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“A porous vessel afloat on sensation”: Temporal Poetics and the Waves of Subjectivity in the Work of Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

"A porous vessel afloat on sensation": Temporal Poetics and the Waves of Subjectivity in the Work of Virginia Woolf

By Jeffrey Rosen

This thesis addresses the relationship between memory and the body in the works of Virginia Woolf. I extract a distinctly Woolfian poetics of time and subjectivity through a formal and theoretical analysis of her memoir, "A Sketch of the Past," (1939) alongside her novel, *The Waves* (1935). I find that Woolf's personal writings on memory reconfigure the shock experience as a rapturous realization of life as art. Such a notion of the shock experience leads Woolf to a new theory of 'extra-voluntary memory': a memory dynamic in which recurring memories are brought into the body from somewhere outside of or beyond the body. Woolf poeticizes this relationship between the body and extra-voluntary memory through the rhythm of the waves. This rhythm textually takes form in *The Waves* through the formal motif of 'unity-dispersion,' a pattern of movement which perpetually structures experience for the novel's narrative consciousness. The Woolfian subject in this sense is figured as a blank vessel, a container for sensations, which cyclically takes on sensations and thus a stable sense of identity, only to disperse and reconfigure itself in accordance with the materialist wave-like rhythms upon which the subject floats. This Woolfian temporal poetics offers itself as a pedagogical tool for teaching an embodied experience of time.

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Abbreviations

BTA - *Between the Acts* (1970 Harcourt, Brace.)

Diary - *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (ed. A. O. Bell, 5 vols.; London: Hogarth, 1977-84)

MB - *Moments of Being* (1985 Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)

MD - *Mrs. Dalloway* (1990. N.p.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)

O - *Orlando*

PA - *A Passionate Apprentice*, ed. M. A. Leaska (London: Hogarth, 1990)

TVO - *The Voyage Out* (1992 Edited by Jane Wheare. N.p.: Penguin Publishing Group)

VWR - *The Virginia Woolf Reader* (1984. Edited by Mitchell A. Leaska. N.p.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)

TW - *The Waves* (1978. Harvest Books ed. N.p.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)

Introduction

> It's odd that science, so they tell me, is making things (so to speak) more spiritual … The very latest notion, so I'm told is, nothing's solid … There, you can get a glimpse of the church through the trees…
>
> Virginia Woolf *BTA*, 199

As many historians and critics have argued, one of the transitions marked by 'Modernity' was a shifting structure of one's experience of reality. Put another way, the rapid and interdependent processes of industrialization, urbanization, and capitalist imperialism brought with them a shifting relation to both time and space. Virginia Woolf, born in 1882, grew up toward the end of the high Victorian era, and began writing novels and essays as these changing relations to time and space cemented themselves into the psyches of Europeans. As mechanization brought about a reorientation of the body to the rhythms of the machine, these changing experiences of the body reflect themselves in the characteristically Victorian desire to organize, name, mechanize, and commodify 'the natural world.'[1] Woolf was one of the most astute observers of the peculiar behavior of the English bourgeois, and her writing can in many ways be seen as a poetic response to her experience of the stiflingly oppressive and often absurd world produced by the English empire.

A critical analysis of the experience of the time is characteristic of 'Modernity.' The early 20th-century German critic Walter Benjamin, in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History,"

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[1] The phrase, 'the natural world' here carries with it a lot of baggage. With the context of Victorian England, the conquest of 'nature' bore within it an array of imperialist assumptions ranging from the necessity of bringing order to the 'family of man', in which the global population of homo sapiens were organized within a 'natural' hetero-patriarchy resembling the English bourgeois family, in addition to the status of colonized (or soon-to-be colonized) subjects as uncivilized and thus included in the 'natural world'. As has been often observed, the 19th century developments of the discipline of anthropology are exemplative of the English tendency to group the entirety of the 'global south' into the domain of the unknown natural world. For a psycho-materialist analysis of Victorian England's production of 'nature' as a necessary opposition to Industrialism, see Celeste Olalqiaga's *The Artificial Kingdom: On the Kitsch Experience*.

addressed how our narrative view of history and time distorts our experience of time.[2] Like Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, Benjamin argues that we are turned backward toward an ever-piling mountain of "wreckage"; we can only see and make sense of things that have already happened. For Benjamin, the pre-existing methods of making sense of history offer a frozen afterimage of apparent progression, which, like a photograph to its subject, affects "both the content … and its receivers" (Benjamin 198). More recently, critics like Anne McClintock, when addressing the lasting effects of Victorian imperialism, have employed Benjamin's theses to call for "innovative theories of history and popular memory".[3] Similarly, Vinay Lal's compelling critique of the homogenization of time by industrial capitalism concludes with a call to "think about the possible ways in which the reterritorialization of temporality might be achieved".[4] There is a general consensus among critics that the ideology of 19th-century global capitalism affected our experience of time.

In his essay, "Rewriting Modernity," Jean-François Lyotard resists a definition of 'Modernity' as a self-evident and defined period of time, and but rather posits that the "diachronical periodization of history is typically a modern obsession" — understood thus, Modernity is a way of experiencing time.[5] Modernity, in its philosophical effort to diagnose itself, perpetually "inscribes itself on itself as a perpetual re-writing" (Lyotard 4). Lyotard evidences this claim through Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, both of whom, he argues, perpetuated the respective processes of alienation and metaphysics they sought to dismantle. Woolf herself, at first, may seem to fall into this self-perpetuating cycle when she writes of developing her own poetics of time: "I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and is only a question of

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[2] Walter Benjamin "Illuminations"
[3] Anne McClintock *The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism,'* 97
[4] Vinay Lal "Empire of Knowledge," 40
[5] Jean-François Lyotard "Re-Writing Modernity", *SubStance* (1987), pp. 3-9. My reading of Lyotard's essay is deeply indebted to Elissa Marder's book *Dead Time*

discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start" (*MB* 67). In desiring to live life "through from the start," does Woolf's desire for a new poetics of memory rewrite the Modernity she sought to escape?

Comparable critiques of self-ensnaring epistemologies were taken up by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who, in her book *Touching Feeling*, advocates for non-dualistic pedagogy as a reparative tool beside the hermeneutics of suspicion (as deployed by thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and those they influenced). For Sedgwick, characteristic features of non-dualistic thinking within the academy involve an embrace of knowledge as aesthetic, spatial thinking, the innate potential for wisdom outside of language and within the body, as well as a direct pedagogical system with the goal of clear and happy minds. Employing a non-dualistic methodology does not suggest a total departure from canonical Modernists like Nietzsche or Freud so as to progress forward to a more 'Enlightened' future; to do so would merely be to walk once more into a linear, dualistic, and dialectical conception of history. My project then focuses on one of the more recognizable faces of Modernism — Virginia Woolf. Rather than cast Woolf aside for more 'recent' thinkers, I instead probe her literature for a poetics of time to empower contemporary readers to realize their rhythmic and bodily experience of time.

In her "Professions for Women" essay, Woolf writes that part of her task as a woman writer is to "tell the truth about my own experiences as a body"; in her "Modern Fiction" essay, however, she writes that the novel should express "the spirit" or "soul" as opposed to "the body" (*VWR 281, 285*). As I will show over the course of this project, Woolf's exploration of "the body" can be best understood as referring to the medium onto which sensations are projected and experienced — the body is the medium through which reality is experienced. Rather than writing

through the style of social realism, Woolf argues for a more embodied and phenomenological novel:

> The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old … Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien or external as possible? (*VWR* 288)

For Woolf, writing should capture the raw flow of energy, to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind" and "trace the pattern … which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" (*VWR* 288). Woolf here suggests a flow of energy and stimuli which is imprinted onto the lens of our bodies and subsequently coheres into a stable sense of reality. Thus, "the body," for Woolf, denotes a varying subject position, an enclosed but not strictly defined space within which she experiences reality.

Woolf's "Modern Fiction" essay was written in 1919. One year later, a similar meditation on the relation between energy and mind was published by Sigmund Freud, in his seminal work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this essay, numerous parallels arise in the writers' 'special interest' in how psychic energy is converted into self-knowledge. Freud questions the nature of traumatic response, and argues that consciousness occurs instead of "memory traces" (Freud 28). Only through the unwilled or forceful recurrence of stimuli can stable subjectivity exist. In 1939, Benjamin's essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" extended Freud's link between trauma and subjectivity to characterize the broader modern urban experience as one of shock. To say the modern experience is traumatic is to say the present moment is an encounter so immediate and so direct that there is a gap or delay in our knowledge of reality. Cathy Caruth defines the traumatic or shock event by its very imperceptibility: "Central to the very immediacy of this experience,

that is, is a gap that carries the force of the event … The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding" (Caruth 7). Benjamin invokes Paul Valéry to illuminate the connection between shock and memory: "the impressions and sense perceptions of man actually belong in the category of surprises; they are evidence of an insufficiency in man … Recollection is … an elemental phenomenon which aims at giving us the time for organizing the reception of stimuli which we initially lacked" (Benjamin 110). For Benjamin, the "price for which the sensation of the modern age" can be achieved is the "disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock" (Benjamin 148). Benjamin locates his theory of memory, and subsequently philosophy of history and modern temporality through his understanding of shock and trauma. This dynamic — in which the mind is actively destroying and protecting against reality while simultaneously repeating and reiterating it through memory — is an essential concern for the literature of Modernism.

In 1939, Woolf also articulated the importance of the shock experience in relation to her motivations and philosophy in "A Sketch of the Past" (1939). "Sketch" is perhaps Woolf's most generously fleshed out autobiographical text; within it, she offers varying theories and images which represent her experience of time, particularly her experience of the present moment in relation to her childhood memories. Woolf discusses "exceptional moments" from her life that have remained with her, which come "to the surface unexpectedly" (*MB* 72).

When she was a child, Woolf's shock experiences were particularly frightening and horrible. For example, when she first heard of a family friend's suicide, she was shortly after gripped with unbearable fear and dread while looking at an apple tree. However, Woolf describes that over time, as she became more invested in writing, the shock experience took on new meanings:

> As one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation for a shock event; and that this explanation blunts the sledge-hammer force of the blow. I think this is true, because though I still have the peculiarity that I receive these sudden shocks, they are now always welcome; after the first surprise, I always feel instantly that they are particularly valuable. And so I go on to suppose that *the shock receiving capacity is what makes me a writer*. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it 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; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. (*MB* 72, emphasis added)

Woolf describes in this passage the utmost centrality of the shock experience to her position as a writer. In line with the notions of Modernity and shock outlined earlier with Benjamin and Freud, Woolf describes the way that over time, the rational mind builds up a firm wall to explain away everything, and that "this explanation blunts the sledge-hammer force of the blow." Through the mind's structures of logic and reason, reality becomes dulled, blunted. It is with great "delight" that Woolf reclaims the shock experience as something empowering her as a writer. She welcomes the peculiar realization of shock, claiming "the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer" (*MB* 72). But what exactly does it mean for Woolf to have this peculiar shock experience, what is actually going on in her mind and body?

Although the writings of Freud, Benjamin, and Caruth in part help position a general understanding of the significance of Woolf's claims regarding shock, their definitions of the shock or traumatic event do not fit entirely that of Woolf's. In particular, Woolf's 'shock' is most distinctly her own when it results in an experience of "satisfaction" or "delight." For the time being, we must be content to see that the shock experience more generally is relevant to Woolf's motivation and experience regarding writing.[6]

[6] I am not suggesting that there are not traumatic shock experiences written by Woolf which fit well with Freud's trauma. As is well known, her accounts of the suicide-tree, her sexual abuse by various family members, as well as the deaths of her mother, sister, and brother, all were written about as characteristically traumatic in the Freudian sense. Much work has already been conducted regarding the role of trauma for Virginia Woolf, including writing by

There is a connection between Woolf's experience of 'shock' or rapture and her resulting theory of time and subjectivity. The two confirm each other and are manifest in each other, they need each other to come to form. Woolf evidently experiences great delight when she is able to articulate her shock experiences, writing, "Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me" (*MB* 72). After describing how she takes the shock encounter and makes it "whole," Woolf describes:

> From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate 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. And I see this when I have a shock. (*MB* 72)

Woolf unabashedly proclaims the world to be an interconnected expression of art. In negating Shakespeare, Beethoven, and God in the same breath, Woolf makes clear that our existence as art is not rooted in metaphysics, but rather an expression manifest only in us, in our presence, in our transitory coming into existence — "we are the thing itself." Woolf's "philosophy" is that life is art, that art is the truth of reality, that we are the truth of the universe manifest in our momentary being, as an aesthetic expression of reality conveying truth and beauty. Woolf positions 'Being' itself as art; existence itself is a perpetual and unbounded artistic expression.

Nietzsche, in his essay, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," similarly explored the aesthetic basis for knowledge or truth.[7] For Nietzsche, language does not truthfully describe the world, but rather self-perpetuates a system of interrelated concepts which give meaning to

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Marlene Briggs, Louise DeSalvo, Cornelia Burian, Patricia Moran, as well as the critical anthology *Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts*. I do not have the space nor intention here to rewrite these projects. I am, however, presently concerned with Woolf's writing of shock as an experience of wonder, and the moments where that shock leads towards self knowledge and mystical unity.

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" (trans. Ronald Speirs), in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, pp 870-884

each other through difference and the simplification of particularities. Nietzsche explains how concepts are formed: "each word immediately becomes a concept, not by virtue of the fact that it is intended to serve as a memory (say) of the unique, utterly individualized, primary experience to which it owes its existence, but because at the same time it must fit countless other, more or less similar cases, i.e. cases which, strictly speaking are never equivalent, and thus nothing other than non-equivalent cases" (Nietzsche 877). Nietzsche undercuts the integrity of memory or language as it pertains to knowledge, in that our understanding of reality through language results in a simplification and homogenization of reality. Rather than our understanding of experience as being particular, singular, or specifically memorable, our process of making reality intelligible through recollection is curtailed by linguistic systems. One can detect resonances with Benjamin's later critiques that modern technology reduces particular experiences into flattened and homogenized sensations.[8] Woolf's project of writing the stimuli as purely as can be, as laid out in the "Modern Fiction" essay, resonates with Nietzsche's concerns in her recognition of the linked limitations of memory and language to represent reality.

In several ways, Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lying" can be understood alongside Woolf's model of writing as laid out in "Modern Fiction" and "A Sketch of the Past." Just as Woolf's starting point is rooted in the phenomenological "myriad impressions" received by the mind and converted into writing, Nietzsche writes that a word is a "copy of a nervous stimulation in sounds." Perhaps most importantly for the present argument, Nietzsche writes that the translation of reality into intelligibility is necessarily an aesthetic conversion, arguing that "there is no causality, no correctness, no expression, but at most an *aesthetic* way of relating, by which I mean an allusive transference, a stammering translation into a quite different language" (Nietzsche

[8] This argument is developed by Benjamin over the course of several pieces, chiefly "The Storyteller" and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," as well as "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire"

880). To reiterate, Nietzsche suggests that our basis for understanding reality, the fundamental root of all epistemological possibilities, is first, necessarily, and "at most an *aesthetic* way of relating" (Nietzsche 880).[9] Nietzsche speaks of "stammering translation" (*Nachstamelnde Uebersetzung*) further emphasizing this translation as a bodily act fraught with resistance, struggle, and difficulty. In Nietzsche's German, *nachstamelnde*, brings together *nach* (after) with *stamelnde* (stammer), envisioning language as a doubly-delayed response to reality.[10]

Woolf remains dedicated to the transformative potential of memory despite her awareness of the limits of language and representation in accessing the past. When she thinks of St. Ives, for example, she literally re-experiences the sensations of the past within the present. In "A Sketch of the Past," she writes:

> Those moments - in the nursery, on the road to the beach – can still be more real than the present moment. This I have just tested. For I got up and crossed the garden. Percy was digging the asparagus bed; Louis was shaking a mat in front of the bedroom door. But I was seeing them through the sight I saw here – the nursery and the road to the beach. At times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there (*MB* 67).

Woolf writes that her experience of the St. Ives memory was "more real than the present moment." She actually stands up from her writing desk to test her experience of the sensations of the past within the present, which, as I argue, enables her to develop a poetic theory of time. With this passage, Woolf can be understood to approach a comparable literary project as that of Benjamin.

Toward the beginning of "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin writes of the "changing structure of experience" brought on by industrialization, and subsequently the need to

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[9] Emphasis is included in the original text.

[10] Nietzsche's critiques of language eventually take the form of a (ironic?) celebration of mankind for succeeding in "piling an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water" (879). In *The Waves*, Neville offers a image on the successes and failures of language: "'Yet these roaring waters…upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, "I am this; I am that!" Speech is false." (*The Waves* 138).

adequately articulate that change.[11] Benjamin locates Henri Bergson's *Matiere et memoire* as foundational in marking "the structure of memory as decisive for the philosophical pattern of experience" (Benjamin 105). Benjamin then uses Marcel Proust's *a la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as a "test" of Bergson's theory to "produce experience synthetically" (Benjamin 105–6). In "Sketch," Woolf documents her own lab procedure when she literally gets up from her desk to walk around her garden at Monk House to test her experience of the past in relation to the present. Furthermore, Bergson's theories on memory hypothesizes that "the eye perceives an experience of a complementary mature in the form of its spontaneous afterimage … Bergson's philosophy represents an attempt to give the details of this afterimage and to fix it as a permanent record" (Benjamin 105). Similarly, one might see Woolf's writing as an attempt to fix the unfolding experience of reality and memory-afterimage through writing, so as to mark and convert the experience as a persisting text.

Proust's *Recherche* famously yields a model of *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*, in which the *memoire volontaire* provides information of the past which retains "no trace of it," as in, it signifies the past in a surface level way, as a photograph or souvenir snow globe might activate the "promptings of memory which obeyed the call of attentiveness" (Benjamin 106). With the *mémoire involontaire,* the past is:

> Somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arises in us) though we have no idea which one it is. As for the object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die or whether we never encounter it. (Benjamin 106)

According to Benjamin and Proust, the experience of the *mémoire involontaire* brings about, full return to that past, an opportunity to gain information that had otherwise been considered lost. In

[11] Walter Benjamin "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, 103

her musings on the St. Ives memory, Woolf offers an implicit rebuttal to Proust's *mémoire involontaire*:

> At times I can go back to St Ives more completely than I can this morning. I reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. In certain favorable moods, memories - what one has forgotten - come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible - I often wonder - that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? I see it- the past - an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions…. Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen in to the past… I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start. (*MB* 67)

Woolf's hypothesizing on memory here echoes Benjamin's concerns while remaining distinctly her own. Proust's critique of Bergson's theories on memory stresses that there is no choice regarding our experience of memory, as in, we cannot control when or where the *mémoire involontaire* is possible. Woolf, in her analysis of her experience of memory, describes witnessing her past unfold in front of her as if it were a full, present experience including unremembered details — she "reaches a state" where she can watch "things happen as if I were there." In Proust's *mémoire involontaire,* one can return to the past and gain access to information one previously had lost. However, Woolf notes that "my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, *though I am really making it happen*" (*MB* 67, emphasis added). Woolf then distinguishes herself from Proust in making clear that she is aware that she is in some way "making it happen".

Why does Woolf say that she is making it happen? She is not referring to 'Virginia Woolf' as an autonomous and defined agent who willfully produces the image of the past, but rather, is pointing to her body as a historical container. Her body, as the variable position from which she

experiences reality, is a translucent receiver for the channels and flows of sensations from the past. Woolf makes this image clear when writes of the invisible material forces acting on the body:

> It is by such invisible presences that the 'subject of this memoir' is tugged this way and that every day… consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and also from class to class; well, if we cannot analyze these invisible presences… how futile life writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream (*MB* 80).

There is a force channeled from beyond Woolf's body that influences her experience of reality. This perspective is extended by Woolf's emphasis that strong emotions "must leave a trace" and that memories have an "existence independent of our minds," leading Woolf to ponder the invention of a device in which one could "plug in" and "listen in" to the past (*MB* 67). Thus, if there are 'invisible presences' or channeled forces which determine the subject's experience, might not those channels also bear within them the sensations which 'leave a trace' and exist independently? Woolf figures her memory device to the structure of a city street, with each door or window providing access to the past. One can begin to see here a distinctly Woolfian theory of memory beyond those of Proust's voluntary and involuntary memory.

Let's take a step back here. Woolf figures a mechanical invention which relies on her sense that memory has an existence "independent of our minds". This has radical implications in that it implies memory or stimuli are brought into or onto the subject by some force outside of the subject. Besides the voluntary and involuntary memory, Woolf's theory might be termed the "Extra-Voluntary Memory," connoting the forces of memory inscription which are both *beyond* and *outside of* the subject. Notably, Woolf theorizes that through some technical ability, one could access these memories from the material world. Like gravity, this process of inscription cannot be overtly observed as a direct force, but rather through its secondary manifestation across the subjective and material world. This will brings memory into the body "as though I am making it

happen," it is channeled from beyond the body into the body through the subject, into subjective inscription.

Given Woolf's potential extra-voluntary memory, and given the changing structure of experience in regards to time and space, I explore two of Woolf's texts from her late period to make visible her poetic relation to time. In Chapter 1, "Writing Rapture and Memory in 'A Sketch of the Past,'" I illuminate Woolf's theories on time, memory, and shock throughout her unfinished memoir, "A Sketch of the Past" (1939–41), enabling a theory of time as a material fluid which is spatially interdependent, as well as further explicating on Woolf's poeticizing of the materiality of the body in relation to time. Such theorizing necessitates a literary grounding to be made sense of in relation to our lived experience in the world. In order to ground Woolf's theories I turn to Woolf's 1935 novel, *The Waves*, where time vibrates to the rhythm of the waves. In Chapter 2, "Rhythmic Time in *The Waves*," I read *The Waves* through Woolf's extra-voluntary memory, particularly from the characters' bodily experiences of the wave-like materialism of time. In Chapter 3, "*The Waves* as a Rhythmic Text," I expand my reading of the novel to address the question of language, ideology, and subjectivity as it relates to Woolf's theories of time. Ultimately, I read Woolf's relationship to memory and the body as a reparative inversion of traumatic history in favor of a a poeticization of time as tuned to the rhythms of the waves and the body.

Chapter 1
Writing Rapture and Sketching Time in "A Sketch of the Past"

Virginia Woolf seems to insist that "Sketch of the Past" (1939) is merely a sketch, a casually thrown together assortment of notes without forethought.[12] With each dated entry, she reminds us of what led her to sit and write in that moment, often citing boredom and exhaustion from crafting Roger Fry's biography, as well as more ominously, to distract her from the looming Nazi threat. Woolf also seems not to care about the preservation of the notes nor their publication. At one point she writes amazingly that she had just "found this sheaf of notes, thrown away into my waste-paper basket" (*MB* 100). This air of casualness suggests a stream of consciousness methodology aligning with the popular understanding of Woolf's writing. But any serious reader or critic of Woolf knows that although her works might read as spontaneous unfolding thoughts, her word choice and phrasing is intentional. In *The Waves*, when Bernard tries his hand at stream-of-conscious writing, he jokes that "profound criticism is often written casually" (*TW* 79).

"Sketch of the Past," then, is a generous spring from which we can learn about Woolf's relationship to memory. In particular, the process of writing about the past became a fruitful practice for Woolf to interrogate her experience with past memories in the present moment. Across "Sketch," Woolf often begins with detailing an exemplary scene of the past, which then triggers a series of associative questions and hypotheses regarding her poetics of time. These exercises enable Woolf to articulate her suspicion regarding the nature of subjectivity, that "we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality" and that "we are the thing itself" (*MB* 142, 72). The following chapter explores how Woolf arrives at such a philosophy in addition to unpacking Woolf's poetics of time as material, interdependent, and spatial.

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[12] Virginia Woolf "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being* pp. 64-159

Woolf structures “Sketch” around a multitude of scenes often stemming from two primary locations. The first and arguably most important is St. Ives, the Cornwall beach town which housed her family’s summer house and was the source of her happiest childhood memories. St. Ives, for Woolf, was an unending source of a romanticized past and happy family life. The second crucial location is that of her family’s London apartment at Hyde Park Gate, the site of her adolescent development marked by the death of her mother, abuse from father, and subsequent mental health struggles.

Over the course of “Sketch,” different forms of memory experience bubble up. The biggest difference seems to be the distinction between the ecstatic and shock memories, and within shock, either rapture or trauma. As exemplified, in part, by the primary St. Ives-waves memory (which will be explored in depth shortly), the ecstatic memory is paradoxical, impossibly embodied and yet immensely pleasurable experience of something seemingly away from the direct present moment. The shock memory, on the other hand, are those experiences involving a rupture in habitual cognition within the present moment. The Woolfian shock experience is sub-categorized into rapture or trauma. Trauma accounts for those experiences in which Woolf felt terror, “helpless” or “powerless,” and which resulted in fear, depression, hopelessness, and dread (*MB* 71). As Woolf scholars have made clear, there are plenty of examples of this “powerless” and terrifying trauma throughout “Sketch,” most notably her sexual assault by Gerald Duckworth, as well as the apple tree marking the suicide of Mr. Valpy (*MB* 69, 71).

Woolf’s experience of rapture, on the other hand, is rooted in the body and marked by overwhelming stimuli or sensations which grip the subject. Perhaps most notably, Woolf’s rapture is repeatedly linked with an affective response of satisfaction, delight, and knowledge. Rapture can also be exemplified well by Woolf’s “highly sensual” and “sunny” memory of the garden at

St. Ives as she was overwhelmed by the wondrous harmony of sensations produced by the natural world (*MB* 66). The experience of rapture allows Woolf insight into new knowledge. Over the course of "Sketch," Woolf hints at the capacity to train and adapt the mind to convert the shock experience from something terrifying or harmful into something pleasant, delightful, and permitting wondrous connections. Furthermore, as I explore later in this chapter, Woolf suggests that if one can tune one's mind properly, one can experience a modality of the present which is fully backed by, adjacent to, or gliding above the past. Recalling Sedgwick's non-dualistic, spatial prepositions of *beside*/*beneath*/*beyond*, such an "irreducibly spatial positionality" of temporalities may offer useful resistance towards the "implicit narrative of, respectively, origin and telos" (Sedgwick 8).

Several of the shock experiences Woolf describes blur the lines between these various categories, in particular, as this chapter will explore, her first St. Ives' memory of the waves seems to inhabit both ecstasy and rapture. Rather than establish a rigid schema of distinct categories of experience, my hope is that my characterization of these forms of memory acts as a common ground to make sense of Woolf's open and often paradoxical approach towards a theorized structure of experience. These differing forms of memory and shock may help to account for how or why these experiences had such lasting effects on Woolf's psyche.

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Virginia Woolf begins "A Sketch of the Past" with two "first" memories, casting aside the temporal assumption that memory, in her eyes, necessarily must be arranged and experienced as a linear sequence of the past. The first memory she describes is that of sitting on her mother's lap and seeing the "purple and red and blue" flowers along her mother's black dress. The details of

the memory itself are scant; she remembers darkness, vague shapes on her mother's black dress, and abstract shapes which resemble oceanic plants. Woolf only writes a few expository sentences about this first memory and quickly moves on to discussing the central St. Ives memory.

Woolf writes that this next St. Ives memory "also seems to be my first memory, and in fact it is the most important of all my memories" (*MB* 64). Before getting to the content of the memory itself, Woolf sets up a framework for approaching this memory, a tentative theory relating the body to memory: "If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills — then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory" (*MB* 64). Woolf asks us to imagine the relationship between memory and the container for memory. The body, for Woolf, becomes an otherwise blank and neutral medium or surface onto which memory sensations act. Woolf's image is oblique - through figuring the body as a bowl in relation to memory, one might logically assume the memories go inside the bowl. And yet, Woolf says that her bowl "stands upon" the memory — her body, "life," remains an empty vessel which happens to be situated above the memory.

We can see a comparable figuration of the body in relation to memory in *Between the Acts* when Isa murmurs to herself, "How am I burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories; possessions. This is the burden that the past laid on me, last little donkey in that caravanserai crossing the desert. 'Kneel down,' said the past. 'Fill your pannier from our tree. Rise up donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoods crack'" (*BTA* 155). Memories here are drawn up from the ground, rooted in the material world and extracted by the subject. The voice of "the past" instructs Isa to fill her "pannier," a basket or bag, with the "burden" of the past.

For Woolf, bodies contain memories, but those sensations come from outside of the body. The life of an individual is a vessel within which memory takes form and expression. Put another way, for Virginia Woolf, bodies are the medium through which stimuli are produced and reproduced. This notion is repeatedly reiterated throughout "Sketch" with the image that "I am a porous vessel afloat on sensation" (*MB* 133), or that "we are sealed vessels afloat upon what is convenient to call reality" (*MB* 142), or when she caricatures George Duckworth as a "perfectly adapted physical vessel" (*MB* 152). The body is not stable in its form, sometimes "porous" while at other times "sealed." Perhaps the most telling of these images is her image of the body as a "sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays" (*MB* 133), suggesting that some will beyond the subject is inscribing stimuli onto the body-as-vessel, which results in a subjective memory experience. However, in order to appreciate the totality of Woolf's theory of memory, I must first make clear her aesthetic assumptions drawn from her childhood memories of St. Ives.

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Woolf's St. Ives's memory is the foundation upon which her experiences are built. Because of this, Woolf's language in her descriptions of this memory are of the utmost importance in understanding her theories on time, as well as making visible the intersecting meanings folded into 'the waves' as a recurring motif throughout her literature. Woolf describes the memory as follows:

> It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (*MB* 64-5)[13]

[13] In Bernard's final monologue of *The Waves*, he recounts his life story: "In the beginning, there was the nursery, with windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea. I saw something brighten– no doubt the brass handle of a cupboard." (*TW* 239)

In the first line of her St. Ives memory description, Woolf writes of being "half asleep, half awake" and ends with feeling that "it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive" (*MB* 64-5). Woolf's experience of remembrance is of simultaneous states of awareness and converging temporalities. She is at once awake and asleep, in both the conscious and unconscious world. Furthermore, Woolf describes that in her experience with this memory, she actually re-experiences the past and not simply summoning a voluntary memory limited to the "promptings" that obey the "call of attentiveness".[14] She is acutely aware of the potential paradox implied by such a feeling and recognizes that "it is impossible that I should be here" and yet undeniably feels the "purest ecstasy I can conceive". Woolf writes that when she re-experiences the St. Ives memory, she encounters a "feeling which is even at this moment very strong in me" (*MB* 65). Her experience with this memory is so immersive that it draws her toward new ways of representing our relationship to the past outside of a linear departure away from it.

The second sentence of the St. Ives description, "it is of hearing the waves breaking," emphasizes the importance of sound with this memory (*MB* 65). Woolf notes various sounds throughout the description, "hearing the blind draw" or "hearing this splash" (*MB* 65). Notably, the waves were heard in their moment of breaking, dispersing, and crashing. Furthermore, Woolf's description of the waves' sound notes characteristically notes their perpetual rhythm through the language "one, two, one, two," suggesting the cyclical nature of the waves — the waves rise, crash, and start again. This particular numerical phrasing also bubbles into *The Waves* as Louis hears the church bell ringing: "'That is the first stroke of the church bell,' said Louis. 'Then the others follow; one, two; one, two; one, two," further suggesting an interest in the aural cycles or repetition (*TW* 11).

[14] Benjamin "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", 106

The sound of the waves is also Woolf's golden road to accessing her memory as an image. Woolf imagines a painting of the St. Ives memory as a "globular" mixture of "pale yellow, silver, and green," with curved leaves and petals from which sounds spring out. Within her imagined painting, sounds are connected to visual form: "Sound and sight seem to make equal parts of these first impressions … the sound seems to fall through an elastic, gummy air; which holds it up; which prevents it from being sharp and distinct" (*MB* 66). The sensory stimuli — sounds, sights, textures — typically conceived as distinct, seem to be united in the memory experience. In the first chapter of *The Waves,* the children's observations alternate between sight and sound, "I see a slab of pale yellow" ... "I hear a sound" ... "I see a globe," and so on (*TW* 9). Air in particular takes on a highly substantive materiality in Woolf's fiction, particularly in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*. *The Waves* begins with a description of the sea being "indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased," and in *Between the Acts*, the physical presence and thickness of air repeatedly serves to mediate and distort the sounds of the performance (*TW* 7). Furthermore, in both of these novels, air is figured as a twin fluidity to the watery waves — further emphasizing a planar relationality of *beside*/*between*/*beneath*/*beyond* — serving as both a medium for words and utterances to physically travel through space, as well as a representation of of the formless, perpetually coming in and out of form with the rising and breaking waves. In *Between the Acts*, Lucy stands alone in a garden and observes, "Above, the air rushed; beneath was water. She stood between two fluidities …" (*BTA* 204). For Woolf, the experience of awareness involves being receptive to "fluidities" of sensations which are spatialized around the subject.

So, Virginia Woolf remembers hearing the waves. Specifically, she recalls "hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach"; the waves are

heard in their characteristic repetition and perpetual motion (*MB* 64). In a later reiteration of the St. Ives memory, she similarly notes the sound of the waves mixing with bird song, "The rooks cawing is part of the waves breaking — one, two, one, two — and the splash as the wave drew back and then it gathered again" (*MB* 66). In Gabrielle McIntire's "Modernism, Memory, and Desire," she reads the "one, two, one, two" as characteristic of the childlike inability to count beyond the number two, as in, she couldn't count to three. I read this differently, and rather find significance in the repeated numerical resetting as characteristic of Woolf's philosophical understanding of the waves in relation to her theories of time. The waves splash, draw back, and 'gather again.' The waves are not bound by the notion of linear progress, nor is Woolf's experience of them limited by her inability to process linear progression. In fact, the memory of the cyclical, recurring waves marks Woolf's turning away from a conception of time as linear progression.

There are two other relevant details related to the breaking of the waves. First, Woolf imagines the waves breaking against the beach, against the rigid form of land, "sending a splash of water over the beach" (*MB* 64). The waves, for all of their grandiose symbolic weight, remain grounded within the knowable material world; this is what characterizes Woolf's waves particularly as hers. They are brought down from a metaphor or allegory into the world of the personal, into the quotidian, into the domestic, into the everyday mannerisms and gestures, into the swimming patterns of fish or the flaps of a butterfly. Escaping the symbol fetishism of the Victorians, Woolf is not interested in the waves because they represent death or time and so on. [15]As I argue over the next chapters, Woolf's waves provide the structure for material interactions and character encounters throughout her whole literary corpus.

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[15] By symbol fetishism, I am referring to the historical tendency of the discipline of English literature to prioritize the narratively symbolic weight of a single object as possessing a quantifiable meaning within a text, which conveys a desire to reclaim object meaning in the age of mechanical reproduction (see Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*).

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Woolf writes of hearing the waves from "behind a yellow blind," which is central to the aesthetic visual of her memory. The sensory information of the waves travels through the yellow blinds and into Woolf's ears and eyes. As mentioned earlier, Woolf imagines a painting of this memory:

> I should paint these first impressions in *pale yellow*, silver, and green. There was the *pale yellow* blind; the green sea; and the silver of the passion flowers. I should make a picture that was globular, *semi-transparent*. I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were *semi-transparent*; I should make curved shapes, *showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline*. Everything would be large and *dim*; and what was seen would at the same time be heard; *sound would come through* this petal or leaf - sounds indistinguishable from sights. (*MB* 66, emphasis added)

Woolf has a sustained aesthetic interest in translucent forms, in the way light or stimuli passes through other forms to disperse itself over space. Woolf's theories of time and materiality can actually be made legible through her imagistic rendering of the St. Ives waves memory.

Throughout the interlude passages of *The Waves*, Woolf depicts a vast, primordial, oceanic space enabling her most poetic and abstract approach to "netting the fin" of space-time, while also serving to metaphorically stage the characters' positions in their lives. These descriptions frequently employ language of light fanning out or dispersing over space, particularly as it regards the sun rising and setting and giving partial or total illumination to various forms. Other obvious iterations of this interest in translucence and light include her description of life being "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us," a description from *The Voyage Out* in which London is "a swarm of lights with a pale yellow canopy drooping above it," as Susan's first observation in *The Waves* of "a slab of pale yellow spreading away until it meets a purple stripe" (*VWR* 288, *TVO* 10, *TW* 9). I read this interest in translucence as connected with Woolf's

theories of time, as she repeatedly describes her experience of the past as shining through the materiality of the present.

We can see this connection between translucence and memory as she develops her ideas regarding her St. Ives memory. Woolf writes that she feels she experiences the St. Ives memory more fully than her present moment. She tests this notion by going outside, looking at her gardeners, and confirms that "I was seeing them through the sight I saw here — the nursery and the road to the beach." There is a sense here that for Virginia Woolf, memories shine through into reality, that our observation of reality is forever aestheticized, given artistic expression, style, sensibility, and meaning, by the ever emerging light of the past. Woolf sees her present moment "through the sight" of St. Ives, just as the sight and sounds of the waves pass through her yellow blinds, giving off the pale yellow dispersion of light. Through Woolf's attempted grappling with the present moment through writing, her desire to "make it whole" is done so through the aesthetic sensibilities of her past.

Woolf attributes the lasting impact and influence of the St. Ives memory to the abrupt shift in environment marked by when her family left London for St. Ives, "of course there was one external reason for the intensity of this first impression … it was due partly to the many months we spent in London. The change of nursery was a great change. And there was the long train journey; and the excitement" (*MB* 65). The note about a "long train journey," and "change of nursery," as well as collective "excitement" of traveling away from the "many months we spent in London" thus marks an experience which broke with the habitual family life.[16] Perhaps young Virginia's St. Ives experience can also be understood as an encounter with something radically outside of her normal life — her first "shock" realization of the strangeness of existence itself.

[16] Notably, Sigmund Freud also vividly remembers train journeys as a child with his mother as a foundational youthful experience in establishing a close intimacy with his mother. Laura Marcus explicates the connection between railroads, shock, and psychoanalysis in her chapter, "Oedipus Express" from *Dreams of Modernity*.

This lends the St. Ives memory a double characterization as both ecstasy and shock-rapture. The disembodied, paradoxical nature of experiencing the blissful wholeness of the past lends the St. Ives memory its ecstatic characteristics. And yet, the characteristic inhabituality of the memory, as in, the youthful Woolf woke up in a new space away from her London home, in addition to the memory's lasting impact on Woolf's epistemology, also evidences this memory as Woolf's most influential shock encounter. This double characterization is significant in that it combines the deeply embodied and self-oriented experience of ecstasy with the wondrous experience of rapture as one. As I will presently demonstrate, this understanding of shock lends itself towards Woolf's theorizing of time and subjectivity, that we are "vessels afloat upon a sensation" (*MB* 133).

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Throughout "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf develops a dynamic relation to shock. In a passage cited earlier, Woolf describes that when she was young, shock was experienced like "a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life" and that many shock experiences "brought with them a peculiar horror and a physical collapse; they seemed dominant; myself passive" (*MB* 72). But across the rest of "Sketch," Woolf describes a very different relationship to shock, particularly those shock experiences described as "rapture" (71).

There are two stand out moments of rapture worth examining. After describing the primary St. Ives waves memory, Woolf moves on to a more "robust" and "sensual" memory of walking around the garden at St. Ives and feeling "as if everything were ripe; humming; sunny; smelling so many smells at once; and *all making a whole* that even now makes me stop" (*MB* 66, emphasis added). In contrast to her first memory of hearing the waves, Woolf writes that this memory "was rapture rather than ecstasy" (*MB* 66). Thus we can understand Woolf's first experience of rapture as a wondrous experience of the artful totality of nature. Woolf's description

of the nature "all making a whole" echoes her note of her greatest pleasure is writing the shock experience and "by putting it [shock encounter] into words that I make it whole" (*MB* 66, 72). Similarly, in a later shock-rapture experience, also in the "garden at St. Ives," Woolf describes looking down at a "flower bed by the front door":

> 'That is the whole', I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it suddenly seemed plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later. (*MB* 71)

This "rapture" experience, as well as her first rapture moment in the garden, both involve experiencing an interconnected oneness between herself, the flower, and all of the earth. Later in this passage, Woolf writes that this experience of shock gave her a "state of satisfaction" when she observed that the flower and earth "is the whole" (*MB* 71).

Woolf's experiences of rapture are the same crucial shock encounters which enable her to write, which give her access to her philosophy that "we are the thing itself," the aesthetic wholeness of herself and the world which inspires her to write in the first place (*MB* 72). Although the specific 'content' of the rapture experience itself is subject to change with each iteration, I argue that for Woolf, an experience of wonder, oneness, and the material interdependency of life are consistent in these moments of rapture. The important "thought" Woolf knew would be "useful to me later" evidently correlates with a profound and mystical unity with the planet. Furthermore, although the term rapture typically connotes an overwhelming intensity, Woolf's language surrounding these experiences repeatedly suggests less profuse affects like "satisfaction, " "delight," or "pleasure" (*MB* 71, 72, 98). These encounters are not ones of fear or dread, but rather that which empowers and teaches.

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Thus far, I have demonstrated various motifs which bubble up throughout "Sketch": the experiences of shock, rapture, and ecstasy, an interest in translucence as well as the materiality, sound, and imagery of water and air, all of which are united in a materialist belief that "we are the thing itself." These motifs can be understood in relation to Woolf's theories of memory, in particular, through her motif of the body as a vessel.

There are two passages in which Woolf employs this image of the body as a translucent vessel. In the first moment, Woolf is discussing how the act of writing about her memories enables a rapturous immersion into reality — she describes, "While I write this the light glows; an apple becomes vivid green; I respond all through me; but how? Figuratively I could snapshot what I mean by some image; I am a porous vessel afloat on sensation; or a sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays; and so on" (*MB* 133). In this moment of apparent rapture, brought on by the act of writing about her childhood memory of the waves — Woolf's environment becomes intensified and sensuous. Amidst this, she is drawn toward the image of herself as a "porous vessel" as well as "a sensitive plate." The body as 'porous' suggests the substances traveling in and out of the body, as if she too is translucent in some way, permitting movement *through* her body. Furthermore, the image of her body as a "sensitive plate" suggests that energy which passes around or through her is also somehow inscribed onto the body, marking her body like a blank piece of film awaiting light. This is a monumental moment for Woolf's own theory of the body's relationship to memory — her experience of rapture draws her toward a poeticization of the body as a vessel receptive to stimuli or sensations from some force outside of the body. This suggests Woolf believes that rather than memories being always and necessarily stored somewhere within the body, as in, either in the conscious or unconscious systems, sensations themselves can be present outside of the body and re-enter the body somehow. Woolf reiterates the idea that "things

we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds … [and] are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them?" (*MB* 67). Thus, Woolf's reconfiguration of shock as rapture draws her towards a distinctly Woolfian figuration of the body within time: the body as a blank container receptive to memories which come from beyond the body, memories which can have an existence independent of the body and mind, and yet still somehow re-enter the body and take form as subjective memories.

Later, Woolf develops this image further when she questions her use of writing scenes to represent the past:

> A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative. This confirms in me my instinctive notion… that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, *the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality*; that is a scene… that is a proof of their 'reality'... Is this liability of mine to scene receiving the origin of my writing impulse? (*MB* 142)

Does the cracking of the "sealing matter" mark the shock experience? If such an experience allows for the flooding of reality, does that represent a unity with the material or stimuli outside of the vessel? Perhaps such an experience of reality "flooding in" to the otherwise vessel marks a merging with the material flow of reality. Such an understanding lends itself to Woolf's experience of "rapture," which brings about an experience of unity and oneness with the materiality of the world.

Lastly, after thinking about her sister Stella on a boat ride, Woolf suddenly notes:

> The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. *In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions*, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else, when the film on the camera reaches only the eye. But to feel the present sliding over the depths of the past, peace is necessary. The present must be smooth, habitual. (*MB* 98)

One immediately striking element with this passage is Woolf's characterization of different modes of presence. Less preferable is the present of when "it presses so close that you can feel nothing else," curiously resonating with her descriptions of trauma in which she felt "powerless" against some imminent danger (*MB* 71–2). Furthermore, her description of a mode of experience in which "the film on the camera reaches only the eye" recalls Benjamin's critiques of modern communication technology, primarily the camera, in which reality can be more intimately and directly captured at the expense of alienating the subject from living through experience in a particular, local, and more fully memorable way.[17] Woolf approaches a similar photographic image later in the text when she describes herself as a "sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays" (*MB* 133). Thus, Woolf links her aesthetic interests in translucence, the poetic image of body as a vessel or photosensitive lens, and the experience of rapture, with a modality of experiencing time.

Additionally, Woolf's use of spatial prepositions — the present as "backed by the past" or "sliding over" the past — forms a planar relation between the present and past. Woolf reiterates the past as something deep below the utter materiality of the present, noting how one can "see through the surface" to experience the "depths" of the past. The present as something which is "sliding over" the past suggests a para-movement between present-past, an unhinging of each from a static relationship of before-after. In place of a linear progression of time, Woolf's model presents time as a fluid and translucent material within which one is positioned.

Thus situated, one can more fully make sense of Woolf's belief that we are "sealed vessels afloat upon what is convenient to call reality" (*MB* 142) or that she is a "porous vessel afloat upon a sensation" (*MB* 133), or even "if it [life] is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills — then my

[17] Walter Benjamin, *Some Motifs in Baudelaire*

bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory" (*MB* 64).[18] The subject as a "vessel" is a porous and translucent body which is subject to receive sensations and stimuli from beyond the subject. These sensations, as they are inscribed upon the subject, are reiterated as memories. Furthermore, Woolf's attachment to the aesthetics of translucence and diffused lighting through material objects, which recurs throughout her St. Ives memories, follow through in her theories of time. Translucence as an aesthetic principle makes clear two new Woolfian theories of time. First, that the uppermost layer of materiality (the present) is a translucent surface through which images, meanings, associations, sounds (projections of the past) can shine. Secondly, the body itself is a translucent vessel onto which these sensations of the past are inscribed. This unhinging of traditional temporal positioning does not mean that Woolf considers the present and past to be homogenized experience. Woolf emphasizes that in applying her poetics of time, she is not caught up "thinking of the past" but suggests a sort of mindful poetics of time in which she is "most fully in the present" (*MB* 98).

[18] Perhaps a scientist might understand Woolf's "reality" - recalling her earlier image of reality as cotton-wool - as the buoyant, attractive, and wave-structured fabric of space-time. Gillian Beer has written on Woolf's connection with 20th century physics, in particular, wave-particle theory in her book *Common Ground*

Chapter 2

Rhythmic Time in *The Waves*: Unity-Dispersion, Materialism, and History

> I read some history: it is suddenly all alive, branching forwards and backwards and connected with every kind of thing that seemed entirely remote before. I seem to feel Napoleon's influence on our quiet evening in the garden for instance - I think I see for a moment how our minds are all threaded together - how any live mind today is of the very same stuff of Plato's and Euripides. It is only a continuation and development of the same thing. It is this common mind that binds the whole world together; and all the world is mind. Then I read a poem say - and the same thing is repeated. I feel as though I had grasped the central meaning of the world, and all these poets and historians and philosophers were only following out paths branching from that centre in which I stand. And then - some speck of dust gets into my machine I suppose, and the whole thing goes wrong again.
>
> Virginia Woolf *PA* 178-9, 1 July 1903

> The flower … is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives.
>
> Virginia Woolf *TW* 229

Coming off the success of *Orlando* (1928), Virginia Woolf began her next project: "What I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole, whatever it includes. Say the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea" (*Diary* 209, November 28, 1928). Woolf initially set out to write a novel that would track the life of a single, mystical woman. Over time, the narrative structure fell away over time as her experimentations yielded something entirely new: "I say I am writing The Waves to a rhythm not to a plot" (*Diary* 316, September 2, 1930).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the rhythmic structure of *The Waves* brings to light Woolf's theories on time. Put another way, I will search the novel for micro- and macro-cosmic iterations of the waves as the poetic rhythm that Woolf observes structures our experience of reality. Gillian Beer describes *The Waves* as "seeking out the rhythms of the body"; in the

introduction, I defined the Woolfian 'body' as the variable position from which one experiences reality, a translucent receiver for channels and flows of sensations (Beer 74). In this chapter, I will also demonstrate how Woolf's search for the rhythms of the body coincides with her poeticization of time, in relation to her notion of extra-voluntary memory.

The rhythm of the waves, drawn literally from hearing the rising and crashing waves outside of Woolf's childhood window, defines the structure of *The Waves*. As established in the first chapter of this thesis, the St. Ives memory is foundational for Woolf's epistemological aesthetic. This memory also carries within it the rhythmic structure which Woolf perceives in our experience of time; these rhythms are subsequently made visible in her novel *The Waves*. Beer noted the link between the waves and Woolf's conceptions of time: "In the image of the waves, which succeeded to her first thoughts of moths or farmyard noises, Woolf found a form that perfectly expressed at once the different measures of chronological and of psychic time" (Beer 88–9). As I will show across this chapter, Woolf's novel does not represent the waves as a signifier of being in time, but rather, textually manifests the rhythm of waves as that which structures our being. The waves permeate Woolf's text fractal-like, setting a rhythm for personal interactions, immersion in the moment in time (and within that experience of time, a persistent cycling between memories of the individual, memories of friends, nature, national history, as well as primordial or primeval pre-history), experiences of release from subjectivity, as well as a rhythmic relation between consciousness to a stable body within form and formlessness. In previous chapters I have discussed Woolf's theories of memory in relation to her childhood memories of hearing the waves crash at St. Ives. In particular, Woolf's apparent extra-voluntary memory, which articulates a will beyond the subjective body and rather a channeling and inscription of stimuli from outside of the body, is poeticized to the rhythm of the waves.

The cyclical movement of the waves as related to one's experience in time can be made legible textually as the motif of "Unity-Dispersion." Although critics in the past have noticed this repetition in Woolf's literature, they often make sense of it through the theories of Freud, Jacques Lacan, or Gilles Deleuze.[19] As established in previous sections, my project is distinct in that my central "rod" is Woolf's own proposed relation to the past. My approach should not be understood as strictly formalist, but rather as an attempt to see Woolf herself as an imaginative theorist on time, the body, aesthetics, and epistemology. Thus situated, I will proceed with an exploration of the various iterations of the rhythm of the waves throughout her novel, *The Waves,* and demonstrate how the text clarifies Woolf's theories of subjectivity and time.

I proceed with a diary entry, written while Woolf was still working on *To the Lighthouse* and noting her stylistic progression:

> I am now and then haunted by some semimystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident - say the fall of a flower - might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist– nor time either. But I don't want to force this. (*Diary* 118, 23 November 1926)

Woolf writes of a paradoxical approach towards representing time — through its obliteration, time becomes cohesive, material and tangible: "future shall somehow blossom out of the past". Similarly, the totality of time is made apparent in "one incident". Only through a total negation of time as traditionally conceived — linear, orderly, changing — can time be reconfigured and made visible as a physical encounter, perhaps "the fall of a flower". These small incidents litter *The Waves*, permitting an approach to the dynamics of time within the novel and for Woolf as a theorist.

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[19] For example, Makiko Minow-Pinkney's chapter on *The Waves* from her book, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* addresses the rhythm of bodily assemblage and dispersion as demonstration of Lacanian and Kristevian *ecriture feminine*.

Part of what makes reading *The Waves* so strange and challenging is Woolf's representation of time. Within the novel, Woolf's depiction of time does not permit the reader a detached and intellectual definition of time, but rather implies an experience of time (potentially one outside of language) through its formal structure, as well as the imagistic poetry the viewer is unrelentingly soaked in. The totality of the novel's expression of Woolf's theory of time can be immediately seen through the novel's use of present tense narration, what Beer calls "pure present tense" (*TW* 82). The narrative dialogue, momentarily inhabits six characters — Neville, Louis, Bernard, Rhoda, Jinny, and Susan — and remains stylistically consistent across all of them. As Beer puts it, the characters "share sensory experience, though they are later sorted socially." Woolf represents these experiences as at once individual and communal through a seemingly detached narrative voice which can "stand further back from life" (*Collected Essays II*, 224–5). The narrative tense through which narrative tentatively takes shape "implicitly suggests self-observation and a kind of instantaneous act of memory, the activity of the watching mind" (Beer 82). That Woolf's tense usage implies "self observation" and "instantaneous act of memory" is remarkable in relation to her sketched theories on memory. The narrative "pure present tense" marks that in subjective existence, the characters are engaged in a form of perpetual inscription, of continual *remembering* of the present moment they are unfolding with; each present moment carries with it an inscription of sensations.

Furthermore, Beer's attention to Woolf's tense usage is visualized within *The Waves* through prepositional spacing between the characters and their perception of the past. This is exemplified by the quiet motif in which characters repeatedly note walking or being *between* two distinct spaces. When the friends are children learning their grammar lessons, Neville remarks, "Each tense … means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are

differences in this world, upon whose verge I step. For this is only a beginning" (*TW* 21). The employment of tense situates meaning within an order of time. Neville's remark brings the prepositional spacing of *between* as an experience of time. The figuration of tense as a "verge" suggests tense usage as a tentative point of stability besides a depth, emptiness, or space beneath. Given the spatial-temporal link of tenses as a "verge," this passage implies a potential for temporal slippage within the experience of language. Neville also links tense usage with the "distinctions" and "differences" of the world, "upon whose verge" Neville steps. Put another way, Neville makes clear the experiential effect of language as it relates to one's experience of time — by reconfiguring one's use of language, one steps into different spaces of time. Woolf's 'pure present tense' then stands in a between-space of the present while straddling a temporal-spatial verge between, alongside, or above the past.

One way this temporal verge is made visible is through the way 'events' in the novel are depicted as simultaneously everyday and allegorical. Woolf made clear in her personal writings that she wanted to reconfigure the notion of what an 'event' is, in short, that "the actual event practically does not exist– nor time either" (*Diary*, 23 November 1926, 118). We can begin to see what Woolf meant by her denial of the event and time when the characters of *The Waves* meet for dinner late in the novel. Rhoda observes:

> The waiter comes; he brings bread. But I see the side of a cup like a mountain and only parts of antlers, and the brightness of the side of that jug like a crack in darkness with wonder and terror. Your voices sound like trees creaking in a forest… Behind you is a white crescent of foam, and *fishermen on the verge of the world are drawing in nets and casting them.* A wind ruffles the topmost leaves of primeval trees. (Yet here we sit at Hampton Court.) Parrots shrieking break the intense stillness of the jungle. (Here the trams start.) The swallow dips her wings in midnight pools. (Here we talk.) That is the circumference that I try to grasp as we sit together. (*TW* 223)

While Rhoda observes the present environment unfolding around her — the waiter bringing bread, the materiality of a cup — she also experiences sensations of prehistory: sounds

and images of nature and the jungle. Her friend's voices are the creaking of trees, the brightness of a cup is "a crack in darkness with wonder and terror".[20] Notably, Rhoda observes a spatial relation between her friends and the waves, "behind you is a white crescent of foam" with the fishermen on the "verge of the world" drawing in nets.[21] In this sense, the 'behind' realm of the waves and fisherman can be seen as a twilight realm in which meaning or sensations are gathered and reconfigured before protruding back into the upper surface of the present moment.

Rhoda's description exemplifies the way reality can be interpreted as grand, allegorical, and even primordial, while also being quotidian. This simultaneity is made clear in the repetition of parentheticals within the narration, suggesting the interlinked metonymies triggered by each sensation and observation. The parrot's shrieking also marks the starting of the trams; the swallow dips her "wings in the midnight pool … while we talk".[22] Thus, the linguistic effort to net reality — "the circumference that I try to grasp" — is figured as a momentary collision (as waves rise for moments coming together) and subsequently dispersed by the necessity to go on with life, "[but] since these rolls of bread and wine are needed by me … I must go through the antics of the individual" (*TW* 223–4).

This recurrent phasing between quotidian and eternal[23] is exemplified further by an interaction Jinny has while on a train.[24] The train enters the tunnel, darkening the interior and

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[20] The experience of wonder and terror within the present moment suggests a possible reading of the uncanny which lies in the present surroundings. I am reminded of Heidegger's translation of Antigone's 'Ode to Man' in which the uncanny (fearful/inhabitual/wondrous) is present at all times, and what is the most uncanny of all is the human will to distance themself from that which is uncanniness. Heidegger also often translated "logos" as "to gather", which resonates with Woolf's image of the fishermen's nets.

[21] Throughout her novels and life writing, Woolf repeatedly describes the relationship between language and reality as a "netting," as an act of capturing through filtration.

[22] The image of the swallow dipping its wings is a pre-historical motif which recurs throughout the novel, see pages 53, 105, 164

[23] If I am to set up a dualism against the trivial, it might be in opposition to the eternal, as well as perhaps the metaphorical or even allegorical. The characters experience a multi-dimensional spectrum rather than any sort of linear polarity.

[24] It should be made clear that the perpetual phasing between present and past does not mark a dialectical synthesis of a new temporality, but rather a simultaneity of experience, an interconnected dependence of present and past as spatially and materially tangible realms.

transforming the once-transparent windows into reflective surfaces. In the reflection of one window, Jinny notices a man looking at her:

> The telegraph poles bob up incessantly; one is felled, another rises. Now we roar and swing into a tunnel. The gentleman pulls up the window. I see reflections on the shining glass which lines the tunnel. My body instantly of its own accord puts forth a frill under his gaze. My body lives a life of its own. Now the black window glass is green again. We are out of the tunnel. He reads his paper. But we have exchanged the approval of our bodies. There is then a great society of bodies, and mine is introduced; mine has come into the room where the gilt chairs are. (*TW* 63)

This passage is tuned to the rhythm of waves: Jinny notices the rising and falling of the telegraph poles; the narrative focus and its changing observations come and go, "Now we roar and swing," building up the physicality of sound and "swing," the text lurches forward and back. When the gentleman pulls up his window, Jinny's body, "of its own accord," responds with an amiable gesture allowing "the approval of our bodies" which welcomes Jinny into "the room where the gilt chairs are." In this moment, a seemingly hollow gesture is marked as Jinny's allegorical entrance into society. The gesture is rapidly and mechanically performed, agency and autonomy (and thus essentialized subjectivity) are drained from the action, yet the event maintains personal significance as Jinny marks her welcoming into the *polis*.

There is a particularly Benjaminian reading of this scene in that Jinny's fleeting interaction is mediated by the coincidental reflection of a window pane. The face of the gentleman is, for a moment, captured and relayed by the flat glass surface acting as a photographic lens. Such a moment recalls Woolf's musing from "A Sketch of the Past," where she understands her body as a "sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays" as well as the recurrent figuration of her body as a "vessel afloat upon a sensation" (*MB* 133). Jinny's brief encounter here develops such a self-image in support of a Woolfian extra-voluntary memory, as her encounter (which occurs as Rhoda's body moves on its own accord) is reflected (thus transformed into a visible image) momentarily upon a glass plate (the window of the train). A force beyond Rhoda's consciousness

brings her to act, and these same external rhythms also register the encounter on a flat glass panel, capturing, reflecting, and thus displaying and re-inscribing the event as an image which Rhoda encounters. The moment is registered by the collective narrative consciousness as allegorically marking Jinny's entrance into the "great society of bodies". The description uncannily figures society as a physical assemblage of bodies which emphasizes the simultaneity of allegory and literality (or triviality) in regards to Jinny's interpretation of reality.

One last moment to demonstrate this phasing between the quotidian and allegorical. Here, the children are running through a house and pass by a looking glass:

> At home the hay waves over the meadows. My father leans upon the stile, smoking. In the house one door bangs and then another, as the summer air puffs along the empty passages. Some old picture perhaps swings on the wall. A petal drops from the rose in the jar. The farm wagons stress the hedges with tufts of hay. All this I see, I always see, as I pass the looking glass on the landing, with Jinny in front and Rhoda lagging behind … (*TW* 41)

Susan narrates this particular passage, and notes the image of her family home, her father, and the "hay waves" which she sees as she passes the looking glass. Woolf again emphasizes the camera-like surface of the looking-glass as a reflective plane which momentarily captures an image. The reflection, in this instance, bears with it a rapid array of memories and associations. It is as if in encountering Susan's own self image in the mirror, she also sees all of the metonymic projections her image suggests. However, Susan does not simply see her father, it is not as if she is reminded of photos of herself or situations relevant to her reflection. Susan sees the "summer air puffs along the empty passages … A petal drops from the rose in the jar" (*TW* 41). Loaded into the quick series of images are moments of a-subjectivity — the natural world unfolding which is not directly related to an embodied subject. In particular, Susan's image of summer air in an empty hallway exemplifies those experiences which lie outside of the subject or body — invisible air particles travel through an empty hallway. That Susan sees a flash of this image when she

looks in the mirror implies that even those experiences far removed from the subject can somehow be 'remembered' by the subject.

Later in the novel, Rhoda describes how her friends stand "embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together" (*TW* 222). Woolf here may be experimenting with her notion from "A Sketch of the Past" that sensations might have an "existence independent of our minds," and that given the right poetic or technical approach, one might access those memories (*MB* 67). Susan at this moment is then able to access these sensations which seemingly existed independent of her body. The forces that enable this encounter can be seen in the rhythms which structure the characters' experience of reality. I will proceed then by exploring the various manifestations of the rhythms of the waves.

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Woolf's primary St. Ives memory of the waves manifests itself in the text through various sounds, movements, processes, and gestures throughout the novel. Early on, Louis hears the church bell, "[t]here is the first stroke of the church bell … the others follow; one, two; one, two; one, two" (*TW* 11). The phrasing of this repetition recalls Woolf's description of hearing "the waves breaking, one, two, one, two" outside her nursery as a child (*MB* 64). Later in the novel, when the children travel into an idyllic garden world, they remark, "I hear nothing. That is only the murmur of the waves in the air" (*TW* 18–19). Within this same passage, Rhoda describes herself as a ship-like vessel, "my ships may ride the waves… one sails alone. That is my ship… The waves rise; their crests curl… [my ship] mounts the wave and sweeps before the gale and reaches the islands …" (*TW* 18–19). Rhoda's body is figured as a vessel, momentarily floating alone, but inevitably reaching the stability of land. Later in this first narrative section, Bernard thinks back on the events of a single day:

> Pouring down the walls of my mind, running together, the day falls copious, resplendent. Now I tie my pyjamas loosely round me, and lie under this thin sheet afloat in the shallow light which is like a film of water drawn over my eyes by a wave. I hear through it far off, far away, faint and far, the chorus beginning; wheels; dogs; men shouting; church bells; the chorus beginning. (*TW* 27)

The sensations of the day are figured as fluidly "pouring down the walls" of his mind. The language throughout Bernard's description points to similar aesthetic motifs of translucent light, filmy veils, floating vessels, as well as simply the sound of the church bells which is sonically associated with the cyclical murmurs of the waves.

There are several other moments throughout *The Waves* which are directly sourced from Woolf's early childhood memories. As mentioned in my chapter on "Sketch," one of Woolf's first moments of rapture involved a mystical revelation with a flower and the unity of the earth. This moment is echoed when Louis similarly lays in a field and notes, "I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world … I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs" (*TW* 12). Another instance of the novel's relation to Woolf's experiences at St. Ives includes Woolf's childhood encounter with suicide. Woolf recalls a realization of the horror of death when she walked near a looming apple tree: "It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it" (*MB* 71). Early in *The Waves*, young Neville's memory of a dead body is linked with an impassable apple tree:

> He was found with his throat cut. The apple-tree leaves became fixed in the sky … I was unable to lift my foot up the stair … There were the floating, pale-grey clouds; and the immitigable tree; the implacable tree … the ripple of my life was unavailing. I was unable to pass by. There was an obstacle. "I cannot surmount this unintelligible obstacle," I said. And the others passed on. But we are doomed, all of us by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass. (*TW* 24-5)

Neville's reckoning with the apple tree becomes a clear symbol for the traumatic experience as an unintelligible and ungraspable experience. As an occurrence so overwhelming and strange,

trauma paralyzes the body's basic abilities to respond and act, both he and Woolf are unable to pass the tree.

Similarly, Bernard's final soliloquy begins with the description, "In the beginning, there was the nursery, with the windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea," as well as another memory of "the garden and the canopy of the currant leaves which seemed to enclose everything; the flowers burning like sparks upon the depths of green; a rat wreathing with maggots under a rhubarb leaf, the fly going buzz, buzz, buzz, upon the nursery ceiling … all of these things happen in one second and last for ever" (*TW* 239–40). The first description clearly relates to Woolf's primary experience of hearing the waves through her bedroom window, and the second, more sensual and embodied description is drawn from Woolf's experiences at the garden at St. Ives, described by Woolf "as if everything were ripe; humming; sunny; smelling so many smells at once" (*MB* 66). Both Woolf's and Bernard's descriptions of their childhood garden employ frequent alliteration and onomatopoeia, which Beer has noted "represents the random communities of language, the waves of sound continuing on beyond sense" (Beer 50). These similarities between memory and novel are notable in their evidencing of the persistent influence of Woolf's personal memories on her writing. However, the motif of the waves functions in far more complicated and radical ways throughout *The Waves*.

One way we can illuminate the significance of the waves as it relates to Woolf's theories of time is through the moments of unity and dispersion. Unity-dispersion is a textual motif in Woolf's novels which demonstrates the cyclical dynamics characters experience in regards to various polarities: individual/collective, form/formlessness, liberation/subjectification, present/past. It is important to make clear, however, that such dynamics are not isolated nor are

their movement defined along a single polarity. Rather, as the following textual examples will demonstrate, these shifting experiences are multi-directional, intermeshed, and overlapping.

This formal interest in unity-dispersion, resembling the structure of the waves, can be seen in the novel's recurrent imagery of diffusion, dispersion, and disintegration. The opening interlude describes the sun rising:

> Green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she [the sun] raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous … Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it into a million atoms of soft blue. (*TW* 7)

In plain language, this is a description of the sun rising. The attention to fibrous diffusion, the expansion of energy and light out from a single source, an atomistic dispersion and disintegration, all articulate a collective rhythmic pattern of energy. This movement can also be easily seen to be the cyclical structure of waves as they rise and crash, coming together momentarily only to break and disperse. In this same opening passage, Woolf also figures the waves as cloth material — echoing her philosophical discovery that "behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern" (*TW* 72) — which "became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other perpetually" (*TW* 7). The waves then mark a multi-layered cycle of movement and attraction - the emphasis on thick strokes under the surface "following each other" makes clear Woolf's theorizing of multi-directional flows, channels, and planes of energy and stimuli exceeding the boundaries of individual body, machine, or state, as macrocosmic assemblages which move to the rhythm of the waves.

There are several other moments across the novel that echo similar poetic language. For example, a later interlude passage describes, "Light descending in floods dissolved the separate foliation into one green mound," (*TW* 150) or Louis's observation of "The roar of London" as:

> Motor-cars, vans, omnibuses pass and repass continuously. All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds – wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merrymakers – all churned into one sound, steel blue, circular. Then a siren hoots. At that shores slip away, chimneys flatten themselves, the ship makes for the open sea. (*TW* 135)

Here Woolf's language captures the flow of movement in an urban setting — figuring the movements and sounds of humans and machines alike into a spectral assemblage, reconfiguration, dispersion, flattening, and reopening. The form of this passage is molded to the processes of unity and dispersion which it poetically captures: beginning with variable stimuli, "all are merged into one," back out into "all separate sounds," then "churched into one sound". Suddenly "a siren hoots" triggering another dispersion and uncoupling of the variable stimuli, channeling them away from their momentary unity, cohesion, and intelligibility as "the ship makes for the open sea".[25]

Such macrocosmic assemblage is brought into the intimate bodily experience later in the novel as Bernard sits and thinks:

> Muscles, nerves, intestines, blood-vessels, all that makes the coil and spring of our being, the unconscious hum of the engine, as well as the dart and flicker of the tongue, functioned superbly. Opening, shutting; shutting, opening; eating, drinking; sometimes speaking – the whole mechanism seemed to expand, to contract, like the mainspring of a clock … I remarked with what magnificent vitality the atoms of my attention dispersed, swarmed round the interruption [phone ringing], assimilated the message, adapted themselves to a new state of affairs and had created, by the time I put back the receiver, a richer, a stronger, a more complicated world in which I was called upon to act my part and had no doubt whatever that I could do it. (*TW* 260)

Here Bernard notes the automatic and hive-like patterns of movement in his mind and body. There is all at once a interpolation and assimilation of the body into its external environment, adapting external elements into the body, observing the fully mechanical and extra-subjective processes linking body to environment, as well as inevitably recalling and restoring a sense of self, in which the entire process of assemblage-dispersion leads to a nationalist sense of duty to

[25] Here one can also see that the textual rhythm of the waves aligns with Woolf's broader epistemological and literary goals of "netting the fin" of reality as purely as possible, in the moments where reality "floods in" granting temporary access to mystical unity before the "vessel" closes off once more and restores us to "non-being".

"act my part". In this description, the biological and bodily act as one with the rhythmical and programmed movements of the mechanical. Bernard's body, the "whole mechanism … functioned superbly," growing and contracting, opening and shutting like "the mainspring of a clock" (*TW* 260).

Formally, this scene flows with the cyclical rhythms of the waves as his brain-body opens and shuts, turns on and off, assembles and disperses and assembles again like a school of fish instinctively compressing and suddenly dispersing in all directions only to reorganize once more. Similarly, earlier in the novel, Bernard sits in school and observes, "I am not one and simple, but complex and many. Bernard in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive … I have *to effect different transitions*; have *to cover the entrances and exits* of several different men who alternatively act their parts as Bernard" (*TW* 76, emphasis added). Perhaps most radically, Bernard describes:

> Underneath, and at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated. I sympathise effusively; I also sit like a toad in a hole, receiving with perfect coldness whatever comes. Very few of you who are now discussing me have the double capacity to feel, to reason… I also am too complex. In my case something remains floating, unattached. (*TW* 77)

From these descriptions, we get the sense that Bernard figures subjectivity as something radically fluid and adaptable. Given the persistent re-iteration of unity-dispersion, there seems to be some loose awareness, something "floating, unattached" which sits like "a toad in a hole" and receives stimuli from beyond. That cold, pure, un-identifiable awareness encrusts itself through a persistent pattern of disassemblage and reconfiguration to external stimuli. As Bernard puts it later, "We are forever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities" (*TW* 118).

Such descriptions through Bernard further evidence Woolf's theory of an extra-voluntary memory inscription. The Woolfian body is a "sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays," which opens and closes itself in relation to stimuli and subsequently reconfigures itself as stimuli are impressed or inscribed upon it. This process of inscription from beyond the subject is what

enables the individual subject to momentarily take form — only through temporarily rising to that which is external (rising toward unity like a wave) can a stable "Bernard" take form, only to be dispersed like a crashing wave in the next moment. It is important here to distinguish that Bernard's machine-like movements are not a presentation of modern life as mimicking the machine, but rather that Woolf is showing body, machine, and atomistic material movement as all tuned to similar rhythmic movements, which arguably go beyond consciousness and history.[26]

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These rhythms of unity and dispersion are rendered in *The Waves* as determining the subject's relation to history. The experience of history is most often noted throughout the novel by Louis, who, contemplating his status as an Australian and a writer, remarks:

> I put off this unenviable body - my large nose, my thin lips, my colonial accent - and inhabit space. I am then Virgil's companion, and Plato's. But I am also one who will force himself to desert these windy and moonlit territories, these midnight wanderings, and confront the grained oak doors. I will achieve in my life – Heaven grant that it be not long – some gigantic amalgamation between the two discrepancies so hideously apparent to me. Out of my suffering I will do it. I will knock. I will enter. (*TW* 52–3)

Louis reckons with his utterly physical existence, as well as the particular characteristics of his facial features and language made "uneviable" as a colonial subject, a historically abject body

[26] In Woolf's earlier novels, like *The Voyage Out*, bodies are noted for their rhythmic hum like the Victorian machines they are surrounded with. An expository passage describes, "Simultaneously, the clock wheezed one, and the gong sounded, beginning softly, working itself into a frenzy, and ceasing…The gong had been sounded in the garden, and by degrees recumbent figures rose and strolled in to eat, since the time had come for them to feed again" (106). The machinery convulses in a striking moment alongside the gong in the garden, blending between the seemingly natural noises of the garden, with the traditionally man-made gong and the mechanical clock. The clock is described as distinctly bodily: it 'wheezes' and works "itself into a frenzy" (106), as if undergoing the neuroses of an anxious patient. The ringing of the clock and gong also triggers the hotel residents to move inside and "feed again" (106 Woolf). The particular phrasing of automatic 'feed' time connotes a farm-like association of scheduled eating, a required and scheduled nutrient in-take for optimal human functioning. In this passage, the clock convulses like a human body while the humans mechanically get up to eat at their scheduled time - the 'natural' humans act robotically as the mechanical clock has bodily spasms. Later in the novel, the protagonist Rachel sits reading: "The morning was hot, and the exercise of reading left her mind contracting and expanding like the mainspring of a clock" (114). I include these passages here to show that Woolf, since her debut novel, has demonstrated an interest in the rhythmic relationship between bodies and their environments. Her later philosophy is distinct in that she began to articulate a greater rhythm beyond her historical context of late Victorian industrialization.

which, he notes, uncannily inhabits space. Bernard is at once the companion of Virgil and Plato, but he also speaks of deserting "windy and moonlit territories" and "midnight wanderings." Louis figures history and tradition as a barren twilight landscape and proclaims he will give up wandering such environs and instead achieve "some gigantic amalgamation between the two discrepancies so hideously apparent to me." Louis wrangles with his own grotesque physicality, of containing an unenviable body, of being a subject created through history and imperialism (as a companion of tradition), and yet also reflects a desire to push beyond the confined subjectivity which history has produced for him. Like a mystic, Louis's suffering may enable him to "achieve" a release from subjectification and a realization of some material unity beyond separateness.

Throughout the novel, Louis repeatedly reiterates the experience of history colliding into his present body. This can be seen when he observes himself writing his name:

> Upon these white sheets I indent my name. The whisper of leaves, water running down gutters, green depths flecked with dahlias or zinnias; I, now a duke, now Plato, companion of Socrates; the tramp of dark men and yellow men migrating east, west, north and south; the eternal procession, women going with attaché cases down the Strand as they went once with pitchers to the Nile; all the furled and close-packed leaves of my many-folded life are now summed in my name; inside cleanly and barely on the sheet. (*TW* 167)

In marking his name, Louis carries the totality of history and prehistory — flashes of various leaders, philosophers, cliches of ancient civilization and prehistory as well as of modernity are all the "close-packed leaves of my many-folded life … now summed in my name" (*TW* 167). Within the minute gesture of inscribing his identity onto paper, the act of marking, externalizing, and iterating his identity, also unifies and reifies history in the present. The surging sea of history is channeled through Louis's signature. Not only are the personal human histories loaded into his writing, but also "the whisper of leaves, water running down gutters, green depths flecked with dahlias …" Just like Susan's mirror encounter, in which personal memories and a-subjective

sensations were simultaneously called up, Louis's channeling of history includes fragmented sounds, textures, and sensations of nature alongside the 'great men of history' and narrativized events.

Such a channeling, the stream of sensations outside of the subject, yields the old hermeneutical paradox between knowledge of the past and our experience of the present. In the encounter with an ever-changing present, the burden of history confuses: "The weight of the world is on our shoulders; its vision is through our eyes; if we blink or look aside, or turn back to finger what Plato said or remember Napoleon and his conquests, we inflict on the world the injury of some obliquity" (*TW* 169). Louis demonstrates a persistent hermeneutical tension between the knowledge of history with the present moment: he makes sense of the present through language and thus through that which is historical; he thus acts with respect to the weight of history. However, to make sense of the present through the past is inevitably to "inflict on the world the injury of some obliquity" (*TW* 169). Critically, this tension occurs within the body, and in the body's interpretation of reality. History uses our organs, seeing "through our eyes," following our every gesture as we "blink or look aside." The body becomes a site in which the momentary unity and inevitable dispersion of history are manifested in the present. This rhythm becomes a source of anxiety for Louis, "I seem already to have lived many thousand years. But if I now shut my eyes, if I fail to realize the meeting-place of past and present, that I sit in a third-class railway carriage full of boys going home for the holidays, human history is defrauded of a moment's vision. Its eye, that would see through me, shuts" (*TW* 66). Louis feels a pressure to maintain an awareness of the interdependency between present and past. If he fails to do this, Louis may be stripped of his bodily connection to history — history will shut its eye, denying him some sense of historical community or continuity.

That this tension between history and present is in the body is of no small consequence. In fact, the infinite interdependence of history leads is what inevitably permits Louis to feel coherent and defined within a body:

> Louis said "I have signed my name … already twenty times. I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name. Clear-cut and unequivocal am I too. Yet a vast inheritance of experience is packed in me. I have lived thousands of years. I am like a worm that has eaten its way through the wood of a very old oak beam. But now I am compact; now I am gathered together this fine morning." (*TW* 167)

Louis is at once a pronounced, protruding, forward-pushing outgrowth from an infinitely receding series of events; and yet, he is also "clear-cut and unequivocal," "compact" and "gathered together;" he is undeniably of the present physical world. His present self is inscribed over and over — per Beer's analysis of tense — persistently observing the self and marking each moment as memory. Louis here exemplifies the perpetual inscription of Woolf's extra-voluntary memory in relation to history, the body is always in a process of taking on inscription, memory, and so on from history, but is also marking history itself, expressing itself outward. There is a simultaneous inward and outward gesture in which the body takes on the weight of history while also producing and manifesting it. Woolf's interest in unity and dispersion maintains itself in these figurations in that the various dispersed flows of stimuli and events throughout history are channelled into Louis's present, singular, and defined body.

But what does the word 'history' even mean within *The Waves*? Two passages may illuminate this dark screen. Given the novel's utmost focus on the present moment, and of the slippery, indecipherable, confusing, fleeting, perpetually morphing experience of the present moment, history in *The Waves* can be understood as a momentary position of stability and intelligibility in which one's body is related to a seemingly infinite set of recursive ideas, sensations, projections, and assumptions. This sense of history can be seen in one of the later

dinner scenes where the friends all come together. Susan and Jinny speak of the present moment; Louis, however, directs their attention toward history:

> But listen … to the world moving through abysses of infinite space. It roars; the lighted strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilization; the Nile; and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in abysses of time, in the darkness … But now listen, tick, tick; hoot, hoot; the world has hailed us back to it. I heard for one moment the howling winds of darkness as we passed beyond life. Then tick, tick (the clock); then hoot, hoot (the cars). We are landed; we are on shore; we are sitting, six of us, at a table. It is the memory of my nose that recalls me. (*TW* 225)

History then is figured within this rhythm of the waves, of a phasing back and forth between a sort of catastrophic loss alongside restoration and presence. The inertia of the historic archive maintains the character's formal material separateness; the mechanical sounds of the city keep them in step with linear time as their bodies react to sounds and feelings. Louis begins with a call to "listen," a plea to attend to their present sensations. After recounting the limitations of a linear and traditional historical narrative — "we are gone … we are extinct … in the darkness" — the sensations of the present moment "hailed us back" to earth (*TW* 225). Notably, within this passage the characters are dissolved into the unintelligibility of a present moment *without* history, and restoration into the present moment also brings with it a restoration of separate, distinct identities: dissolved into darkness, "we are extinct, lost in abysses of time," and then back into form in the present, "we are sitting, six of us, at a table."

Thus, lack of history or lack of memory does not lead to a totally immersive here and now, but rather a submersion into the dark "abysses of time." History (or memory, the recurring and intelligible sensations of the past) is necessary to make sense of one's body and one's position. This is useful in showing Woolf as not directly opposed to history itself, but rather of the linear configurations of time and a thin "lightened strip" of history which includes only "Kings and Queens." The strangeness of encountering the monuments of this "lighted strip" takes on a comic absurdity later in this same scene:

> But how strange it seems set against the whirling abysses of infinite space a little figure with a golden teapot on his head. Soon one recovers a belief in figures: but not at once in what they put on their heads. Our English past – one inch of light. Then people put teapots on their heads and say, 'I am a King!' No, I try to recover, as we walk, the sense of time, but with that streaming darkness in my eyes I have lost my grip. (*TW* 227)

Bernard demonstrates a tangible confusion in regards to time — in one moment recovering "a belief in figures," an understanding of oneself in relation to people in the past, in another losing his "grip" to the "streaming darkness in my eyes" and an agnostic refusal to take up a single relation to history, the historical event, or time. These passages reflect Woolf's theory "that the actual event practically does not exist – nor time either," and her broader effort to unravel the assumed structures of history in favor of a more bodily theory of time (*Diary* 118, 23 November 1926).

So what takes the place of a linear narrative history? The waves. As Gillian Beer has pointed out, at the time of writing *The Waves*, Woolf had also been reading the work of the physical chemist John Tyndall, and quotes from his texts which she'd been reading: "Thus, while the waves pass onward horizontally, the individual particles are simply lifted up and down vertically. Observe a seafowl, or, if you are a swimmer, abandon yourself to the action of the waves; you are not carried forward, but simply rocked up and down" (Beer 89). Woolf's theory of history can then be seen as not linear progression, but cyclical reiteration. As Beer puts it, "the wave-form flows onwards but the substance is not transferred. Psychic life remains fluid yet strangely unchanging. Individuals do not move much: they reach the crest and then fall back" (Beer 89). Maureen Chun, building on Beer's writing, writes that Woolf's novels emphasize "the survival of prehistory in contemporary existence, rather than on contemporary life as the product of ongoing evolution" (Chun 89).

Such a model of history makes sense with the motif of unity-dispersion in which the subject repeatedly experiences subjective dispersal or diffusion followed by reassemblage and reconfiguration. While the physical structure of bodies changes in space-time, our psychic life cyclically reiterates itself. With such an understanding of history we can more fully make sense of Rhoda's description that her friends "stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together; are committed, have an attitude, with children, authority, fame, love, society …" (*TW* 222–3). Rhoda's description here directly addresses what it means for the waves to offer a model of time or history. The bodies of the friends are "embedded" in a material which is constructed out of "repeated moments," fragmented sensations and stimuli which, through their rhythmic dispersion and reassemblage, "run together" as the material fluid of time.

Similarly, Louis describes, "I am not single and entire as you are. I have lived a thousand lives already … I find relics of myself in the sand that women made thousands of years ago … What you see beside you, this man, this Louis, is only the cinders and refuse of something once splendid" (*TW* 127). Louis senses his body is made of the excremental leftovers of history molded once more into a new person. Such a notion of "cinders and refuse" formally aligns with Woolf's broader, primordial beginning of the novel, when she describes the color of the sea around the horizon "as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green" (*TW* 7). What is persistent across these several descriptions is a sense of mixed fluids which momentarily find stability and coherent configuration, before being mixed around once more.

Bernard brings all of these ideas together in his final monologue, where he ponders the illusions of the calendrical procession in favor of Woolf's more fluid theories of subjectivity and time:

> *Outside the undifferentiated forces roar*; inside we are very private, very explicit … *A shell forms upon the soft soul, nacreous, shiny, upon which sensations tap their beaks in*

> *vain* … But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights – elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing – that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner. While one straightens the fork so precisely on the table-cloth, a thousand faces mop and mow. *There is nothing one can fish up in a spoon; nothing one can call an event*. *Yet it is alive too and deep, this stream. Immersed in it I would stop between one mouthful and the next*, and look intently at a vase, perhaps with one red flower, while a reason struck me, a sudden revelation … after which on I trotted taking stock with *renewed delight* of ties and things in shop-windows.
>
> 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. Faces recur, faces and faces – they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble. (255–6, emphasis added)

Bernard's soliloquy is perhaps Woolf's most overt critique of the Proustian theories of memory.

In Proust's *Recherche du Temps Perdu,* the unnamed narrator sits alone at a table, and famously carries a "spoonful" of tea to his mouth along with a soft bite of a madeleine cookie:

> And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. (Proust 60)

Like the characters of the waves, whose bodies are frequently noted to act "of their own accord,"[27] Proust's narrator "mechanically" raises a spoonful of tea to his mouth. The sensation of the tea is what immediately triggers a "shiver," and as the passage goes on to describe, what enables forgotten memories dormant in the unconscious to rise up into consciousness. With the Proustian involuntary memory, the sensations of the past are resurrected and the past fully experienced through a chance encounter with a sensation.

[27] See Jinny's automatic gesturing on the train (63) or Bernard's kitchen phone call (263)

In Bernard's soliloquy, he similarly sits alone at a table contemplating his life much like Proust's narrator. However, whereas for Proust, "the past is unmistakable present in some material object," [28] Bernard specifically notes that there is "nothing one can fish up in a spoon," memories are evidently brought into his body from somewhere beyond his body. Bernard's body is a "bubble" within which he views outside "undifferentiated forces" and "sensations" which "tap their beaks" onto his body-lens. Similarly, Bernard experiences the recurring faces - the memories — of his friends pressing against "to the walls of my bubble." Sensations come from outside of the subject and are inscribed onto the body like light entering a camera lens. Such a notion is extended by Woolf's figuration of Bernard standing deep within a powerful stream which catches him "between one mouthful and the next," he is 'between' two bites, suggesting the irrelevance of the actual sensory encounter and rather emphasizing Woolf's belief in the streams or channels of sensations which we stand 'between.'[29] These streams carry "broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights — elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing," these sensations are not coherent memories of a restored past, but rather fragmented sound-images which mark themselves onto Bernard's psyche and make up his conceptual world. These processes of memory inscription are not tied with a chance sensory encounter but are rather implicit in one's existence within the channels of history. The stream of memory sensations is described as "alive," acting with its own will or movement beyond that of any subjective desires.

Notably, Bernard's experience of reckoning with the stream of extra-voluntary memory leads him to a revelation: "I would … look intently at a vase … while a reason struck me, a sudden revelation" (*TW* 255). Such a moment recalls Woolf's musing in "A Sketch of the Past"

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[28] Benjamin *Illuminations*, 106

[29] In "Between the Acts," Lucy stands in a stream, "Above, the air rushed; beneath was water. She stood between two fluidities" (205).

when she writes: “The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present” (*MB* 98). Just as Woolf’s experience of the stream of the past through the present is one of her “greatest satisfactions,” Bernard’s experience enables him to go out into the world with “renewed delight.” This Woolfian poetics of time then brands with it an ethical dimension in that engaging with the present-past as a unified material presence enables a more delightful or satisfactory life.

The similarities of Bernard’s soliloquy to Woolf’s theories from “A Sketch of the Past” continue. Bernard peculiarly describes, “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.” (*TW* 256) Similarly, Woolf wrote in “Sketch” how “at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene … that is a proof of their ‘reality.’” (*MB* 142) The scene, a notable memory image of the past, occurs in the moments where reality floods in. Thus, the subsisting and accessible narrative moments of the past — the moments of being — occur when there is a break in habitual reality. This aligns with the Woolfian notion that one can most fully tap into the temporal rhythms of the extra-voluntary memory, to see the stream of the past beneath and within the present, only when one’s life is habitual and quiet. For Woolf, this sense of reality is broken when habit breaks, when the bubble pops and when reality “floods in.”[30] With the flooding of reality, one is overwhelmed with the merging into the material unity of reality. Such an experience is marked by the experiences of shock, rapture, and trauma, all of

[30] This notion of inhabitual activity leading towards a “flooding” in reality may explain the immense power frequently attributed to train journeys throughout the novel, as trains mediate the journey from one habitual location to another. There is also certainly a Heideggerian reading of the relationship between ‘the inhabitual’ with a flooding in of reality, although I won’t be entertaining this.

which are characterized as ruptures from habitual living, and often leave Woolf with a sense of profound knowledge (often mystical unity or melancholic despair) regarding her relative existence within a sensitive and vessel-like body in a massive and interconnected world.

Such a notion of history and ethics is also connected with Woolf's theories of reality itself as aesthetic, as us being "the thing itself." Late in his life, Bernard notes that he buys:

> a picture of Beethoven in a silver frame. Not that I love music, but because the whole of life, its masters, its adventurers then appeared in long ranks of magnificent human beings behind me; and I was the inheritor; I, the continuer; I, the person miraculously appointed to carry it on. So, swinging my stick, with my eyes filmed, not with pride, but with humility rather, I walked down the street… (*TW* 254)

Bernard once again has a sort of revelation of himself in relation to history, which results in him setting off down the street, going back into the habitual stream of life. In this instance, however, the connection with history is directly tied to artistic tradition, the "Long ranks of magnificent human beings" which Bernard miraculously becomes the inheritor; his eyes film up with "humility" rather than "pride." Just as Woolf specifies that her belief in the world as art is not a belief in Beethoven or Shakespeare themselves, "there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven," Bernard makes clear that he is not specifically celebrating Beethoven, but rather expressing humble gratitude for being part of the work of art of life. (*MB* 72) Bernard's gratitude stems from the realization that everyone is the inheritor of the great arts; the works and ideas, the aesthetic principles, phrases, images, figurations, and sensibilities are not only continued by, but reified in us.

The Waves constructs a relationship between the body as the translucent medium through which the channels of history shines through, and such a theory of history, time, and memory is directly tied to the wondrous revelation of reality itself as a constant and perfect expression of art. To experience the world as a unified aesthetic expression is to see the present physical world in addition to the memories and past sensations it reiterates, or to realize the linguistic and

communicative exchange latent within physical sensations. Thus understood, *The Waves* can be seen to explicate the rhythmic poetics of time which Woolf searches for in "A Sketch of the Past." If, as Rhoda says, we stand embedded in a substance of recurring sensations, and if as Bernard shows, we are translucent, photosensitive vessels within that material, then seemingly one must only recognize the patterns — the rhythmic flow — of how such a material behaves in order to "live our lives through from the start." (*MB* 67)

Chapter 3

The Waves as a Rhythmic Text: Material Language and Non-Dualistic Subjectivity

> The relevant opposite of Modernity here is no postmodernity but the Classical age, which conveys, let us say, a time status against which the 'coming up' and the 'going off,' the future and the past, would be measured as if both of them do carry out the entire sequence of life and meaning. That would be the case, for instance, in the way time is shaped and dispatched by myths, that is, in making rhythm and rhyme between the beginning and the end of a story.
>
> Jean-François Lyotard "Re-writing Modernity", 4

In Chapter 2, "Rhythmic Time," I analyzed the wave-like motif of unity-dispersion as it pertains to Woolf's interrelated theories of time, aesthetics, memory, and the body. In Woolf's novel, *The Waves*, the rhythmic structure of the waves manifests itself in the rhythm of subject formation and dispersion as channels of sensations from the past — memories — collide onto the subject, enabling a stable subject to arise temporarily in relation to history, only to crash like a wave and disperse in the next moment, before reconfiguring and rising once more. However, there are several other critical characteristics which enable the waves to function beyond that of a metaphor or even as the conceptual rhythm of Woolf's theories of time. In particular, throughout *The Waves*, Woolf depicts language as a sensuous and physical entity. In the following chapter, I argue that such an understanding of language dissolves the waves as a metaphorical or allegorical process. Furthermore, by attending to the utter and unspeakable materiality of the waves, I demonstrate how Woolf's waves serve as a mode of understanding subjectivity within a non-dualistic framework. Lastly, in dissolving the waves as something merely conceptual, I attend to the political consequences of Woolf's waves.

In Maureen Chun's essay "Between Sensation and Sign," Chun argues that for Woolf's later work, "all practices of language and aspects of consciousness are essentially physical phenomena in the world of people, words, and waves." For Chun, *The Waves* in particular establishes a "continuity of word, narrative, and world through a non-subjective, physicalized consciousness" which is "unfixed in subjectivity … [and] both corresponds to and infiltrates the limitless physical world" (Chun 53–4).[31] Chun reads *The Waves* as Woolf's foray into the cinematic, claiming that:

> Film … alerted Woolf to the possibility of using words and literary images in ways that would unsettle narrative as a system of representation. In *The Waves*, as in the cinema, we discover several recurring images functioning, sometimes simultaneously, on different semiotic registers. One such recurring image is that of words themselves. In many illuminating instances, the characters perceive words as sensuous, synesthetically evocative phenomena or things rather than basic units of verbal representation. We see the non-semantic, purely perceptual aura of such words and phrases fluctuate and pass through separate minds, with all the impalpability and physical reality of smoke in air, in ways analogous to the non-subjective drift of sense-impressions represented in the circulation of image… (Chun 55–6)

It is in Woolf's experience with the cinema that Chun locates Woolf's potential reconfiguration of the semiotic hierarchy (words as secondary to reality or 'the thing itself'). The possibility of the physical world as containing its own bank of metaphors and metonymies comes from Woolf's incredible experience of watching the German expressionist horror film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920):

> For instance, at a performance of Dr. Caligari the other day, a shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. It swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity. For a moment it seemed to embody some monstrous, diseased imagination of the lunatic's brain. For a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words. *The monstrous, quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement, 'I am afraid.*' In fact, *the shadow was accidental, and the effect unintentional*. But if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for *emotions that so far failed to find expression*. Terror has, *besides its ordinary forms*, the

[31] Maureen Chun, *Between Sensation And Sign: The Secret Language of the Waves*

> shape of a tadpole; it burgeons, bulges, quivers, disappears … Is there, we ask, some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and if so, *could this be made visible to the eye*? Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can be rendered visible without the help of words … The likeness of the thought is, for some reason, more beautiful than the thought itself." (Woolf, "On Cinema" from *Oh to be a Painter!,* 47)

Woolf encounters an "accidental" and "unintentional" shadow produced by a projector error, and yet this encounter is a compelling and memorable experience of 'fear.' Woolf describes how the word "terror" is merely an "ordinary form" which could also be manifested accidentally as a shadow, among seemingly infinite other possibilities. As Chun writes, "the tadpole-shadow does not signify, it is fear itself" ("On Cinema" 59). The tadpole-shadow exemplifies Woolf's instinct that "we are the thing itself," that our material reality itself is an active aesthetic expression. Furthermore, Chun argues that Woolf's encounter with the cinematic shadow tadpole as something "substantive" rather than representative leads her to claim that:

> Woolf is suggesting that fear – the affect as predicate, as physical effect of reality – contains the lasting and essential grammatical proposition of which the subject is merely an agent … In this way, the sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions of the subject – the poetics of consciousness – constitute impersonal moments that may enter the subject from without and exit again into other physical bodies. (Chun 64–5)[32]

Chun's argument effectively decentralizes "consciousness" as something not situated or contained within an essential subject, but rather as latent within the material processes itself and subsequently, which the inner ambiguous self externalizes and attaches onto. On its own, the material realm possesses a certain unspeakable and infinite potential for meaning, which through language we are granted only partial, tangential, and secondary access. For example, in a scene I examined earlier, Rhoda sees "the side of a cup like a mountain and only parts of antlers, and the brightness of the side of that jug like a crack in darkness with wonder and terror" (*TW* 223).

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[32] In Gillian Beer's chapter on *The Waves,* she wrote of Woolf's "insistence of substantiality" which is made clear by a persistent "sense of how objects warp, bend, deliquesce and how the senses seize a world always irretrievably altered, endlessly contingent" (Beer 76)

Through spoken words and writing, the unspoken language of the material realm is curtailed, limited, and bounded.[33]

I extend Chun's interpretation of a physicalized language through Woolf's extra-voluntary memory to make the claim that Chun's proposed material (or what she calls 'secret') language latent within the material realm also contains memories. Sensations are metonymic. In other words, the characters throughout *The Waves* demonstrate the ways in which sensations are interpreted in habitual, associative, and historical ways. By encountering sensations, our habitual response is reliant on all of the other historical forces colliding on the body; this manner of interpretation brings with it the resurrection of memories from past encounters with similar stimuli. The subject-body is raised to encounter the sensation — the wave rises — and with that encounter also arises the historical interpretive methods and associations which the body-mind stores through language (or has been taught through language), and thus, the body also re-experiences the memories of the historical collective with their encounter with everyday sensations. Once again, Beer aptly puts her finger on this when she describes:

> Living in an old linguistic culture burdens the speaker with shared and unshared experience. The autocracy of the inherited tongue may be at odds with the particular. So Mrs Ramsay resents being betrayed into uttering a belief she does not share ('We are in the hands of the Lord' through the power of language to stretch belief beyond reason. Woolf was attracted by assemblage rather than coherence: the slippage, repetition and reversal of oral elements within sentences and within… [Beer cites an extensive instance of onomatopoeia in an opening passage in *The Waves*] this onomatopoeic emphasis is one means by which she represents the random communities of language, the waves of sound continuing on beyond sense. (Beer 50)

Woolf's discovery of a cinematic language should then emphatically not be read as an explicit restoration of the classical semiological hierarchy of reality over language, but rather that Woolf recognizes the potential of the material realm to communicate linguistically in unspeakably

[33] As Alan Watts once observed, another word for 'word' is 'term', since 'term' denotes the beginning and ends of things, as in, the boundaries of potential meaning which language brings forth.

complex, unpredictable and accidental ways, as well as its inexhaustible potential to produce substance for interpretation. For Woolf, sign, signifer, and signified all slide and glide beside each other as sensuous encounters in the physical world.[34] Furthermore, such an understanding also aligns with Chun's decentralized subjectivity within *The Waves* wherein subjectivity exists only secondarily within the body and is in fact a product of linguistically charged sensations latent in the material realm. It is through a structuring of the material world itself, through shaping her novels to the rhythms of the waves, that Woolf finds a way to communicate something unspeakable about materiality and time, what she observes to be rhythms of existence, which can only reductively be termed "the waves."

The waves, then, are not the statement, "things recur," "time is cyclical," or "the unconscious lies below the conscious," but it is rather the "thing itself," the unspeakable manifestation which those significations only secondarily approach. In its unwillingness to stray from the rhythms of the waves, Woolf's novel serves to materialize her theories on time and memory in a way that extends beyond words, metaphor, or defined signification. The futility of speaking of one's experience of time or of reality in a body comically becomes a motif throughout *The Waves* as each character undergoes their own struggle to put to words or find the perfect phrase for their experience of reality, despite the overwhelming array of sensations, experience, associations, and stimuli the broader narrative consciousness ceaselessly notes. In one instance, Rhoda describes her attempt to push forth beyond spoken language to some unfathomable realm:

> When the white arm rests upon the knee it is a triangle; now it is upright – a column; now a fountain, falling. It makes no sign, it does not beckon, it does not see us. Behind it roars the sea. It is beyond our reach. Yet there I venture. There I go to replenish my emptiness, to stretch my nights and fill them fuller and fuller with dreams. And for a second even now, even here, I reach my object and say, 'Wander no more. All else is trial and

[34] The unrelenting ability for the physical world to produce meaning, sensations, connections, suggestions is critical dimension to the deconstructed materialism of Woolf's philosophy that "the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art… we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself" (*Sketch* 72).

> make-believe. Here is the end.' But these pilgrimages, these moments of departure, start always in your presence, from this table, these lights, from Percival and Susan, here and now. Always I see the grove over your heads, between your shoulders, or from a window when I have crossed the room at a party and stand looking down into the street. (*TW* 139)

Reality is not concerned with human-ness or man-made language — "it does not beckon, it does not see us." There is an absurd distance between Rhoda's linguistic interpretation of reality and the reality itself: an arm resting upon a knee rapidly morphs from a triangle into a column and then into a fountain. And yet, latent within the material realm is indeed something substantive which Rhoda searches for. This other realm of meaning and exchange is figured as "the sea" which lies "behind" the surface of reality and "beyond" our reach. Invoking Sedgwick here, these prepositions serve to spatialize various linguistic realms without placing them within a rigid hierarchy. Rhoda is given access to seeing this parallel linguistic realm "over" the heads of her friends, or "between" their shoulders — always a secondary or non-direct view accessed while immersed in the world of the present. The roaring sea serves as a sort of nursery which sustains and nourishes Rhoda's "emptiness"; at the same time, Rhoda's "pilgrimages" or "departures" to the beyond realm (a comparable twilight realm which sources Louis's stream of historic memories) "start always in your presence … here and now." The present moment is necessary to access the other streams and channels of language and memory, and as Woolf makes clear from her theories in "A Sketch of the Past," those parallel streams of the past are necessary to be most firmly immersed in the "here and now." Thus, the means and the ends of communication and linguistic meaning are united as the present gives access to some unspeakable meaning beyond the physical surface of reality, and that which is beyond that surface recursively gives fullness to the here and now.

There is thus a dense mystical aesthetic cycle which the characters are unable to explicitly speak about to each other; this is partially resolved in the novel's conclusion, in which Bernard

recalls the intimate experiences and memories of his friends from the perspective of collective awareness (246–251). In one of Beer's readings of *the Waves*, she approaches a similar conclusion:

> Virginia Woolf said that she wanted in *The Waves* to follow a rhythm not a plot: that rhythm is figured in the pressure of the waves moving beneath the surface of the sea, humping themselves momentarily at the shore to break in foam. The pattern can express both long continuity and ephemerality, the single and the common life. At death the waves of the individual break and are drawn back into the sea of shared memory, memory which then itself is loosed and scattered but never entirely lost, since the body of water remains. (Beer 65)

In Beer's specification that death marks the return to shared memory, she emphasizes only the final iteration of the wave rhythm within a singular body. As I read Woolf, the cycle between individual and shared is in fact a persistent rhythm occurring throughout the daily lives of the characters. The phasing between individual and shared memory is not strictly bordered by birth and death, but are rather streams (to use a spatial descriptor) or rhythms (to use a musical descriptor) that are perpetually blurred, phased, interpolated, and intermeshed. As Beer notes, Woolf frequently figures the rhythm of the waves as one stream "moving beneath the surface" of another, just as Woolf can feel the past "like the sliding surface of a deep river" (*MB* 98).

One might imagine a polyrhythm, two different and contrasting rhythms which function harmonically together. In the minimalist music of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*[35] or Philip Glass's *Glassworks*[36] compositions are structured through individually phasing elements: different orchestral elements play different rhythms that start and end at different moments occasionally crossing over to produce unexpected new harmonies. Beer herself certainly sees this in Woolf's writing when she described the way that novel's characters' "sinuously overlapping thoughts and images, however, emphasize the easy abrasions and floatings apart which occur in

[35] Steve Reich, *Music for 18 Musicians* (1998)
[36] Philip Glass, *Glassworks* (1982)

community. Waves are all the universe contains. The permeable human transmits and is composed by them" (Beer 64). The body, as Woolf makes clear, is a translucent or 'permeable' medium through which wave-like phenomena (language, sensations, images, associations) pass through, momentarily allowing for the human to be 'composed.'

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The narrative path which the six focal characters chart is also structured to the waves. This takes on significance in relation to Woolf's theories of time as the character's paths of life and death, as well as subjectivity and release, also follow the rhythm of the waves. The continual back-and-forth or rising-falling nature of the waves enables an understanding of subjectivity and ultimately release from subjectivity (or liberation) in a non-dualistic sense. The novel is opened by two passages: first, the poetic interlude of the sun, and secondly the first narrative soliloquy section. Each marks an opening up of existence into the world, a birth, a first encounter with form. The characters become distinct and separate as they each observe different sensations from their individual bodies. The novel opens:

> The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky … gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky … gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk … (*TW* 7)

Echoing the introductory passages of the book of Genesis, the dawn of *The Waves* sees a primordial division of light from darkness, and within light, form from formlessness. Like particles descending in a stilled fluid, color and form become visible like "sediment in an old wine-bottle. With the rise of light and form, the central characters take the stage, each registering different sensations as they take in the stimulus of the world around them.

We can get a sense of the strange unity experienced by the friends through one of Bernard's early descriptions of language: "When we sit together, close … we melt into each other

with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (*TW* 16). Here, the children's words bring about a sort of erotic merging. The borders of their bodies, rather than separating and distinguishing them, actually blurs their identities. Words, which plagues the characters later in their life as a persistent source of distance, enables intimacy as they "melt into each other with phrases." Later in the novel, however, the characters recall the ways they grew into distinct separate identities:

> 'Down from our heads veils fell', said Rhoda. We clasped the flowers with their green leaves rustling in garlands.'
> 'We changed, we became unrecognisable,' said Louis. '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.
> …
> 'The tiger leapt, and the swallow dipped her wings in the dark pools on the other side of the world,' said Rhoda.
> 'But here and now we are together,' said Bernard. 'We have come together, at a particular time, to this particular spot. We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion. Shall we call it, conveniently, love?' (*TW* 125–6)

This excerpt begins with Rhoda's recollection of clasping the flowers — a moment early in the novel where the children feel a sort of rapturous unity with the world — echoing those of Woolf's own personal youthful experiences where she held a flower and realized the unity of her own body, the flower, and the rest of the earth. Thus, beginning with a moment of unity, the passage continues with the characters imagining their development into separateness, as they changed and became "unrecognizable." Here the characters figure their maturation almost as if they were lab specimens on a plate. They are not autonomous agents, but rather an assemblage of atoms which lawfully and chemically respond to stimuli, "as if some acid had dropped unequally on the plate." Louis points to each friend as an object, a thing — "I was this, Neville that …" The chemical materiality of the characters is representative of Woolf's broader ontological determinism. Her characters come into the world pure and undifferentiated and are made separate through the

random assortment of stimuli and varied and interdependent movements of material which fashion their bodies into "this" and "that."

Furthermore, Bernard explains their happy moment of union through some "deep" and "common emotion," tentatively called "love." Emotion — etymologically derived from the Latin *emovere*, to move out, and the French *émouvoir*, to stir up, agitate, or excite — is what brings them together. Their bodies are collectively activated to move as one. The passage rhythmically expands and contracts with the growing dispersion and unity of the characters' individual paths.

We can see such alchemical imagery reiterated in Bernard's final soliloquy:

> We were all different. The wax – the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us. The growl of the boot-boy making love to the tweeny among the gooseberry bushes; the clothes blown out hard on the line; the dead man in the gutter; the apple tree, stark in the moonlight; the raw swearing with maggots; the lustre dripping blue – our white wax was streaked and stained by each of these differently … We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies. (*TW* 241)

There is a sense here that the children were at one point a collective, communal, and unified awareness, and they are forcefully wrenched apart into separateness. Bernard's language emphasizes the violence implied in the traumatic recurrence of various shock encounters from their youth. That the grotesque and macabre images of adult sexuality, dead bodies, and decay are placed alongside the recurring images of clothes drying, apples trees, and a blue "lustre"[37] exemplifies Woolf's understanding of the shock experience as not only located, in the traditional sense, within the frightening and dangerous, but also as a revelatory possibility within trivial encounters as well as a-subjective reality. Bernard also notes the recurring images experienced

[37] One might make the argument for a Derridean theory of trauma as described by Bernard, in which trauma is no longer conceived of as something different or distinct from 'normal life', but rather as a process which defines all moments of interpretation and awareness. As I am writing this project, I get the sense that Derrida may have played quite a large role in encrusting some of my readings of Woolf, but it is too late for that (as of my moment of writing, it is currently midway through February of 2023); to incorporate Derrida into this project would take far too long, but I also think it is to this project's advantage that my readings of Woolf remain deeply immersed in her own language, and not that of Deconstruction.

and internalized by all of his friends, once again emphasizing the fact that at the end of the novel, the characters merge back into collective awareness through the avatar of Bernard.

Bernard's final narrative section makes visible the way the rhythm of the waves also structures the experience of release from subjectivity, as in, release from the trappings of a mortal and temporally bound ego. Within this final section, Woolf presents us with a non dualistic representation of release or liberation as a reconfiguration of one's position of awareness within one's body, a shifted position of awareness from which we inevitably must take in reality. This is markedly different from an idea of release in which one departs completely from some normal life into an idea of heaven or asceticism. The experience of release comes in and out of intensity, in and out of profound unity back into separateness to the rhythm of the waves:

> But we – against the brick, against the branches, we six, out of how many million millions, for one moment out of what measureless abundance of past time and time to come, burnt there triumphant. The moment was all; the moment was enough. And then Neville, Jinny, Susan and I as a wave breaks, burst asunder, surrendered – to the next leaf, to the precise bird, to a child with a hoop, to a prancing dog, to the warmth that is hoarded in woods after a hot day, to the lights twisted like ribbon on rippled waters. We drew apart; we were consumed in the darkness of the trees leaving Rhoda and Louis to stand on the terrace by the urn.
>
> When we returned from that immersion – how sweet, how deep! - and came to the surface … (*TW* 278)

This moment exemplifies Woolf's suspicion that "the actual event does not exist, nor time" (*Diary* 118*,* 23 November 1926). The passage traces the unity of the friends coming together, beyond life and death, experiencing the "measureless abundance of past time and time to come," burning "triumphant"; the moment was "all" and "enough," satisfying their subjective desires or drives, giving them union with the material realm of time-space.

Given the rhythm of the waves, however, Bernard's experience of unity is inevitably drawn apart into dispersion once more. Therefore, even the mystical release from the confines of subjectivity and linear time remains bound to the rhythms of the waves: "And then Neville, Jinny,

Susan and I as a wave breaks, burst asunder," the friends disperse into a sense of separateness made vivid through a rapid listing of various fragmentary movement-images. Once more, Bernard's observation that they "returned from that immersion" and "back to the surface" suggests such an experience of time requires a spatial movement. Their experience of liberation in this moment is not marked as a release from the rhythms of time, but rather a repositioning within time. Woolf's temporal rhythm is not merely one plane moving up and down, but rather rotational, axial, pulled in several directions, and attuned to several rhythms at once.

Bernard continues interrogating into the structure of the experience of his release from subjectivity, articulating the force which binds the friends' collective consciousness together and which pulls them apart:

> The sound of the chorus came across the water and I felt leap up that old impulse, which has moved me all my life, to be thrown up and down on the roar of other people's voices, singing the same song; to be tossed up and down on the roar of almost senseless merriment, sentiment, triumph, desire. But not now. No! I could not collect myself; I could not distinguish myself; I could not help letting fall the things that had made me a minute ago eager, amused, jealous, vigilant and hosts of other things into the water. I could not recover myself from that endless throwing away, dissipation, flooding forth without our willing it and rushing soundlessly away out there under the aches of the bridge, round some clump of trees or an island, out where seabirds sit on stakes, over the roughened water to become waves in the sea – I could not recover myself from that dissipation. So we parted. (*TW* 279)

Bernard is "moved" and "thrown" by "other people's voices" — stressing the way in which their experience is tuned to the communal and historical aspect of language. Their existence as temporarily extant creatures, as well as the subsequent reckoning with being alive and imminent death, are all mediated through language, through the merry and sentimental songs of history. Like vessels afloat upon sensations, some fluid force maintains an "endless throwing away" and "flooding forth without our willing it" which maintains their body's utter immersion with sensory projection. The collective narrative body is whirled outward, dissipated and rushed away "without

our willing it," the channels which bring them back into existence, allowing an interpretation of experience. And yet, this interpretation is also what casts him back into the sea.

Bernard looks back upon his life as well as the lives of his friends. This final soliloquy roughly sees him sketching out their past from the perspective of narrative collective awareness. As he thinks back on his life, he reckons with the group's continual experience of involuntary unity and dispersion, asking, "Was this then, this streaming away mixed with Susan, Jinny, Neville, Rhoda, Louis, a sort of death? A new assembly of elements? Some hint of what was to come?" (*TW* 280). In their dispersion, the six characters return into a collective awareness, a "sort of death" of the individual subject. Bernard then speaks from the position in which their separate identities have merged into one:

> But how to describe the world seen without a self? There are no words. Blue, red – even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through. How describe or say anything in articulate words again? – save that it fades, save that it undergoes gradual transformation, becomes, even in the course of one short walk, habitual – this scene also. Blindness returns as one moves and one leaf repeats another. Loveliness returns as one looks with all its train of phantom phrases. One breathes in and out substantial breath … (*TW* 287)

The narrative consciousness, even in a moment of collective unity, remains burdened by the limitations of language and the "blindness" which occurs as reality becomes "habitual" or linguistic. The narration here also marks the "substantial breath," recalling an earlier description in the novel when Bernard speaks of moving through the "radiant yet gummy atmosphere, how conscious one is of every movement — something adheres, something sticks to one's hands" (*TW* 250). Once more we can see Woolf's figuration of the self as a vessel afloat upon a sensation, a delicate container of awareness upon which sensations are inscribed, as this container moves through the wave-like material of space-time.

The release from individual subjectivity progresses as the narrator's relation to physical, forms disintegrates:

> I begin now to forget; I begin to *doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now*, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, 'Are you hard? ... now I ask, 'Who am I?' I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; *we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them* ... Yes, Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away … the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt." (*TW* 289, emphasis added)[38]

The narration is no longer 'Bernard' but has dissolved into the blurred collective identity of the friends. This blurring can also be seen in the narrative voice is increasingly detached and derealized from the physical realm — they need to touch "apparently solid objects" to come back into form, into solidity. This gesture of touch, the search for form, represents an accordance with the waves' rhythm — the spiritual or collective awareness inhabits Bernard's body, a state of unified or formless identity, and yet taps the hard table to convince themselves of the "fixity" of reality in form. The awareness phases in and out of form and fluidity, inhabiting both a firm identification with the physical body as well as a collective merging of identities.

The characters' sense of subjectivity within form and formlessness is evidently tuned to the rhythm of the waves. Some force perpetually thrusts the characters in and out of form, in and out of identification with a single body, in and out of their individual identity in spite of repeated rapturous realization of the material unity of time: "So into the street again, swinging my stick, looking at wire trays … murmuring … mingling nonsense and poetry, floating in the stream. Something always has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday, Tuesday. Each

[38] One might draw a connection here with *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which Clarissa feels, surprisingly, an intimate connection with Septimus after his suicide. Gillian Beer writes, "His death momentarily allows her absolute intimacy, which everywhere else eludes her: 'closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death'.

spreads the same ripple" (283).[39] This movement is inescapable, the rhythm of unity and dispersion maintains its grip over all interactions:

> Always it begins again; always there is the enemy; eyes meeting ours; fingers twitching our; the effort waiting. Call the waiter. Pay the bill. We must pull ourselves up out of our chairs. We must find our coats. We must go. Must, must, must – detestable word. Once more, I who had thought myself immune, who had said, 'Now I am rid of all that,' find that the wave has tumbled me over, head over heels, scattering my possessions, leaving me to collect, to assemble, to heap together, summon my forces, rise and confront the enemy. (*TW* 293)

Bernard strains over the "must" of life, the perpetual movement which keeps him and everyone else moving with the great machine. Bernard, who had a moment ago experienced total union with time, who had thought himself "immune" and said "Now I am rid of all that," is once again tumbled by the waves back into the rhythmic "must" of daily life. Reckoning with the experience of unity and dispersion, Bernard is left with an ethical question: "How can I proceed now, I said, without a self, weightless and visionless, through a world weightless, without illusion?" (285).

One can then see Woolf's non-dualistic conception of subjectivity and release — Bernard's revelatory experiences do not land him alone in ecstasy atop a mountain, but rather right where he has been sitting all along. Woolf's representation of unity with time does not brand an Enlightened notion of progression or completion, but rather a repositioning within that which was already there. After his revelatory experience, 'Bernard' slowly comes back into form in the English countryside:

> How then does light return to the world after the eclipse of the sun? Miraculously. Frailly. In thin stripes. It hangs like a glass cage. It is a hoop to be fractured by a tiny jar. There is a spark there. Next moment a flash of dun … The woods throb blue and green, and gradually the fields drink in red, gold, brown … The earth absorbs colour like a sponge, slowly drinking water. It puts on weight; rounds itself; hangs pendant; settles and swings beneath our feet … So the landscape returned to me; so I saw fields rolling in waves of color beneath me, but now with this difference; I saw but was not seen. I walked unshadowed; I came unheralded … Thin, as a ghost, leaving no trace where I trod,

[39] This murmuring stream of poetry and nonsense recalls the old woman in *Mrs Dalloway* who sits on the street and cries out a nonsensical song drawn from the spring of prehistory.

> perceiving merely, I walked along in a new world, never trodden; brushing new flowers, unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable; without sheltered from phrases. (*TW* 286–7)

The rhythms of Bernard's experience of subjectivity are poeticized by the rhythms of nature — in the cycles of the sun, and in the aesthetic effects of the sun's light restoring form and color to the world after the dark night. Repeatedly, Bernard phases in and out of his identity into the collective awareness and then back again, each time gaining insight into another dimension of time, relativity and dependence, weight and form. Eventually, he/they (simultaneously inhabiting character, persona, and form alongside the collective and formless consciousness) experience a relation to the body which is at once demystified of his identity as an essential and autonomous being, while also possessing a highly mystical awareness of interconnectedness, immense gratitude, and appreciation and realization of the totality of the aesthetic offerings of the here and now:

> But no more. Now tonight, my body rises tier upon tier like some cool temple whose floor is strewn with carpets and murmurs rise and the altars stand smoking; but up above, here in my serene head, come only fine gusts of melody, waves of incense, while the lost dove wails, and the banners tremble above tombs, and the dark airs of midnight shake trees outside the open windows. When I look down from this transcendency, how beautiful are even the crumbled relics of bread! ... Even the forks laid straight side by side appear lucid, logical, exact; and the horns of the rolls which we have left are glazed, yellow-plated, hard. I could worship my hand even, with its fan of bones laced by blue mysterious veins and its astonishing look of aptness, suppleness and ability to curl softly or suddenly crush – its infinite sensibility. (*TW* 291)

Bernard's experience here is not a detachment from or transcendence above reality. His body is his body is spatialized vertically, rising "tier upon tier," immersed in the smells of incense, the cool winds, the visual appeal of carpets, the "gusts of melody." Bernard observes from a position of total awareness, he looks down from "transcendency," and yet, from this perspective, is most grateful, appreciative, and loving towards his body and the little quotidian details of his environs.

He is amazed by "crumbled relics of bread," the wondrous existence of his body, and the "infinite sensibility" of his hand.[40]

Finally, Bernard's awareness reaches a peak of release from the bounds of the ego or subject within time-space:

> Immeasurably receptive, holding everything, trembling with fullness, yet clear, contained – so my being seems, now that desire urges it no more out and away; now that curiosity no longer dyes it a thousand colors. It lies deep, tideless, immune, now that he is dead, the man I called 'Bernard,' … The shock of the falling wave which has sounded all my life, which woke me so that I saw the gold loop on the cupboard, no longer makes me quiver what I hold. (*TW* 291)

For a moment, Bernard, cresting the wave of unity (let's imagine a bubble floating atop the flattened surface of a big wave), experiences a moment of stability, his body vessel is "tideless" and "immune" as he loses his desires and identification with his persona, to the preservation of his self and body. The above passage also marks Bernard's ability to articulate and thus momentarily extricate himself from the traumatic shock of existence. The first line of dialogue in *The Waves* is Bernard's observation of a "ring … hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light" (*TW* 9). Towards the end of his final soliloquy, in the passage block-quoted above, Bernard notes that the "shock of the falling wave … which woke me so that I saw the gold loop … no longer makes me quiver what I hold" (*TW* 291). The subjective trauma which brought Bernard into his identity, the "shock" which resounded throughout his life, no longer rings. Bernard is seemingly extricated from the cycle of traumatic rupture in and out of linguistic intelligibility. This moment represents a climax in Woolf's figured journey of life as a vessel atop a sensation, in this moment, their vessel is totally open, containing all, receiving all, rejecting nothing, totally aware, without desire, even without the linguistic desire to articulate as "curiosity no longer dyes" them.

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[40] The hand is also described as a "fan of bones," through which "blue mysterious veins" are laced. This imagery further exemplifies the aesthetic of dispersion and assemblage, the bones spread out from a common source. Woolf's interest in translucence is also on display here - the skin of Bernard's hand becomes a translucent film through which the organic network within the body can shine through.

And yet, even this total mystical unity is merely another sensation which the vessel of Bernard is upon, and he/they remain comedically subject to the rhythm of the waves:

> Oh, but there is your face. I catch your eye. I, who had been thinking myself so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe, unconfined and capable of being everywhere on the verge of things and here too, am now nothing but what you see – an elderly man … (I see myself in the glass) ... That is the blow you have dealt me. I have walked bang into the pillar box … (*TW* 292)

The particular language of "being everywhere on the verge" and of seeing "myself in the glass" echoes Woolf's theories of time. To be "on the verge" is essentially Woolf's spatial figuration of the body within a stream of extra-voluntary memory. As I described throughout this project, Woolf poeticizes the body as a translucent vessel hovering above a stream of sensations of the past. To tap into this stream and to be aware of the depths of the past beneath the surface of the present is one of Woolf's greatest satisfactions.[41] Thus, Bernard's moment of rapturous unity is figured alongside a poetic realization of Woolf's theories of time. Notably, this rapture is broken by an encounter with "the glass." The mirror, a mediator for imagistic self-awareness, breaks Bernard's rapturous union with time. The mirror brings himself back into exchange of ego, identity, and language, "now nothing but what you see," which is "an elderly man," a body marked by time. Thus, Bernard's contact with the collective restores his attachments to his body and identity and disperses him out from rapturous unity with time.

Bernard's awareness gradually becomes more finely attuned to the wave rhythms, each moment of rapture enables a more clear realization of the rhythms which structure reality:

> But wait. While they add up the bill behind the screen wait one moment … The clock ticks; the woman sneezes; the waiter comes – there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification. Listen: a whistle sounds, wheels rush, the door creaks on its hinges. I regain the sense of the complexity and the reality and the struggle … and with some pity, some envy and much good will, take your hand and bid you good night. (*TW* 294)

[41] Woolf "Moments of Being" 98

Bernard leaves his last dinner, walks out into the street one more time, noting the "eternal renewal, incessant rising and fall and fall and rise again," which he now sees structures the experience unfolding everywhere around and within him — "And in me too the wave rises … I am aware once more of a new desire" (*TW* 297).

Finally, Bernard, brought back down into the ego and self, confronts death as "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!' (*TW* 297)

Bernard, returned from his mystical progression into a subjective and nationally defined identity, recalls Percival's intrusion into India. Bernard infuses a imperially charged martyr's symbolism in his fight against death. Bernard's death, as a sacrifice against death/India, positions the English nation as the privileged position of humanity which fights against death. Thus, Bernard's struggle against death and time ultimately is subsumed into a nationalist narrative against the unknown and unconquered world.[42]

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As Walter Benjamin explains in his essay, "The Storyteller,"[43] the novel as a medium traditionally functions to trace the life of one life, end with their death, and within their life and death lies the meaning of life. That the novel as a medium often strives to capture life in its totality, and with it, a totalizing meaning of life, is what distinguishes it from previous modes of storytelling. In particular, Benjamin stresses the way traditional oral and folk storytelling emphasized mystery, ambiguity, paradox, and strangeness, so as to lure the reader (or listener) into generating their own particular and applicable 'moral.' Woolf resists and satirizes this

[42] I want to be clear that I am not reading this section as Virginia Woolf revealing herself as inclined towards the English empire, but rather that she is depicting the ideological biases of her characters.
[43] Walter Benjamin "The Storyteller" *Illuminations*, 26-55

novelistic tendency as the characters of *The Waves* perpetually strive to find the perfect phrase to capture life in its totality and cement their identities as eternal subjects. Furthermore, Bernard's final challenge to death acts as the novel's final counter gesture against traditional novelistic progression through a journey of a single life. In its place, the novel is structured by the rhythmic cycle of unity and dispersion. As Woolf made clear that she was writing *The Waves* "to a rhythm not to a plot" (*Diary* 316, 2 September 1930).

Therefore, we can take another step back and see once again how the rhythm of waves unrelentingly structures the lives of the characters. As described earlier in this chapter, the central characters come into being at the start of the novel undifferentiated, marked by the abstract descriptions of the sun rising, which, as light is diffused, gradually transforms the formless void into distinct, defined, and color-filled forms. This process is mimicked by the opening narrative section in which the characters register stimuli, differentiating their bodies and identities. As the characters progress through the novel — and as the sun rises and sets in the interlude passages — they gradually become more defined into their distinct identities, culminating in the middle of the novel as they meet for dinner as adults are shocked by the dramatic changes each friend sees in the other. Percival's death brings the characters together with further shared experiences, the traumatic rupture in the center of their friendship, the lack of Percival, brings the six friends closer together as defined and separate adults. As the novel comes to a close (as I have just described at length), the different friends are merged into a collective consciousness which shines through Bernard as he realizes a grand unity of time and awareness. This rhythmic structure is iterated intensely in Bernard's final reckoning with death, which, tuned to the rhythm of the waves, climaxes with a mystical revelation only to come down once more back into a defined

identity as old man Bernard who sublimates Percival's imperialist martyrdom in India into his own fight against unknown death.

Given Woolf's rhythmic structuring and lack of traditional narrative resolution, Woolf's novel can be understood to possess many of the most exciting elements of 'the storyteller' as articulated by Walter Benjamin. *The Waves* is a story of a group of friends and their journey into existence in form, and the story offers a moral which bears the aesthetic mark of its storyteller. The moral is an understanding of time as rhythmic, and this moral is made clear through the aesthetic of the waves. The aesthetic of the waves is drawn primarily from Woolf's personal memories of St. Ives. Thus, the story she tells, and the moral it imparts, is inextricably bound from the life and personal aesthetic of the storyteller. On completing the novel, the reader is left empowered with a "renewed delight" as they can make sense of the otherwise fearful and confusing aspects of reality in relation to the waves (*TW* 255).

Bernard's return to subjectification after his mystical rapture aligns also with Woolf's musings from "A Sketch of the Past": "At times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, *though I am really making it happen*" (*MB* 67, emphasis added). As discussed earlier in the project, when Woolf writes that she is "really making it happen," she is not making a claim for individual autonomy or agency, but rather acknowledging the historical-ideological-psychological-archival forces colliding on her which determine not only her actions but her phenomenological experience of reality. Put another way, the thing "making it happen" is the stream of extra-voluntary memory. Bernard's return into form then makes evident the unrelenting power of the rhythm of the waves, the extra-voluntary channel of historical

sensations which inscribes itself on the subject do not cease once one experiences 'unity' for one moment. Rather, the rhythms keep the subject-body-vessel perpetually thrust back into the 'must' of life, back into their mechanical or ideological behavior (as seen with Jinny's automatic polite gesturing or Bernard's brain re-configuration around his phone call).

This moment draws attention to the limits of subjectivity as understood through the waves in several senses. First, that Bernard can experience seemingly such totalizing rapture and mystical unity, and yet preserve a deep faith in nationalist narratives reveals Woolf's understanding of the political potential latent in powerful, rapturous affects. Despite mystical experiences, historical ideology persists. That the recurring images of history and prehistory most frequently experienced by the characters — images of Egyptian women carrying vases, canonical literary figures (most often Shakespeare, Plato, and Virgil), sounds of the jungle, cavemen, romanticized pastoral countryside, empty landscapes with classical Greek columns — are so explicitly drawn from distinctly English academic imaginations of history and 'the world' is particularly telling in regards to subject formation. More directly, Bernard's final challenge against death raises particular concerns about ideology and subjectivity in relation to Woolf's poetics of the waves. If the friends' absorption and dissolution into a collective awareness renders their phenomenological experience of awareness as consisting entirely of recurring, intersubjective sensations seemingly drawn from the silently privileged position of the English empire, then Woolf's poeticization of subjectivity bears within it a particularly frightening ideological prison. One is then a vessel afloat upon invisible, unspeakable narratives shaped by the literature, painting, stories, and songs which both derive from the idealized sign of the English empire, in addition to the imperialistically produced narratives regarding the rest of the world.[44]

[44] For a fuller exploration of the way in which England produced a fictional image of itself against fictional images of the colonized world, see Gauri Viswanathan's "Currying Favor: The Politics of British Educational and Cultural Policy in India, 1813-1854".

To be subsumed out of one's individual identity into the collective awareness risks being subsumed into a sort of ideological soup.

Woolf's theories of subjectivity and time, as I have argued they should be understood, are increasingly complicated given the rise of the culture industry in the 20th century, in which global capitalist monarchies mediate a majority of the media produced (and thus mediate a majority of the recurring stimuli disseminated by new information and media technologies) which one is subject to encounter throughout their lives.[45] One might then see that given the developments of the culture industry and the Woolfian notion of extra-voluntary memory inscription, the psychic material of the subject is themselves a manifestation of the culture industry. This may explain in part the 20th century trend in subjects increasingly defining their identity through the media they consume, rather than the culture particular to their religious, ethnic, or geographic environs. In order to escape such ideological prison, we are once again faced with the Foucaultian paradox of knowing the limits of one's archive.

This discussion of *The Waves* makes clear several defining characterizations of Woolf's theories on time and subjectivity. If, as Woolf sensed, the event itself does not exist, and if time is something material and wavelike which we, as vessels, sit atop; then the Woolfian theory of time can be understood as a fluid channel of sensations which we are contained within. Time then is a materially dependent pool which contains micro- and macro-cosmic assembling, attracting, dispersing, and dissolving sensations. The change we experience as we age and witness the unfolding of the universe is not a progression through time, but rather, the perpetual reconfiguration and reiteration of a constant set of material. Rhoda finds the perfect phrase for this when she describes how we "stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together" (*TW* 222–3). Woolf's waves make clear the structure of our experience as wave-like

[45] Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1944)

encounters of sensations which follow a pattern of unity and dispersion. Language, memories, sensations, and so on are figured as material flows and channels which are projected and inscribed onto our translucent and vessel-like bodies. *The Waves* then can be seen as a profoundly generous poetic text which conveys Woolf's proposed rhythmic relation to reality, and thus teaches us to literally experience the cohesion of time as we move to the rhythms of the waves.

Within *The Waves*, time is tangibly spatialized. The subject lies within planar streams of the present-past within which the subject-as-vessel is brought into and out of coherence, just as waves ceaselessly rise and crash. If the material remains the same, but moves to a rhythm, then the traces and sensations of the past are bound to re-enter our vessels along the rhythm of those channels. The characters of *The Waves* regularly experience multitudes of historical periods, meanings, languages, sensations, and yet futile struggle to communicate or make sense of these experiences. That so many processes and experiences throughout the novel flow to the rhythm of the waves, to the motif unity and dispersion, clarifies that the poetic reality Woolf strove to communicate is beyond merely linguistic descriptions or metaphor.

Ultimately, Woolf's waves teach us that the body is subject to rhythms flowing both outside and inside of the body. The spatial and material imagining of time makes visible the way the present is not simply aestheticized by the past, but actually is perpetually and actively engaging with the sensations (the swirling eddies, the remnant foam) of that past. Time is not a progression but a reiteration and reconfiguration of material that preserves traces and sensations — this is why Woolf believes that memories have an existence outside of us, and that if we can understand the rhythm of the waves fully enough, we might be able to invent a techne to access those memories (perhaps by way of predicting when or how they arise). The remnant traces and residual sensations of each wave mixture gets mixed in, reincorporated, re-assembled into our

experience of reality, made clear in the novel's aesthetic interest in assemblage, atomistic dispersal, swarm or hive-like movements. The novel also demonstrates the movements of man, machine, and atom are all attuned to the waves alike, thus revealing an ethical approach so that in our experience of reality, educated and empowered by a new poetic understanding of time, we can live in tune with the sensations of past, rather than in perpetual longing for it. Lastly, in the depiction of the rhythm of the wave, or unity-dispersion, as a defining structure of experience, the novel offers a grounded and non-dualizing representation of subjectivity and liberation as a reconfiguration of otherwise set relations between one's individual ideological consciousness, sensations, and the body. *The Waves* does not express the phrase "there is a rhythm to reality," but is the rhythm itself.

Conclusion

Although I have spent this project focusing almost entirely on two specific later texts in Virginia Woolf's oeuvre, these concerns are present throughout much of her major novels. One novel that is ripe for analysis given my proposed understanding of Woolf's theories of time is *Between the Acts*, a novel which often holds a special tenderness in the heart of Woolf readers. Late in *Between the Acts*, Isa is idling in a garden and touches a pear:

> The pear was hard as stone. She looked down at the cracked flags beneath which the roots spread. 'That was the burden,' she mused, 'laid on me in the cradle; murmured by the waves; breathed by restless elm trees; crooned by singing women; what we must remember: what we would forget." (*BTA* 155)

The murmurs of the waves, the unintelligible language produced by the waves, carries the burden of the past which is "laid" onto Isa as a child. The primordial waves transmit the past onto Isa's body, forming her as a historical subject. Furthermore, at the end of the main pageant play of *Between the Acts*, a record player, which had provided the sound effects throughout the performance, begins to skip:

> The gramophone was affirming in tones there was no denying, triumphant yet valedictory: *Dispersed are we; who have come together.* But, the gramophone asserted, *let us retain whatever made that harmony…. Dispersed are we*, the gramophone repeated …"*Dispersed are we*, the gramophone triumphed, yet lamented, *Dispersed are we* ... (196, 198)

The record player, in an a-cinematic moment of audible unintelligibility, calls out the moment of dispersion, just as the waves murmur in their moment of crashing.

Beer observed in *The Common Ground* that Woolf took a particular interest in the locales of parks and parties because they provided buoyant spaces for momentarily bringing people together. We can see this most prominently throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, the novel that first introduced me to the magic of Woolf's writing. The entire novel hums with unity-dispersion as characters walk around alone, experiencing chance encounters only to be broken apart by the

stream of life once more. Early in the novel, while Clarissa first embarks on her great walk around London, she ponders to herself:

> Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. But what was she dreaming as she looked into Hatchards' shop window? (*MD* 9)

Clarissa poeticizes some atomistic watery substance, mist, which transmits in and out of all beings, making up the substance of all beings. Clarissa sees herself as part of the "ebb and flow of things" which unites her and Peter just as it unites her with the expansive life of trees, the materiality of houses, and all other forms of life "she had never met." Her body is lifted by the communal ebb and flow "as she had seen the trees lift the mist," a stunning inversion of the manifestation of form within the formless. In this passage, the formless "mist" — that which spreads throughout life and activates the cyclical unity between life and death — is supported by the form, the opposing polarities of material and immaterial act as one.

Mrs. Dalloway also bears within it the watery primordial murmurs which recur throughout *The Waves*, as well as *Between the Acts*. As Peter is walking around near the Tube station, he is stopped by the sound of a crooning

> A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into
>
> ee um fah um so
>
> foo swee too eem oo-
>
> the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube station from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump …" (*MD* 80–1)

Just as in *Between the Acts*, Isa is exposed to primordial weight of the past as "crooned by singing women," Peter encounters a primordial "voice of an ancient spring" which bubbles up without decipherability or coherence. Like the murmur of the waves, the old woman's watery song, "like a rusty pump … streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilizing, leaving a damp stain" (*MD* 81). There is evidently a link in Woolf's writing between the murmuring and extra-linguistic sound of the waves and the burden, knowledge, and thus sensations of the past. As Woolf senses, "I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (*MB* 80). In addition to *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*, further exploration of Woolf's extra-voluntary memory might turn next to *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse*, two novels which distinctly poeticize time, history, and the body in radically different ways.

As I see it, Woolf's theories of time mark an exciting and reparative inversion of Benjamin's traumatic temporality. Benjamin derives his philosophy of history through his understanding of memory and experience itself as traumatic. For Benjamin, trauma and history are both catastrophic realizations of a reality which is forever lost. That our experience of time itself is traumatic lends itself to a theory of history as traumatic. Woolf similarly derives her philosophy of history or time from her understanding of shock. However, Woolf's reconfiguration of the shock experience as rapture — an overwhelming mystical unity with reality-as-art — subsequently enables a different philosophy of memory and history to come to light.

For Woolf, time and history are not traumatic. That which truly ever is, never fully goes away. Aligning with her experience of rapture as well as her own personal aesthetic drawn from her memories of St. Ives, Woolf theorizes and poeticizes time as a reiterating wave, in which the

material substance remains the same, although its particular form is constantly reiterated.[46] Such a notion of time is reparative in that we essentially contain within us the unified reality — everything that ever happened and ever will happen is latent within each present moment. Furthermore, Woolf's sense of an extra-voluntary memory, a process of memories being brought onto and into the body from outside of the body, does not essentialize the individual subject as the root of memory or sensations. Rather, memories exist "independent of our minds," and thus, our relationship to them is far more fluid than we previously deemed possible.

In addition to extricating memory from an essentialized subject, Woolf's theory of time also does not brand a sense of progression or departure, but rather an ever-morphing unity. This unity is why Woolf suspects that given the right poetic or techné of time, "we shall be able to live our lives through from the start" (*MB* 67). "The start," in this sense, is not the beginning of time, but rather simply a repositioning within the unity of time. In this position of unity within time, the individual subject, and their ego, life, and death, are decentered as romantic individuals (from which an obsession with departure and loss derives). Rather, the subject is "a porous vessel afloat on sensation; or a sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays; and so on" which is subject to the sensations and stimuli reiterated within the wave-like material of time-space (*MB* 133).

I see this Woolfian reconfiguration of history, time, and the body as an exciting opportunity to expand the literary possibilities of teaching time. By this, I refer, as I did in my introduction, to writers like Anne McClintock or Vinay Lal, who call for new theories of history and time so as to undercut the homogenized experience of calendrical time disseminated by imperialism and industrialization. Literature which bears a plurality of temporalities serves as a direct method for reconfiguring and aestheticizing one's structural experience of reality. Such a

[46] Woolf was a fan of Albert Einstein; she even had a photograph portrait of Einstein (the one with his tongue out) right next to her reading chair at Monk's House. One of Einstein's most popular and influential discoveries was that light/energy takes form as both a particle and a wave at once. See the epigraph on page 6.

reconfiguration offers an experience of reality, subjectivity, and the body which is at once immersive and detached, critical and comedic, heady and somatic. As such, one persistent suggestion implicit in the writing of Virginia Woolf seems to be a critical and humorous embrace of one's aestheticized position within the dramatic performance of history. In *Between the Acts*, Lucy stands by a river and thinks, "Silenced, she returned to her private vision; of beauty which is goodness; the sea on which we float. Mostly impervious, but surely every boat sometimes leaks?" (*BTA* 205).

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