanence in the text's hearkening back to the descriptors used by Mrs Ramsay during the dinner party scene. Although Lily's memory is of a moment on the beach with Mrs Ramsay and Charles Tansley, her impressions of the "simplicity" (*TL*:132) of the scene focus on the stability and power of her presence:

> That woman sitting there, writing under the rock resolved everything into simplicity; made these angers, irritations fall off like old rags; she brought together this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite…something —this scene on the beach for example, this moment of friendship and liking—which survived, after all these years, complete (*TL*:132-3).

The emphasis lies on the way she smooths over their clashing temperaments, suggesting that Mrs Ramsay brings others into a sense of community by "merging and flowing" (*TL*:69), harmonising discordant elements into something "which survived…complete". One of Lily's "little daily miracles" (*TL*:133), an everyday revelation tied together by her memory of the beach and her repetitive glances between "her canvas to the drawing-room steps and back again" (*TL*:133), is the

recognition that Mrs Ramsay is able – as "Lily herself trie[s]" – to "mak[e] of the moment something permanent" (*TL*:133). Similarly to the unity and structure that the candlelight brings around the dinner table, there might "[i]n the midst of chaos [be] shape", and a moment may be "stuck into stability" (*TL*:133) through willpower, memory, or art.

Woolf not only describes the painting process in terms of rhythmical movement but also as a slow building up of the visual and tangible depth of paint and images on a canvas. Lily's insistence that beneath the "beautiful and bright" surface, the fabric or "weight" of the painting should "be clamped together with bolts of iron" (*TL*:141) once again demonstrates her aspiration to achieve the sensation of structure and depth, unlike the fleeting gaze of impressionism. Simultaneously, the descriptions of depth tunnel into the past so that "model[ling]" with paint is both an act of creation and reflection: she "[goes] on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past" (*TL*:142). Lily's feeling that "she seemed to be sitting beside Mrs Ramsay on the beach" (*TL*:141) while painting suggests that reminiscence acts as a transcendent dwelling or shared inhabitation of the temporal space. As she paints, she "[feels] as if a door [opens], and one [goes] in and [stands] gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place" (*TL*:141), echoing the architectural imagery of Mrs Ramsay's selfhood presented in "The Window". Space becomes an intimate reflection of the self to which Lily gains access through the simultaneous processes of memory and painting. Importantly, this moment of intimate reflection is not possessive; it marks a revision of Lily's previous questions regarding intimacy:

> Mrs Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? (*TL*:141)

Silence, or "haunting" the edges of an intimate togetherness as Lily had previously imagined of herself, becomes a careful balance of activity and passivity which seeks to remain open and receptive but which does not try to lay claim to something or someone to "spoil[ ]…by saying them" (*TL*:141). In this way, the artist's fascination stretches beyond a focus on an individual's being-in-the-world during the present moment and encompasses a sense of being which might, through reflection and creation, "illumine[ ] the darkness of the past" (*TL*:141) as folded into the present.

As she paints, Lily "collect[s] her impressions" of the past, such as interactions with Minta and Paul, Mrs Ramsay's plans for her to marry William Bankes, and the platonic relationship she has maintained with him over the years. The recollections are part memory, part "making up scenes" (*TL*:142), and the blurring of fact and fiction is presented not as baseless assumption but as an understandable filling in of the gaps which still allows for "'knowing' people, 'thinking' of them, 'being fond' of them" (*TL*:142). These impressions culminate in two memories of Mr Bankes: his shock at her disregard for the symbolism of "mother and son" (*TL*:145) and a later moment where he recounted the first time he met Mrs Ramsay. Once again drawing on a notion of dwelling together, Lily looks "at the drawing-room step" (*TL*:145) and sees Mrs Ramsay through both her and William's perspectives:

> She saw, through William's eyes, the shape of a woman, peaceful and silent, with downcast eyes. She sat musing, pondering (she was in grey that day, Lily thought). Her eyes were bent. She would never lift them. Yes, thought Lily, looking intently, I must have seen her look like that, but not in grey; nor so still, nor so young, nor so peaceful (*TL*:145).

In overlapping their perspectives, the memory both celebrates the closeness between Lily and William and questions, once more, if the image presented is a true reflection of the woman sitting there. The conditions of knowing someone, initially presented as possible through both memory

and imagination, are interrogated anew, opening up the acknowledgement of alterity without disregarding the value of knowledge unbound by facts.

The figure of Mrs Ramsay is described, through Lily's memory of William's claim, as "astonishingly beautiful" (*TL*:146). However, in contemplating Mrs Ramsay's beauty Lily is drawn "[a]gainst her will…to the surface" (*TL*:146). The reason for the disturbance lies in beauty's penalty: "it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life—froze it" (*TL*:146). Much like the "deceptiveness of beauty" which tangled Lily's perceptions "in a golden mesh" (*TL*:43) a decade prior when she tried to make out the essence of Mrs Ramsay, the thought of her beauty now interrupts Lily's memories. Beauty echoes the uninterrogated claims of Mrs Ramsay's identity made by unknown characters in the first part of the novel. Its freezing quality acts in contrast to artistic fascination, as it fixes an image "too readily…too completely" for reflection: "[o]ne for[gets] the little agitations; the flush, the pallor, some queer distortion, some light or shadow, which ma[kes] the face unrecognisable for a moment and yet add[s] a quality one [sees] for ever after" (*TL*:146). In an uninterrogated form, the memory of Mrs Ramsay's beauty results in a stillness and fixity which deny the quivering vitality Mr Bankes had intuited in her so long ago. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty explains that the "painter who conceptualizes and seeks the expression first misses the mystery—renewed every time we look at someone—of a person's appearing in nature" (CD:66). The critique of beauty offered in *To the Lighthouse* joins together the aesthetic concerns of representing or interpreting visual stimuli with an implicitly ethical stance that valorises the unfamiliarity of the other.

Woolf suggests, through the depictions of Lily's increasing desperation, that her grief abandons formulated expression as inadequate in comparison to her desire. Words "[break] up the thought

and dismember[ ] it" and pre-figured phrases "[a]bout life, about death; about Mrs Ramsay" (*TL*:146), like the painter who conceptualises the vision too soon, are futile. Desire, therefore, needs to be grounded in pre-reflective, perceptual experience that does not immediately grasp for expression.

Shortly before this scene, the narrator describes Lily as having "triumphed over Mrs Ramsay" (*TL*:144) through her knowledge that she, William Bankes, and the Rayleys had all disobeyed her plans for their futures. At that moment, "one pitied [the dead], one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at [one's] mercy" (*TL*:143). She, therefore, relegates the memory of Mrs Ramsay to an insubstantial "[g]host, air, nothingness, a thing [she] could play with easily and safely at any time of day or night" (*TL*:146); in short, a memory to be grasped, interpreted and expressed in her painting. Her attempts at manipulation are futile, however, and she is left "to want and not to have" (*TL*:146) as desire "put[s] her hand out and wr[i]ngs the heart" (*TL*:147).

Lily's increasingly desperate and generalised questions – "What does it mean? How do you explain it all?" (*TL*:147) – seem to extend the metaphors of depth which had previously been applied to her tunnelling process of recollection: "the whole world seem[s] to have dissolved in this early morning hour into a pool of thought, a deep basin of reality" (*TL*:147). Her desire to understand this "reality" and the place of her art within it might be seen, in light of the previous comparisons between the artist and a swimmer, as a further example of this diving or tunnelling process. In contrast, much like when Mrs Ramsay's ghost wrings her heart, she finds her attempts to navigate the depths of artistic purpose thwarted:

> Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle […] Could it be…that this was life?—startling, unexpected, unknown? (*TL*:147)

In an echo of the scene from "The Window", during which she hoped that physical touch would grant a sense of intimacy, Lily wonders if she might overcome this unpredictability of life and resurrect the essence of Mrs Ramsay by "demand[ing] an explanation" from her surroundings (*TL*:147) as if enough emphasis would force "beauty [to] roll itself up; the space [to] fill; those empty flourishes [to] form into shape" (*TL*:148). However, just as her interrogation of the nature of intimacy proved futile,[60] "a sense of someone there, of Mrs Ramsay" (*TL*:148) returns, but only after the "pain of the want, and the bitter anger" subside (*TL*:148). Her attempts to make sense of her circumstances and transform these into a coherent composition elude her here as seen in the series of verbs which seem to act upon her: the world is able to "thrust…and grip one…cut…grasp". What remains, instead, is the need to accept elusiveness and unknowability. Merleau-Ponty, in a description of his desired philosophical approach, argues that

> [things] offer themselves therefore only to someone who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps, or to immobilize them as under the objective of a microscope, but to let them be and to witness their continued being—to someone who therefore limits himself to giving them the hollow, the free space they ask for in return, the resonance they require (*VI*:101).

Johnson uses Merleau-Ponty's frequent assertions that philosophy and art have much in common to note that "[e]rotic and aesthetic desire are both forms of openness to the Other and the world that are interrogative, a sensitive questioning of both world and self" (2010:159). That is not to insist that Lily's desire is necessarily erotic; instead, it highlights the interrelated nature, the

[60] "'Mrs Ramsay!' Lily cried, 'Mrs Ramsay!' But nothing happened" (*TL*:148). Cf., "Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing! as she leant her head against Mrs Ramsay's knee" (*TL*:44).

overlaps, between her desire for an artistic method and for intimacy.[61] Merleau-Ponty's description, therefore, refigures the "centre of complete emptiness" (*TL*:147) from a void to a "hollow" in which the Other might find "the resonance they require" (*VI*:101) – the depth of Lily's non-possessive reflections and creation of material weight through the paint on her canvas.

The spatial metaphors of distance and depth are joined together in Lily's meditation on the "extraordinary power" (*TL*:154) of distance. If depth has been the means by which one might access memory and aesthetic desire, distance is the measurement of the physical separation of individuals and has implications for the possibility of intimacy. Her relationship with Mr Ramsay, which had previously been measured by a suffocating closeness and demand for sympathy, now changes "as he sail[s] further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote" (*TL*:156). A connection or tension remains between them and, as Doyle remarks: "the distance always spins out her feelings for him and those feelings exert their pressure on what she creates" (1994:67), as seen in her intermittent switch of focus between her canvas and the bay. It is through this attention to the perceptible world, "before habits ha[ve] spun themselves across the surface" (*TL*:157), that distance and depth are filled with an "unreality" and "vivid[ness]" (*TL*:157) that highlight both difference and intercorporeality: "Certainly I do not live their life; they are definitively absent from me and I from them. But that distance becomes a strange proximity as soon as one comes back home to the perceptible" (Merleau-Ponty, [1960] 1977:15).

[61] Johnson further argues that "beauty and love are diminished if not destroyed by overbearing approaches that prefer domination to appreciation, dogmatism to communication, commodification to free circulation" (2010:159), lending Merleau-Ponty's stance a more obviously ethical framework.

In contrast to the possessive desire to grasp or understand which dominated her earlier thoughts of Mrs Ramsay, Lily begins to realise that "one got nothing by soliciting urgently" (*TL*:158). Instead, her artistic practice should be grounded in the "fascination" to which she had previously aspired:

> Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything. Get that and start afresh; get that and start afresh; she said desperately, pitching herself firmly again before her easel. […] She stared, frowning. There was the hedge, sure enough. But one got nothing by soliciting urgently. One got only a glare in the eye from looking at the line of the wall, or from thinking—she wore a grey hat. She was astonishingly beautiful. Let it come, she thought, if it will come (*TL*:158).

The "[b]eatiful phrases" of language and preconfigured aesthetic compositions fail here; their descriptive or illustrative natures – as Woolf suggests critically in her essays – fall short of authentically translating the painter's vision. As evident in previous sections, the artist's fascination instead requires a return to pre-reflective experience – the "jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made" – and a patient awaiting or "germinating" (CD:67) with one's surroundings. In a similar vein, Claudia Tobin argues that such a state of simultaneous passivity and attention is "central to the sensitised lexicon that Woolf develops in order to describe the vibrating stillness, tension and receptivity associated with moments of intensity and heightened attention" (2020:34). Artistic vision, then, is marked by plurality and openness: "all the partial views one catches sight of must be welded together; all that the eye's versatility disperses must be reunited" (CD:67); one needed "fifty pairs of eyes to see with [including] one that was stone blind to her beauty" (*TL*:161). Furthermore, in being "blind" to the beautiful as an uninterrogated and assumptive smoothing over of impressions, she longs "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) so that the

ordinary and everyday might be transformed into art, not through its apparent use value, but through multiplicity and openness.

Merleau-Ponty remarks that "[o]nly one emotion is possible for this painter—the feeling of strangeness—and only one lyricism—that of the continual rebirth of existence" (CD:68). When the light in the drawing-room window changes, therefore, and defies her relief that "[t]he problem might be solved after all" (*TL*:164), Lily acknowledges that her memories of Mrs Ramsay might also "bec[o]me part of ordinary experience" (*TL*:165). In doing so, her aesthetic vision no longer occupies mental space apart from the incongruities of daily life but instead "[sits] there quite simply" and "cast[s] her shadow" (*TL*:165) on Lily's perceptual existence in a way that is akin to Merleau-Ponty's description, quoted earlier, of the paintings radiating from the walls of the Lascaux Cave:

> For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it (EM:126).

By figuring aesthetic vision as the receptive fascination which prioritises process rather than object, the claims that "[t]here it was—her picture" and that "[i]t was done; it was finished […] I have had my vision" (*TL*:170) both mark a conclusion to the process and tangible object of her painting, and echo the openness of the hyperdialectic presented in the first part of the novel.

Intercorporeality, in "The Window", is marked by a wave-like divergence and overlapping as things and people draw closer and further apart. Lily's desire for intimacy is matched by a perpetually shifting horizon of revelation and occlusion as Mrs Ramsay's selfhood is revealed only through the allusion to textual similarities, thereby never fully translating the contents of that cathedral-like space. "Time Passes" fissures this relationship as the terms are broken and remade with Mrs

Ramsay's death, as well as the expansion of textual focus to an intercorporeality of the house and surroundings. The start of "The Lighthouse" is, therefore, aptly marked by a pervasive sense of strangeness, of symbolic and interpersonal relationships straining in vain toward some remembered meaning. Simultaneously, the section acts as the overlap in the novel's overall chiasmatic structure, with Lily questioning again the method and scope of intimacy and compositional unity. It is, however, the fissures of the intervening years which complicate Lily's painting process: she seeks not only to understand Mrs Ramsay's presence but to navigate her absence.

The artist's fascination which figured during "The Window" as only a momentary respite for Lily before the circumstances of her life interfered with her vision is resurrected and deepened during her painting process in "The Lighthouse". While this attentiveness and receptivity were initially a guide for establishing the authenticity of her composition, they gain an explicitly elegiac and ethical framework in the final part of the novel. The return to pre-reflective experience requires a passivity and openness to the world, which in turn leads her to express her vision. In attempting her painting again, she must reconsider the problems of composition which she believed she had solved, or as Merleau-Ponty argues, "[t]here is nothing to prevent the painter from going back to one of the emblems he has shied away from—making it, of course, speak differently" (EM:148). Johnson, in a discussion of the significance of artistic repetition and recollection, extends this idea by referring to Kierkegaard:

> Kierkegaard draws a crucial distinction between recollection and repetition. They are the same psychic movement, except in opposite temporal directions: 'What is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas repetition is recollected forward.' The phrase, 'recollected forward' dovetails past and future into a unity as a 'from-to' temporal structure embedded in the heart of the desire for the beautiful, not merely and only to remember or recollect, but to recollect creatively with a new horizon of difference and anticipation (quoted in Johnson, 2010:171-2).

Lily's first tunnelling into the hollows of her memories mirrors the above notion of recollection. She resurrects what "has been" but finds that the momentary triumph of knowledge over Mrs Ramsay denies the realisation of aesthetic or ethical unity. Instead, it is only through a passive openness to the intercorporeal world that she is able to "dovetail" her memories into a new aesthetic vision.

The hyperdialectic is not only present in the artistic process and the nature of interpersonal relationships but also in the structure and style of Woolf's writing. In her famous letter to Fry regarding the symbolism of the lighthouse, she praises ambiguity and plurality:

> 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 saw all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions—which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another. I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalised way (*L3*:385, original emphasis).

Her denial of fixed meaning valorises a notion of creative interpretation as a horizon which shifts not as a negation of that which has come before but which *"arises from* continual questioning" (Mildenberg, 2017:143, original emphasis). Writing and painting, therefore, spring from both an acknowledgement of pre-reflective experience and the subsequent stylisation thereof, as the artist "recaptures and converts into visible objects what would…remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness" (CD:68): the pattern "behind the cotton wool" (*MB*:71) of life.

CHAPTER 4
THE FLESH OF THE RED CARNATION

> The sun was now low beneath the horizon. Darkness spread rapidly. None of my selves could see anything beyond the tapering light of our headlamps on the hedge. I summoned them together. 'Now,' I said, 'comes the season of making up our accounts. Now we have got to collect ourselves; we have got to be one self'.
>
> "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor-Car" (*E6*:455)

The essay from which I have quoted above provides an example of one of Woolf's most phenomenologically-grounded expressions of perceptual experience as the speaker recounts the sensation of driving down a country lane during sunset. It is an account where the lines of external stimulation and internal reflection overlap with one another, as the speaker's various selves contemplate various aspects of the surroundings, such as the sights of "a hay stack; a rust red roof; a pond", the "presence of beauty" or the sudden glimpse of "a light; brilliant, freakish; inexplicable" – a star (*E6*:454-455). Alongside these, and implicitly affecting the speaker's perceptions, is the simultaneous movement of the car down the road and the progression of time toward evening and darkness. The opening of the essay declares that "[e]vening is kind to Sussex" as the landscape, much like an ageing woman, might hide imperfections behind "the veil of evening" (*E6*:453). The text of the epigraph gives the close of the interior dialogue of the speaker – quite possibly Woolf herself – in this essay, as well as the final darkening of the twilight sky. The initial early evening light dims rapidly, thereby instilling a sense of "impotency" at the inability to control the scene: "mastery here meant the power to convey what one saw now over Sussex so that another person

could share it" (*E6*:454). These desires to capture perceptual experience as if to freeze it in time and express it in an enclosed and coherent manner echo the frustrations of Mrs Ramsay and Lily explored in the previous chapter.

Woolf's use of the disappearing horizon line and the encroaching darkness effectively represents what Merleau-Ponty describes as the immanence at the heart of perception and expression. No sooner does one attempt to capture prelinguistic lived sensations than that nature escapes, and the expression that remains is a transformation of what came before. Similarly to the horizons of intimacy discussed in the previous chapter that exist between Lily and Mrs Ramsay, the speaker's ability to express perceptual elements is thwarted by the plenitude of these perceptions: "beauty spread at one's right hand, at one's left; at one's back too; it was escaping all the time; one could only offer a thimble to a torrent that could fill baths, lakes" (*E6*:454). This seems, at first, to mark an inherent inadequacy in human expression. However, I would argue that the essay's fragmentation of the speaker's selves and the continued attempts at describing the surroundings and the offshoot meandering thoughts contest the hierarchical differences between perception and expression offered at the start of the essay.

The image of the horizon used in the previous chapter to describe the simultaneous drawing-together and divergence present in intimacy – a closeness as well as an acknowledgement of difference – takes on a more literal turn in this essay, though the core ideas of the *écart* and chiasm remain present. Examples of the *écart* are found in both the visual illumination offered by the setting sun – there is still enough light to see the differences in the landscape rendered by various objects and structures – as well as differences present in the various speaking selves. Four distinct selves emerge over the course of the essay, each observing different aspects of the surroundings and

responding to these in varying ways. The first two "[hold] a colloquy about the wise course to adopt in the presence of beauty" (*E6*:454) of the agricultural landscape, while the third remains "aloof and melancholy" (*E6*:454), reflecting on the similarities between the headlamps' momentary lighting up of windows and the shortness of human life: "We have been over that stretch, and are already forgotten […] the light is out now. Others come behind us" (*E6*:454). The closing together of individual lives into a threatening image of endless continuity is broken apart by the "ambush" of the fourth self, who points out "a light; brilliant, freakish; inexplicable" – a star – which it considers to be a symbol of the future. Although time might be passing, this self argues, the future will be "full of charming thoughts, quick, effective beams" (*E6*:455), which create sparks that break the third self's pessimistic view. The essay begins at a time "too early for lamps; and too early for stars" (*E6*:454), but the sun moves swiftly "beneath the horizon. Darkness spread[s] rapidly", gradually reducing visible differences until they are momentarily illuminated only by the "tapering light of [the] headlamps on the hedge" (*E6*:455). The thin lines between unity/intimacy and conformity are problematised, therefore, in this seeming obliteration of difference, especially considering that the summoning together of selves quoted in the epigraph follows on directly from the onset of darkness.

What is unclear in the gathering darkness is whether or not this drawing together of selves alongside the elimination of visual differences denotes a finite unification of disparate parts. The first-person narrating self, for example, calls the other aspects together to "mak[e] up our accounts" (*E6*:455). The "trophies" of their perceptions are drawn together into a single expressed image of a "little figure advancing through beauty, through death, to the economical, powerful and efficient future" (*E6*:455). The movement from perception to expression echoes Mildenberg's understanding of

Merleau-Ponty's *écart* as the "temporal divergence between prelinguistic perception and expression that is also the ground of meaning-giving" (2017:142), but the selves' reaction to this figure suggests a culminating finality:

> Indeed it seemed as if the reality of things were displayed there on the rug. A violent thrill ran through us; as if a charge of electricity had entered in to us. We cried out together: 'Yes, yes,' as if affirming something, in a moment of recognition (*E6*:456).

The selves are connected in a shared moment of ecstasy at the sight of this unified symbol or expression, similar to the gathering together of the "severed parts" in Woolf's description of her "moments of being" (*MB*:72). However, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty's claim, quoted earlier, that "as soon as we examine and express [the world's] absolute proximity, it becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance" (*VI*:8), there is no clear indication of such an ever-moving milestone of meaning-making. The notion of a continual openness to the world remains only a vague possibility through the narrator's reference to the splitting of selves "in circumstances like these" (*E6*:454), thereby implying that such a colloquy might only happen in the future under specific circumstances.

The tensions between unity, conformity, and assemblage hinted at in this essay may be seen as fully realised in *The Waves*, a novel[62] which manipulates the overlapping and differences between selves through its splitting of "the self" into the six characters, who are also "supposed to be one" (*L4*:397).

[62] In calling it a novel I do not intend to ignore Woolf's suggested alternative genres: "Away from facts: free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel & a play" (*D3*:128) and "the play-poem idea" (*D3*:139. Exploring the implications of reading the text as these is, however, beyond the scope of my current project.

Merleau-Ponty's Later Ontology

Merleau-Ponty moves, in his later lectures and writing, such as *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* ([1995] 2003) and "Eye and Mind", toward a more explicit ontology. These ideas culminate in the incomplete, though posthumously published, work, *The Visible and the Invisible* ([1964] 1968), which consists of about two-thirds systematic text, and a third working notes that both refer to existing material and hint toward thoughts left unwritten.[63] This final period – late 1950s to 1960s – forms the theoretical lens for my exploration of Woolf's *The Waves*, and more specifically, the explicit ontology of the final chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*: "The Intertwining—The Chiasm". The aims of his earlier works, which have been discussed in previous chapters, are summarised in "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work":

> The perceiving mind is an incarnated mind. I have tried, first of all to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness. These philosophies commonly forget—in favor of a pure exteriority or of a pure interiority—the insertion of the mind in corporeality, the ambiguous relation which we entertain with our body and, correlatively, with perceived things ([1962] 1964:3-4).

The theses described here regard perception as essential to the "incarnated" or embodied consciousness and situate acts of consciousness and meaning-making in the perception of "the mind in its body and in its world". His later works reframe these ideas in ontological terms in his

[63] It may seem counterintuitive to incorporate a work with so many open ends, yet in doing so, I hope that my discussion might highlight that the assertion by Claude Lefort – the work's editor – about Merleau-Ponty's work as "the continuous exploration of our perceptual life and of our life of knowledge" (1968:xxxiii) holds true for *The Waves* as well.

expression of the interdependence of all phenomena and are explained through the notions of reversibility and "the flesh", as discussed in Chapter 3.

Merleau-Ponty posits that any notion of identity relies on difference or disparity and that concepts of self, other, or world are inherently relational. This means, Morris and Maclaren argue, that a sense of self is defined by an internal disparity:

> Something other than me opens me up and determines me as a self, first of all reveals me to myself and thereby realises me as the self that I am. I thus find myself fundamentally inhabited and haunted by otherness—but this does not undermine (2015:3).

Merleau-Ponty describes this relation in terms of reversibility, a movement of crossing over and drawing apart, which establishes unity in difference through an image of an individual's one hand touching the other:

> My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realisation, and one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch it— my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering (*VI*:147-8).

One might imagine the right hand holding an object and then the left touching the right. The perception of one's right hand grasping, for example, a pen, does not disappear, but at the same time, a similar sensation might be consciously perceived in the left hand as it touches an object; in this case, the right hand. In this way, the reversibility of ipseity and alterity is internalised within one's body as the momentary "realisation" of the doubled sensation of touching and touched. This remains momentary, however, as a true coincidence in terms of perception would mean that "my right hand really passes over to the rank of the touched", splitting consciousness as subject and body as object. The unity of the two hands of an individual does not produce an absolute

overlapping; there is, instead, "a sort of dehiscence [which] opens my body in two" (*VI*:123) and which perceives a sense of "difference/distance/alienation within the identity/unity" (Dillon, 1988:159).[64]

This sensation of unity-in-difference is not solely present in the body but extends to the perception of other things, other beings, and what we might term "world". In "Eye and Mind", as discussed previously, Merleau-Ponty draws on Klee's claim that he sometimes felt that the trees were looking back at him (EM:129); this is not intended to suggest inherent sentience in all tangible objects but rather to demonstrate that the tree, much like a mirror – another tangible object, albeit with a reflective surface – "sees" the painter as it renders visible something which one cannot perceive from within the unity of one's body: "his outside, his physiognomy, his carnal presence" (Dillon, 1988:161-2). As Merleau-Ponty states at another point, "I who see [the visible] do not see it from the depths of nothingness, but from the *midst* of itself; I the seer *am also visible*" (*VI*:113, emphasis added). The perceiving body is not a transcendental consciousness gazing upon the world from afar,[65] and the reversibility present in the body anticipates the experiences of an Other and marks them as irreducibly different from my subjectivity[66] – the Other is not subsumed into my body but recognised as another sensible being to whom I am perceivable and who exists alongside me in a shared world. As Barbaras ([1991] 2004:31) explains, the experiences of this other are figured

[64] At another point Merleau-Ponty explains the reversibility within the body as: "the body sensed and the body sentient are […] as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases" (*VI*:138).

[65] See Dillon (1988:146-7) for a summary of the arguments against a reading of Merleau-Ponty's work as continuing the notion of the transcendental ego found in writing by Kant or Husserl.

[66] One might consider this assurance of reciprocity without symmetry in terms of Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the handshake (*VI*:142) in that while both parties can perceive their own, and the other's, hands joining together, the precise perception of shaking my hand remains solely the other's, as well as any impressions or reflective thoughts the other might experience about our surroundings, or the way I present myself to her/him.

"no longer as the experience of an alter ego for an ego, but as the experience by one flesh of another flesh, of another perception, and finally of a dimension of the world itself". Prior to the conscious recognition and reflection upon these similarities or differences of an Other, the perceptual relationship is not figured as a "body-subject in relation to a world-object" but more accurately as "an anonymous perceptual unfolding, dehiscence, *écart*" (Dillon, 1988:164) where any implicit hierarchical boundaries of seer/seen, subject/object are eliminated through the reciprocity of vision – "we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (*VI*:139). This "generality of the Sensible" (*VI*:139) is what Merleau-Ponty terms "flesh", or as Daly explains, it is the shared carnality of sensible things which are "enveloped in a sphere of visibility—the 'flesh of the world'" (2016:58).

The discussion above about the interdependence of the *visible* – that is, beings and objects which exist in the phenomenal world – is followed in *The Visible and the Invisible* by exploring the expressive, cultural, and yet invisible world. Merleau-Ponty terms the invisible not as "an object hidden behind another…[nor] an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible" (*VI*:151), such as language, expression, and culture. The reversibility thesis is, therefore, extended to notions of reversibility within the invisible and, by extension, the interdependence and reversibility of the visible and the invisible worlds.

To mirror the discussion of the visible, one might begin by considering the relationship between thought and language as an internal process of reversibility. Merleau-Ponty's conception of language – in both internal and external speech acts – does not pretend to copy the world or our experiences; instead, it is how "the world's intelligibility/meaning/sense…unfolds" (Dillon, 1988:171). In the earlier *Phenomenology of Perception*, he argues that if "speech presupposed

thought, if talking were primarily a matter of meeting the object through a cognitive intention or…a representation, we could not understand why thought tends towards expression as towards its completion" (*PP*:206); thoughts, if not expressed through internal or external speech, may, therefore, remain "indeterminate" (*PP*:206), like the sensation of having the name for a familiar thing on the tip of one's tongue, or the creative process which only, upon reflection, is able to trace the line from original idea to the final product. As Daly summarises, thought is "inchoate expression…it is the reaching for an articulation that can grasp experience; it is like a hinge between experience and expression, and this expression is most often but not always linguistic" (2016:94). Reflection, therefore, may be seen as part of the reversibility thesis, as the pre-reflective and prelinguistic experience – that is, perception – is articulated and expressed in reflection.

Merleau-Ponty conceives of language as asymmetrical reversibility: perception may be expressed in new linguistic phrases, which are then sedimented through their repeated use and collective ownership, but this sedimentation is not complete, and new expressions are formed to articulate perception. It forms an open-ended dialectical relationship where ideas exist in everyday and regular use and can generate new expressions. Speech acts, therefore, produce a "coherent deformation" (*VI*:262) as coherence is found in both the continued sedimentation of language and its "deformation" where recognisable expressions may go beyond the sedimented expectation and express something new – expression is continually changing, and absolute, finite meaning is impossible.

Language, as part of the "invisible", is not separated from the tangible, visible world. Instead, the invisible is 'that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being' (*VI*:151). Merleau-Ponty draws on Proust's "little phrase" to

explain this relationship between the visible and the invisible. Although Swann might pore over the musical notation of the phrase, it is only when it is heard that he experiences its meaning in full. Similarly, "carnal ideas" (Daly, 2016:102) "render[ ] [linguistic notation] visible" (*VI*:151) in an open-ended relationship, the *écart* or "certain divergence, that never-finished differentiation" (*VI*:153), that is, the flesh. While flesh has previously been articulated as the shared carnality of the visible world, in the reversibility of the visible and the invisible flesh becomes the "place where the apparent oppositions of perceiving body and expressive gesture meet" (Daly, 2016:135). As Daly summarises, flesh is "the relationship characterised by reversibility of the visible and the *invisible*, the particular and the universal, of existence and essences, of the phenomenal and the cultural, of the sensible and the intelligible, of facticity and logos" (2016:135, original emphasis). Each of the pairs listed above is a version of the reversibility thesis, so this thesis becomes a series of nested expressions: the reversibility within the self, the self and other/world, speech and linguistic signs, an artwork and its cultural or historical context.

The concept of the flesh is a careful balance between generality and specificity. Merleau-Ponty claims that it is "not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' […] in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatiotemporal individual and the idea" (*VI*:139); however such encompassing terms risk an impression of "a cohesion without concept" (*VI*:152). In contrast, there are clear indications that the chiasm does not lead to "coinciding of the seer with the visible" (*VI*:261),[67] such as the asymmetrical overlapping between the body as sensed and sentient or between human and nonhuman life.

[67] However, Dillon (1988:166) argues that the recognition of these overlaps, of "the generality of the flesh", remains wholly different from "that of the oneness of consciousness" supported in some other scholars' philosophies: "I can experience the Other's flesh without merging with it, but-in the case of the Other's consciousness either I cannot

The lecture notes collected in *Nature* provide further explication regarding the cohesion between different bodies and between these and the world and point to a clear overlapping in the thinking proposed in *The Visible and the Invisible*.[68] Merleau-Ponty turns to, among others, the work of ethologist Jacob von Uexküll and his notion of the *Umwelt*. This idea refers broadly to the subjective reality of individual organisms and how this reality is shaped in a reciprocal relationality with the world around it: "Each subject weaves its relations like the threads of a spider web weave relations concerning things of the exterior world, and constructs with all its threads a solid network that carries its existence" (Uexküll, quoted in Merleau-Ponty, [1995] 2003:176). The image, while potentially positing a clear subject in the spider, does not view this "network" as a simplistic system of cause and effect since each element in the network, whether "exterior" or "interior" to the subject, is continually in the process of producing the environment or *Umwelt*. Although it would be too far a stretch to directly equate the *Umwelt* with Merleau-Ponty's chiasm and reversibility thesis, scholars have convincingly argued that "[t]his chiasm is the philosophical payoff of [his] interpretation of Uexküll's work" (Hansen, 2005:252).[69] In particular, the *Umwelt* assists in explaining the continual production of the chiasm between organism and world. Merleau-Ponty describes the "unfurling of an *Umwelt* as a melody that is singing itself" ([1995] 2003:173), a reference to Uexküll's descriptions of the balancing of activity and passivity in the *Umwelt* – a being is both shaped by and actively shapes its environment. The reference to music is, in turn, connected to other arts, such as when a painter is "struck by a painting which is not there" or a

experience it at all, or, if somehow I could, I would become lost in it and lose my singularity." In this sense, the mind is incarnated in the body but remains occluded from others until, for example, thought is expressed in gestures or words.

[68] Lefort, in his editor's introduction to *The Visible and the Invisible*, suggests that parts of the manuscript could be dated to 1959, thereby drawing it closer to the *Nature* lectures.

[69] Cf. Buchanan, 2008:133.

piece of music "sings in [the performer] much more than [he/she] sing[s] it" ([1995] 2003:174), both of which imply reciprocity in the process of creation, a communion between the artist's active artmaking, and the world's germination or inspiration for it.[70]

I propose that the overlapping between Merleau-Ponty's notions of chiasm and flesh and Uexküll's *Umwelt* may be further connected to Woolf's "philosophy", which was briefly explored in Chapter 1. I quote it here in full for reference:

> [The shock] is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; […] it gives me…a great delight to put the severed parts together. perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself (*MB*:72).

While Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll focus their respective notions of interconnectedness on pre-reflective phenomena, Woolf stresses here that it is only *in* reflection that this relationship may be teased out and illustrated in art. Although she begins by claiming that writing allows her to "put the severed parts together", her later descriptions of a "pattern" suggest that such interconnectivity is not produced through reflection, merely explicated or revealed in more systematic terms. Therefore, "mak[ing] it whole" is not an act of "surveying…the body and…the world by a consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty, [1995] 2003:209) as some controlling higher power or reality, nor

[70] This might, for example, be related to Lily's feelings of "a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back" (*TL*:130) and "the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly [lays] hands on her, emerge[s] stark at the back of appearances and command[s] her attention." (*TL*:131)

is her "philosophy" a thing separated from "the cotton wool"; instead, it is similar to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the invisible lining the realm of the visible or the sensible, as "some real thing behind appearances" (*MB*:72), an acknowledgement of "my body as interposed between what is in front of me and what is behind me, […] in a circuit with the world, an *Einfühlung* [feeling in] with the world, with the things, with the animals, with other bodies" (Merleau-Ponty, [1995] 2003:209). Taken together, these thinkers' ideas question "the limit between the body and the world" (*VI*:138), and propose, each in their way, that the relationality of the world might be a "melody", a "flesh", an intercorporeality where "we are the thing itself" (*MB*:72).

Phenomenology, Ontology, The Waves

Various scholars have commented upon connections between Woolf's *The Waves* and different strands of phenomenology and ontology. Some of the earliest studies, such as Suzette Henke's "The Waves: A Phenomenological Reading" (1989) and Mark Hussey's chapter on *The Waves* in *The Singing of the Real World* (1986), contain short references to phenomenology but do not ground these ideas in a clear philosophical framework or theory. Henke cites isolated quotations from Heidegger's *Being and Time* ([1927],1996) in her analysis of the novel and suggests vaguely that Bernard "psychologically 'brackets' *a priori* experience in the process of reduction that approximates Husserl's phenomenological epoché" (1989:465), though she does not directly reference Husserl in support of such a claim. Jo Ann Circosta's PhD thesis, *Witness to Consciousness: Virginia Woolf and Phenomenology* (2006), provides a more focused engagement with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl as part of her argument regarding Woolf's conceptualisation of consciousness in various texts, including *The Waves*. Emma Simone's *Virginia Woolf and Being-in-the-world: A Heideggerian Study* (2017) continues this combination of a single philosophical

focus alongside several of Woolf's works, though the thematic arrangements of the monograph do not always allow a sustained analysis of the novel. Finally, Ariane Mildenberg's chapter titled "Virginia Woolf's Interworld: Folds, Waves, Gazes" in her study *Modernism and Phenomenology: Literature, Philosophy, Art* (2017:105-37) presents the most direct overlapping with my proposed research, as it explores "the *non-dialectical* quality of Woolf's configuration of…doubleness" (2017:113, original emphasis), such as the *The Waves*'s complications of exteriority and interiority, and considers how Merleau-Ponty's ideas of chiasm and flesh may be used as new terminology for "the new kind of voice in Woolf's work" (2017:109). Overall, the past scholarship demonstrates the necessity of a careful balance between labelling or applying another scholar's phenomenology *to* Woolf's work versus attempting to bring these *into conversation* with each other.

Rhythmical Folds

Woolf describes the rhythm of *The Waves* as "a series of dramatic soliloquies" that "[run] homogeneously in and out, in the rhythm of the waves" (*D3*:312). This combination of descriptors creates a sense of unity and difference as the textual and interpersonal rhythms of the work continually draw into or out of focus. The rhythm she describes may, more generally, also be linked to her notion of style. Woolf famously declares to Vita Sackville-West that "[s]tyle is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words" (*L3*:247),[71] a notion which she then elaborates upon in her "A Letter to a Young Poet" (*E5*:306-323), where she describes rhythm as a "perpetual beat" which infuses the poet's everyday existence and "attempts to sweep all the contents of [the] mind into one dominant dance" (*E5*:309). Rhythm as style exists,

[71] While this statement is situated between the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and may, therefore, refer to those texts, I would argue that the claim holds true for her later writing, particularly *The Waves*.

in these passages, as the pattern and sequence of words chosen not only for their meanings or connotations but as notes in a melodic line or as words that "speak at once, striking two notes to make one chord" (*E6*:43-4).

Woolf's concern with the patterning of words and phrases, which only reach their full sense when considered in relation to each other, in turn, strikes a chord with Merleau-Ponty's call for a new, more poetic language for philosophy:

> It would be a language […] that would combine […] through the occult trading of the metaphor— where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges (*VI*:125).

There are several echoes here of Woolf's comments about rhythm, style, and, more specifically, the writing process of *The Waves*. Each mark in her writing process requires her "to think of its relation to a dozen others" (*D3*:259), yet also to "eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity" (*D3*:209) and "compost" (*D3*:285) her ideas to fit the "free yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel & a play" (*D3*:128) form to which she aspired. The "kinships" of words, much like the chords of a metaphor chiming in harmony in "Walter Sickert" (*E6*:43-4), become "the curious props / By which the world of memory & thought / Exists & is sustained" (a section from Wordsworth's *Prelude*, quoted in D3:247).

The "kinships…implicated in…transfers and…exchanges" (*VI*:125) emphasise the rhythmic structures of *The Waves*, which may be described as "waves accumulating and breaking", highlighting the "recurring return to a state in which 'I' cannot be separated from 'you'" (Högberg, 2020:166-7) and in which the subject is represented "in an inescapable relation with the world and the other, a relation depicted as a *wavering* between signification and indeterminacy, between same

and other" (Jonsson, 2006:39, original emphasis). The shared metaphors which "[run]…in and out" between the characters' perspectives mean that they "melt into each other with phrases" (*W*:8), thereby highlighting a shared carnality and intercorporeality and echoing Merleau-Ponty's claim of "borrow[ing] from the other, [being] in chiasm with the other" (*VI*:261). These folds are made distinct, in contrast, by the fact that difference remains; each has its "style":

> There is no emplacement of space and time that would not be a variant of the others, as they are of it; there is no individual that would not be representative of a species or of a family of beings, would not have, would not be a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center— in short, a certain manner of being (*VI*:115).

Importantly, in Merleau-Ponty's configuration, style is not a value- or category-marker applied *to* a thing/being[72]; instead, it is both the *what* of being and the *how* of it. Things and beings, such as the six speaking characters, each have a "certain manner" of behaving in their shared interworld. Considering each of the characters through this lens is particularly productive in light of Woolf's present-tense narrative voice(s), since style to Merleau-Ponty, Daly argues, "not only encompasses the past imprints of manners of being but also projects forward and such has a latency, a generativity, a teleology; simply *style* is not fixed but dynamic, always becoming" (2016:73, original emphasis). The present-tense utterances of the characters do not function as a reported, finite sense of being, as narrated descriptions in other texts might, but instead highlight their perpetual openness to the world: as Bernard says, "the virginal wax that coats the spine melt[s] in different patches for each of us" (*W*:145).

[72] Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty describes how style for an artist "is not a manner, a certain number of procedures or tics that he can inventory, but a mode of formulation that is just as recognizable for others and just as little visible to him as his silhouette or his everyday gestures' ([1952] 1993:90).

The fluid nature of intercorporeality, particularly the interwoven nature of the six characters and their relations to each other, features in Woolf's correspondence with Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson about his impressions of the novel:

> But what are we? Waves, yes? but waves in the sea part of the sea inseparable from the sea bound too [sic] each of us to be this wave and not that (whence much if not all of our trouble) but able and increasingly able as we get older to perceive that the other waves have their life too and that while we are clashing with them we are somehow they (Dickinson, quoted in Blyth, Herbert & Sellers, 2011:lxxvii).

> What you say you felt about the Waves is exactly what I wanted to convey […] But I did mean that in some vague way we are the same person, and not separate people. The six characters were supposed to be one (*L4*:397).

Woolf's explanation that "in some…way we are the same person, and not separate" seems to lie on the side of coincidence or unity, but her agreement with Dickinson and various textual markers of difference – found, at the most basic, in the employment of six names rather than one continuous stream of thought – complicate the boundaries of the characters' individual lives and lead to a sense of being both separate and conjoined as separate strands in a single weave.

The cyclical motion of the waves, which, as Tamlyn Monson (2004:173) mentions, forms "a…model of subjectivity—a process of self-constitution and dissolution represented by the image of a wave", mimics the motion of something rhythmically folded and unfolded. In this way, the novel might be considered as a series of waves or folds moving either linearly through time, embodying, as Monson suggests, "[stages] in the individual's life" (2004:173), or folding/unfolding, breaking open/drawing back in the shifts of perspective of the soliloquies[73] and

[73] This is echoed by Högberg when she says that "[e]ach soliloquy unfolds like a wave succeeding and succeeded by others, and each shift in focalisation emulates the breaking of one wave and the accumulation of another" (2020:170).

through the repeated images which appear not only through each character's speeches but which weave in and out of each other's, as if folding together porous layers of selfhood and identity.

Notions of folding, overlapping, and enveloping have been previously discussed concerning Woolf, most notably by Ariane Mildenberg, who considers how "the notion of 'flesh' and the related chiasmatic 'fold'" might serve as "terminology for the new kind of voice" (2017:105-137) in the novel, and Elsa Högberg (2020:151-186), who explores various textual and intersubjective boundaries which are upheld, negotiated or transgressed in *The Waves*. Figurations of folds as points of connection and divergence have also been related to the representation of time: Pamela Caughie, for example, draws on Michel Serres's work which claims the lived experience of time resembles "a crumpled handkerchief rather than a flat plane, where the past folds in on the present" (2013:501) and vice versa. Her discussion of *Orlando* and "A Sketch of the Past" considers "the proximity of the present and the past" (2013:501-502) in both texts and highlights more generally the ways that Woolf's writing presents the complexities of both the formation of self and intersubjective experience.

The fold has also been regarded as an emblem for ethics in Woolf's writing, in the connections of an interpersonal fabric which are drawn together in care or empathy or unfolded to highlight difference. Jessica Berman's (2004) Levinasian reading of sections of *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Orlando* views ethics as "inhabiting the fold between beings that brings them into relation" and considers how Woolf's work figures "public ethical and political responsibility" as arising "from the private moments of eros and care as well as from the call of the radically other

stranger" (2004:151).[74] This image is acknowledged by Janine Utell in her chapter on "Narrative Ethics" in the *Oxford Handbook of Virginia Woolf* (2021:180-196), where she summarises the contributions made by several scholars regarding the nature of an ethical encounter and intimacy or community between the characters in Woolf's works. She remarks that Woolf is a "profoundly ethical writer" and that her "radical innovations in the representation of character and everyday experience have profound implications for ethical thinking and reading" (2021:180). Pinpointing a singular framework for her ethics is more challenging, as her writing is filled with instances where contingency and ambiguity are preferred. She suggests that in light of Woolf's resistance to "attempts to impose the norms and rules one might associate with ethics and moral philosophy" one might also read her work for "gaps" in the "folds" of connection, affection, and intimacy: "what if the folds are unfolded, left hanging, in moments of unfulfilled encounter and refused responsibility?" (2021:187). Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis, with its basis in the interrelationships of identity and difference, may, I propose, provide both an ontological and ethical foundation for a reading of Woolf's work which acknowledges "Woolf's attempts to problematise ethical relationships and the sociality, the intimacy, at the foundation of those relationships" (Utell, 2021:187). Although Merleau-Ponty never compiled a directly ethical treatise, there are ethical comments interwoven into his discussions of intercorporeality – as seen in the discussion in Chapter 2 of Dr Holmes's' objectification of Septimus Warren Smith – and possible ethical readings of his ontology – for example, as applied to the intertwining of intimacy and alterity in Lily's approach to Mrs Ramsay as both subject material and subject. More

[74] Berman mentions that she has borrowed the concept of the "fold" from Deleuze, and that her use of the term is also inspired by Mieke Bal's work. However, she also notes that the term may also point toward Merleau-Ponty, and credits Laura Doyle – who has written on Merleau-Ponty and Woolf – for this link (2004:171n1).

specifically, for this chapter's focus on *The Waves*, I propose that Merleau-Ponty's ontology may assist in revealing the juxtapositions of connection and resistance in the novel, especially Woolf's considerations of the relationality between beings and the world, If, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, reversibility offers an understanding of unity-in-difference which *may* but does not always *ensure* ethical action, how might one approach both the aesthetic or textual boundaries – and blurring of these – in Woolf's "play-poem" of soliloquies, and senses of community and solitude, of the interiority of a "mind thinking" (*D*3:229) and exteriority of being seen by others?

Rhythms of the Body

The speeches of *The Waves* present various moments of chiasm, with the notion of a shared interworld established from the opening scenes. The descriptions of their surroundings in the first section and each other in the aftermath of Jinny kissing Louis establish six lived perspectives. As Bernard remembers it, their childhood is marked by the sensation that "there's Jinny. That's Neville. That's Louis…That's Rhoda…[That's] Susan" (*W*:144). The perceptual awareness of an-Other – in this case, Susan rushing past in tears – is accompanied by his realisation of his individuality: "I felt my indifference melt. Neville did not melt. 'Therefore,' I said, 'I am myself, not Neville', a wonderful discovery" (*W*:144). The acknowledgement of physical and emotional differences prompts Bernard toward care and sympathy – or, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, a demonstration of "*Einfühlung* [empathy] with the world […] with other bodies" ([1995] 2003:209). As Gillian Beer, in her essay "*The Waves*: The Life of Anybody" (1996:74-91), argues: "the work is often described as if it were the product of a secluded disembodied sensibility [but it] might more aptly be described as seeking out the rhythms of the body" (1996:74). The text is replete with references to the characters' varying perceptions of their embodied existences, captured

in the soliloquies' movement beyond the immediate perception and toward reflection and self-questioning. Therefore, Bernard's realisations in this scene demonstrate not only a turning away from "secluded disembodi[ment]" but also that the "rhythms of the body" might be sought through the points of contact between inner and outer worlds, between the self and the other.

The youthful experiences of Bernard, Jinny, and Rhoda demonstrate varying iterations of connection and divergence between themselves and others and provide a glimpse into contrasting experiences of intercorporeality. At school, Jinny exists in perpetual movement as her body seems to flow in tune with a sense of fluidity from her surroundings:

> Look, when I move my head I ripple all down my narrow body; even my thin legs ripple like a stalk in the wind. I flicker between the set face of Susan and Rhoda's vagueness; I leap like one of those flames that run between the cracks of the earth; I move, I dance; I never cease to move and to dance. I move like the leaf that moved in the hedge as a child and frightened me (*W*:24).

Jinny's perspective is one grounded in her knowledge of her body moving through space, with her sense of self inseparable from her "pirouetting" (*W*:19) limbs: "for…they are one, my body and my head" (*W*:24). The three similes employed in this description further this sense of unity by connecting her to a world perpetually in flux, as she likens her embodiment to a "stalk in the wind", a volcanic "flame", and the fluttering "leaf that moved in the hedge" (*W*:24). Her view of her self and her world as continuously changeable extends into the perceptions of intersubjective rhythms, as she imagines "[t]here is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph" (*W*:26). Her daydreams about adult life demonstrate her longing to be "single[d]…out" (*W*:31) by someone for a moment of connection, but the desire for a sense of flux and movement remains: "I do not want to be fixed, to be pinioned. I tremble, I quiver, like the leaf in the hedge" (*W*:32). Her conceptualisation of the relationship between self,

others, and world as "a great society of bodies" (*W*:36) is, therefore, one which balances intimacy with autonomy. Chiasms or crossings-over between her and any other are on her terms: "I give myself up to rapture […] I open my body, I shut my body at my will […] I now break into my hoard of life" (*W*:36).

This "hoard of life" is described in the most detail in section three, where her soliloquies detail her experiences at a party as a young woman. The gathering is one where she is "exposed to [her peers'] gaze, as they are to [hers]" (*W*:58), echoing the dual layers of intercorporeality in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the chiasm. The fluidity of her interactions – she confesses that she becomes "arch, gay, languid, melancholy" (*W*:59) as the situation demands – does not mean, however, that the stability of her autonomous self is in any way lost or overwhelmed. She is "rooted" within the "flow" (*W*:59) of sociability, waiting for the man she has chosen to approach.

Merleau-Ponty, in his description of how an artist might best express the essences of a particular subject matter, considers such representations in terms of "flesh". His description of painting the figure of a woman on a canvas is reminiscent of his descriptions of style:

> [A woman] is a certain manner of being flesh which is given entirely in her walk or even the simple click of her heel on the ground … [if this encounter is] transmitted to the canvas, [there] will be also be the emblem of a way of inhabiting the world, of treating it, and of interpreting it by her face, by clothing, the agility of the gesture and the inertia of the body—in short, the emblems of a certain relationship with being ([1952] 1993:91).

> There is no individual that…would not have, would not be, a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center— in short, a certain manner of being (*VI*:115).

Although the first excerpt focuses on representation in visual art, I would argue that in Jinny's soliloquies, Woolf highlights the character's "relationship with being". Her descriptions of her

body, clothes, and mannerisms demonstrate her "way of inhabiting the world […] of interpreting it by her face, by clothing, the agility of [her] gesture[s] and the inertia of [her] body": "I…begin to unfurl, in this scent, in this radiance, as a fern when its curled leaves unfurl" (*W*:59); "O come, I say to this one, rippling gold from head to heels. 'Come', and he comes towards me" (*W*:60). She commands the room in these moments, "managing the domain of space and time" in a series of momentary intimacies, oscillating, "flowing", "rippling" (*W*:60) between closeness and "indifference" (*W*:60).

This culminates in the scene between her and her chosen suitor, as it focuses both on the joining of their bodies, "his hard, [hers] flowing" (*W*:59), and their shared connection to a greater communal presence:

> I fall with him; I am carried off. We yield to this slow flood. We go in and out of this hesitating music. Rocks break the current of the dance; it jars, it shivers. In and out, we are swept now into this large figure; it holds us together; we cannot step outside its sinuous, its hesitating, its abrupt, its perfectly encircling walls. Our bodies, his hard, mine flowing, are pressed together within its body; it holds us together; and then lengthening out, in smooth, in sinuous folds, rolls us between it, on and on. Suddenly the music breaks. My blood runs on but my body stands still. The room reels past my eyes. It stops (*W*:59).

The couple "yield" to a deeper current, a "dance" which draws them into "this large figure". The two are enveloped into a larger communal entity or atmosphere identified as "its perfectly encircling walls…its body", reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's "flesh", specifically a shared carnality. He describes how "every relation between me and Being, even vision, even speech, is…a carnal relation, with the flesh of the world" (*VI*:83-4), while Judith Butler, in a discussion of the chiasm, argues that Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of flesh is "a relation of tactility that precedes and informs intersubjective relations", a "web in which one lives" (2005:181). While both these quotations may refer to a more abstract notion than the shared "matter" (*VI*:139) of things, Jinny's

soliloquy dramatises both the intertwining of the couple's touches, possibly as they dance and the sense of tactility in the atmosphere as it "holds [them] together…rolls [them] between [sinuous folds]". The chiasm is only momentary, however, as "there is no flesh without hiatus, disruption, or deferral that constantly troubles this harmonious circuit" (Murphy, 2019:288): the "music breaks" and Jinny's "blood runs on…but [her] body stands still". She is, in short, "on the verge" of coincidence, but it remains "always imminent" (*VI*:147) – even the slightly later mention of the "ecstasy" in being "admitted to the warmth and privacy of another soul" (*W*:60) is short-lived: no sooner has she experienced it than "it is over…slackness and indifference invade us" (*W*:60).

Jinny's interactions with her suitors, not only in this section but throughout the text, highlight a "manner of being" (Merleau-Ponty, [1952] 1993:91) in perpetual movement, "so fluid has [her] body become" (*W*:131-2) that she tailors her gestures and habits to suit each of them. Furthermore, her engagements with others and with her surroundings are also drawn into "one full drop…which quivers, which flashes" (*W*:132) with a sense of flux and dynamism:

> I cannot remain seated for long. I must jump up and go. […] I cannot tell you if life is this or that. I am going to push out into the heterogeneous crowd. I am going to be buffeted; to be flung up, and flung down, among men, like a ship on the sea (*W*:103).

The feeling of a perpetual present in the various references to action and movement may also be tracked by Jinny's frequent use of repetitive "now" statements – for example, "Now I feel…now I feel…Now the cool tide of darkness breaks…" (*W*:104) – and these together create something suggestive of Merleau-Ponty's "style". In this case, the connections between form and content not only emphasise Jinny's character as a particular "manner of being" and her "relationship with being" (Merleau-Ponty, [1952] 1993:91) but also, in turn, highlight that such expressions of relational connections – self-self, self-other, self-world – are marked in these sections of *The Waves*

as "latency…generativity…dynamic, always becoming" (Daly, 2016:73). Therefore, to return to Beer's point about the focus on embodied existence in the text, I would argue that Jinny's soliloquies do not only display the "rhythms of [her] body" (1996:74) but, through "the body's imagination", gesture toward a web-like structure of intercorporeality in which intimacy remains a fleeting horizon.

In contrast to Jinny's assertiveness, Rhoda feels wholly out of her depth in social situations. She despises "all details of the individual life" (*W*:61) and is often figured in an extreme state of passivity to that of the active, and potentially even violent, nature of others.

> But here the door opens and people come; they come towards me. Throwing faint smiles to mask their cruelty, their indifference, they seize me […] I must take his hand; I must answer […] I am thrust back to stand burning in this clumsy, this ill-fitting body, to receive the shafts of his indifference and his scorn […] I am fixed here to listen. An immense pressure is on me. I cannot move without dislodging the weight of centuries. A million arrows pierce me. Scorn and ridicule pierce me. I…am pinned down here; am exposed (*W*:61).

The verbs frequently render her either under a sense of obligation – "I must…I must" – or as a passive recipient of the world's fast-approaching activity. She does not approach; instead, "they come towards [her]"; unnamed characters "seize" and "thrust" her into the conventions of a dance with another who "pierce[s]" her with "his indifference and his scorn". She is ultimately "pinned down" under the "weight of centuries" of the expectations of womanhood in London society due to any lack of "alternative to being a woman, no other sphere where she can solidify her being" (Berman, 2001:145). Högberg suggests that Rhoda's lack of a "shell-like identity"[75] that would ordinarily provide a protective threshold between herself and others "entails an absolute passivity

[75] This is in reference to "[a] shell forms upon the soft soul, nacreous, shiny" (*W*:153).

which makes violent action directed towards others impossible" (2020:175). Rhoda is, in this view, incapable of reacting with anything beyond passive openness to the social world, leaving her "the most naked of [them] all" (*W*:61).

Rhoda's vulnerability leaves her isolated from a comfortable social world, and her worries about authenticity translate into frequent mimicry; she seeks out the mannerisms and habits of those around her and imitates these as exemplary actions:

> Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No; whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second. If they meet a housemaid she looks at them without laughing. But she laughs at me. They know what to say if spoken to. They laugh really; they get angry really; while I have to look first and do what other people do when they have done it (*W*:24).

> But since I wish above all things to have lodgement, I pretend, as I go upstairs lagging behind Jinny and Susan, to have an end in view. I pull on my stockings as I see them pull on theirs. I wait for you to speak and then speak like you. I am drawn here […] to light my fire at the general blaze of you who live wholly, indivisibly and without caring (*W*:76).

In both quotations above, Rhoda presents her struggles with social interaction as a physical insubstantiality, as if she has become translucent due to her lack of stable identity. "The other", Susan and Jinny most specifically, have weight: they are able to say "Yes; they say No, they bring their fists down with a bang on the table" (61), which allows them to both occupy the world and affect it. Mimicry, therefore, bridges the seeming intrinsic differences between her ability to relate to the world and that of others. Rhoda, Lisa Marie Lucenti argues, "imagin[es] the other as essential in and of itself, [so] she can conceive of no place for herself" (1998:82). Her repeated assertions that she has "no face" (*W*:19, 24, 71, 76, 132) and that she is unable to live in the "real world" mean that her accounts of embodied existence are figured in the negative, as something at which she fails or from which she is essentially excluded. That is not to say, as Mark Hussey has, that she

is "the furthest extreme of unembodiment" (1986:16),[76] but rather that conceptions of self and other in Rhoda's soliloquies frequently privilege the other as more authentic than her sense of self, thereby creating an imbalanced, and perhaps even hierarchical relationship which leaves her feeling detached and unable to live efficaciously in a social world.

Rhoda, as seen above, views herself as apart from the "real world" of "heavy" things. She seems to alienate herself, not only from a life of sociality but also from a fundamental, ontological similarity to the other characters. She "draw[s] a figure and the world is looped in it", yet she remains "outside the loop" (*W*:11), with "no body as the others have" (*W*:12). Although this seeming ontological difference pervades her soliloquies, there is little evidence that this is a view fully shared by the others. They describe her face as "mooning, vacant"; they suggest that a sense of "vagueness" is frequently present in her behaviour and acknowledge that social situations – including their friendships – "torture" (*W*:70) her, while "solitude" (*W*:137) and "dreams" (*W*:121) are preferable. However, none of these attributes displays an exclusion from intercorporeality. Instead, I would argue that this may be found coalesced in her failure to uphold the implicit expectations of womanhood, figured in her "ill-fitting body" (*W*:61), and in the frequent realisation that she "is…a girl, here in this room" (*W*:62), inhabiting gendered spaces.

Rhoda's alienation from an intercorporeal world is presented as translucence or intangibility: she "shift[s] and change[s] and [is] seen through in a second" (*W*:24). This lack of weight is also found

[76] Laurence (1991:147) contends that "[t]raditional notions of character and body are diminished in Rhoda" and suggests that, rather than presenting her as lacking *any* sense of embodiment, one might read her as "the dreaming self in a bodily quiescent state". While I agree that the oneiric has a strong hold on her attention and desires, I would argue that much of her struggle is that she is not "[r]eleased from the body" (168) even in dreams, and conversely that some of her most intense moments of fantasy – for example when standing at the water's edge in sections 5 and 7 – occur when the imaginary underlines her bodily experiences.

in the blurred boundaries between her body and her surroundings where instances of panic lead her to feel as if she is "fall[ing]" (*W*:15) through space. A childhood dream in which Mrs Constable tells her that her "aunt has come to fetch [her] in a carriage" – implicitly to some dreaded social event – includes a momentary escape as she "rise[s] on spring-heeled boots over the tree-tops" but then swiftly falls again "into the carriage at the hall door" (*W*:15); she is "blown like a feather" and is "wafted down tunnels" when confronted by self-doubt in a "grey puddle" (*W*:37) which she encounters on an errand. Although both occasions may be dismissed as imagination brought around by her fears, her worry about such extreme insubstantiality, and her response to it, point not only to her fraught self-esteem but also to a broader relationality between her and the world.

It is not so much the existence of the imaginary as the unwanted succumbing to it that frightens her: before the dream of her aunt and Mrs Constable she is content to daydream of her "Armadas sailing on the high waves", and the perceptual details suggest a "soft, and bending" landscape, "relieved of hard contacts and collisions" (*W*:15). Her eagerness to let "[her] mind pour" out of her differs from her later dream in how she situates herself, particularly her body, in relation to her fantasies. She is aware of the possibility that her subconscious may feel fragmented or intangible in (day)dreams and so attempts to anchor herself:

> *But I will stretch my toes so that they touch the rail* at the end of the bed; I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard. Now I cannot sink; cannot altogether fall through the thin sheet now. […] Out of me now my mind can pour […] Oh, but I sink, I fall! That is the corner of the cupboard; that is the nursery looking-glass. But they stretch, they elongate. I sink down on the black plumes of sleep; its thick wings are pressed to my eyes. […] Oh, to awake from dreaming! *Look, there is the chest of drawers. Let me pull myself out of these waters* (*W*:14-5, emphasis added).

> I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. […] 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. This is life then to which I am committed (*W*:37, emphasis added).

> There is the puddle…and I cannot cross it […] All palpable forms of life have failed me. *Unless I can stretch and touch something hard*, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors for ever. What, then, can I touch? What brick, what stone? and so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely? (*W*:92, emphasis added)

In each of these sections, she grounds herself through sensory perception, most often touch, using the sensations to "assure [her]self…of something hard". The expression of her anxiety may be compared to a dispersal or diffusion of self into the environment, while the painful return to her body acts as a re-establishment of boundaries and differences. This interplay is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's notion of reversibility: an initial openness and vulnerability which leads to a negative experience of oneness as she is thrown into a tumultuous envelopment in her imagined surroundings. A further series of "opening-divergence and…accompanying overlap" (Hass, 2008:132) occurs in her response: a tangible difference and bodily autonomy are created by looking at or touching a nearby object, but then an acknowledgement that she remains "stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths" (*W*:15) of the social world and that it is "life then to which [she is] committed" (*W*:37).

Despite the suggestion above of a continuous sequence that breaks her open to others and the world and then draws her together in the bounds of her body and that of intercorporeality, Rhoda ultimately fears that "nothing persists" and that she "cannot make one moment merge in the next" (*W*:76). Circosta (2006:129) argues that "Rhoda…lacks the ability to integrate world time and her inner sense of time…she feels a lack of continuity which […] would allow her to participate in a sensible and enduring inner time consciousness". While Rhoda does claim that she is incapable of "run[ning] minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass [called] life" (*W*:76), it is not enough to consider this as an issue of "inner time consciousness" whereby there is a disconnect between clock time and the

"absolute flow underlying her intentional acts" so that the latter "is not continuous, it has gaps or breaks" (Circosta, 2006:130). Instead, when considering this scene alongside Rhoda's final words after the second dinner party, it becomes evident that her problem with the "loop of time" is not only one of the incapability of a flowing intentionality in her relations with the world but also her felt impossibility of what Merleau-Ponty ([2003] 2010:206) calls "a vortex of experience which is formed…at the point of contact" between the inner life and the outside. Rhoda's final soliloquy, as she and Louis watch the others approach after their second dinner, recalls the scrutiny of others at the party she attended when she was twenty. She is once more "grappled to one spot by these hooks", though this time not by strangers' judgement but by the "greetings, recognitions, pluckings…and searchings" (*W*:138) of long-time friends. Significantly, though that may be endured, when they speak, their words "with the remembered tone and the perpetual deviation from what [she] expects, and their hands moving and making a thousand past days rise again in the darkness, shake [her] purpose" (*W*:138). She finds, therefore, that their expressions of being "embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together" (*W*:132) remind her of her fear "of the shock of sensation" (*W*:76) that each successive chiastic engagement with the world might bring.

Merleau-Ponty claims (as quoted earlier) that "[t]o live, for humans, is not merely to impose significations perpetually, but to continue a vortex of experience which is formed, with our birth, at the point of contact between the 'outside' and the one who is called to live it" ([2003] 2010:206). Rhoda's experience of life as a series of moments, "all violent, all separate" (*W*:76) means that she attempts "to impose signification perpetually" – she can hold onto the "remembered tone[s]" of her friends, but their "perpetual deviation from what [she] expects" (*W*:138) leads to confusion

and self-doubt. In comparison to the others who live "wholly, indivisibly" (*W*:76) and who are seemingly able to engage in "the point of contact between the 'outside'" and their own lives in a more productive manner, she has "no face" (*W*:76), no bodily threshold which acts as "the point of contact". Rhoda describes this difference as their "end in view" (*W*:76), and her lack thereof. Her description and Merleau-Ponty's definition of "institution" echo each other quite closely:

> Therefore by institution, we were intending here those events in an experience which endow the experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, will form a thinkable sequel or a history—or again the events which deposit a sense in me, not just a something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future ([2003] 2010:77).

> [N]othing persists. One moment does not lead to another. The door opens and the tiger leaps […] I am afraid of you all. I am afraid of the shock of sensation that leaps upon me, because I cannot deal with it as you do—I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate […] I have no end in view. 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. Because you have an end in view […] your days and hours pass like the boughs of forest trees and the smooth green of forest rides to a hound running on the scent. But there is no single scent, no single body for me to follow (*W*:76).

She is not able to "endow the experience with durable dimensions" beyond a vague sense of dread – "[t]he door opens and the tiger leaps", and so "nothing persists. One moment does not lead to another", and she cannot build an understanding of the patterns of intersubjective engagement with which to anticipate the future. Furthermore, she "[has] no end in view" and often feels that she does not have "the call to follow, the demand of a future" as others' "days and hours pass like…the smooth green of forest rides to a hound running on the scent" of "the whole and indivisible mass that [they] call life".

This is not to suggest that Rhoda is a *failed* character in some way. Instead, in her struggles Woolf complicates both the possibility and means by which such contact, as defined by Merleau-Ponty's

idea of the "institution", might be experienced. His definition is similar to the declaration in "Cézanne's Doubt" regarding the relationship between the life and the work of an artist: "*that work to be done called for that life* (CD:70, original emphasis). However, as I argued in the previous chapter, Woolf interrogates such triumphant self-determinism. Similarly, Małgorzata Myk argues: "Rhoda embodies the feminist dilemma of how to sustain a sense of non-unitary identity without subscribing to its predefined sources and without having it stabilised or reified by others" (2011:120). What emerges then is a clash between the notions of institution and flesh as "posit[ing] worldly indeterminacy as an abundant condition for new collective beginnings" (Gerçek, 2020:584) on the one side and "the network of patriarchal signification that excludes her" (McGiff, 2018:147) on the other, the consequences of which I discuss in a later section.

Bernard's storytelling and phrasemaking highlight the permeability and malleable nature of the threshold between self and other. In an early moment of sympathy toward Susan, he insists that physical proximity and conversational engagement will blur such boundaries even further, allowing for *Einfühlung* or fellow feeling "with the world [and] with other bodies" (Merleau-Ponty, [1995] 2003:209). However, as much as Bernard insists that the moment that their "bodies are close" (*W*:8) enables him and Susan to "melt into each other with phrases" while he comforts her, this overlapping, the "unsubstantial territory" (*W*:8) created by their intimacy, is also suggestive of a pervasive solitude. Susan claims that he "wander[s] off; [he] slip[s] away" (*W*:8) and that he has "escaped" (*W*:9) her in pursuit of the perfect phrase. It is possible to attribute this to Bernard's wandering focus, but the proximity of the wildly divergent statements – Susan's worries follow directly from Bernard's assurances – highlights the fleeting nature of such intimacies and the contradictions between their perceptual, tangible closeness and the implicit boundaries erected by

Bernard's inattention. He confesses the detriments of his permeable selfhood are most evident when in search of the perfect phrase: "observe how meretricious the phrase is—made up of what evasions and old lies. Thus my character is in part made of the stimulus which other people provide, and is not mine, as yours are" (*W*:78). Counter to previous debates about the possible objectification or intimacy which Bernard's phrases produce,[77] I would argue that it is his struggles to maintain the boundary between self and world that lead to possible breakdowns in intimacy or the possibility of an ethical encounter. In the same soliloquy where he contemplates the intangibility of his phrases, he notes two instances where he disappointed his friends. He imagines Susan "staring at the string that slips in and out among the leaves of the beech trees, cr[ying]: 'He is gone! He has escaped me!'" and recalls how Neville would be "enrage[d] at school, that [he] left him" (*W*:78, cf. 40).[78] Bernard, at least in his youth, believes that his lack of a fully autonomous self – "I only come into existence when the plumber, or the horse-dealer, or whoever it may be, says something which sets me alight […] For there is nothing to lay hold of. I am made and remade continually" (*W*:77-8) – leads him to seek out "sequences everywhere" (*W*:77), sometimes at the expense of what, or who, had initially held his focus. In this way, while it is clear that his initial "desire to understand every aspect of Susan's anger is indistinguishable from his compassion and wish to comfort her" (Högberg, 2020:179),[79] when his "stimulus" (*W*:78) shifts to the creation of a make-believe adventure he "trail[s] away" (*W*:9). Although the permeability of his threshold

[77] Cf. Berman, 2001:139-40; Högberg, 2020:179-80; Monson, 2004:178-9.

[78] The exchange between Bernard and Neville at university might be another example of this due to Neville's exasperation at his friend's seeming inattention and reliance on other literary figures – in this case, Byron – for his sense of self (*W*:50-1).

[79] Högberg notes the careful overlapping of language in Bernard's and Susan's soliloquies during this scene (2020:179-80, cf. *W*:7-8).

between self and other might enable the possibility of sincere engagement, his inability to productively "contract" his sense of self and focus denies this.

The Globe of Time

The two occasions when the six meet in *The Waves*, at a farewell dinner for Percival in their early twenties and at Hampton Court when they are middle-aged, demonstrate their interactions with one another and their reflections upon the progression of their lives and possible futures. Although some of Rhoda's speeches in these scenes have been discussed above, the group's soliloquies may also more broadly be related to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "institution" through their repeated focus on their shared past and the creation of the present moment.

Percival's presence seems to gather the "separated…eager birds" (*W*:72) into one; once he arrives during the first dinner, he "impose[s] order" (*W*:71)[80] and draws their focus together and toward the past. Louis and Neville's commands that they should "issue from the darkness of solitude" and "say, brutally and directly, what is in [their] minds" (*W*:72) are tellingly followed by a series of memories, as if the present, the communal moment has drawn them to reflect upon "those events in an experience which endow [it] with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense" (Merleau-Ponty, [2003] 2010:77). The memories from childhood cover a series of "revelations" (*W*:72) which have gradually drawn them away from the shared attention of the opening soliloquies and toward individualism. Each of these also demonstrates a moment of fissure or contemplation during which the characters confront

[80] Jane Marcus discusses Percival's role at length in her chapter "Britannia Rules *The Waves*" (2004:59-85).

something they had previously experienced.[81] Although the precise effects of these events are not explained, Louis's summary of the effects demonstrates that both personality and circumstance have, upon reflection, resulted in growing differences due to their individual responses to the worlds they inhabit:

> We changed, we became unrecognizable…Exposed to all these different lights, what we had in us (for we are all so different) came intermittently, in violent patches, spaced by blank voids, to the surface as if some acid had dropped unequally on the plate. I was this, Neville that, Rhoda different again, and Bernard too (*W*:73).

Their experiences have "exposed" them and seemingly drawn clearer boundaries between self and other, and in revisiting these memories, they attempt to make sense of the "acid" which has dropped on each of their "plate[s]" (*W*:73) and the connections between their pasts – childhood up to early adulthood – and the present. During the dinner scene, they contemplate the nature of their presence within a larger continuum of time. Bernard claims that "sitting together here [they] love each other and believe in [their] own endurance" (*W*:72).

The dinner party scene, with Percival as their "captain" (*W*:72) who "makes [them] aware that these attempts to say, 'I am this, I am that' […] are false" (*W*:80), is figured in a series of folds or "chiasms" where things are unfolded or diverge, and then once again encroach or overlap. Their memories of childhood up to early adult life detail a divergence as their "expos[ure]" (*W*:73) to varying experiences acts as a chiasm or fold wherein inner and outer life are drawn apart and then

[81] Susan, for example, remembers witnessing Florrie and Ernest "kiss[ing]" (CW:18) or "ma[king] love" (*W*:72) in the kitchen garden, a scene which she described initially as metaphorically shattering: "Now though they pass plates of bread and butter and cups of milk at tea-time I see a crack in the earth and hot steam hisses up […] I am blown out hard like the pyjamas" (*W*:13). Neville mentions the man who "lay livid with his throat cut in the gutter" (*W*:72) and his feeling that everyone "[is] doomed…by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass" (*W*:13), and Jinny's memory of the leaf "danc[ing] in the hedge without anyone to blow it" (*W*:72) recalls her worries at seeing the leaves rustle: "What moved the leaves? What moves my heart, my legs?" (*W*:6)

back together through feelings of both disparity and connectedness. The overall *écart* or dehiscence of their individualism is, in turn, drawn to a close by Bernard's reminder that they have "come together, at a particular time, to this particular spot" and that they are "drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion" (*W*:74).

Woolf describes similar identity-defining memories in *Moments of Being* which often initially shocked and almost paralysed her in her inability to "explain" them or refigure them as "a revelation of some order…a token of some real thing behind appearances" (*MB*:72). The occurrences, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, share a common sense as intense and significant but are split between those which resist explication – "[t]his difference…arose from the fact that [she] was quite unable to deal with the pain of discovering that people hurt each other; that a man I had seen had killed himself" (*MB*:71-2) – and those for which "[she] found a reason…[she] was conscious…that [she] should in time explain it" (*MB*:72). Although the characters' responses are not always clear in the novel's initial descriptions of those events, their reflections in this scene suggest that they could belong to the latter category. This process of reflection whereby the "revelation" or "token" of their significance is articulated resembles Merleau-Ponty's comments about the problem of "pure memory" (*VI*:122). He argues that one is "separated from [the past] by the whole thickness of [one's] present" so that one can only reclaim it "by finding in some way a place in [one's] present, in making itself present anew" (*VI*:122). In this way, Woolf's articulation of the "shocks" and the subsequent "revelation of some order" (*MB*:72) mirrors how the past may "mak[e] itself present anew" when one reflects upon the concept of institution: institution endows events with "durable" or lasting effects in that it enables the sense-making of "a whole series of other experiences" (2010:77), and in so doing, forms "a thinkable sequel or a history…a sense [of] something

surviving or as a residue [and] as the call to follow, the demand of a future" (Merleau-Ponty, [2003] 2010:77). In this way, the characters' reminiscing does not resurrect the past as an act of solely looking backwards. Instead, just as Percival's arrival galvanised their contemplation of the "residue[s]" (Merleau-Ponty, [2003] 2010:77) of their pasts in relation to their present circumstances, it is in part the reminder of their "love of Percival" (*W*:74) that leads them to come together to "mak[e the past] present anew", in "some deep, some common emotion" (*W*:74). Bernard's claim that the dinner is an opportunity "to make one thing […] seen by many eyes simultaneously […] to which every eye brings its own contribution" (*W*:74) is an acknowledgement that, while "not enduring" (*W*:74), their acts of remembering, reflecting, and asking "what shall we do?" (*W*:82) at least momentarily make it possible that "the severed parts" (*MB*:72) might be globed together in anticipation of a shared future.

Remembrance and reflection give way to senses of the "width and spread" (*W*:74) of closeness and unity. Högberg (2020:172) argues that the scene follows a juxtaposition of "the conformist effacement of individuality and the intimate return to the pre-subjective" through "heightened sensitivity attained in the moment of joint seeing". Louis follows the former attitude quite closely in his claims of his "efforts to make a steel ring of clear poetry" (*W*:75). His desire for artistic creation aims to overturn the inferiority he feels due to his Australian heritage by encircling "the gulls and the women with bad teeth, the church spire and the bobbing billycock hats" (*W*:75) within a single perspective – his own. His response to the characters' "widened" (*W*:79) senses is to suggest that their auditory surroundings are "merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds—wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merrymakers—are churned into one sound, steel blue, circular" (*W*:79). Unlike the generative passivity and openness which were at the

core of Woolf's aesthetics in *To the Lighthouse* – though arguably similar to Lily's futile attempts to pin down Mrs Ramsay's essence in "The Window", Louis's egocentrism, which views the world as creations solely designed "as [he] see[s] them" (*W*:75), displays an attitude toward others and the world that seeks to relegate everything into "the same order of variables" (*VI*:101) and to possess "these dazzling, these dancing apparitions" (*W*:130) through "their relation with known terms" (*VI*:101). In this view, any notion of individuality or difference is destroyed through the persistent reduction of multiplicity to terms which advance his sense of personal history – "[e]very day I unbury—I dig up. I find relics of myself in the sand" (*W*:74) – and which "hold...or…immobilize" (*VI*:101) his perceptions into "one line capable of linking all in one" (*W*:130).[82]

Their farewell dinner interrogates the relationship between connectivity and individuality through its various iterations of these ideas as acknowledging or effacing alterity. Högberg's comments about "acute receptivity as a ground for exchange between singular beings rather than a solipsistic immersion in one's own sensations" (2020:173) demonstrate an alternative to Louis's reductive view. Bernard, Jinny, and Rhoda all suggest that looking together might generate emotional receptivity as their senses "widen[ ]" (*W*:79) through shared perceptual attention and reflection – Bernard at the red carnation, and the others at the "bloom and ripeness" (*W*:78) which captures their attention round the room. While Louis hears "[t]he roar of London […] merged in one turning wheel of single sound" (*W*:79), thereby emphasising the forcible joining together of sensations to one point, Rhoda's and Jinny's observations that "one thing melts into another" and

[82] This quotation was discussed in more depth in relation to Lily's attempts to resurrect Mrs Ramsay's memory in *To the Lighthouse*. Merleau-Ponty contends that things "offer themselves…only to someone who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps, or to immobilize them as under the objective of a microscope, but to let them be and to witness their continued being" (*VI*:101). Louis might, in this light, be an intensified example of such an attempt at defining one's surroundings which objectifies rather than participates in a non-possessive manner.

"webs of nerve…have filed and spread themselves […] catching in them far-away sounds unheard before" (*W*:79) retain differences. The malleability of Rhoda's vision – "curtains of colour […] yield like veils and close behind [our eyes]" – and Jinny's far-reaching aural "membranes" (*W*:79) both encourage connectivity rather than envelopment. Similarly, Bernard's focus on the "red carnation" in a vase on their table, "a seven-sided flower […] to which every eye brings its own contribution" (*W*:74), stresses that their evening of "communion" (*W*:74) is one where all seven bring their own thoughts, histories, and desires, and that, although seemingly joined together by a common purpose, this shared creation retains its multiple perspectives. Joint attention, Woolf seems to suggest, can only achieve an ethical slant when it is coupled with a simultaneous understanding of connectivity and difference.

The scene's closing enacts one final chiasm in the simultaneous drawing apart and the want to hold their moment together. The "globe" of their lives which had previously featured during their moments of introspection infiltrates a number of their soliloquies as if to echo textually their attempt to hold together "this common feeling" (*W*:84). Louis, sensitive to the desire for unification, seems aware of a shared plea that Percival's departure should not "let the swing-door cut to pieces the thing that we have made […] Do not move, do not go. Hold it for ever" (*W*:84), which is echoed in Jinny's "Let us hold it for one moment" (*W*:84) and then added to by the other characters' imaginings of the contents of this globe. Tension remains between unfolding and continuity on one side and folding/encroachment and crystallisation on the other. Ann Banfield, in a discussion of the crystallisation of a moment in *To the Lighthouse*, argues that the metaphor of crystallisation refers to "the process by which something enduring is made out of the moment's impressions" (2003:493), as when Mrs Ramsay surveys her dinner party. This scene of *The Waves*

also highlights the gradual crescendo of the crystallising process (cf. Banfield, 2003:494) in statements from Louis's claim that "these lights, these peelings, this litter of bread crumbs and people passing" are "globe[d]" (*W*:84) within the moment, to Rhoda's fantastical descriptions of "[f]orests and far countries on the other side of the world" (*W*:85) and finally, Bernard's culminating claim that this globe contains their anticipation of the future that "[they] let fall like some supernal quicksilver into the swelling and splendid moment" (*W*:85). However, "this globe whose walls are made of Percival" (*W*:84) both adheres to and diverges from Banfield's definition. While their globe does include a multitude of "little daily miracles" (*TL*:133, also quoted in Banfield, 2003:494), it seems to attempt to "contain everything" (Banfield, 2003:494), contrary to crystallisation's "instantaneous unity, modeled on perception [which] draws together, fuses, and welds, creating something small and not diffuse" (Banfield, 2003:494). The characters' contributions encompass the present moment (Louis), the emotions of youth (Jinny), fantasy and dreams (Rhoda), the quiet pleasures in a relationship (Neville), and the cyclical passing of time in days and months (Susan). Bernard's addition of "[w]hat is to come" (*W*:85) may, therefore, be read as the climax in a proliferation of ideas – a variety of experiences from their youth jostle and encroach upon one another in their creative globe, but rather than forming a small, hard gem-like structure, the seemingly endless generativity creates a form that is "swelling" with the potential for other perspectives.[83] In contrast, Bernard's closing claims do seem to follow Banfield's discussion of the second process, which "'transfix[es] the moment' [thereby] reveal[ing] 'a coherence in things […] immune from change'" (Woolf, quoted in Banfield, 2003:494):

[83] The malleability of these boundaries is seen in greater intensity in Bernard's final soliloquy where he acknowledges that the idea "that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe" is a "preten[ce]" (*W*:150). Any "globe of life" created is not "hard and cold to the touch" but has "walls of thinnest air" that are at risk of breakage; hence it may not capture life "whole and entire" (*W*:153-4).

> We have proved, sitting eating, sitting talking, that we can add to the treasury of moments. We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road (*W*:85).

The additions to "the treasury of moments" echo the earlier sense of expansion and the gem-like nature of crystallisation, as if their creation might be moulded to a single form as representative of their present moment for "the innumerable congregations of past time". The language of conquest, also seen in Neville's final remarks, seems to intensify the demand that "life stand still here" (*TL*:133) as if their perceptions and emotions might "bridge the distance[s]" (*W*:85) of space and time to "force [and] subjugate" that which might forget or ignore that "they, who stand in the street, in the lamplight, loved Percival" (Neville, *W*:85).

The farewell dinner for Percival acts as a temporal and thematic axis. Placed at, ostensibly, the end of their youth, it invites the characters' introspection and reflection upon their individual and shared lives. Percival's presence may be considered in light of Merleau-Ponty's concept of institution, as discussed previously in relation to Rhoda, in that his company in their youth has been a "residue" and "history" by which "a whole series of other experiences will make sense" (Merleau-Ponty, [2003] 2010:77). Conversely, Bernard's addition of future time to their created globe of experiences signals that, at least to some of them, he is both a past- and a future-defining event: "the call to follow, the demand of a future" (Merleau-Ponty, [2003] 2010:77). Thematically, this scene also interrogates the relationship between the continuum of time and the creation of a preservative memory. In a series of folding and unfolding images, Woolf presents various ways in which convergence and divergence may be both positive and negative, fostering or denying commonality and alterity. It is not, therefore, sufficient to consider any of these pairs as

dichotomous or dialectical. The differences between them may lead to productive or reductive divergences as the multiplicity of their experiences enriches the scene but also leads to moments of misunderstanding or alienation.

Similarly, the convergence of memories toward a shared present moment encourages the potential for connection but centring such a bond around one perspective can also be harmful. Woolf suggests, through the complication of her previously used crystallisation metaphor, that the forceful melding together of perceptions might not be sufficient to "do battle against this flood" (*W*:135) but that instead, endurance lies in the creation of a "composite" (Banfield, 2003:494) globe whose walls are permeable and able to gather together new memories as the past takes up "a place in [their] present, in making itself present anew" (*VI*:122). The imperialist language used in Bernard's and Neville's final soliloquies as they stand in opposition to what they believe to be a relentless flood suggests, however, a problematic desire for endless renewal, as if creation might resurrect the past similar to how "*[t]he waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping*" (*W*:87, original emphasis). Percival's primacy as both the focus of their party and the sharing of their experiences means that he acts as a "residue" (Merleau-Ponty, [2003] 2010:77), not only for some of their life views and plans but also as an imprint of a dominating approach, as seen in his choice to follow a career in service of Imperialism, to the production or creation of personal and collective history.

Woolf's Umwelt

Early in the writing process of *The Waves*, Woolf writes in her diary of "the play-poem idea: the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night &c, all flowing together" (*D3*:139). This early sketch of the work highlights her concern with reaching

beyond "see[ing] human beings not always in their relation to each other" and instead considering the human "in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves" (*AROO*:98). The relations between the natural world and the human appear on various levels in the text: the interplay between human soliloquy and the natural world of the interludes, the characters' various observations of natural phenomena, and the fluid boundaries between these two.

Derek Ryan and Laura Winkiel, among others,[84] have suggested that the seas of the novel might be "reconfigured as participating in a[n]…intra-relational[ ]" (Winkiel, 2019:146) system rather than only functioning as structuring device or anti-imperial commentary,[85] and that the interludes, in particular, offer instead a "nonanthropocentric anthropomorphism" (Ryan, 2014:149) where "human beings are always already embedded within a material world" (Ryan, 2014:149) that entangles "human bodies and nonhuman environments" (Ryan, 2014:154).[86] The interludes are mainly devoid of actual human presence; many of the human figures found in these sections appear as figures of speech, or, when literal, they appear only briefly as either "markers of the colonial context" (Ryan, 2014:150) of the novel, or as momentary glimpses into the human which are "soon blotted out by darkness" (Ryan, 2014:150).[87] The focus on the nonhuman is evident in the

[84] See, for example, Frank McConnell's "'Death Among the Apply Trees': *The Waves* and the World of Things" (1968) and Carrie Rohman's "'We Make Life': Vibration, Aesthetics, and the Inhuman in *The Waves*" (2011).

[85] See, for example, Renee Dickinson's chapter "Exposure and Development: Re-Imagining Narrative and Nation in the Interludes of *The Waves*" in *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel: The Corporeum of Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore* (2009).

[86] Derek Ryan's "Posthumanist Interludes: Ecology and Ethology in *The Waves*" (2014:148-66) draws on Uexküll's notion of the *Umwelt* to discuss "[her] interest in nonhuman 'Umwelten'" as a way of "situat[ing] Woolf's response to Darwinian evolution and her interest in nature and animality more broadly" (2014:149).

[87] Cf. Ryan (2014:149-50) for a detailed overview of the human figures in specific interludes.

interludes' careful observations of different animal environments, for example, the birds' "*blank melody*" (*W*:3)[88] they sing while perched on the trees or when they "*s[i]ng a strain or two together, wildly, like skaters rollicking arm-in-arm*" before "*breaking asunder*" (*W*:16). The intrusion of the human skaters in the second quotation does not displace the primacy of the focus on the animal environment but instead uses anthropomorphic language to "make sense of [their] world" (Ryan, 2014:154). The use of simile here, and other figurative language at frequent points in the interludes, inverts an expected human-nature dynamic by avoiding what Beer notes as the potential hierarchisation of symbolism: "[s]ymbol gives primacy to the human because it places the human at the centre, if not of concern, yet of signifying" (1996:41).

The textual echoes of the thematic foci of the soliloquies in the interludes – for example, the birds' song as reflective of the characters' interrelationships – should not be read as a counter to Beer's point above but rather a suggestion that the notions of the nonhuman as literal or as figurative are superimposed upon each other so that the nonhuman world exists as both separate and as a figurative representation of the characters' states. The following section from the third interlude, for example, presents both an extension of the birds' environment in a broader natural habitat, and a connection to issues of "unthinking aggression and violence" (Högberg, 2020:177) in the soliloquies:

> *Now glancing this side, that side, they looked deeper, beneath the flowers, down the dark avenues into the unlit world where the leaf rots and the flower has fallen. Then one of them, beautifully darting, accurately alighting, spiked the soft, monstrous body of the defenceless worm, pecked again and yet again, and left it to fester. Down there among the roots where the flowers decayed, gusts of dead smells were wafted; drops formed on the bloated sides of swollen things. The skin of rotten fruit broke, and matter oozed too thick to run. Yellow excretions were exuded by slugs, and now and again an amorphous body with a head at either end swayed slowly from side to side. The gold-eyed birds darting in between the leaves observed that purulence, that wetness,*

[88] All quotations from the interludes are in their original italics.

> *quizzically. Now and then they plunged the tips of their beaks savagely into the sticky mixture* (*W*:43).

While the bird's repeated "*peck[ing]*" at the "*defenceless worm*" may be read as a dramatization of an assault on the selfhood or body of another human being, it is enmeshed within a larger description of the composting of various natural things in the "*unlit world*". The seeming anthropomorphism in the birds' attitudes – they observe "*quizzically*" and poke at their surroundings "*savagely*" – does not reach any direct symbolic link between human and nonhuman environments. Instead, one could argue that the literal and the figurative, the visible and the invisible, are brought into chiasm in moments of similarity but not coincidence.

Such moments of interlacing are also present in the relationship between the human and nonhuman within the soliloquies. Susan's desire, especially before her marriage, for an intertwining between herself and the nature of her father's farm surroundings suggests not only a prioritisation of the rural over the urban but a more profound identification with the fecundity of nature:

> I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him. Mine is the heron that stretches its vast wings lazily; and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another munching; and the wild, swooping swallow; and the faint red in the sky, and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields—all are mine.
> […] I am not a woman, but the light that falls on this gate, on this ground. I am the seasons, I think sometimes, January, May, November; the mud, the mist, the dawn (*W*:56-7).

Susan's descriptors vacillate between identification and possession. In her "I am" statements, she demonstrates something more than human, as she envisions herself not merely fused to but inherently part of both specific elements, "the field…the barn…the trees", and the sensation of an enduring cyclicity captured in the movement of light, the passing of the seasons, and various states of water. Although the first excerpt incorporates several "mine" claims, these are not forcibly

possessive. Instead, the heron, the hare, the "creak[ing]" cow, and the "wild, swooping swallow" all retain their independent identities, and Susan's claims draw her toward nature rather than tethering it to an anthropocentric hierarchy. Furthermore, the two mentions of agricultural activity, "the bell [and] the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields", do not disturb this web of elements, or, as Derek Ryan (2013:180) contends, in these descriptions Woolf "[blurs] the boundaries between human and nature in order to refuse any settled concept of human nature, [thus] providing an image of intra-action which rejects the notion of hierarchical distinctions between human and nonhuman, culture and nature".

The complex webs of interrelatedness between the human characters and the natural world are also evident in Louis's description of a flower stalk he finds in the garden:

> I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear tramplings, tremblings, stirrings round me.
> […] I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk. I press the stalk. A drop oozes from the hole at the mouth and slowly, thickly, grows larger and larger. […] Now an eye-beam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. […] All is shattered (*W*:6).

The lack of phrases introducing a split between the real and the figurative – there is only one instance where he describes himself as "green as a yew tree" – blurs the boundaries between the literal and the figurative so that he is simultaneously figured as a "boy in grey flannels" and as a "stalk" rooted in the earth. Despite the momentary distancing when he "hold[s] a stalk in [his] hand" and when he "press[es]" it, the overwhelming sense is one of connection as he does not only become the plant with hair and eyes of "leaves" but also experiences his "roots" spreading deep

into both geological and temporal depths. The avoidance of a dichotomisation of depth as connection and surface as separation – both are experienced "up here" – furthers the sense of intertwining. Merleau-Ponty describes a similar interlacing in a vivid description of the present moment:

> What makes the weight, the thickness, the flesh of each color, of each sound, of each tactile texture, of the present, and of the world is the fact that he who grasps them feels himself emerge from them by a sort of coiling up or redoubling, fundamentally homogeneous with them; he feels that he is the sensible itself coming to itself and that in return the sensible is in his eyes as it were his double or an extension of his own flesh. The space, the time of the things are shreds of himself, of his own spatialization, of his own temporalization, are no longer a multiplicity of individuals synchronically and diachronically distributed, but a relief of the simultaneous and of the successive, a spatial and temporal pulp where the individuals are formed by differentiation (*VI*:113-4).

In this sense, Louis's rootedness in both space and time means that the "coil[ed] up" stalk/boy body emerges not only "through earth dry with brick" (*W*:6) but also offers an understanding of the "redoubling" and homogeneity between himself as sentient/sensible being and that of his surroundings. His expression of being situated in and across time and space acts as a cross-section or "relief" that demonstrates the coexistence of "the simultaneous and…the successive". The homogeneity Merleau-Ponty describes does not denote a merging or negation of one into another. Instead, Louis retains his individualism through recurring references to the "differentiation" found in the "grey flannel suit" (*W*:6) in contrast to the green of the leaves. This dehiscence from the "spatial and temporal pulp" (*VI*:114), the "dark, green waters" (*W*:6), is realised in full through another, though profoundly different overlap: "an eye-beam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. [Jinny] has found me […] She has kissed me. All is shattered" (*W*:6). In the two moments of visual and tactile "cross[ing] and overlap[ping]" (*VI*:48),

he is rent from the interleaving with the stalk and is, instead, reminded of and returned to his human body through "his double or an extension of his own flesh" (*VI*:114).

The "I am" statements which link a human character to an aspect of the natural world may be seen as culminating in Rhoda's relationship with the waves. The first closing-in of comparative terms is found in her descriptions at the end of the party she attends with Jinny:

> I am to be broken. I am to be derided all my life. I am to be cast up and down among these men and women, with their twitching faces, with their lying tongues, like a cork on a rough sea. Like a ribbon of weed I am flung far every time the door opens. I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this room (*W*:62).

The section begins with a clear separation between her experience and the figurative waves of an unwanted and frightening social life. The waves act upon her, leaving her in a state of extreme passivity. "I am" in these statements gestures not so much to a sense of being as it does to an encroachment of others' being in a series of violations as she is "to be broken…to be derided…to be cast up and down...like a cork on a rough sea. Like a ribbon of weed [she is] flung far". In contrast, however, the final sentence draws her identity closer to overlapping with that of the waves as she, similarly to Louis and the stalk, is simultaneously "the foam" and "a girl, here in this room". This chiasm of human and watery bodies remains in a state of tension, however, not only because of the juxtaposition of their simultaneity but also in the sediment of potential violence that the preceding descriptors contained. Her connection to the waves, at this point, seems to hang in anticipation of a future subsuming: she is figured here as both part of the same matter as the force of the waves but also as the almost insubstantial "foam" that "sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness" and which has little evidence of acting upon something or someone in the same way that she has experienced and therefore seems ineffectual.

Her "offering to Percival" (*W*:96) – a bunch of violets thrown into the waters at Greenwich – marks a return to the fraught relationship between this "life…to which [she is] committed" (*W*:37) and the endless waves. In this scene, she acknowledges that she has held back a desire to "relinquish…let loose…free the checked, the jerked-back desire to be spent, to be consumed" (*W*:96). By claiming that she will now let go of such concerns as part of her mourning, she transforms the hierarchy of the figurative waves as acting upon her state of passivity into a freely chosen communion. While this could be read as an example of her "tendency to escapism" (McGavran Jr., 1983:60) and a "yearning" for or "env[y]" of death (McGavran Jr., 1983:70) – that is, a return to extreme passivity, her valediction reaches toward a connection between herself, her memory of Percival, and the waves below her:

> We will gallop together over desert hills where the swallow dips her wings in dark pools and the pillars stand entire. Into the wave that dashes upon the shore, into the wave that flings its white foam to the uttermost corners of the earth, I throw my violets, my offering to Percival (*W*:96).

Rhoda's use of an unidentified collective may signify an afterlife with Percival, but her longing for this is not truly "suicidally solipsistic" (McGavran Jr., 1983:67). Previous iterations of the land "where the swallow dips her wings in dark pools" have highlighted the isolation of such a landscape, contrary to the shared space in the quotation above.[89] Furthermore, if she is the "white foam" as in the previous section – "I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness" (*W*:62) – then this scene may read as a gathering together of contrasting associations:

[89] See in particular: "[p]ools lie on the other side of the world reflecting marble columns. The swallow dips her wing in dark pools. But here the door opens and people come" (*W*:61). The "pools on the other side of the world" (*W*:61) are presented as a desirable isolation away from the throngs of people – and the potential for violence which they represent – during the party.

she is both part of the waves and separate from them when she throws the violets for Percival into the water.

This ambiguous coiling over of unity and difference is seen once more in the possible vision of her suicide:[90]

> "Who then comes with me? Flowers only, the cowbind and the moonlight-coloured May. Gathering them loosely in a sheaf I made of them a garland and gave them—Oh, to whom? We launch out now over the precipice. Beneath us lie the lights of the herring fleet. The cliffs vanish. Rippling small, rippling grey, innumerable waves spread beneath us. I touch nothing. I see nothing. We may sink and settle on the waves. The sea will drum in my ears. The white petals will be darkened with sea water. They will float for a moment and then sink. Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in a tremendous shower, dissolving me (*W*:122).

She wonders not only "to whom" she might give her flowers, as she did earlier in the novel,[91] but also "[w]ho then comes with [her]", once again removing any sense of solipsism from the encounter. The leap itself is posited as a joint action in the repeated first-person plural pronouns, but her physical and emotional responses to "sink[ing] and settl[ing] on the waves" remain her own. The contrast between the waves' activity and her still receptivity returns here, but the relationship has again been refigured. In the first iteration, the figurative waves at the end of the party scene relentlessly act upon her; in the second, she claims that "[n]ow [she] will relinquish; now [she] will let loose. Now [she] will at last free…the jerked-back desire to be spent, to be consumed" (*W*:96), thereby placing herself in a more active role in contrast to the passive results for which she longs. In the final instance above, her motivation for the imagined communal leap

[90] Although the nature of her suicide is never fully reported in her soliloquies, Bernard imagines that he can "feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt" (*W*:173) which echoes her description in this scene: "We launch out now over the precipice" (*W*:122).

[91] Cf. *W*:32. The flowers named there mirror this passage too. Both passages contain various references to Shelley's "The Question", an allusion which McGiff (2018) analyses in detail in relation to her broader argument of Woolf's incorporation of Shelley in her interrogation and recreation of the pastoral.

"over the precipice" remains ambiguous and the power of the waves to "shoulder [her] under […] dissolving [her]" (*W*:122) suggests a return of passivity.

Overall, these three scenes demonstrate a textual piling up of connections between Rhoda and the waves, which, while they might be linked to suicidal ideation, do not demonstrate this as a systematic "dissolving" (*W*:122) or fragmentation of self beyond repair. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty suggests that people and the ideas they create or express are "experiences [that] do not hold under their gaze a serial space and time…but have about themselves a time and a space that exist by piling up, by proliferation, by encroachment" (*VI*:115). In this way, the textual chiasm between past and present experiences of the foam of the waves does not present a linear or serial configuration of space and time but instead one in which her ambiguous desire for connection articulates feelings of both consumption and freedom. The return to the waves might be read as an acknowledgement that her body exists, as Merleau-Ponty describes in the interposing of a body amidst others "in a circuit with the world, an *Einfühlung* [feeling in] with the world" (Merleau-Ponty, [1995] 2003:209), that being consumed or dissolved by the waves does not destroy her, but rather "the limit between the body and the world" (*VI*:138) as it highlights Woolf's claim that "we are the thing itself" (MB:72). The final interlude – "*[t]he waves broke on the shore*" (*W*:177) – becomes, therefore, suggestive of a shared "ontological vibration" (*VI*:115) that permeates the novel, and which draws together Rhoda, and by implication the others, into an oceanic *Umwelt*.

"A Little Language"

On 7 February 1931, Woolf writes in her diary that she had at last "netted that fin in the waste of waters" (*D4*:10), a reference to a vision from 1926 she had while finishing *To the Lighthouse*:

> I wished to add some remarks to this, on the mystical side of this solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with. It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling and thinking I have never come up against this before. Life is, soberly and accurately, the oddest affair; has in it the essence of reality. I used to feel this as a child—couldn't step across a puddle once I remember, for thinking, how strange—what am I? etc. But by writing I don't reach anything (*D3*:113).

While Woolf's claim in 1931 implies a sense of success and completion – one coupled with the elation at having written the final words of *The Waves* only moments before – Jason Skeet astutely notes that "the idea of a net hints at permeability, whilst a fin is only a partial object" (2013:478). Similarly, Woolf's first mention of the "fin" in 1926 is coupled with repeated iterations of something lying beyond expression: "something in the universe" which resists any "image" she might use to convey her ideas, a "reality" which is only ever partially witnessed. Conversely, through the writing of *The Waves* she has, in fact, "netted" it, thereby seemingly overcoming the previous resistance she experienced. The possibility for this, she contends, only appeared once she had abandoned the process of using "images & symbols [as] set pieces". Her writing instead has aimed to "only suggest", rendering the partiality of her vision as an openness to the slippery "something in the universe" – a chiasm, perhaps, where netting has momentarily drawn together "images & symbols […] the sound of the sea & the birds" (*D4*:11) and then diverged once more into an unfurling horizon.

The nature of the relationship between reality and language – particularly its creative expression – features in various points of Bernard's and Neville's soliloquies. In their youth Neville grows frustrated that Bernard seems to become more preoccupied with the process of "making phrases" (*W*:51) than with direct interaction, suggesting that in searching for the perfect expression, he treats his friends as "phrases in [his] story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under

B" (*W*:40). The "perfect phrase that fits [the] moment exactly" (*W*:40) has an encompassing approach, as if the world of pre-reflective, lived experience might be tied together or crystallised in a "neat design[ ] of life" (*W*:143) once an apt expression is found.

In a later soliloquy, Neville offers an alternative to the vain attempt to comprehend "things in themselves" (*W*:176) via abstraction. His guide for approaching poetry is remarkably similar to Lily's realisation in *To the Lighthouse* that patience and an openness to multiplicity are needed for art:

> To read this poem one must have myriad eyes, like one of those lamps that turn on slabs of racing water at midnight in the Atlantic, when perhaps only a spray of seaweed pricks the surface, or suddenly the waves gape and up shoulders a monster. One must put aside antipathies and jealousies and not interrupt. One must have patience and infinite care and let the light sound, whether of spiders' delicate feet on a leaf or the chuckle of water in some irrelevant drain-pipe, unfold too (*W*:117).

Lily's "fifty pairs of eyes to see with" (*TL*:161) in the process of artmaking is translated to a reader who needs "myriad eyes", indiscriminately opening oneself to pre-reflective perception before considering the transformation of this into expression. Neville suggests that artistic expression, whether painting or writing, should be a process whereby "[one] let[s] down one's net deeper and deeper and gently draw[s] in and bring[s] to the surface what he said and she said and make[s] poetry" (*W*:118). Whereas Bernard's phrases attempt to include everything – and often fail, trailing off for this very reason – Neville's "lamp" requires a receptivity that might net "a spray of seaweed" or a "monster". Furthermore, like Woolf's net catching the "fin" of *The Waves*, it is one from which some of reality might escape.

Bernard's closing soliloquy is his final attempt to "explain…the meaning of my life" (*W*:143), to reflect upon his past by "turn[ing] over these scenes as children turn over the pages of a picture-

book and the nurse says, pointing: 'That's a cow. That's a boat'" (*W*:144), much like the phrases he stored in his notebook. Straightforward delineations battle, however, with a recurring sense that he cannot break off memories like "a bunch of grapes" (*W*:143), nor is life "a solid substance" (*W*:150) to be examined in an "orderly manner" (*W*:151).

Bernard's soliloquy highlights the connections and contrasts between the expressive subject and the "indifference" (*W*:143) of nature. His first call for "some little language such as lovers use" (*W*:143) in response to the sensations of watching the sky when "[l]ying in a ditch on a stormy day" (*W*:143) focuses on the "inarticulate" (*W*:143) forms of such expressions – the lovers use "broken words […] like the shuffling of feet on the pavement" (*W*:143) and the clouds communicate only "confusion…indifference and…fury" (*W*:143). The proliferation of continuous verbs and other indications of movement – "always changing, and movement; something…bowled up, helter-skelter; towering, trailing, broken off, lost" (*W*:143) – echo the inevitable disconnect between pre-reflective perception and reflection. No sooner has he noticed one thing than it changes, and notions of "story, of design" which attempt to fix things into place are "forgotten" (*W*:143).

The summaries of his friends' lives are similarly recalcitrant. Unlike "[t]he crystal, the globe of life" (*W*:153) they constructed together through shared attention and emotion at Percival's farewell dinner and that seemed to contain any- and everything they could add to it, his present attempt cannot transfix their stories:

> The crystal, the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls of thinnest air. If I press them all will burst. Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers (*W*:153-4).

The "hard" gem-like globe is transformed into an almost diaphanous substance. The stability and coherence of any expression are liable to "burst", and whatever is extracted "whole and entire" is through a sense of reciprocity – the "six little fish…let themselves be caught" – rather than the hierarchical undertone of Bernard's insertion of his friends as "phrases in [his] story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B" (*W*:40). Woolf once again highlights the incompleteness of expression in Bernard's comment that "a million others leap and sizzle" uncaught, the "cauldron" or net of writing "bubble[s] like boiling silver, and slip[s] through [his] fingers" (*W*:154) so that the creative project is bound to be "incomplete, only ever a sketch of reality…unfinished" (Skeet, 2013:479). In contrast to the "biographic style", where "phrases laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives…compel us to walk in step like civilized people" (*W*:155), Bernard returns to images of tumult and simultaneity in his description of how their intertwined lives are "a symphony with its concord and its discord". This "symphony" of the six characters' melodies – and by extension innumerable other unnamed characters and the nonhuman world – echoes Merleau-Ponty's description of the "unfurling of an *Umwelt* as a melody that is singing itself" ([1995] 2003:173) suggesting a symbiotic relationship between artist and source.

Andrea L. Harris suggests that in searching for a new form of expression, Bernard seeks "access to that which is all around us in its openness and for a language that will speak of our connection with it" (1997:348). The desire to grow closer to the "things in themselves" (*W*:176) is particularly evident in his description of "light return[ing] to the world after the eclipse of the sun" (*W*:171). His perceptions of both his surroundings and his attitude echo the *epoché*, the phenomenological reduction which seeks to bracket preconceptions and encounter the world with a generative unfamiliarity. He "walk[s] unshadowed", and "the old cloak, the old response" of phrasemaking

has disappeared, leaving him "unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable" (*W*:171). Although the solitary vision of "a new world, never trodden" (*W*:171) does not last long as the repetition of things makes them "habitual" and "[l]oveliness returns…with all its train of phantom phrases" (*W*:172), it allows a glimpse into the silent world of perception and for the "possibility of a state in which identity is subsumed, not erased" (Harris, 1997:342). Significantly, this subsumption of individual identity – "the world seen without a self" (*W*:171) in which the "I [is] forgotten" (*W*:143) – occurs at a point of contact with the natural world, an *écart* that lets the light of the interconnections and differences between "the world of perception and the world of meaning" (Toadvine, 2009:128) through and which enables Bernard to express what "substance or truth" he can.

Bernard's final call for "a little language such as lovers use" (*W*:176) is coupled with the unceremonious discarding of his notebook "stuffed with phrases" (*W*:176) as he surrenders the last vestiges of his pre-structured ways of expressing the world. Instead, he desires "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" (*W*:176) which could perhaps be variations of "look", a call for shared attention and wonder. He longs to confront "the indifference and the fury" (*W*:143) of the mute landscape with "a howl; a cry" (*W*:176) as if to meet nature with "inarticulate words" (*W*:143) that acknowledge and do not attempt to diminish or control the sheer expanse of it. However, as much as he claims that he no longer wants "those resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts, making wild music, false phrases" (*W*:176), many of these elements continue up to his last words in the text.

His final claims swing between descriptions of "bare things" – "this coffee-cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself" (*W*:176) – and the poetic-heroic language of his cry against "Death…the enemy" (*W*:177). In between these two, he narrates his departure from a restaurant and his perceptions of the dawn:

> There is a sense of the break of day. I will not call it dawn. What is dawn in the city to an elderly man standing in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky? Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. Another day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September. Another general awakening. The stars draw back and are extinguished. The bars deepen themselves between the waves. The film of mist thickens on the fields. A redness gathers on the roses, even on the pale rose that hangs by the bedroom window. A bird chirps. Cottagers light their early candles. Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again (*W*:177).

He seems hesitant or reluctant to be drawn back into the habit of "[ ]articulate words" by "call[ing] it down", connecting the process of expression to the return to the "habitual" (*W*:172) of "[a]nother day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September" and the relentless pacing of time. The "resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve" (*W*:176) also reappear in the descriptions of the dawn and the "bars" of the incoming waves that hearken back to the sea of the first interlude: *"[a]s they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand*" (W:3). The cyclicity evident in both the imagery of each quotation and the "resonances" between the two emphasises the "renewal" of the world. Furthermore, the image of the wave meeting the shore creates an intertwining of elements as land and water meet and diverge again, which implies a simultaneous juxtaposition and encroachment between them. The echoes between Bernard's soliloquy and the interlude should, therefore, not only be seen as a structuring device for the cyclical rhythms of the text but also a textual demonstration of what Woolf might have termed "pattern" (*MB*:72) and Merleau-

Ponty calls flesh: "we situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other, at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become world" (*VI*:160).

Bernard seems to abandon the decree for a new language in his last speech with its heroic phrasing and implicit mention of Percival's enmeshment in the imperial project. Similarly to his previous claims that he, and at times the other five, have stood valiantly against the inevitability of time, here he transforms "this stretch of pavement" into a battlefield and himself into a knight or soldier:

> And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death! (*W*:177)

Woolf's diction has been variously interpreted as emphasising "[his] defiance of death" (Brombert, 2010:443), an indication of his "existential authenticity" (Henke, 1989:470), or as encapsulating a "mock-heroic tone" as an "ironical deflating of heroism" (Carter, 2002:89).[92] Though his choice of imagery may be self-aggrandising at best, and perhaps even indicative of an ironic perpetuation of nationalistic language, the conflation of rearing wave and horse echoes not only the "false phrases" (*W*:176) of the literary and imperial traditions of which he is an "inheritor…continuer" (*W*:152) but also an earlier interrogation of the worth of "story" as an expression of one's enmeshment in the world:

> Should this be the end of the story? a kind of sigh? a last ripple of the wave? A trickle of water to some gutter where, burbling, it dies away? […] But if there are no stories, what

[92] Cf. Jane Marcus' discussion of the ways in which Woolf uses irony to undermine heroism grounded in imperialism, and, more broadly, "mock the complicity of the hero and the poet in the creation of a collective national subject through an elegy for imperialism" (2004:63). While I agree that the novel includes several indictments of imperialism, I hesitate to classify the main project of *The Waves* as an ironic "elegy for imperialism".

> end can there be, or what beginning? […] Sitting alone, it seems we are spent; our waters can only just surround feebly that spike of sea-holly; we cannot reach that further pebble so as to wet it. It is over, we are ended. But wait—I sat all night waiting—an impulse again runs through us; we rise, we toss back a mane of white spray; we pound on the shore; we are not to be confined […] After Monday, Tuesday comes (*W*:160).

In this configuration of the "unvanquished and unyielding" (*W*:177) figure, Bernard asks whether a life story should sputter into nothingness as "a kind of sigh…[a] trickle of water to some gutter" or if, despite the inability to "surround" or net all the elements of life "whole and entire" (*W*:154), the act of expression is still worth it. In the quotation above he imagines "toss[ing] back a mane of white spray…pound[ing] on the shore" in response to the "impulse…not to be confined", while in his final soliloquy, he feels that the "eternal renewal" is not only observable as an exterior force, but that "in [him] too the wave rises…swells…arches its back" (*W*:177), suggesting that, similarly to the intertwining of images between his descriptions of the dawn and that of the first interlude, there is an overlapping of the sea, horse, and man that reaches beyond the metaphoric. The "unvanquished and unyielding" approach to the "incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (*W*:177) places him at a meeting point between death and renewal figured in the dual images of the dawn and the waves.[93]

In closing, I want to return to Merleau-Ponty's comments on language. He argues that "[i]t is by considering language that we would best see how we are to and how we are not to return to the things themselves", how one might encounter "the natural world or time" (*VI*:125), as has been evident at various points of *The Waves*. Language as expression, he contends, should not attempt

[93] In analysing the same section, Rizzuto also notes that the meeting of the imperial hero and the "vastus" or watery waste "[d]ramatiz[es] battle with the vastus in imperial-heroic terms, [so that] the referential drift of waves simultaneously heralds and denies empire's end. The 'enemy [. . .] advances', 'death' breaks upon and thus 'vanquish[es]' the imperial hero who rides the vastus, but that hero is identified with that triumphant sea, the 'wave' that 'rises' in him" (Woolf, quoted in Rizzuto, 2016:289, cf. *W*:177).

to reach "the things themselves" through "coincidence" or the restoration of some originary point of "pure memory" (*VI*:125) or prelinguistic experience, since then one "cuts the continuous tissue that joins us", collapsing the *écart* between perception and reflection. He suggests, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that language which is grounded in "the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in [the] transfers and [the] exchanges" (*VI*:125) of words and images can "bring[ ] to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience" (*VI*:126), not only that of humans but of the "Being of every being" (*VI*:127), a language which could express the notion of the *Umwelt*.

CHAPTER 5
AN INTERCORPOREAL POETICS

At the end of Scene One of the pageant in *Between the Acts*, the audience is "[f]olded in [a] triple melody" (*BA*:121). The 'melody', conceived of in metaphoric terms, includes a repeated tune from the gramophone, the view of the sunset's "merging" colours, and shuffling cows (*BA*:120-1). The synaesthesia of these elements transforms everyday objects into props representing far grander items – "a box tree in a green tub take[s] the place of the ladies' dressing-room" (BA:121) – and gestures to an interlacing of the human and nonhuman, nature and culture. While the audience watches and listens to this "without interrogation" (*BA*:121), Woolf valorises the attentive and open perceiver in both the textual dynamics of this text and in the various works of fiction and non-fiction explored in this thesis.

The first chapter of the thesis provided an introductory conversation between the ideas of embodiment and lived experience, as evident in Woolf's and Merleau-Ponty's writing. It aimed to lay the groundwork for the intertwining of authorial voices presented in the analyses undertaken in the later chapters.

Chapter Two discussed Woolf's depictions of perception and perspective in a number of short stories – "The Mark on the Wall", "Solid Objects", and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" – and in *Mrs Dalloway*. The shorter fiction demonstrates Woolf's concentrated representations of single- and dual-character perspectives intertwined with the narratorial voice. Considering these stories in light of the phenomenological reduction or *epoché* as Merleau-Ponty

details in his earlier work highlights Woolf's valorisation of careful visual attention, which approaches life without allowing preconceived notions of knowledge and use to predetermine the value and meaning of objects and people encountered in one's lived experience. This conceptualisation of perception is carried through and deepened in the multivocality and intricate web of narrative perspectives (narration, free indirect discourse, individual focalisation) of *Mrs Dalloway*. Through a careful analysis of Clarissa Dalloway's and Septimus Warren Smith's perspectives, among others, the chapter has contended that intersubjectivity, as Merleau-Ponty terms relationality in his earlier *Phenomenology of Perception*, is a web-like system of perceptions and reflections that reveals characters' interiority as essentially embodied. In scenes where the two main characters delve into either memory or vision, the mind and the body are seen to be malleable boundaries that porously allow for the interlacing of self/other, past/present. The moments of joint attention in the novel, both in consideration of an external object and where two characters are turned toward each other in conversation, present possibilities of shared meaning-making that are either realised – such as through the collaborative making of Mrs Peters' hat by Septimus and Rezia – or broken down, as in Peter and Clarissa's meeting. An extreme consequence of instances where individuals in this shared world are hierarchised is demonstrated in the breakdown of communication and understanding between Septimus and his doctors, particularly Sir William Bradshaw. Bradshaw's dismissal of Septimus's perceptions – both his inability to navigate the everyday context of post-war London and his more visionary perceptions – demonstrates how the possibility of a common world of engagement is violently disregarded when an individual's lived experience is rendered as wholly unreal and utterly inconsequential. Rezia and Clarissa both counter this through their empathic sense of relationality toward him. Clarissa's intuitive vision of his death, while unable to fully take on his perspective, suggests that one might foster an ethical

intersubjectivity through an empathy that seeks out the other's circumstances without any attempt to overtake another's experience and subsume it into one's own. Ultimately, this chapter contends that in Woolf's "tunnelling process", she creates chthonic narrative, social, and textual connections that allow notions of self, other, and world to remain in a state of negotiation with one another and which move back and forth between the perceived and the reflective in an open-ended folding together of what has come before and what might come thereafter.

Chapter Three further develops the conceptualisation of such performative meaning-making, specifically in relation to the literary or visual artist's project(s). In a discussion of two of his essays on aesthetics, "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind", it provides an overview of Merleau-Ponty's developing ideas regarding the embodied perceptions of the artist and the ways in which the artist, and her/his project, are always enmeshed within the flesh of the world. It then turns to Woolf's comments on the similarities and differences between writing and painting, detailing her translation of the painter's considerations of composition into a poetics that celebrates the latent connections between words and phrases and between descriptions of visual perception and attention to characters' interiority. Most of the chapter draws together the two writers' insights on art and focuses on exploring the aesthetic visions and projects of Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*. While Mrs Ramsay does not produce artwork in the same way that Lily paints, her conceptualisation of social interaction as a performative collecting of disparate points and her felt closeness to the nonhuman world in moments of solitude both echo the "fascination" of the artist as detailed by Merleau-Ponty and lived out by Lily. In the descriptions of the making of the two paintings, Woolf highlights a reflexive connection or interworld between the artist, subject matter, and surroundings that allows the artist to grasp a more profound sense of interpersonal

intimacy; through an attentive but passive openness to this intercorporeal world the artist is able to fold perception, memory, and reflection into new creative visions. In this openness, Lily's artistic process is also one of perpetual revision and re-creation: her momentary solution in part one seems to recede like the horizon's vanishing point in the fissure or divergence of symbolic structures in the events of "Time Passes". The second painting, although ending with the declaration that she has "had [her] vision" (*TL*:170), defies fixed meaning or symbolism and suggests that both art-making and interpretation become a horizon of continual questioning and becoming.

The final chapter draws the conversational or relational into the interactions I have traced between the two authors' writing in a discussion of *The Waves*. Thus, although it begins with an expansion of Merleau-Ponty's later ontology that was first introduced in Chapter One, it periodically interlaces his writing with Woolf's in order to highlight moments of convergence and divergence in their thinking. The chapter details various iterations of the characters' engagements with others (Bernard, Jinny, and Rhoda) and how such embodied interactions are encoded within larger notions of an intercorporeal world. The comparisons between Woolf's "philosophy" and Merleau-Ponty's "flesh" allow for a consideration of the characters' potential as simultaneously six separate figures and one composite being and demonstrate, similarly to Chapters Two and Three, how joint attention may foster a generative and performative folding together of perception and memory, but may also, conversely, enable a convergence of perceptions that seek to dominate or suppress through a denial of autonomous subjectivity. By interweaving Merleau-Ponty's adaptation of Uexküll's *Umwelt* with the above ideas, it becomes further apparent that, even in moments where interpersonal relationships and social structures seek to deny intercorporeality, the novel's focus on the nonhuman expands the possibilities of relationality beyond the social and toward the

ecological. Finally, in both the microcosm of Bernard's final soliloquy and the overarching textual patterns or rhythms, Woolf suggests that poetic language that valorises a kinship between words, ideas, people, and the nonhuman may, not through symmetrical coincidence but in its asymmetries and gaps, bring to the fore those patterns hidden behind the cotton wool of everyday experience.

What this multifaceted conversation between Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and Woolf's writing demonstrates is that, despite their contextual and thematic divergences, their philosophy and literature share the desire that these do not lie apart or "above life" but are, instead, the "pattern[s]" (*MB*:72) "beneath" (*VI*:266). Much like the connections drawn between phenomenology and modernism in the first chapter, the analyses of their work highlight the need to displace systems in which the self is entangled in order to reappraise the possibilities for and obstacles to a relationality of self, other, and world. The drawing together of their writing into a close dialogue shifts the focus from theoretical application to conversation and highlights possibilities of reading relationality not only within their work but as an enduring interest of literature and philosophy in the ways that the "work to be done call[s] for [the] life" (CD:70), of a character, a person, a community.

The "kind of attentiveness and wonder, the…demand for awareness" (*PP*:xxiv) shared by both phenomenology and modern art are seen, in Woolf's writing, in her representations of the imaginal as opening and deepening perception – those instances where embodied perception seems intensified through poetic language. The purpose and effects of this kind of attentive openness to the world and the forms expression might take are mirrored in Woolf's comments on "rhythm" as an attitude to both *what* the writer might want to express and *how* to do it. If rhythm is "[a] sight, an emotion [that] creates this wave in the mind" (*L3*:247) as, "[o]n the floor of [the] mind…[it] keeps up its perpetual beat" (*E5*:309), then it follows that an understanding of rhythm is necessarily

relational, a "dance", a "relationship" which the writer builds "between the self that [s/he] know[s] and the world outside" (*E5*:315), and textually within the kinship of words. The rhythmic and relational nature of a literary text is at the forefront of Merleau-Ponty's discussions of literature too, such as when he insists that "a successful novel…would have the same kind of existence as an object of the senses or a thing in motion, which must be perceived in its temporal progression by embracing its particular rhythm" (Merleau-Ponty 2010, pp. 100–1) so that the writer's task becomes the "depict[ion] of an inter-human event" (*PP*:175). Language, if considered in such rhythmical and melodic terms – as in "Walter Sickert: A Conversation" – may emulate visual art: words and ideas "speak at once, striking two notes to make one chord" (*E6*:43-4). The simultaneity of words, notes, ideas, or even connections of self, other, and world do not, in this description, produce an *addition* of elements but a porous superimposition of these that both highlights their distinct shapes or circumstances and suggests the possibility of overlapping and interlacing – "It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms" (*PP*:175). The "felt intimacy in one's embodying being" (Mazis, 2016:191-2) of the imaginal is found, therefore, in both the interconnected worlds of her narratives and also in Woolf's recommendations for the writer's relationship with the world s/he inhabits.

Woolf's notions of textual and interpersonal relationality may be productively linked with Merleau-Ponty's recurring attention to the connections between literary language and textual and interpersonal relationality. He describes the work of the creative writer (poetry or prose) as "tak[ing] everyday language and mak[ing] it deliver the prelogical participation of landscapes, dwellings, localities, and gestures […] a system of signs whose internal articulation reproduces the

contours of experience" ([1968] 1970:25). Literary language, in its emphasis on the felt encounter of the perception of a thing, an idea, an other, marks the possibility of a return to prelogical perception and a clearer understanding of the flesh of the world. Such language does not aim to present abstractions but instead relies on a generative relationality between words, ideas, and contexts that approaches meaning-making as both a doubling-back toward what has come before – linguistically, socially, personally – and a gesturing toward the potentiality for future transformations. "Words, even in prose", he contends in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" ([1952] 1993), "carry the speaker and the hearer into a common universe by drawing both towards a new signification by their power to designate in excess of their accepted definition". In this sense, literature is an example of the generative nature of the hyperdialectic in its momentary drawing together of meaning which, through noncoincidence and the inherent proliferation of other potential meanings or associations, draws apart once more.

The links between Woolf's style and rhythm and Merleau-Ponty's comments on literary language in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" and *The Prose of the World* ([1969] 1973) may be extended in discussions that lie beyond the scope of this study. These include the latter's reliance on literary language, particularly the idea of metaphor, as demonstrating the ontological reversibility of the chiasm and the flesh of the world. The ontological dimensions of metaphor have been often remarked upon by scholars in that field, most notably by Galen Johnson, Mauro Carbone, and Emmanuel de Saint Aubert in their co-authored project, *Merleau-Ponty's Poetic of the World: Philosophy and Literature* (2020). Their work, particularly de Saint Aubert's chapter on "Metaphoricity", explores Merleau-Ponty's consideration of metaphor as a chiastic encounter between two elements: it is the "participation of fragments of the world with one another"

(Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Saint-Aubert, 2020:131). Metaphor becomes, therefore, not only a structural principle for *demonstrating* chiastic relationality, it *underpins* the chiasm. de Saint Aubert further demonstrates Merleau-Ponty's anchorage of metaphor within his broader arguments on embodiment and the flesh in that his formulation of metaphor as similar to the chiasm means that it avoids any ontological dualism and instead "expresses—and in turn contributes to the composition of—an anthropological unity" (de Saint Aubert, 2010:134). The current project's focus on intercorporeality may, therefore, be developed by considering both writers' approach to relationality as metaphoricity.

Relationality (compositional, ecological, social, textual) in the works studied is an ever-changing constellation of elements that relies on physical distance, intervals in time, and an underlying non-coincidence in order to enable ethical action based on care. Although neither writer, as mentioned previously, developed an explicit ethics, the consideration of a simultaneous unity and difference evident in Merleau-Ponty's ontology has provided an entry-point into thinking about the potential ethical implications of Woolf's focus on self-other relationships. She demonstrates that conceptualising an all-encompassing ethics may hinder necessary concern for the contingencies of individual situations. Her works discussed in this thesis suggest, however, that there are two methods by which the possibility for an ethical relationality may be broken down: connections which draw together in order to eliminate difference, that is, to absorb what is other into what is the same, or those that seek to break down the possibility of kinship entirely. Both of these deny individuals' alterity by either overwhelming their identity into the broader social system or expectations or by rendering them wholly other and viewing this 'gap' as unbridgeable. Intercorporeality, in ethical terms, becomes a broad term that remains vague enough to allow for

specificities of a relationship to determine the shape of ethical action. It may, therefore, be considered a state of ontological similarity where overlaps between people and ideas remain partial in an allowance of difference and autonomy; individuals draw close together or toward the nonhuman in intimacy, but their selfhood is not absorbed into a dominant view or disregarded as having any potential for connection/community.

The wonder and awareness of the artist's "fascination" as called for in the process of art-making take on an ethical stance in the acknowledgement and dwelling within Being that approaches the world with openness and does not participate in the possessive or oppressive disregard for another's opacity. This "fascination" may, in Woolfian terms, be considered an attentiveness to the "patterns" behind the "cotton wool" of everyday life. In moments of creative meaning-making (entertaining, painting, sewing, writing), such an attitude highlights an inability to reduce, abstract, or define one's own and others' embodied existences to strict dichotomies (for example, Clarissa's insistence that she "would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that", *MD*:7) or to essentialise into a "perfect shape" which imposes boundaries and renders static the possibility for change or difference. This generative preoccupation with meaning-making and expression in turn suggests that the connections between past and present remain in a state of perpetual negotiation, much like the journey toward a horizon point. Although the unmediated, pure past is irretrievable, memories are recreated or refolded into present perception and reflection. Ultimately, such an engagement with the world – human and nonhuman, past and present – highlights a Woolfian *Umwelt*, a dynamic meaning-making environment of different interrelated ideas and beings that eschews hierarchical or finalising definitions and systems.

In doing so, the works explored in this thesis demonstrate Woolf's abiding support for a poetics as described toward the end of *A Room of One's Own*:

> For my belief is that […] if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and 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 […] if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down (*AROO*:98).

This considers human beings as opaque and, to some degree, self-contained so that interpersonal relationships are grounded in an underlying, and arguably more fundamental, connection to "the world of reality" and "whatever it may be in themselves" discovered through contact with the nonhuman. Furthermore, Woolf suggests that, through the encompassing relation to the "world of reality", the self-containment of individual experience should not be turned into polarising narratives which deny the intrinsic ontological similarity of all things. Such a poetics understands textual and narrative experience and expression as spatiotemporally embodied and embedded, coupling together the unifying images of the "world of reality" with an observance of differences and contingencies; it celebrates the possibility of creative projects that might revitalise existing meanings and systems. An intercorporeal life may be conceptualised as one that is "show[n] by words" (*VI*:266); that is, the existence and ethical negotiation of our relationships to ourselves, others, things, and the world are captured through creative language.

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