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THE PROBLEM OF THE FIXITY OF TABLES: VIRGINIA WOOLF AS A NON-DUALIST AND PROCESS-ORIENTED THINKER

PROBLÉM HMOTNÉHO SVĚTA: VIRGINIE WOOLFOVÁ JAKO NEDUALISTICKÁ A PROCESUÁLNÍ MYSLITELKA

DISSERTATION THESIS

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I declare that the following PhD dissertation is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in another university study, or to acquire another or the same title.

Kamenice nad Lipou, March 31, 2021

Veronika Krajíčková

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Introduction

Tracing Virginia Woolf's Philosophy

> Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it.[1]

> And as happens sometimes when the weather is very fine, the cliffs looked as if they were conscious of the ships, and the ships looked as if they were conscious of the cliffs, as if they signalled to each other some secret message of their own.[2]

> (…) what I call "my life", it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs.[3]

> Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. If discordant, producing harmony—if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head.[4]

The four quotations from different works of Virginia Woolf capture the main topics of this dissertation and illustrate the wide thematic and philosophical scope of Woolf's oeuvre. The first quotation illustrates Woolf's interest in the interaction between her characters and the material reality around them. She raised this idea for example in her essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," where she claims that novelists have focused so much on interpersonal relationships that the readers "long for some more impersonal relationship."[5] Consequently, writers should not forget that "a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales."[6] Accordingly, Woolf's texts contain long passages that deal with human subjects, who reflect upon their connection and fascination with all kinds of objects in their proximity. This aspect of Woolf's writing may be found for

1. Virginia Woolf, "Solid Objects," in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Harcourt, 1989), 105.
2. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 198.
3. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), 62-63.
4. Virginia Woolf, "Between the Acts," in *The Years & Between the Acts* (Ware, Wordsworth Classics, 2012), 388.
5. Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford, OUP, 2009), 80-81.
6. Woolf, "Poetry," 80-81.

instance in the short stories "The Mark on the Wall," "Solid Objects," and novels *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. Furthermore, Woolf often indicates that this interaction between sentient human beings and lifeless material substance may result in the reconfiguration of this traditional dualism and that, in fact, the human subject is not separated from the object but "becomes" that object. For example, in *To the Lighthouse* Mrs Ramsay watches the light from the lighthouse "until she became the thing she looked at—that light for example"[7] and in the short story "Solid Objects" John compulsively collects curious objects until they intermix with his own consciousness as indicated in the first quotation in the head of this introduction.

The blurred distinction between the subject and object is illustrated in the second quotation from *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf suggests that while we often think of the material world as of something deprived of psychical and conscious elements, in reality, there is not much difference between the "thing-stuff" and the "thought-stuff."[8] Woolf, like other philosophers of her time, rejects the scientific materialism that advocates the "irreducible brute matter"[9] and often talks about the dissolution of solidity in her fiction, for example in "The Mark on the Wall," where the narrator laments that people worship "the chest of drawers," "solidity," and "reality,"[10] or in *The Waves*, where Bernard doubts "the fixity of tables."[11] To balance the prevalence of solid matter, Woolf argues in her essay "On Being Ill" that both mind and body represent equally important aspects of life and complement each other like "the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea."[12] This suggests that Woolf's engagement with materiality cannot be read either from a materialist perspective, or an idealist viewpoint, but rather via non-dualist theories that consider physical aspects and mental aspects as

7. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 70.
8. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 72.
9. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 17.
10. Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," in *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 88.
11. Woolf, *The Waves*, 162.
12. Woolf, "On Being Ill," in *Selected Essays*, 101.

simultaneously present in all kinds of matter. Consequently, it is suggested in the second chapter of this thesis that Woolf's perspective of matter may be approximated to panpsychism, a theory of consciousness claiming that "the basic physical constituents of the universe have mental properties, whether or not they are parts of living organisms."[13] In reference to the quotation from *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf likewise suggests that while cliffs and ships are usually considered to be inanimate objects defined by their physical properties, they might be conscious of each other and interact with each other. Woolf attributes the same capacity to the lighthouse or a garden urn in *To the Lighthouse*, pieces of stone and china in "Solid Objects," or to rooms in *Orlando*.

While the first two quotations illustrate that Woolf undermines the dualisms of the subject and object, and mind and matter, the third quotation given above demonstrates that the author also attempts to bridge the abyss between separate identities of individuals, subverts the unitary subject of predominantly male-dominated psychoanalysis of her period and anticipates the notion of fragmented postmodern self. Whereas Woolf is often accused of focusing on subjectivism and individualism, she devises an intersubjective and constantly changing self. Woolf reveals this idea in her diary, where she claims that human beings are "somehow successive, & continuous,"[14] or in *The Waves*, where Bernard says that he is "made and remade continually."[15] Moreover, an individual never exists in isolation but represents a part of a wider community, wherein the community and the individual are interdependent. Woolf develops this idea of network identity especially in her late works *The Waves*, *Three Guineas*, "A Sketch of the Past," and *Between the Acts*, where she suggests that

13. Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 436, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2183914.
14. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3 1925-30*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 218.
15. Woolf, *The Waves*, 15.

all individuals are ontologically related as "we are members of one another,"[16] which also indicates that the ontological interrelation bears an ethical aspect. This "ontoethics"[17] enables the author to attribute value to each member of the community in *Between the Acts*, and ultimately in *Three Guineas*, where Woolf rejects social exclusion because "a common interest unites us; it is one world, one life."[18]

The fourth quotation is linked to the relational ontoethics outlined above and reveals Woolf's inclination to blur the distinction between the human self and the surrounding nature, weaken the importance of humans and disprove their right to subjugate other natural organisms in their surroundings. The introductory quotation indicates that humans, animals, and other organisms are equally important parts that create a harmonious whole, which results from Woolf's emphasis on the human embeddedness in their environment. For example, Clarissa Dalloway is "being part of the trees at home; of the house there,"[19] or Susan in *The Waves* claims that she is "rooted to the middle of the earth" and that her "body is a stalk."[20] These quotations illustrate Woolf's non-anthropocentric viewpoint, her tendency to erase the distinction between the human and the non-human, or in other words nature and culture. By focusing on human beings conceived as integral parts of their environment, she reconciles the human and nonhuman worlds which drifted apart as a consequence of modernity. In her essay "Flying over London," she emphasizes that the mind is "inveterately anthropocentric,"[21] which is counterbalanced by her attempt to get rid of the human existence in the passage "Time Passes," or natural interludes in *The Waves*, where she explores the description of nonhuman temporality and space. Moreover, in her essay "The Sun and the Fish" Woolf

16. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 396.
17. Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 1.
18. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), 163.
19. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2003), 7.
20. Woolf, *The Waves*, 6.
21. Woolf, "Flying over London," in *Selected Essays*, 207.

offers an apocalyptic vision of humanity "rushing to destruction" and "accepting its doom;"[22] in the "London Scene Essays"—"Thunder at Wembley" and "The Docks of London"—she deals with the human need to show off their mastery over the natural world and, at the same time, expresses her fascination and repulsion by the docks of London, where one can see the illustration of consumerism and exploitation of nature.

The issues raised in the previous four paragraphs, related to the quotations from the head of this introduction, suggest that Woolf was intrigued by the idea that everything is interconnected at some deeper level, the ontological level, and that she rejected all kinds of separation and dualisms established by science and adopted by literature prior to, and also contemporary with, her writing. This interconnection at the fundamental level, penetration beneath the surface and the appearance of the physical world may be traced already in her first-published short story "The Mark on the Wall," where the narrator states that she wants "to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts."[23] Therefore, this thesis seeks the definition of Woolf's "personal philosophy" and suggests that it is based primarily on the intimate relation between the subject and object, the human being and its surroundings, and the idea that even physical matter, traditionally conceived as lifeless and inert, might have some psychical properties and agency. As a result, living organisms and inorganic matter are not distinct, as claimed by scientific materialism, but fundamentally similar in the way that they are endowed with both mental and physical properties and cannot be considered as merely "solid" or psychical. Furthermore, Woolf also recurrently evokes the idea that human beings are ontologically interconnected, for example in "A Sketch of the Past," where she claims that "behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all

22. Woolf, "The Sun and the Fish," in *Selected Essays*, 171.
23. Woolf, "The Mark," 85.

human beings—are connected with this,"[24] or in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*, where Woolf explores the notion of pluralistic and intersubjective identity that goes against the individualism and "privatism,"[25] of which modernism was often accused. Finally, this thesis highlights that this ontological bond between both human beings and natural elements results in a sort of ontoethics that emphasizes difference and multiplicity within a community and recognizes the value of every being. Consequently, Woolf applies this value recognition to her essays, where she explicitly, or implicitly, criticizes anthropocentrism and reveals her proto-ecological thinking. By the description of a possible extinction of life and criticism of consumerism and its negative impact on the natural world, she demonstrates that she is not an elitist, "human-centred" modernist, but rather a thinker who responds to the scientific and philosophical context of her period and the way "animals, environments and objects"[26] were treated at that time.

The "personal philosophy" outlined in "A Sketch of the Past" has intrigued Woolf scholars for decades, and particularly in the last two decades when the focus of Woolf studies shifted from detailed analysis of language and psychoanalytic approach to her fiction to the examination of materiality, ontology, and ethics.[27] Scholars have discussed Woolf's "pattern behind the cotton wool" from various and often opposing perspectives. For example, Mark Hussey devotes one chapter of his book *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* to Woolf's concept of reality and claims that what we recurrently find in the author's works is the sense of "gap" between the everyday reality as it appears to

24. Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Harcourt, 1985), 72.
25. Derek Ryan, "Following Snakes and Moths: Modernist Ethics and Posthumanism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 61, no. 3 (2015): 291.
26. Ryan, "Following Snakes," 290.
27. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 3.

us and "the yearning for transcendence of the world of time and death."[28] That is to say, Woolf often deals with "abstract reality" which, on the one hand, surpasses the everyday human experience, but on the other hand, cannot be perceived as something idealistic, mystic or religious, which would not correspond to Woolf's atheistic background. However, as Hussey points out, Woolf did not accept the atheism and materialism of her father Leslie Stephen and G.E. Moore completely and searched for abstraction, or a pattern, behind the actual world. Hussey concludes by identifying Woolf's abstract pattern as "psychic perception of pattern" behind daily life, which results from "a state of rhythmic rest"[29] experienced mostly by female characters. Therefore, this abstract level is not connected with some transcendental reality, but it comes as a side effect of the sensitive apprehension of the visible world. The search for this transcendental philosophy, a pattern behind the everyday, and its definition is also the focus of Lorraine Sim's book *Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience*, where the scholar suggests that especially in Woolf's early fiction, we may trace a certain Romantic pantheism suggesting that the divine "inheres in, and emanates through, the visible world."[30] Moreover, Sim claims that Woolf's abstract reality of the pattern behind the cotton wool of daily life is "non-material principle or essence,"[31] and that it may be likened to Plato's realm of transcendental forms of which the sensible world is a mere copy. Therefore, Sim argues that Woolf's personal philosophy consists in the "belief in the existence of an objective, non-material reality that provides order and meaning to life."[32]

In contrast, Ann Banfield employs a very different perspective in her book *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* and traces the

28. Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1986), 96.
29. Hussey, 105.
30. Lorraine Sim, *Virginia Woolf: The Pattern of Ordinary Experience* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 168.
31. Sim, 168.
32. Sim, 173.

influence of the Bloomsbury Group's discussions of philosophy, and particularly Bertrand Russell's philosophy on Woolf's writing. Although there is not a direct evidence that Woolf ever read Russell's philosophical works, Banfield focuses on Russell's rejection of transcendentalism and idealism and ascribes the same shift to Woolf. According to her, the most striking parallel between the writer and her friend philosopher is the dual reality of objects, which are divided into sensible objects perceived by an observer, or, in other words, real objects, and unobservable physical objects, or unreal objects.[33] Banfield demonstrates this distinction on the difference between "a scrubbed kitchen table" that Lily imagines after she learns about Mr Ramsay's philosophical subject and "a white deal four-legged table" of Mr Ramsay's imagination which represents a pure form deprived of sense-data a perceiver attributes to the object. Moreover, she claims that Woolf and Russell both believed in "atomic" vision of reality, which means that we usually see an object from our own private perspective and assume that the others see the same thing but, in fact, we take on only one of the multiple perspectives.[34] This multiple reality of physical objects may be illustrated for example in "The Mark on the Wall," where Woolf rejects the existence of "the standard thing, the real thing"[35] and contrasts it with a personal perspective of the mark. Although the analogies drawn between Woolf and Russell in Banfield's book are very persuasive and the author claims that Woolf's 1921 encounter with Russell resulted in the historically particularized conjunction of literature and philosophy, the proofs that Woolf tried to apply Russell's philosophy to her art are nowhere to be found. Nevertheless, Banfield's enquiry is crucial in marking the shift in Woolf's studies from the ethics and philosophy of G. E. Moore and the focus on personal relations towards "the aesthetic of the impersonal,"[36] which means

33. Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 60.
34. Banfield, 79.
35. Woolf, "The Mark," 86.
36. Banfield, 54.

towards the issues of materiality and ontology. Derek Ryan's book *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory* attempts to capture Woolf's definition of reality and matter, arguing that "Woolf's writing offers new conceptualisations of the material world where the immanent and intimate entanglements of human and nonhuman agencies are brought to the fore."[37] Ryan discusses this reconceptualization via philosophical theories that emerged decades after "high modernism," for instance via poststructuralism of Deleuze and Guattari and new materialism as outlined by feminist thinkers such as Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, or Rosi Braidotti. By focusing on human interaction and entanglement with nonhuman objects and animals, Ryan elaborates on the impersonal line in Woolf's writing explored by Banfield. In the first chapter of the book the author discusses Woolf's personal philosophy based on the reading of the essay "The New Biography," where Woolf distinguishes between solid facts and things, symbolised by "the granite," and the ephemeral ideas and experience, illustrated by the image of "the rainbow." In the following chapters, he goes on analysing how Woolf tackles this dualism and often transitions in her fiction from solidity to ephemerality. Moreover, Ryan emphasizes that the two terms do not represent oppositions, but complement each other, which creates the basis of Woolf's treatment of materiality. In the same vein, J. Ashley Foster argues in her article "Writing in the Light of Truth: History, Ethics, and Community in Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts" that Woolf's longing for transcendence behind material reality might be read via the influence of Quakerism, where God manifests himself as light glowing through the physical world including human beings, which justifies the value of every being. Accordingly, Foster argues that Woolf often uses the images of light to talk about spirit, reality, and life described as a "luminous halo," and she contrasts this spirituality of light to Woolf's focus on material elements. She highlights that the spiritual aspect, and the divine light, are never separated

37. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 4.

from matter and that the two aspects of reality are interconnected: "This luminous halo is not transcendent but immanent in the material."[38]

With the awareness that Woolf read philosophical and scientific works ranging from Plato to the new physics and possibly even Bergson, Moore or Russell, this thesis does not aim to demonstrate that Woolf was directly influenced by any single philosopher whom she might have read. As Benjamin Hagen points out in his article "Bloomsbury and Philosophy," Woolf was far from being a systematic philosopher, however, she created her works "philosophically,"[39] with the use of concepts that she read or discussed with her friends. Moreover, Woolf's use of the term "philosophy" is rather vague and differs in her essays and other works, therefore, if we want to devise its definition, it must be regarded as her perspective of life, reality, and one's relation to other human and nonhuman beings.

This dissertation elaborates on the above-mentioned attempts to capture the main premises of Virginia Woolf's "philosophy" as directly outlined in "A Sketch of the Past" but dispersed throughout her works, which gives evidence of Woolf's interest in the nature of reality, and the knowledge of the material world. It shares with the previous attempts the assumption that Woolf acknowledges the equal importance of mental and material aspects of reality and that she is deeply interested in the way these two aspects interact and interrelate. Moreover, as it is sketched in the following section describing each of the following chapters, it is to be suggested that whereas Woolf is commonly thought a modernist writer and thinker, she anticipates many issues discussed later in the discourse of postmodern and poststructuralist philosophy and literature. This anticipation lies predominantly in Woolf's rejection of dualistic perspective or binary oppositions of subject/object, material/spiritual,

38. Ashley J. Foster, "Writing in the Light of Truth": History, Ethics, and Community in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 22 (2016): 54.
39. Benjamin Hagen, "Bloomsbury and Philosophy," in *The Handbook to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. Derek Ryan and Stephen Ross (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 139.

human/nonhuman, nature/culture, or individual/community. Woolf writes in her essay "Character in Fiction" that "about December 1910 human character changed," and she describes this change as a complete turnaround in both private and public spheres of "religion, conduct, politics, and literature."[40] It is possible to add to these changes also the shift in one's perception of reality and their relation to the surrounding nature, which is based precisely on the blurring of the boundaries between above listed dualisms. Rachel Crossland interestingly discusses the dualistic climate of the beginning of the 20th century in her book *Modernist Physics*, where she points out that various scientific disciplines and popular science of that time struggled with "dualistic models," for example evolutionary biology or physics, which was revolutionized by the Einstein's and de Broglie's discoveries of wave-particle duality of light.[41] Moreover, Crossland refers to scholars who argue that dualisms were also central to the Victorian culture[42] and she demonstrates that various kinds of dichotomies are to be found in Woolf's autobiographical writing and fiction. In contrast to reinforcing the dualistic aspects in Woolf's fiction, Crossland argues that Woolf, similarly to other nondualist scientists and philosophers such as Einstein, Bohr or Bergson,[43] envisages a project that intertwines dualisms and replaces the dualistic models with "complementary models."[44] She illustrates this very aptly on Woolf's use of conjunctions "and" and "or" that dominate titles of Woolf's short stories and novels, for example *Monday or Tuesday* or *Night and Day*, and suggests that although Woolf often starts with exclusive "or" in relation to certain thematic or conceptual aspects, she mostly concludes with inclusive "and."[45]

40. Woolf, "Character in Fiction," in *Selected Essays*, 38.
41. Rachel Crossland, *Modernist Physics: Waves, Particles, and Relativities in the Writings of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 35.
42. Crossland, 37.
43. Crossland, 37.
44. Crossland, 39.
45. Crossland, 40.

This thesis follows the same footsteps and suggests that Woolf's effort to reconcile the binary oppositions, which is an integral part of her "personal philosophy," or "creative ontology,"[46] might be likened to the main premises of process-oriented philosophy, especially Alfred North Whitehead's "philosophy of organism,"[47] which rejects "the bifurcation of nature" into the aforementioned oppositions. Although Whitehead represents another "Cambridge philosopher," who, by means of collaboration with his student Bertrand Russell, might have influenced Woolf, this thesis provides not only a "paratactic coordination"[48] of Woolf's and Whitehead's thought, but it attempts to discover and examine understudied parallels between Woolf's and Whitehead's conceptions of reality and criticism of all forms of the bifurcation of nature. Whereas Whitehead primarily defines this bifurcation as epistemological problem of the distinction between the nature composed of "entities such as electrons which are the study of speculative physics" and the apparent nature produced as "the byplay of mind,"[49] he examines several other dualisms throughout his philosophical work, for example the distinction between substance and experience, the subject and object, the animate and the inanimate, the organism and its environment, or ultimately an organism and the community of its fellow beings. Precisely these themes are the points of intersection between Woolf's personal philosophy and process thought. In this light, the thesis proposes that if we want to pigeonhole Woolf as a philosopher, its closest correlative would be a process-oriented thinker. For this reason, it is quite surprising that there are only a few papers which analyse the potential that process philosophy offers in relation to Woolf's writing. This might be partly explained by the neglect of Whiteheadian thought in the mid and second half of the 20th century and "the Whiteheadian turn" appearing in philosophy and science only in the last few

46. Hagen, 146.
47. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 7.
48. Hagen, 137.
49. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 21.

decades, and partly by the fact that Woolf's ontology has been extensively discussed in relation to Deleuze's poststructuralist thought, new materialism, or object-oriented ontology —theories that more or less directly elaborate on Whitehead's cosmology.

The parallels between Deleuze's poststructuralist philosophy and Woolf's fiction have been analysed by Derek Ryan in his already mentioned book *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, where the author discusses Woolf's writing in relation to Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of rhizomatic structure or becoming-animal, and by Laci Mattison, who has published many articles on Deleuzian reading of modernism and importantly also the article "Woolf's Un/folding(s): The Artist and The Event of the Neo-Baroque," where she mentions Deleuze's notion of the fold inspired by Whitehead. Mattison highlights that objects in Woolf's fiction may often be called "events" because they enter various relations with their environment, which is one of the topics discussed later in this thesis. Although this article opens up a new way of reading Woolf's fiction via the "aesthetics of event,"[50] it tends to identify Deleuze's ontology with that of Whitehead, which is, of course, justifiable to some extent, but as some scholars point out, Deleuze freely modified Whitehead's thought to his own image and we cannot think of these two philosophies as entirely equivalent.[51] For this reason, this thesis focuses primarily on the ontology, or cosmology, outlined by Alfred North

50. Laci Mattison, "Woolf's Un/folding(s): The Artist and The Event of the Neo-Baroque" in *Contradictory Woolf: Selected Papers from the Twenty-First Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Derek Ryan and Stella Bolaki (Clemson, Clemson University Press, 2012), 97.

51. Michael Halewood in his article "On Whitehead and Deleuze: The Process of Materiality," published in *Configurations* 13, no. 1 (2005): 57-76, acknowledges the parallels between Deleuze's and Whitehead's ideas of materiality and points out that both Whitehead and Deleuze envisaged a nonessentialist ontology and saw nature as the realm of interrelated experiences of subjects. He adds that while Whitehead also prioritizes becoming over being, however, unlike Deleuze he is more successful in "advocating a notion of physicality" (61). Didier Debaise in his book *Speculative Empiricism: Revisiting Whitehead* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) points out weaknesses of Deleuze's appropriation of Whitehead's thought, for example his perception of Whitehead's philosophy as philosophy of events (54) based on the idea that an actual entity is an event. In fact, what Deleuze sees as an event is Whitehead's society (55).

Whitehead because he is not only the inspiration for Deleuze's own ontology of becoming but above all Woolf's contemporary. In the introduction of his above-mentioned book Derek Ryan argues that he wants to discuss Woolf's writing via Deleuze's perspective because the philosopher "in one way or another" influenced the theories of new materialism as proposed by Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, or Jane Bennett, and that the "Deleuzian" reading of Woolf may "open up new perspectives and conceptual paradigms"[52] and re-establish the importance of theory while analysing Woolf's texts. Moreover, the Deleuzian poststructuralist lens enable Ryan to link Woolf's writing with contemporary theories that focus on "the material entanglements of humans with nonhuman objects"[53] and demonstrate that Woolf still has a say in today's post-humanist debates.

While this dissertation analyses Woolf's texts from a similar perspective to that of Ryan, it also aims to bridge the temporal gap between Woolf and Deleuze's poststructuralist thought by supporting its arguments with the process thought of Whitehead. The philosopher was not only a predecessor of and inspiration for Deleuze's thought but also Woolf's contemporary, which suggests what both the writer and the philosopher were, in fact, ahead of their own time and anticipated our current discussions of materiality. Claiming that all the above-mentioned new materialists at least partly elaborate on Deleuze's ideas, Ryan neglects Whitehead's direct influence on some of these thinkers. For example, Donna J. Haraway mentions Whitehead's concept of concrescence in the first chapter of her book *When Species Meet* to exemplify the natural connection between human/nonhuman individuals, their ancestors, and contemporaries. Whitehead is mentioned also in other chapters of the book and especially in relation to Haraway's concept of "worlding" inspired by Isabelle Stengers and

52. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf* 18.
53. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf* 12.

her elaboration on Whitehead's philosophy.[54] In her article "Diffractive Propositions: Reading Alfred North Whitehead with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad" Melanie Seghal suggests that Karen Barad's focus on quantum physics and her idea of "ontological entanglements" is strikingly similar to Whitehead's interrelated actual entities and societies.[55] Deleuze himself refers directly to Whitehead in his book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, where he speaks about Whitehead as one of the successors of the philosophical school of "events."[56] Therefore, these parallels indicate that whereas Woolf's fiction is often read in line with the postmodern and poststructuralist theories of materiality in order to be related to contemporary discussions about materiality, nature and culture dualism or posthumanism, it may be read alongside Whitehead's "philosophy of organism," which prefigures the main issues discussed by Deleuze and his successors new materialists. As a result, this thesis aims to complement various readings of Virginia Woolf's fiction via the Deleuzian lens with the original Whiteheadian perspective from which these readings often originate.

Moreover, with its focus on Whitehead the thesis also attempts to bring the philosopher, who had been neglected for a few decades because of his focus on all-encompassing cosmology, into current discussions and demonstrate that his philosophy enables us to read literature in a new light and renders it pertinent to our current critical climate. The striking parallels between Woolf's fiction and Whitehead's ideas also illustrate that Whitehead's process thought does not represent an abstract philosophy but that it may enlighten our conceptualisation of the everyday and material objects, connections between things and human beings, interpersonal relations, and last but not least the nonhuman and

54. Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 93.
55. Melanie Sehgal, "Diffractive Propositions: Reading Alfred North Whitehead with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad," *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014): 194.
56. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993) 76.

criticism of anthropocentrism. Unfortunately, there is no clear evidence that Woolf ever read Whitehead's works, but she must have known him via her friends Bertrand Russell and Ottoline Morell.[57] In her autobiographical memoir "Old Bloomsbury" Woolf mentions her attendance at the 1912 ball that celebrated the end of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition organized in London's Crosby Hall, where she was dressed very colourfully like a "negro woman" from Gaugin's paintings, which scandalized Mrs Whitehead, the wife of Alfred North Whitehead.[58] At that time, Whitehead was known mainly as a co-author of 1910 *Principia Mathematica*, rather than as a philosopher. Therefore, the direct influence of his philosophy on Woolf cannot be justified. In this light, this thesis suggests that analogies between Woolf's and Whitehead's "philosophies" result from the fact that they were contemporaries and that they were interested in similar issues, probably due to the changing social and scientific discourse of their time. In this respect, the thesis discusses the parallels between Woolf's and Whitehead's thought via the prism of zeitgeist model, which is based on shared interests of various disciplines at a particular period, rather than direct influence model,[59] which would claim that Woolf knew Whitehead, and therefore must have read some of his philosophical works and applied his ideas to her fiction. Thus, this thesis analyses the analogies between Woolf's literary viewpoint and Whitehead's philosophical perspective in accordance with Gillian Beer's idea from her book *Open Fields*, where the literary critic suggests that diverse scientific and artistic disciplines "share the moment's discourse."[60] As a result, this thesis provides another description of Woolf's "personal philosophy," broadens the

57. Holly Henry suggests in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), on page 68, that the Woolfs met Whitehead in Morrell's Garsington House.
58. Virginia Woolf, "Old Bloomsbury," In *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Harcourt, 1985), 200-201.
59. Crossland, 4-5.
60. Gillian Beer. *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 171.

scale of philosophical analyses of Woolf's opus and suggests that Woolf might have been influenced by Whitehead to the same extent as by Russell, Einstein, or Bergson because all these outstanding figures of the early 20th century created the above-mentioned discourse of their period. In this way, this thesis contributes to the array of approaches that a scholar may adopt while analysing not only Woolf's fiction but also works of other modernist writers or scientists.

Virginia Woolf as a Process Thinker

Virginia Woolf shows her interest in the nature of reality and fascination with the world around her throughout her fiction. She might have taken this interest after her father Leslie Stephen, famous historian, critic, and philosopher, who was inspired by Darwin's evolution theory, adopted agnosticism and wrote several influential essays on the nature of reality, epistemology, and faith, for example "What is Materialism?" where he argues that scientists are good at describing material substance, but they do not know how to include immaterial notions such as feelings or experience in their descriptions. Moreover, he claims in the essay, "emotions are just as real as the stone,"[61] by which he condemns scientific materialism that tends to discard experience as a mere secondary product of our brain processes. Similarly, Virginia Woolf fought against the dominance of matter and set herself a goal to "saturate every atom" with experience and life and "eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity"[62] from her fiction. However, this does not mean that Woolf rejects the notion of material substance, which is illustrated for example in her essay "On Being Ill," where she acknowledges the equal importance of both bodily and mental processes. The material and the mental, or experiential, always complement each other in Woolf's fiction "like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea."[63] The questioning of purely material reality is a recurrent theme in Woolf's works, for example in *The Waves*, where Bernard feels a table and asks "Are you hard?"[64] or in the short story "The Mark on the Wall," where the narrator wants to "sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts."[65] In the same story Woolf also doubts the existence of "the real thing" or "the standard thing"[66] that is

61. Leslie Stephen, "What is Materialism?" in *Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1903), 132.
62. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3,* 209.
63. Woolf, "On Being Ill," 101.
64. Woolf, *The Waves*, 162.
65. Virginia Woolf, "The Mark," 85.
66. Woolf, "The Mark," 86.

unchangeable and the same for everyone. In her diary Woolf asks whether life is something "very solid or very shifting"[67] and admits her uncertainty and anxiety about this contradiction. Similarly, Alfred North Whitehead rejects scientific materialism, which prevailed in the then science, and argues in his book *Science and the Modern World* that although experience may seem "dim and fragmentary," it "sounds the utmost depths of reality."[68] For this reason, Whitehead devises an ontology based on atomic actual entities, defined in his opus magnum *Process and Reality* as "drops of experience, complex and interdependent,"[69] whereof the whole world is made up. For Whitehead these actual entities represent the "final real things"[70] and this thesis suggests that they may also be seen as the pattern lying beneath the surface of "hard separate facts" mentioned by Woolf in "The Mark on the Wall."[71] The fact that Whitehead's "atoms" are of experiential nature is strikingly similar to Woolf's idea from her essay "Modern Fiction," where she suggests that modern writers should "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in order in which they fall."[72] Woolf also speaks about "innumerable atoms" of impressions that are processed by a mind during a single day.[73]

Whitehead's actual entities come to existence by the process of concrescence, or becoming, and they assemble into larger macro-scale objects which he calls societies. Although these societies are relatively stable objects we encounter in everyday life, for example a tree, a table, or a lighthouse, their internal configurations are parts of a constant flux of change as the individual actual entities repeatedly emerge and perish. In a similar way, objects in Woolf's fiction are described as solid and at the same time continually changing entities. This may be illustrated in "Solid Objects," where Woolf emphasizes the solidity of

67. Woolf, *The Diary*, Vol. 3, 218.
68. Whitehead, *Science*, 18.
69. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.
70. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.
71. Woolf, "The Mark," 85.
72. Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 9.
73. Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 9.

pieces of different materials collected by John and points out that these objects may lose their actual form and recompose in a slightly different shape,[74] which means that they also affect their environment differently. Likewise, the lighthouse in the eponymous novel is depicted as a solid landmark whereupon all the characters fix their eyes, however, it is described differently in each passage and Woolf even argues, from the perspective of James, that "nothing was simply one thing" as "the other was also the Lighthouse."[75]

The first chapter of this thesis analyses the similarities between Woolf's and Whitehead's conception of "things" and highlights their dislike of this designation. Moreover, the chapter discusses Whitehead's attempt to blur the distinction between the categories of the subject and the object via his concept of prehension based on the idea that each actual entity is at the same time a subject, which feels and interacts with other entities, and an object, which is "prehended" by other entities and may become a part of their process of concrescence, or in other words, becoming. This idea may be applied to Woolf's description of human interaction with the surrounding world, which is often described as transgressing the boundary between the subject and object. For example, this applies to John's interaction with the collected objects that intermingle with his thoughts and become active subjects or to *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily wants to become "one with the object one adored" or Mrs Ramsay renounces her own subjectivity and slips into the objective position of the light she is looking at. Therefore, Woolf adopts Whitehead's belief that "no individual subject can have independent reality"[76] as it is co-created by the aspects of other subjects that act the part of objects. The first chapter also discusses the merging of the subject and object in relation to Woolf's short story "A Simple Melody" and "The Fascination by the Pool" and suggests that the distinction between the two aforementioned categories is entirely abandoned. Moreover, this topic is elaborated

74. Woolf, "Solid Objects," 105.
75. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 202.
76. Whitehead, *Science*, 150.

on in the third chapter, which deals primarily with the interconnection of human subjects and the natural environment whereof they are parts.

Another idea that Woolf shares with Whitehead is her recurrent description of live or animate matter. It is demonstrated in *To the Lighthouse*, particularly in its central passage "Time Passes," where the objects such as the lighthouse, Lily's canvas, cliffs, or garden urns are often described as having a degree of sentience and they react to or originate changes in their environment. In Whitehead's terminology, these objects are subjects of feeling that can influence their process of becoming and impose their agency on their environment, as they are endowed with "lure for feeling." While Whitehead attributes consciousness only to animals and humans, which are "centres of feeling and of experience,"[77] inanimate objects are capable of feeling and affecting each other at least at the physical level. In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead acknowledges that conscious and experiential elements penetrate the whole universe: ". . . we should conceive mental operations as among the factors which make up the constitution of nature."[78] This represents Whitehead's main argument against the Cartesian dualism and its incoherence.

For the same reason, Whitehead may be labelled a panpsychist, in other words someone who believes that "the basic physical constituents of the universe have mental properties, whether or not they are parts of living organisms."[79] As it is suggested in the second chapter of this thesis, the same label might be ascribed to Woolf, who highlights the importance of experience in her essays "Modern Fiction" and "On Being Ill," where, like Whitehead, she criticizes her "materialist" literary predecessors and contemporaries. This deadness and insentience of matter is denounced in *To the Lighthouse*, where the lighthouse

77. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 23.
78. Whitehead, *Science*, 156.
79. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 181.

"laid its caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again,"[80] or where "the cliffs looked as if they were conscious of the ships"[81] and vice versa. Therefore, Woolf revives the tradition of the Romantic pantheism and her idea that everything is alive and enminded peaks in her short story "The Death of the Moth," where she is fascinated with the presence of life and intentionality in a tiny creature, in *Mrs Dalloway*, where Septimus declares that "leaves were alive; trees were alive,"[82] or in *The Waves*, where Louis points out that "All seems alive."[83] The chapter also analyses Woolf's interest in other-than-human experience in her short stories "Kew Gardens" and the novella *Flush*, where Woolf explores lower degrees of consciousness attributed to animals and plants and acknowledges the value of each organism. This echoes Whitehead's ideas that "human beings are merely one species in the throng of existences"[84] and that the sense of "worth" may be attributed to each being regardless its benefits for its environment.[85]

Whereas the first two chapters demonstrate that Woolf rejected the notion of stable and inert things or objects, united the categories of the subject and object and was intrigued by the "buzzing world" of relations and the importance of experience outlined by Whitehead's philosophy or organism, the third chapter focuses on Woolf's definition of personhood and interpersonal relationships. It is suggested that Woolf shares the processual view of identity, which means that a person is considered to be "a society" of actual entities, both of physical and experiential nature. Moreover, one's soul is nothing more than "the succession of experience, extending from birth to the present moment,"[86] which suggests that a personality is nothing fixed and easily pinpointed. Consequently, one's identity is a constantly changing

80. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 145.
81. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 198.
82. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 51.
83. Woolf, *The Waves*, 130.
84. Whitehead, *Modes*, 112.
85. Whitehead, *Modes*, 109.
86. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 63.

process and although it seems relatively stable, it is comprised of subprocesses that "enjoy adventures of change throughout time and space."[87] Woolf's concept of identity is strikingly similar to this processual perspective, which may be illustrated primarily in "A Sketch of the Past," where Woolf argues that one's identity is a "bowl that one fills and fills and fills"[88] with experience, in *The Waves*, where Bernard suggests that he is "made and remade continually,"[89] or in *Orlando*, where the protagonist possesses several selves derived from various aspects of experience. The multiplication of selves is also an essential idea of Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*, where the author connects the processual perspective of selfhood with her feminist ideas based on non-unitary identity. In her essay "Street Haunting: The London Adventure" Woolf confirms this claim by highlighting that a unitary and fixed self is a mere social construct, as "for convenience' sake a man must be a whole."[90] Interestingly, Woolf also shares Whitehead's belief that "there is no society in isolation"[91] because each actual entity and each society interacts with its environment, which contributes significantly to the emerging identity. In this way, Whitehead avoids the "dim division" between "This-My-Self," "That Other" and "The Whole"[92] and argues that there is a universal interconnection between all beings based on internal relations between actual occasions: "We are, each of us, one among others; and all of us are embraced in the unity of the whole."[93]

At the very beginning of *Process and Reality* Whitehead argues that "the obvious solidarity of the world" springs precisely from this universal relationality which suggests that his ontology is inextricably intertwined with ethics. This Whiteheadian "ontoethics"[94] was

87. Whitehead, *Process*, 35.
88. Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 65.
89. Woolf, *The Waves*, 74.
90. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 82.
91. Whitehead, *Process*, 90
92. Whitehead, *Modes*, 110.
93. Whitehead, *Modes*, 110.
94. Grosz, 1.

taken over by feminist process thinkers, for example Sheila Greeve Davaney, Valerie C. Saiving,[95] or Isabelle Stengers.[96] With her focus on the interpersonal relations and intersubjective identity in her late works, Woolf may also be considered a predecessor of these thinkers, who above all adopt Whitehead's idea that a subject is intrinsically social, or relational, and has value for itself and for the others. Woolf envisages similar relationality in *The Waves*, where she rejects the modernist emphasis on individualism and explores intersubjective narrative, where individuality, "this difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome."[97] The six characters of the novel are symbolized by the image of "a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution,"[98] which suggests that separate characters co-create the reality they perceive and enrich each other's identity. Woolf expresses her satisfaction that springs from making wholes and unifying in "A Sketch of the Past," claiming 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."[99] Like in "The Mark on the Wall," here Woolf acknowledges the relations between human beings and other entities that lie under the visible reality.

The third chapter of this thesis analyses how Woolf uses this relationality not only in *The Waves* but how this interconnectedness acquires ethical dimension in *Between the Acts* where Woolf intentionally employs very diverse characters, highlights their common ground, and criticizes the pretence omnipresent in the society. She points out that "we are members of

95. For further discussion and parallels between feminism and process philosophy see the anthology *Feminism and Process Thought*, ed. Sheila G. Davaney (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).
96. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).
97. Woolf, *The Waves*, 162.
98. Woolf, *The Waves*, 70.
99. Woolf, "A Sketch," 72.

one another,"[100] which is mentioned also in *Three Guineas*, where Woolf urges people to unite and fight against the aggressors who deny "one world, one life."[101]

The last chapter of this thesis elaborates on Woolf's own ontoethics described above and suggests that the writer was equally concerned not only with one's power exercised on other human beings but also with the doubt whether humans really represent a superior and unique species which has the right to subjugate nature. The first part of the chapter argues that Woolf's characters are often described as integral parts of nature, for example Louis in *The Waves*, who says "I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world,"[102] or Clarissa Dalloway, who is "part of the trees at home; of the house there."[103] This interconnection may be analysed via Whitehead's aforementioned relationality and belief that "the body is part of the external world"[104] and that it is impossible to clearly divide where the molecules of one's body end and start intermingling with the environment. Stating that a human being is just "one among other natural objects,"[105] Whitehead rejects the inveterate anthropocentrism rooted in the Western philosophy and civilization. Instead, he envisages a universe where a subject emerges from the environment and remains intertwined with it until it ceases to exist. Interestingly, Woolf talks about our "inveterately anthropocentric" mind in her essay "Flying Over London" and acknowledges that "Everything changes its values seen from the air."[106] Woolf elaborates on this idea of changed perspective in her essay "The Sun and the Fish," where she plays with the description of human extinction and the perishing of life on the planet, which she connects with the disappearance of colours during an eclipse.

100. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 396.
101. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 163.
102. Woolf, *The Waves*, 5
103. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 7.
104. Whitehead, *Modes*, 21.
105. Whitehead, *Modes*, 144.
106. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 211.

The following part of the chapter then deals with Woolf's nonhuman passages, the interludes in *The Waves* and "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf intentionally foreshadows human existence, shows a world "seen without a self"[107] and focuses on nonhuman "geological" temporality. The last part of the chapter explores Woolf's "London Scene" essays, in which Woolf describes the consumerist way of life based on the exploitation of natural resources, which are perceived as materials that may be easily turned into commodities. It is suggested that short stories "The Docks of London" and "Thunder at Wembley" reveal Woolf's proto-ecological thinking and her ambiguous perception of modernity, whose progress, and possibilities she at the same time admires and criticizes. This is related to Whitehead's criticism of modern consumerist society which "directed attention to *things* as opposed to *values.*"[108] Moreover, Woolf anticipates the currents debates on the Anthropocene, which attempt to highlight the impact of the human action on the natural environment. She is aware of human participation in the above-mentioned exploitation of natural resources, which is revealed in "The Docks of London," where she points out that "The only thing, one comes to feel, that can change the routine of the docks is a change in ourselves."[109] While claiming that "one feels an important, a complex, a necessary animal,"[110] throughout the essay she describes the effects of this importance and domination and the tendency of humans to devoid other natural elements of their value and use them for the satisfaction of our consumerist needs.

Brief summaries of this thesis' chapters suggest that Woolf was interested in the same notions as process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, which probably springs from their need to react to the changing scientific and social context of their time. Whitehead was

107. Woolf, *The Waves*, 162.
108. Whitehead, *Science*, 203.
109. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 198.
110. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 198.

dissatisfied with the direction of science and philosophy of the beginning of the 20th century, which abandoned the discussions of ontological and cosmological questions about the nature of the universe, the relation of the material world and the mind, and the nature of being. Moreover, Whitehead rejected the "substance metaphysics" which was rooted in Western philosophy since Aristotle and later further developed by Descartes, who acknowledged the separation of matter and experience. Instead of a philosophical system that bifurcates, Whitehead envisaged a speculative relational cosmology, which denies purely physical substance and imagines the universe as a megaprocess made of interconnected creative processes and not of fixed and permanent objects in the state of stasis. Virginia Woolf's obvious interest in the aforementioned questions and her recurrent search for "the nature of reality" are the main aspects of her thought that enable the imposition of the processual worldview on her oeuvre. Raised by her father in the tradition of the British empiricism of the 18th century, she was fascinated by the new theories focusing on psychological perception of reality and consciousness. Moreover, she could not reconcile with the Victorian and the early 20th century fiction, which was primarily concerned with material aspects of reality and often entirely left out the mind and experience of its characters. Similarly to Whitehead, who acknowledges experience as the basis of his ontology, in her essay "Modern Fiction" Woolf argues that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end"[111] and likens experience to material atoms. Therefore, her idea of the smallest particles of experience strikingly resembles Whitehead's atomic actual entities. Instead of creating "solid" and fixed characters, Woolf starts sketching "will-o'-wisps" that "change their shapes" according to other entities in their environment which contribute to their becoming. Similarly, the objects in her fiction are not fixed and easily defined entities, they are not "standard things," as Woolf argues in "The Mark on the Wall,"

111. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 9.

and they never occur in the state of stasis and passivity, which is explored in "Solid Objects," or *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, both human beings and objects are never considered as entities separate from each other but always in their relations to one another, which should be the main concern of fiction, as Woolf argues in her essays "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" and *A Room of One's Own*. This relationality also represents the "pattern" hidden behind the visible world about which Woolf speaks in the famous passage from "A Sketch of the Past." For these reasons, the following chapters of this dissertation illustrate that Woolf inclined to process-oriented thought acknowledging the importance of change and movement as opposed to stasis and permanence, which is encapsulated in the sentence "I am rooted, but I flow"[112] from *The Waves.* Furthermore, it is suggested that Woolf highlights the interrelation behind processes of reality and rejects the bifurcation of nature, which enables her to deconstruct dualisms discussed in the following chapters.

112. Woolf, *The Waves*, 56.

Chapter 1: Woolf's Conception of Things and the Relation between Subject and Object

Woolf's Interest in Objects and her Reconceptualization of Matter

As Derek Ryan points out in his book *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, Woolf studies have changed their focus over the past decades and turned the attention from the analysis of "language and discourse" towards the interest in "materiality and ontology."[113] This shift is undoubtedly a part of the general shift in philosophy which is no longer centred solely on epistemology and language but returns to "big questions" of the nature of reality, which means that it privileges ontology and metaphysics over epistemology. Elisabeth Grosz states in her book *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism* that "ontology has been increasingly diminished as a concern for philosophical, political, and cultural reflection"[114] and suggests that we should be interested not only in "things and their knowable, determinable relations"[115] but also in "realities of space and time, of events and becomings."[116] In this light, contemporary philosophy should explore new approaches to materiality which do not resort to reductionism, do not separate the ideal from materiality, but explore the entwinement of the ideal and the material. As a result, such ontologies enable us to reconceptualize the material reality around us, they make us reconsider the rooted dualism of the animate and valuable versus the lifeless, valueless, and brute. In correspondence with Ryan's claim that Woolf "theorises the creative, immanent materiality of human and inhuman life" and "offers new conceptualisation of the material world where the immanent and intimate entanglements of human and nonhuman agencies are brought to the fore,"[117] this chapter provides a new approach to Woolf's reconceptualization of the material and analyses

113. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 3.
114. Grosz, 2.
115. Grosz, 4.
116. Grosz, 4.
117. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 4.

the author's treatment of physical objects not through the lens of Platonism and Romanticism, as Lorraine Sim does in her book *The Patterns of Ordinary Experience*, "new materialism" of Bennett, Braidotti, Barad or Deleuze, like Ryan in his book *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, or object-oriented ontology, as Elsa Högberg in her article "Virginia Woolf's Object-Oriented Ecology,"[118] but via the concept of materiality developed by process philosophy, particularly Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism.

Process philosophy does not conceive of physical objects as entities created out of extended substance with purely physical properties deprived of mental experience but as processes or events that are defined by their relations and effect on entities in their proximity. Moreover, ideality, or psychical properties, is integrated in the very core of the elementary particles of which physical objects are formed, therefore, process philosophy attempts to reconcile the dualism of the material and the mental, which has dominated the Western philosophy over centuries from Descartes and Kant to contemporary representatives of "scientific materialism" such as Daniel Dennett or Paul and Patricia Churchlands. By interpreting "solid objects" in Woolf's fiction as "manifolds of process" defined "in terms of processual activities and stabilities"[119] and by what they "do," rather than "are," this chapter suggests that Woolf also rejected the long-established dualism of the body and mind, the extended and the thinking, and explored the potentiality of physical objects in relation to their interaction with human and other-than-human subjects. The latter term of "subject" is particularly important because this chapter, and the following chapter focusing on the animated nature in Woolf's fiction, foreground the idea that Woolf, in reference to

118. Högberg, Elsa. "Virginia Woolf's Object-Oriented Ecology," *Virginia Woolf Writing the World: Selected Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf* eds. Pamela L. Caughie and Diana Swanson (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2015).
119. Nicholas Rescher, *Process Matephysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 52.

Whitehead's actual entities that are defined as subjects of experience, subverts the distinction between the subject and object, overthrows this hierarchy and imagines reality composed of mutually affecting entities or subjects. It is important to point out that this chapter does not lessen the potential of new materialism for the analysis of Woolf's approach to materiality but elaborates on this shift in Woolf's studies by focusing on a less explored realm of process philosophy, which in many respects prepared the ground for new materialism. For example, Steven Shaviro's book *The Universe of Things*[120] explores Whiteheadian thought in relation to recent developments in continental philosophy termed as "speculative realism" or "new materialism" and contemporary philosophers such as Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, Levi Bryant, Timothy Morton, or Jane Bennett. Similarly, Austin J. Roberts suggests in his articles "Pneumatterings, The New Materialism, Whitehead, and Theology"[121] and "Intersubjectivity in the Anthropocene: Toward an Earthbound Theology"[122] that Whitehead's metaphysical system, or philosophy of organism, directly influenced contemporary representatives of new materialism such as Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, or Bruno Latour. As Shaviro points out, these new materialists and Whitehead share the interest in ontology and metaphysical speculation, their realism, the belief in the existence of matter, the rejection of correlationism, the belief that objects cannot exist independently of human mind, and the critique of anthropocentrism.[123] Therefore, Whitehead's philosophy of organism seems to anticipate the postmodern wave of new materialism(s), however, the philosopher had been pushed into the background for most of the second half of the twentieth century and his cosmological project and organic conception of reality start to be appreciated

120. Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneaspolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
121. Austin J. Roberts, "Pneumatterings: The New Materialism, Whitehead, and Theology," *Process Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 4-23, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44798049.
122. Austin J. Roberts, "Intersubjectivity in the Anthropocene: Toward an Earthbound Theology," *Open Theology* 4, no. 1 (2017): 71-83, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2018-0006.
123. Shaviro, 5-10.

only now when philosophy returns to the so-called "big questions." Consequently, it may be concluded that whereas "Woolfians" have examined Woolf's writing either in relation to the philosophical thought of Woolf's contemporaries, or postmodern philosophers and new materialists, for example Bertrand Russell's philosophical ideas analysed in detail in Ann Banfield's book *The Phantom Table*, G. E Moore's thought discussed in Lorraine Sim's *The Pattern of Ordinary Experience*, Deleuze's metaphysics of becoming and new-materialists concept of matter in Derek Ryan's *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, the potential of Whitehead's thought for the analysis of Woolf's fiction has been discussed so far only in Katelynn Carver's article "Behind the Cotton Woolf: Process Philosophy in the Works of Virginia Woolf "[124] and very briefly also in Holly Henry's already mentioned book *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy*. While being Woolf's contemporary, Whitehead might have influenced Woolf indirectly via his student Bertrand Russell, with whom the philosopher wrote their famous book *Principia Mathematica*. Moreover, in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonisms 1854-1936,*[125] Kate Fullbrook discusses the friendship of Gertrude Stein and Alfred North Whitehead, which entails that Whitehead was not entirely unknown in the circles of the early 20th century modernist avant-garde, therefore, it cannot be excluded that Woolf had met the philosopher and discussed his work with him. In this light, this chapter aims to expand the range of Woolf's possible influences to Whitehead and his process-oriented metaphysics, which in many respects prefigures the new materialist tendencies in contemporary Woolf studies. Consequently, the present chapter fills the blank spaces, or supplements a logical

124. Katelynn Carver, "Behind the Cotton Woolf: Process Philosophy in the Works of Virginia Woolf," *The Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School* (Spring 2013), https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/hdsjournal/book/behind-cotton-wool.
125. Kate, Fullbrook, "Encounters with genius: Gertrude Stein and Alfred North Whitehead," in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonisms 1854-1936*, eds. Janet Beer and Bridget Bennett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 242-258.

transition, between Woolf scholarship focussing on Woolf's theory of materiality in relation to philosophical and scientific theories of the beginning of the 20th century and postmodern "new materialism," or object-oriented ontology popular among contemporary Woolf scholars.

Throughout her novels, essays and diaries, Woolf demonstrates her interest in everyday experience and ordinary objects that the humans encounter in their environment. Like most philosophers, Woolf asks questions such as "What is reality?" and how she might transcribe everyday experience of this reality in her fiction. For this reason, Benjamin Hagen suggests that Woolf's fiction may be described as "philosophically literary."[126] It attempts to capture life, reveal some philosophical truths about it, and, at the same time, has the aesthetic ambition. In most of her novels and short fiction Woolf aims to describe the nature of things and the way the experience of them can be aesthetically processed by writing. In *Jacob's Room* the reader learns about Jacob's personality only from the objects that the character uses, creates, or gets in touch with. In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs Ramsay studies the question of "the subject and the object and the nature of reality"[127] and Lily wants to be "on a level with ordinary experience."[128] In *The Waves* Bernard questions "the fixity of tables" and "the reality of here and now"[129] and *Between the Acts* starts with the discussion of a cesspool, a very ordinary and unpoetical object. In her essay "Modern Fiction" Woolf suggests that a modern writer should transcribe "the trivial, fantastic, evanescent" impressions that an ordinary mind receives on an ordinary day.[130] At the end of the essay Woolf claims that "the proper stuff of fiction does not exist,"[131] by which she authorizes writers to explore not only issues traditionally considered literary and noble but also those that seem to be "low," ordinary, and

126. Hagen, 139.
127. Woolf. *To the Lighthouse,* 28.
128. Woolf. *To the Lighthouse*, 218.
129. Woolf, *The Waves*, 162.
130. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 9.
131. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 12.

commonplace. In "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" Woolf criticizes authors for exploring "personal relations" as the only subject of their novels and for forgetting that an "important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales,"[132] and we may add that also towards things such as a table, a chair, a painting, or a book.

Woolf's first short-story collection published by the Hogarth Press in 1921 is called *Monday or Tuesday*, which hints at the nature of the short-stories that primarily deal with everyday experience, for example walking in a park or watching a mark on the wall. However, this poetics of everydayness penetrates the whole array of Woolf's short fiction. When readers look at the contents page of *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, they find out that at least a quarter of the stories bear in their titles words referring to ordinary material objects, for example the stories "The Mark on the Wall," "Solid Objects," "Nurse Lugton's Curtain," "The New Dress," "Three Pictures" or "The Fascination of the Pool." The word "fascination" in the last-mentioned short story is especially important because it reveals Woolf's awe by everyday objects that permeates all her works.

This attraction to ordinary objects is discussed particularly in Woolf's short story "Solid Objects" published in 1920. The title of this short story corresponds to the central theme of the story—collecting pieces of solid objects. Solidity of matter is emphasized from the very beginning, where Woolf draws the reader's attention to images of solid objects such as "body," "spine," "ribs," "lump" or "solid matter." While walking on the beach, John, one of the main characters of the story who works in the British parliament, accidentally comes across a lump of glass, which attracts his attention and forces the man to display it on his mantelpiece. When John picks up this piece of glass, Woolf relates that the object "pleased" and "puzzled" the man and that it was "so hard, so concentrated, so definite an object

132. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 80.

compared with the vague sea and the hazy shore."[133] Here, Woolf proposes that solid objects in our surrounding represent certainties to which we can return after ruminating on abstract ideas, which are, in case of the two characters of the story, represented by politics. This is anticipated also by John's cry "Politics be damned!" and consequent burrowing of his fingers into the sand. Woolf adds that as John's fingers plunged deeper into the sand, his face, and particularly his look, lost the expression of "grown people" and gave way to "wonder" that we usually find in the eyes of young children. Since John finds pleasure in the wonder hidden in such an ordinary object, which Woolf at the same time describes as "almost a precious stone," he starts to "haunt the places which are most prolific of broken china,"[134] glass, and other pieces of matter. Gradually, John's flat fills up with shards of pieces of commonplace objects depicted as "creatures of another worlds," "remarkable," and fascinating. The more objects John collects, the more indifferent to his duties and work-related issues he becomes. At the end of the story, John entirely yields to the lure of pieces of glass and china and alienates himself from his usual way of life. When visited by his friend Charles, who finds John and his flat in a depressing disorder and accuses his previously rational friend of giving his promising career up, John refuses to admit that his passion has got out of control.

While Lorraine Sim interprets the story as a spiritual journey of a character who experiences "excitement at the mystery and strangeness of the world"[135] and learns to reattribute "the overlooked value" to the "everyday material world,"[136] Bill Brown discusses the story in his book *Other Things* in relation to his "thing theory," claiming that things which no longer serve their common function may be presented to us in a new light as aesthetic objects. As a result, "we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working

133. Woolf, "Solid Objects," 103.
134. Woolf, "Solid Objects," 105.
135. Sim, 47.
136. Sim, 52.

for us"[137] and human relationship to objects also changes and becomes more intimate. Agreeing both with Sim and Brown that "Solid Objects" relates a moral story about relearning to appreciate the value and beauty of everyday objects, I would like to focus not so much on the everydayness of the objects that John collects, but on the way Woolf reconceptualizes them and proposes a new subject-object dynamics.[138] Brown suggests at the beginning of the story's analysis that "Solid Objects" is not about "the solidity of objects," as it might seem from its beginning, where Woolf foregrounds solidity, but about "the fluidity of objects, about how they decompose and recompose themselves as the object of a new fascination."[139] My intention is to discuss the-above mentioned fluidity of objects in the story in conjunction with process-philosophy that conceives of material objects as fluidities, processes, and constantly re-emerging entities. In this respect, it elaborates on Barbara K. Olson's brief discussion of parallels between Woolf's fiction and Whitehead's philosophy in her book *Authorial Divinity in the Twentieth Century*, where the author suggests that Woolf was unaware of the striking similarities between her writing and Whitehead's thought, particularly their belief in "continuity of flux in the universe" and "secular mysticism."[140]

Nicolas Rescher explains in his book *Process Metaphysics* that process ontologies refuse to define objects in our surroundings as substantial things, but describe them as manifolds of process, complexes of functional unity, which are best described by their effect and the way they influence their environment.[141] Consequently, things are presented as "bundles of powers,"[142] or centres with their own degree of agency.[143] Moreover, Rescher

137. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," in *The Object Reader*, eds. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (London: Routledge, 2009), 140.
138. Bill Brown, *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 57.
139. Bill Brown, *Other Things*, 55.
140. Barbara K. Olson, *Authorial Divinity in the Twentieth Century: Omniscient Narration in Woolf, Hemingway and Others* (London: Associated University Presses, 1997), 78.
141. Rescher, 52-53.
142. Rescher, 52.
143. Brown, *Other Things*, 7.

adds that process philosophers feel the urge to perceive material objects as "no more than stability waves in a sea of process,"[144] by which he acknowledges that things, despite their processual nature, are presented to us as relatively stable entities. Another important aspect of processual conception of nature is relationality. Processual objects never stand as separate individualities, but they are in constant interaction with "things" in their environment: "The identity of things is discrete (digital); that of processes is continuous (analogic)."[145] Process metaphysics thus envisages a world made up of interacting entities with "open ended and flowing"[146] identity which is shaped by the contact with other entities or processes.

An example of such metaphysics is Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism that rejects "scientific materialism" which worships "senseless, valueless, purposeless" matter and describes a system of things, or events, that cannot be easily disentangled.[147] In *Process and Reality* Whitehead introduces his speculative metaphysics by saying that his philosophy of organism avoids the concept of "substance-quality" of matter and replaces it with the concept of "dynamic process."[148] Accordingly, the philosopher envisages a concept of actual entities that he defines as "final real things from which the world is made up" and he emphasizes that there is nothing more real behind them.[149] Moreover, they are "drops of experience, complex and interdependent,"[150] which hints at their relational nature. This relationality is enabled by the process of prehension during which actual entities involve each other and create "a togetherness of actual entities" termed "nexus."[151] Therefore, actual entities and nexuses are "microparticles" that create our reality. In order to ensure the

144. Rescher, 53.
145. Rescher, 53.
146. Rescher, 53.
147. Whitehead, *Science*, 17-18.
148. Whitehead, *Process*, 7.
149. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.
150. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.
151. Whitehead, *Process*, 20.

emergence of enduring objects, these microparticles assemble and create macroscale togetherness, which Whitehead calls "a society." This society-object has a peculiar character, which its constantly perishing actual entities pass on emerging actual entities. Consequently, these societies are relatively stable real things but they "enjoy adventures of change throughout time and space"[152] as their inner constitution alters incessantly. Based on this categorical distinction of Whitehead's metaphysical entities, it may be suggested that material objects which John collects in "Solid Objects" represent Whitehead's stable and at the same time constantly changing societies. This is exemplified in the following quotation, where the lump of glass, which triggered John's search for pieces of matter, is, on the one hand, a real object displayed on the mantelpiece and, on the other hand, a society whose composition changes at every instant: "Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it."[153] The object loses its solidity, its "substance-quality" of "an excellent paperweight"[154] and rather appears to be a process subjected to change that affects the object in its surroundings, in this case the human mind. Therefore, the impact of the object on John's mind exceeds the realm of the object's physical properties, which suggests that the object itself is a centre of agency, a process that is capable of entanglement with human mental processes.

Holly Henry points out in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science* that this new definition of objects is precisely what Woolf took from reading and discussing scientific discoveries of her friends and acquaintances grouped around Bertrand Russell and the weekly magazine *The Athenaeum*, which published articles on the latest discoveries in

152. Whitehead, *Process*, 35.
153. Woolf, "Solid Objects," 104.
154. Woolf, "Solid Objects," 104.

literature, art, and science.[155] Moreover, Henry interestingly suggests that Woolf was writing and publishing "Solid Objects" at the same time as Whitehead outlined a new theory of materiality in his book *The Concept of Nature* and Russell gave his popular public lectures on the bridging of the gap between mind and matter. Both philosophers were intrigued by the mutual relationship between an object and its perceiver and agreed that the visible world represents "a network of sense data, which are effects of both the object and a percipient observer."[156] Consequently, both the observer and the object enter the same, or even multiple, percipient events, which contradicts the traditional conception of enduring objects affected by the human mind and perceived "in terms of our own preimposed concepts."[157] Similarly, Woolf seems to criticize the anthropocentric correlationism, or, in other words, dependence of objects on human consciousness, and suggests that objects have their proper mode of existence and that they may, in turn, impose their own "power" on human subjects and affect them. This thing-power is foregrounded and exemplified in the story from the moment John picks up the first piece of glass until the very end, where the character is tormented by the lure of objects and his "determination to possess" them. Paradoxically, at the end of the story, it is not John, who owns the objects, but the pieces of matter which, or "who," in fact, possess him as a human subject. The traditional power distribution of the perceiver's influence and the object's "submissiveness" is, therefore, reversed as John's collector's passion gets out of control.

Woolf's suggested interrelation of the object, defined by process philosophy as a relational process, and the human mind, also described as bundle of mental processes, demonstrates Whitehead's idea that no entity exists in vacuum, but always "prehends," or feels, other entities. Similarly, when the philosopher discusses societies, he insists that "there

155. Henry, 15-18.
156. Henry, 77.
157. Shaviro, 66.

is no society in isolation," which means that "every society must be considered with regard to its background or a wider environment of actual entities."[158] In relation to this concept of interrelation of actual entities or societies, James J. Bono suggests in his article "Atomicity, Conformation, Enduring Objects, and 'Things': Science and Science Studies after the Whiteheadian Turn" that Whitehead makes us reconsider the traditional ontology of discrete and self-contained substances and replaces it with the concept of "things," which are "simultaneously diffuse—imbricated in/with other things."[159] Consequently, it may be inferred that when Woolf lets John's physical processes intermix with the "fluid" thing, the lump of glass, she, in fact, devises a relational reality similar to Whitehead's "entangled" and "buzzing world of actual occasions and enduring objects."[160] With regard to this conception of reality based on the permeating of one thing into the other, I would like to suggest that "Solid Objects" is not primarily about a character who is fascinated by physical objects that lost their value by not being used anymore, or a character who learns to reappreciate the everyday objects which he perceives as aesthetic objects, but primarily about the character's reconsideration of the meaning of the words "substance" or "thing." The reader witnesses John's overcoming of the gap between the human subject and the object and his gradual entanglement with the objects that the collects. Therefore, the human no longer stands in opposition to objects but establishes intimate relations with them. As it will be discussed later mainly in relation to the novel *To the Lighthouse*, this relation between a human being and an object is particularly important because it serves as the basis for Woolf's reconsideration of the subject-object relation and rejection of this dichotomy.

158. Whitehead, *Process*, 90.
159. James J. Bono, "Atomicity, Conformation, Enduring Objects, and 'Things': Science and Science Studies after the Whiteheadian Turn," in *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy,* eds. Roland Faber and Andrew Goffey (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13.
160. Bono, 23.

A fascination with objects and the idea that objects are not inert substances but processual "agents," which manifest their effect on other human subjects and non-human subjects/objects in their environment, appears also in other Woolf's short stories and novels. In "A Simple Melody" Mr Carslake, the protagonist of the story who is also an admirer of nature and a tramp, attends a party and he feels very uncomfortable among distinguished upper-class people. Instead of maintaining conversation with other participants of the party, he is looking at a beautiful painting of a heath. Like John, the man is also fascinated by the picture, which triggers a vivid interaction between him and what the painting represents. He feels attracted to the painting and thinks about how easily things enter human thoughts: "Mr Carslake again looked at the picture. He was troubled by the sense of something remote. Indeed people did think about things, did paint things."[161] Not only does the main character wonder at the relation people establish with objects, but he also describes the effect a thing has on the human mind: "Mr Carslake, at least, thought it was very beautiful, as he stood in the corner where he could see it, it had the power to compose and tranquilize his mind. It seemed to him to bring rest of his emotions—and how scattered and jumbled they were at a party like this!"[162] Quite interestingly, a very similar scene describing the painting's capacity to calm down one's mind appears also in *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily Briscoe struggles with the completion of Mrs Ramsay's portrait and the painting seems to organise the artist's disorderly thoughts:

> She saw her canvas as if it had floated up and placed itself white and uncompromising directly before her. It seemed to rebuke her with its cold stare for all this hurry and agitation; this folly and waste of emotion; it drastically recalled her and spread through her mind first a peace, as her disorderly

161. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 203.
162. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 201.

> sensations (he had gone and she had been sorry for him and she had said nothing) trooped off the field; and then, emptiness.[163]

The quotation demonstrates Lily's ability to establish a relationship of intimacy with her environment, which is analysed later in this chapter. Quite interestingly, Woolf moves from this fascination by physical objects described in this section towards one's descent to the level of ordinary experience, where a human subject no longer dominates their environment but represents an integral part of it, a subjectivity emerging from the external, as it is suggested in the last section of this chapter.

163. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 171.

Rejection of Absolute Knowledge of Objects in Favour of Emotional Response

In "The Mark on the Wall," a short story published in 1917 by the Hogarth Press, Woolf attempted to describe the perception of objects around us, reformulate our conception of objects and suggest a new way of looking at the world. This newly gained perspective, however, may also take place "within the space of the domestic everyday"[164] and not only in places the characters are unfamiliar with like in "Solid Objects." This short story demonstrates Woolf's intention, mentioned in her essay "Modern Fiction," to "examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day" and transcribe "the shower of innumerable atoms" that fall on one's mind during a particular period.[165] The title of the collection *Monday or Tuesday,* where the story is included and which was published in 1919 by the Hogarth Press, suggests that the volume contains random sketches of ordinary life. These expectations are met at the very beginning of the story, where the protagonist remembers sitting in the living room and staring at the mark on the wall, but she cannot recall the exact date, which infers that it could have happened any day: "Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall. In order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one saw. . . Yes, it must have been the winter time. . ."[166] The woman's need to re-evoke the impressions and things related to that particular moment in order to fix the date when she had seen the mark for the first time, refers back to Whitehead's idea that no society exists in isolation but defines itself by its background. Like John in "Solid Objects," the woman fixes her eyes on the mark in fascination and cannot help thinking about its identity and possible origin. Her recollection of the afternoon is interrupted by a glimpse at the mark which changes the direction of her thoughts: "Rather to my relief the sight of the mark on the wall interrupted the fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a

164. Sim, 46.
165. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 9.
166. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 83.

child perhaps."[167] The quotation indicates that the woman feels a childish attraction to objects in her surroundings, which is explained in the following quotation: "How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it. . ."[168] This infers that our thoughts attach very easily to objects in their proximity and that this entanglement of our mental processes and the object perceived are unintentional. I would like to suggest that the mark, like the lump of glass in "Solid Objects," desolidifies, decomposes and serves no longer as a material object but as a processual entity that triggers the woman's experience and manifests its "thing-power" on the woman's mind. In other words, the woman penetrates beneath the surface of the object and creates an experiential event, a unity with it. When Whitehead discusses events in his early work *The Concept of Nature*, at the very beginning he outlines an ontology based on the idea of nature conceived as "a complex of related entities,"[169] and suggests that this complex is an "entity for thought,"[170] which means that it is something to be perceived and thought about. However, he insists that this complex entity can never be entirely disclosed to sense-awareness. As a result, Whitehead claims that "unexhaustiveness is an essential character of our knowledge of nature,"[171] from which he infers that what we can be aware of in nature is only a particular manifestation or an "event,"[172] a complex of relations that changes incessantly.

I would like to suggest that when the woman in Woolf's short story perceives a mark on the wall, she perceives a particular instance of a natural event which is subject to change. This change is reflected in the woman's diverse associations provoked by the same object, which means that every time she looks back at the mark and starts realizing its contours, the

167. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 83.
168. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 83.
169. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 9.
170. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 9.
171. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 9.
172. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 9.

object triggers different images in her mind. Therefore, the mark on the wall may be interpreted as an event that provokes "some special activity within a subject."[173] When Whitehead discusses experience and the subject-object relation in *The Adventures of Ideas*, he argues that the traditional distinction between the subject, conceived as the knower, and the object, regarded as the known, is one of the greatest philosophical misconceptions. Instead, he suggests that perception is not concerned with knowledge of an object but the emotion that the object arouses. This emotion comes from the "affective tone originating from things."[174] Borrowing the term "concern" from Quakerism, he explains that an object is a trigger of the subject's interest in the initial impulse and that the object becomes "a component in the experience of the subject."[175] In this vein, it may be suggested that when the woman wonders about "how easily our thoughts swarm upon a new object,"[176] she might marvel at the "concern" which people automatically feel towards objects they perceive. In line with Whitehead's idea that experience does not result in acquisition of knowledge, but in emotional response, the woman's reaction to the mark's "lure for feeling"[177] is of emotional nature. She begins her train of thought rationally by describing the mark's physical appearance and guessing what its origin might be, then she imagines who might have occupied their house before, and finally arrives at a general reflection on the meaning of life, which is highly agitated:

> But as for that mark, I'm not sure about it; I don't believe it was made by a nail after all; it's too big, too round, for that. I might get up, but if I got up and looked at it, ten to one I shouldn't be able to say for certain; because once a thing's done, no one knows how it happened. Oh! Dear me, the mystery of life!

173. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 176.
174. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 176.
175. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 176.
176. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 83.
177. Whitehead, *Process*, 25.

> The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! To show how very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilisation—let me just count over a few of the things lost in our lifetime. . . [178]

The quotation not only exemplifies Woolf's circular narrative structure of the short story, consisting in several trains of thought and emotional response induced by the woman's recurrent look at the mark, but also introduces another key topic of the story—the epistemological question about the knowledge of reality. As the woman's reflection in the above-quoted passage indicates, Woolf gradually suggests in "The Mark on the Wall" that the idea of human beings capable of getting hold of the full knowledge of objects is entirely wrong.

As Lorraine Sim points out, the entire short story may be read as Woolf's attack of Victorian positivism and exemplification of her belief in "a perspectival view of truth."[179] This reading is justified by the main character's dismissal of the possibility to reveal the true nature of reality and her reluctance to get up and see what the mark is. Although she would then be able to call the mark its proper name, she could not say anything more about it. As the woman explains later, she prefers letting the mark impose its power on her mind, which makes her penetrate beyond the surface of everyday reality composed of distinct objects: "I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciously, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts."[180] The intention to "slip from one thing to another" without any interruptions refers back to Whitehead's events that overlap and form an interconnected web of reality, which thwarts any

178. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 84.
179. Sim, 40.
180. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 85.

attempt to abstract discrete facts or objects from it. Therefore, it may be inferred from the quotation that the woman is not content with the knowledge of "bifurcated nature," nature divided into subjects and objects, the mental and the material, but attempts to get a grasp of the relations between separate objects. Moreover, when Whitehead defines knowledge in *Adventures of Ideas*, he emphasizes that it is "nothing more than an additional factor in the subjective form of the interplay of the subject and the object."[181] This suggests that although Whitehead is considered to be an objective realist, due to his belief in substance independent of the perceiver's mind, he emphasizes that there is nothing like absolute knowledge of reality. Such knowledge is impossible because perception of an object is always influenced by a subject's past experience and feelings which shape his or her vision of the object. In addition to this, Whitehead emphasizes that his "actual entities," are "the final real things"[182] and that there is no abstract or transcendental reality behind them. Therefore, he rejects the idealist viewpoint of things perceived as mere imperfect versions of true forms which exist on a transcendental plane. Similarly, in "The Mark on the Wall" Woolf demonstrates that she is an objective realist for whom the real things represent objects as they appear disclosed in perception. She cannot be accused of being a subjective idealist because her characters' ecstatic moments of being, moments of intensified experience and hyper-perception, are often calmed down by a character's fixation on real objects. This applies also to "The Mark on the Wall" where the woman interrupts her train of thought by refocusing on the mark, which makes her regain the sense of reality:

> Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality which at once turns the two Archbishops and the Lord High Chancellor to the shadows of shades. Here is

181. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 177.
182. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.

> something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the lights and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is proof of existence other than ours.[183]

In spite of the above-demonstrated belief in hard facts of reality, Woolf refuses to admit that there is a "standard thing." Instead, there are countless subjective and situational versions of an object which is referred to by a single name. When Whitehead discusses perspective in *Modes of Thought*, he explains that the defective insights of philosophy or science, in general, often stem from its excessive reliance on language and literature. He suggests that words, "each with its dictionary meaning, and single sentences, each bounded by full stops,"[184] generate an idea that an object can be abstracted from its environment and understood without reference to anything else. As a result, this practice permits the construction of reality made of separate "standard things" criticized by Woolf. This critique is the subject of the following quotation, where the writer urges future novelists not to be content with the image of "standardized" and "generalized" reality in their fiction:

> And the novelists in future will realise more and more the importance of these reflections [of diverse, yet interconnected interaction between people and the external reality], for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps—but these generalisations are very worthless. The military sound of the word [most likely the word "reality"] is enough. It recalls articles, cabinet

183. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 87.
184. Whitehead, *Modes*, 66.

> ministers—a whole class of things indeed which as a child one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation.[185]

It may be suggested that the whole quotation explains the rationale behind the woman's unwillingness to get up, reveal the identity of the mark and classify it as one of standard things—a snail. Moreover, the idea of standard things is closely related to the issue of authority that "codifies" the identity of an object or the definition of a name. This privilege of naming and prescribing authority is ascribed primarily to "the masculine point of view," in particular to "cabinet ministers" and "Whitaker's Table of Precedency": "What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker's Table of Precedency. . ."[186] At the end of the story, this male authority is exercised by the woman's husband, who arrives home and stops his wife's wondering about the mark on the wall. He provides a rational explanation of its origin: "All the same, I don't see the reason why we should have a snail on our wall."[187] The very same idea is explored also in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mr Ramsay studies the question of "subject and object and the nature of reality."[188] While he imagines the subject of his philosophical enquiry as a singular object, a kitchen table described as "a white deal four-legged table," an ideal form of a table, a standard thing, Lily visualizes the same object as "a scrubbed kitchen table," "one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted."[189] This suggests that Woolf's male characters are more likely to incline to the authority of "standard things," whereas female characters usually give more subjective account of reality and do not distinguish between their

185. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 86.
186. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 86.
187. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 89.
188. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 28.
189. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 28.

experience of reality and "true" reality, which is discussed in detail in the last section of this chapter.

It is also worth pointing out that Woolf was not the only modernist author who rebelled against fixed ideas of objects and the single meaning of words and names. Gertrude Stein, who was familiar with William James' and Whitehead's thought, published her *Tender Buttons* in 1912. This poetry collection represents a prime example of literary work that exemplifies a language's arbitrariness and rejects the idea that there is a discrete and unequivocal meaning encoded in a name. Most of the poems included in the collection bear a name or a noun in their title, for example "Apple," "A Carafe," "A Box," or "A Red Stamp," however, the poems have nothing to do with usual ideas of these objects. Instead, the objects mentioned in the poems' titles have the same function as Woolf's mark on the wall and serve as triggers of associations and feelings very loosely associated with the object in question. Like Woolf, Stein is also more interested in the relations between particular associations than in providing a true-to-reality account of the object. When Stein comments on her extension of the object's description beyond its physical properties and name in the section "Rooms," she explains that there is always some deeper meaning behind the name and that its change makes a difference: "Why is the name changed. The name is changed in the little space there is a tree, in some space there are no trees, in every space there is a hint of more, all this causes a decision."[190] This passage outlines Stein's intention to liberate herself from the authority of a name, or a concept of the "standard thing," and explore a free personal response to objects in one's proximity, which is also the main topic of Woolf's above-discussed short story. Both writers seem to be intrigued by our vision of and interaction with everyday objects in our proximity, which results in prose or poetry that no longer distinguishes between the subject

190 Gertrude Stein, "Tender Buttons," in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 397.

and the object but treats these categories as interchangeable. Moreover, both Woolf and Stein were influenced by the aesthetic theories of Post-Impressionism, particularly by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. In his essay "The Post-Impressionists" Fry criticizes the Impressionists for providing a mere copy of an impression of an inert natural scene and suggests that Impressionist paintings fail to capture "emotional significance which lies in things."[191] Instead of imitating nature, the Post-Impressionists should contemplate a scene and focus on the way it transmits emotions that result from a particular set of "lines and colors combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms."[192] Therefore, the Post-Impressionist painters are not interested in the truthful description of what a thing or a scene is, but in what an observer feels while perceiving it, which is strikingly similar to Woolf's and Stein's rejection of standard things and focus on the emotional associations. Moreover, Fry accuses the Impressionists of advocating "a passive attitude towards the appearances of things,"[193] therefore, of depicting things as passive objects, which is countered by the Post-Impressionist still-lives that paradoxically engage actively the mind of the observer and, hence, become active subjects. Woolf's experiment with the interchangeable nature of subjects and objects and her attempt to "de-subjectify" the subject is the focus of the following and last section of this chapter.

191. Roger Fry, "The Post-Impressionists," in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 82.
192. Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914), 8.
193. Fry, "The Post-Impressionists," 82.

Intermingling of the Subject and the Object

The short story "The Fascination of the Pool" written in 1929 has never received great critical attention, which is surprising because like "Solid Objects" or "The Mark on the Wall," it is equally concerned with the issue of materiality. This story foreshadows Woolf's innovative approach to the subject-object relation which levels the gap between these two entities and treats them as mutually interchangeable. Although the story describes a perception of a pool, it lacks the main character who would function as a perceiving subject. Instead of a subjective perceiver, Woolf opts for a generic subject "one" or "we," which indicates that she reflects on perception and its functioning as a general concept: "But if one sat down among the rushes and watched the pool—pools have some curious fascination, one knows not what—the red and black letters and the white paper seemed to lie very thinly on the surface, while beneath went on some profound under-water life like the blooding, the rumination of a mind."[194] Not only does the quotation suggest that the pool is a subject of human "concern" or "lure" discussed in the previous section, but it also reveals that the water surface that we see is a mere part of the object and that we can never fully explore the pool's inner life and depth under the water. This refers back to what has been indicated about objects' "unexhaustivness" stemming from the incapability to fully capture it only by sense perception. Therefore, Woolf again hints at the impossibility of gaining knowledge of the object and emphasizes that it is both a trigger of experience and a sponge that absorbs the thought of perceivers:

> Many, many people must have come here alone, from time to time, from age to age, dropping their thoughts into the water, asking it some question, as one did oneself this summer evening. Perhaps there was the reason of its fascination—that it held in its waters all kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences, not

194. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 226.

> printed or spoken aloud, but in a liquid state, floating one on the top of another, almost disembodied.[195]

The passage exemplifies Whitehead's idea of nature conceived as a complex of interrelated events or processes. It is possible to interpret people's thoughts and mental processes that penetrate the water's surface as events, which interact and interchange some of their constituents. Similarly, in the already-mentioned short story "A Simple Melody," Woolf suggests that walkers' thoughts and emotions somehow pervade natural entities in their surroundings:

> He tried to analyse this favourite theme of his—walking, different people walking to Norwich. He thought at once of the lark, of the sky, of the view. The walker's thoughts and emotions were largely made up of these outside influences. Walking thoughts were half sky; if you could submit them to chemical analysis you would find that they had some grains of colour in them, some gallons or quarts or pints of air attached to them. This at once made them airier, more impersonal.[196]

The actual occasions of the walker's experience are integrated in the actual occasions of natural entities such as the sky, the air, or colour and they merge in order to create a new entity, which is less personal, or less subjective. However, the attenuation of identity mentioned in the quotation does not mean that the man or the natural events listed above cease to represent individual subjects. It only suggests that subjects are never entirely separated or deprived of their relations with other subjects, which also implies that the bifurcation of the subject and the object into two distinct categories is unnatural. Moreover, if the thoughts become "airier" and transmissible, Woolf may hint at the idea that thoughts do

195. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 226.
196. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 206.

not belong exclusively to subjectivity, but they may be conceived as something "collective" and shared. Therefore, Woolf here explores William James's idea of mind-compounding and "superhuman intelligence" introduced in his book *A Pluralistic Universe*:

> Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of something of a wider self, it quivers along various radii like the wind-rose on a compass, and the actual in it is continuously one with possible not yet in our present sight. And just as we are co-conscious with our own momentary margin, may not we ourselves form the margin of some more really central self in things which is co-conscious with the whole of us? May not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness, and confluently active there, tho we know it not?[197]

James points out that if various centres of experience in our body can be co-conscious and focus on the same thought, then, it should come as no surprise that this thought might be experienced also beyond the limits of our body and penetrate the field of experience of other subjects: "Mental facts do function both singly and together, at once, and we finite minds may simultaneously be co-conscious with one another in a superhuman intelligence."[198] For James, this co-consciousness and compounding of minds ensures the continuity of the universe and its fundamental principle of relationality. Therefore, it may be suggested that in line with James's superhuman intelligence, which synthesizes experiential events of many co-conscious subjects, Woolf also believed in basic relationality between subjects, who can exchange and intermingle their experience.

This exchange and merging between subjects, or subjects and objects, also takes place in Whitehead's process of becoming, or "concrescence," during which diverse data converge

197. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag GmbH, 2018), 103.
198. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 104.

and create an occasion of experience or "an actual entity." Whitehead describes this highly creative process, which guarantees novelty in the universe, as follows:

> The novel entity is at once the togetherness of "the many" which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive "many" which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthetizes. The many become one, and are increased by one. In their natures, entities are disjunctively "many" in process of passage into conjunctive unity.[199]

The quotation demonstrates that each actual entity is novel and created from multiple data that it can select and integrate. In this way, each occasion determines its own identity through "prehension," or the interaction with other actual entities. Moreover, Whitehead repeats throughout *Process and Reality* that every actual entity is also a distinct subject: "An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences."[200] Here the word "subject" refers to the actuality, to a present state of an actual occasion which can feel other occasions and the term "superject" is used for a togetherness of these occasions. During the process of prehension, each occasion is a subject that prehends data, which it either integrates or rejects (negative prehension). When the process of concrescence of an actual entity is completed, the occasion physically perishes but it gains "objective immortality" as it serves as an object for the process of concrescence of succeeding actual occasions. Consequently, each actual occasion represents a subject and an object at the same time. As Whitehead points out in relation to this subject–object relation in *Science and the Modern World*, "the fundamental principle is that whatever merges into actuality, implants its aspects in every individual event."[201] This quotation suggests that everything, which in any sense exists, can leave a trace on other existing things or organisms. Whitehead also adds that "no

199. Whitehead, *Process*, 21.
200. Whitehead, *Process*, 29.
201. Whitehead, *Science*, 150.

individual subject can have independent reality, since it is a prehension of limited aspects of subjects other than itself."[202]

If these ideas are applied to the above-quoted passage from "The Fascination of the Pool," it may be suggested that the water in the pool receives, stores and distributes the "aspects of other subjects" which are represented by people's concerns and emotions: "The charm of the pool was that thoughts had been left there by people who had gone away and without their bodies their thoughts wandered in and out freely, friendly and communicative, in the common pool."[203] While a subject perceives the pool, they may integrate some of these aspects hidden in the depth of the pool and create a new event out of them. Thus, the pool in the story serves as a storage of these data left behind by people who spend their time watching its surface. However, these aspects offer themselves not only to people, but also to fish, the moon and other societies in the water or in the pool's proximity: "A fish would swim through them [people's emotions], be cut by the blade of a reed; or the moon would annihilate them with its great white plate."[204]

The idea that people may pass some of their experience or characteristics on other entities is suggested by Woolf also in her novel *The Waves*, where she interweaves identities of the six characters and invents a form of collective consciousness. Woolf suggests in the following quotation that her characters can generate aspects or data that may serve as the basis for other events: "We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregation of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road."[205] This quotation suggests that an occasion of experience,

202. Whitehead, *Science*, 150.
203. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 226.
204. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 226.
205. Woolf, *The Waves*, 81.

physical or mental, continues living in Whitehead's mode of "objective immortality" that enables it to be a part of future events, or in proper words societies. In this way, Woolf indicates that no existence, no object is ever a distinct perishable individuality, but it is always linked to something else and continues its existence via other living and non-living objects. There is also another place in the novel, where Woolf points out that reality is co-created by the aspects of various interacting subjects—the moment when the characters gather in a restaurant and co-create the event of a red carnation placed in a vase on the table:

> We have come together (from the north, from the south, from Susan's farm, from Louis's house of business) to make one thing, not enduring—for what endures? —but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution.[206]

Moreover, this passage at the same time hints at the processual nature of things, which are more conveniently described as processes or events created at every moment afresh. The appearance of the red carnation changes in accordance with the perception of individual characters and experiential aspects that they lend to the "togetherness" of the carnation. Moreover, Woolf again emphasizes that the characters create something "enduring" that acquires objective immortality and mixes later with other groupings of Whiteheadian "many" that become "one."

However, to interpret the intermingling of the aspects of subjects and objects in Woolf's above-mentioned short stories and novel via Whitehead's concrescence of actual entities in not unproblematic. Although perishing occasions offer themselves as data for the process of concrescence of other actual occasions, Whitehead emphasizes that the perishing

206. Woolf, *The Waves*, 70.

occasion may serve as data only for succeeding occasions and not for contemporary occasions or subjects. However, some scholars try to extend Whitehead's doctrine of continuity facilitated by internal relations between actual entities also to simultaneously existing occasions. Whitehead's process of concrescence generates only subjects, or objects, for subsequent actual entities, which ensures seeming continuity of things that consist of constantly emerging and perishing actual occasions. Nevertheless, Joseph A. Bracken in his book *The One in the Many*, or Jorge Nobo in his book *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity* both pointed out that it is possible to extend Whitehead's relationality and claim that "strictly contemporary actual entities indirectly influence one another's becoming."[207] According to these Whiteheadians, an actual entity can influence another actual entity only within so-called "extensive continuum" —relational complex, where all the potentialities, perished and objectified actual entities, may interact with other entities and create an actuality: "An extensive continuum is a complex of entities united by the various allied relationships of whole to part, and of overlapping so as to possess common parts, and of contact, and of other relationships derived from these primary relationships."[208] Therefore, an extensive continuum is a space of potentiality and contact, wherein various contemporary entities, or even whole societies (objects), exercise their influence on others and share some of their characteristics or data. James J. Bono describes the concept as "a matrix of potentialities out of which actual occasions become actual through a process of selective, or subjective, prehension."[209] Moreover, the concept of extensive continuum ensures general relationality typical of Whitehead's cosmology, or "philosophy of organism," which "beckons us to reimagine things as simultaneously diffuse—imbricated in/with other things."[210] This notion

207. Joseph A. Bracken, *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 122.
208. Whitehead, *Process*, 66.
209. Bono, 18.
210. Bono, 13.

of extensive continuum may be approximated to Deleuze's "plane of immanence" described as a place of contact and contagion:

> The plane of immanence or consistency is abstract: it cannot be understood as a dimension, a flat surface, a volume, or, more generally, in spatial terms. Rather it is the order in which all ideas take place, the "place" where one concept can encounter another, enhance or diminish it, and which other concepts must attain in order to engage in the domain of concepts.[211]

It may be suggested that Woolf also creates a similar space in "The Fascination of the Pool" and "A Simple Melody," a non-physical conceptual space where various objects and human beings potentially interact with each other, exchange their characteristic features and experience and co-create new actualities. Therefore, Woolf emphasizes relations beneath actualities in the world and refuses a thing's separateness and isolation from its environment. This is manifested not only in the above-mentioned short stories but also in "A Sketch of the Past," where Woolf repeatedly foregrounds the image of the whole, for example in the following quotation, where she highlights that a flower is interconnected with the soil in which it grows: "I was looking at the 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 was suddenly 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. . ."[212] In this autobiographical essay she also suggests that people's existence is related to other things in their environment, in a similar way to emotions intertwined with the pool in "The Fascination of the Pool": "One's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods and conceptions."[213] A similar idea is also introduced in *The Waves*, where

211. Grosz, 137.
212. Woolf, "A Sketch," 71.
213. Woolf, "A Sketch," 73.

Bernard, who in many respects personifies Woolf, claims that "we are forever mixing with unknown entities."[214] This quotation again demonstrates that in her fiction, Woolf often creates a space of contact where subjects, or subjects and objects, interact and interchange their aspects in order to outline a relational universe.

To conclude this analysis of Woolf's reimagination of the concept of things and the relation between the subject and the object, it is necessary to highlight that Woolf seems to be equally interested in the nature of objects and fascinated by their ongoing interaction with their surroundings. As it has been demonstrated in relation to human feelings that penetrate the water's surface in "The Fascination by the Pool," or human thoughts that escape one's mind and become parts of natural elements in "A Simple Melody," Woolf explores literarily the potentiality of Whitehead's extensive continuum, in which constantly perishing and emerging actual occasions are enriched with aspects of other simultaneously existing human and non-human, animate and non-animate, subjects/objects. By this means, Woolf redefines the traditional relation between the subject and the object, the active experiencer, and the passive thing, and suggests that these two categories may be considered in more equal terms as two interdependent and overlapping concepts.

214. Woolf, *The Waves*, 66.

The Subject Finally Becomes the Object

In *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927 and intended as Woolf's elegy for her parents, the relation between the subject and the object represents one of the main themes. Although it is primarily a topic of Mr Ramsay's philosophical enquiry into "subject and object and the nature of reality," which is to some extent ridiculed by Woolf, it becomes the central focus of the novel, especially concerning its female characters' experience of reality. Like in the above-discussed short stories, in this novel Woolf experiments with the concept of a thing and plays with the objects' oscillation between the state of solidity and fluidity. Moreover, the author plays with the idea that things do not always remain the same, but continuously change their "configurations." Woolf also elaborates on an object's ability to attract the attention of its perceiver, which may result in the perceiver's diminished subjectivity or de-subjectification.

As Ann Banfield points out in her book *The Phantom Table*, in *To the Lighthouse* Woolf plays with the concepts of solidity and fragility[215] that is metaphorically described in her essay "The New Biography" as the duality of "granite" and "rainbow." Like in "Solid Objects," Woolf decides to fill the narrative of the novel with significant material objects such as the lighthouse, Lily's canvas, the skull in the children's nursery, the kitchen table, or the Ramsays' summer house itself. In spite of this, she is not interested in the knowledge and definition of these objects, but in the exploration of their interaction with the characters' minds. Consequently, most material objects in the novel do not exist as some changeless stable forms, which Mr Ramsay tries to capture in his philosophical enquiry, but rearrange their configurations and appearance according to their immediate environment and perceivers, with whom they interact. For example, the lighthouse is once represented as a solid landmark, which is described in the following quotation, and on other occasions as a fairy creature, "a

215. Banfield, 150.

silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye"[216] : "Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst; and on the right, as far as the eye could see. Fading and falling, in soft low pleats, the green sand dunes with the wild flowing grasses on them, which always seemed to be running away into some moon country, uninhabited of men."[217] Similarly, the house represents a centre of stability, especially in the first part of the novel, but it starts falling apart in the middle section "Time Passes," where nature takes control of the house, and it becomes an unreal place near the novel's end:

> She [Cam] raised herself reluctantly and looked. But which was it? She could no longer make out, there on the hillside, which was their house. All looked distant and peaceful and strange. The shore seemed refined, far away, unreal. Already the distance they had sailed had put them far from it and given it the changed look, the composed look, of something receding in which one has no longer any part.[218]

This quotation hints at Woolf's interest in describing objects and places in relation to the changed perspective of the perceiver, here with respect to the spatial distance that Cam and Mr Ramsay gained while sailing to the lighthouse. The house is no longer the centre and a fixed landmark because it loses its clear outline and solidity, and finally becomes unreal. Moreover, Cam reflects on how their existence, "those paths and the lawn, thick and knotted with the lives they had lived" recedes and how they too become "unreal,"[219] in contrast to the boat, the waves, and the Lighthouse that "became unmovable."[220] Regarding the changing characteristics of physical objects, Gillian Beer points out that the novel starts with an

216. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 202.
217. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 17.
218. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 180-181.
219. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 181.
220. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 199.

emphasis on solid objects that are "loaded with symbolic weight."[221] This applies predominantly to Mr Ramsay, who tends to reflect only through abstract and symbolic ideas. Conversely, in the second half of the novel, Woolf emphasizes "momentariness and lightness" and she "empties and thins" solid substance. This move towards fleetingness of physical substance and perspectival perception of objects, which, like in "The Mark on the Wall" implies that there is not a single standard version of a thing, is emphasized by James in the following quotation:

> The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening. Now—James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?
>
> No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening and shutting and the light seemed to reach in that airy sunny garden where they sat.[222]

The quotation indicates that James, for whom the lighthouse represented his desire for boyish adventure continually thwarted by his father, realizes that nothing is solely what it seems to be, and that one thing shows itself in multiple ways, depending on the perceiver's position and past experience. Here Woolf again hints at the main premise of process philosophy that rejects the conception of things as extended substance and conceives of them as "manifolds of process" interacting with the human mind. This suggests that physical objects are constantly in the process of making, changing, and perishing.

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221. Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 43.
222. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 202.

Similarly, Whitehead rejected the notion of extended substance with a simple location as one of the long-established misconceptions of the Western philosophy and science, which he termed "misplaced concreteness."[223] He replaced this conception of substance with his already-discussed actual entities and suggested that things around us are societies, or "enduring objects," which temporally undergo the process of change. This is possible only if we admit that an enduring object is a "historic route" of successive occasions, which in themselves change constantly.[224] Whitehead provides the example of The Castle Rock at Edinburgh that "exists from moment to moment" via its "historic route of antecedent occasions."[225] Similarly, Woolf's lighthouse does not represent a single enduring thing, but a togetherness of actual occasions, which is determined by its relations with its preceding configurations and other enduring objects, including human beings.

Interestingly, Woolf does not emphasize the changing nature of the material world only in relation to the lighthouse, but it almost seems to be a fundamental principle of both her fictional and "real" universe. She reveals this basis of her conception of reality in her essay "Montaigne," where she admits that "movement and change are the essence of our being; rigidity is death."[226]As it has already been pointed out, she re-evokes the contrast between the permanence and transitoriness of reality. For example, Lily Briscoe is aware of the "eternal passing and being,"[227] of the fact that "human things" also "passed and changed,"[228] which counters her search of a moment of stability and stillness. Similarly, Mrs Ramsay wishes to provide "a specially tender piece, of eternity" and searches for something "immune from change," which would not surrender to "the flowing, the fleeting."[229]

223. Whitehead, *Science*, 55.
224. Whitehead, *Process*, 56.
225. Whitehead, *Process*, 43.
226. Virginia Woolf, "Montaigne," *Genious and Ink* (London: TLS Books, 2019), 134.
227. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 176.
228. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 171.
229. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 114.

Moreover, Mrs Ramsay is anxious about the passage of time and she does not want her children to "grow a day older."[230] The novel's gradual departure from the initial solidity and shift towards transient nature of reality marks Woolf's own realisation that permanence and stability are nothing but an illusion. The recognition of transience as a general principle, which represents the key thought of process-oriented metaphysics, is undoubtedly connected also with Woolf's anxiety about death and loss. In her diary, she expresses the same fear of the transience of life like Mrs Ramsay and accepts the fleeting nature of existence:

> Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever: will last forever; goes down to the bottom of the world—this moment I stand on. Also, it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change; one is flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive & continuous—we human beings; & show the light through. But what is the light?[231]

Not only does the quotation demonstrate the correspondence between Woolf's conception of human life and the process-oriented idea that human beings are unities of successive physical and mental experience, but its emphasis on light foreshadows the focus of the rest of this chapter, the interaction of the subject and the object exemplified by Mrs. Ramsay's relationship of intimacy with the light from the lighthouse. Moreover, light that emanates from human beings and connects them to other human beings may be linked with Woolf's and Whitehead's interest in quantum physics, and especially with the wave-particle duality and the discovery that "the ultimate elements of matter are in their essence vibratory."[232] Vibratory nature of particles such as atoms suggests that organisms made up

230. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 64.
231. Woolf, *Diary, Vol.3*, 218.
232. Whitehead, *Science*, 36.

from these particles must also be "vibratory organisms,"[233] meaning that these organisms affect their environment. Focusing on vibratory existence, Whitehead rejects the tradition of scientific materialism, based on externally related substances, and prepares the ground for his philosophy of organism, whose basic elements are "self-creating subjects which are profoundly interrelated."[234] The following part of this chapter aims to demonstrate that Virginia Woolf also rejects purely external relations between subjects, or a subject and an object, and emphasizes the internal bond or intimacy between constituents of reality. Moreover, it will be suggested that Woolf criticizes the notion of a dominant subject, or ego, and replaces it with a less authoritative subjectivity, or intersubjectivity, which treats other subjects as mutually immanent equals.[235]

Mr Ramsay, whose character is partly modelled on Woolf's father Leslie Stephen, represents a philosopher who studies the nature of reality, particularly, the relation between the subject and object and tries to establish whether a thing exists even when it is not perceived. In fact, he explores the British empiricists', especially Hume's and Berkeley's concern with "the survival of the object without a perceiver" and "scepticism about substance."[236] Hume is repeatedly mentioned throughout the novel, for example when the reader learns that Mr Ramsay is supposed to give a lecture on Locke, Hume, and Berkeley for students in Cardiff, or when he reflects on the philosopher's unfortunate fall into a bog. This philosophical undertone of the novel has already been analysed by Gillian Beer in her essay "Hume, Stephen, and Elegy," where Beer analyses the connection between the philosophical thought of David Hume and Mr Ramsay, or in *The Phantom Table* where Ann Banfield focuses on the paradigmatic object of the table, which symbolizes both Mr. Ramsay's and

233. Whitehead, *Science*, 36.
234. Roberts, "Intersubjectivity," 79.
235. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 197.
236. Beer, 32.

Woolf's own rumination about the nature of substance. In contrast to these detailed analyses, I would like to focus on Woolf's description of Mr. Ramsay as the embodiment of a philosopher who maintains the traditional distinction between the subject and the object and reinforces what Alfred North Whitehead termed "bifurcation of nature." Moreover, I aim to suggest that Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, on the contrary, subvert this bifurcation and establish a more harmonious relationship with the external world, which may result in them becoming the objects of the external world, or their own subjectivity emerging from the objective.

Despite his study of Hume, who prioritizes the role of sense-perception in our knowledge of reality, Mr Ramsay seems to be indifferent to the workings of his sense-perception and immediate experience of his surroundings and prefers to focus on abstract ideas such as "a white-deal four-legged table."[237] However, when Lily learns that the man studies "subject and object and the nature of reality,"[238] she imagines a particular "scrubbed kitchen table" with all its marks made by the repeated use: ". . .a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seems to have been laid by the years of muscular integrity, which stuck there, its four legs in air."[239] Whereas Lily sees the actuality of the universe, a particular table with its own primary and secondary qualities, which are also modified by the artist's own perspective and past experience, Mr Ramsay observes an abstraction, an ideal form which does not possess any particular qualities. These are meant to be supplemented during the process of perception. This illustrates that Mr Ramsay represents a philosopher who, on the one hand, studies the nature of the universe and the nature of the everyday, but, on the other hand, is entirely disconnected from actual

237. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 28.
238. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 28.
239. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 28.

realities of his surroundings and seems to embrace the idea of psychically supplemented secondary qualities.

In *The Concept of Nature* Whitehead rejects "any theory of psychic additions to the object known in perception"[240] and argues that all "ingredients" already exist in nature prior to being perceived. Thus, Lily's holistic vision of the table corresponds more to the real appearance image of the object than Mr Ramsay's ready-to-be-completed abstraction. Moreover, this belief in particularities also justifies the existence of objects that are not perceived. By the aforementioned rejection of additional secondary qualities of visible objects, Whitehead protests against science that divides nature into two categories, first "the nature apprehended in awareness" and "the nature which is the cause of awareness"[241]:

> The nature which is the fact apprehended in awareness holds within it the greenness of the trees, the song of birds, the warmth of the sun, the hardness of the chairs, and the feel of the velvet. The nature which is the cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind to produce the awareness of the apparent nature.[242]

The quotation ridicules the long-established irrational division into two kinds of nature and emphasizes that there is only one nature at once conceived as what we are aware of in perception and as an agent which "imposes itself on us."[243]

Whitehead's new concept of nature, which he later called "philosophy of organism," is based on the idea that there is an ongoing interaction between us and the natural world, which exercises certain power on our mental and bodily processes. As a result, the philosopher rejects purely subjectivist doctrines that see the natural world as a mere construct of our

240. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 20.
241. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 20.
242. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 21.
243. Whitehead, *Science*, 83.

minds, which leads to our domination of the external world, and adopts an objectivist stance by claiming that "the things experienced and the cognisant subject enter into the common world on equal terms."[244] This is explained in the following quotation, where he diminishes the distance between us, subjects of perception, and the surrounding nature: "It appears from this interrogation that we are within the world of colours, sound, and other sense-objects, related in space and time to enduring objects such as stones, trees, and human bodies. We seem to ourselves elements of this world in the same sense as are other things which we perceive."[245] The quotation demonstrates that there is no distinct boundary between "us" and "nature," which implies that there is also no clear-cut division between the categories of the subject and the object as these are "relative terms."[246]

Whereas Whitehead deconstructs this dualism, in *To the Lighthouse* Mr Ramsay continuously sustains it by his preoccupation with abstract and wholly potential images of the real world. Mr Ramsay alienates himself from the ordinary experience and cannot see Whitehead's "buzzing world" of vibratory relations. This is illustrated in the following quotation, where Mrs Ramsay reflects on her husband's inability to establish intimate relationships with his surroundings:

> Indeed he seemed to her sometimes made differently from other people, born blind, deaf, and dumb, to the ordinary things, but to the extraordinary things, with an eye like an eagle's. His understanding often astonished her. But did he notice the flowers? No. Did he notice the view? No. Did he even notice his own daughter's beauty, or whether there was pudding on his plate or roast beef?[247]

244. Whitehead, *Science*, 89.
245. Whitehead, *Science*, 89.
246. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 176.
247. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 77.

This quotation illustrates that Mr Ramsay represents a stereotype of a philosopher who prefers indulging in the study of abstract phenomena, neglects the real nature and bifurcates reality into subjects and objects, or "us" and "nature." Mrs Ramsay continues the critique of her husband and adds that "he never looked at things,"[248] because he never admired surrounding nature about which he barely realizes that it is there. Moreover, as Beer suggests, the whole novel is highly symbolic[249] and Mr Ramsay's constant search for the symbol instead of the actual, for example when he uses his philosophical work as an instrument to reach immortality, or when he insists on the voyage to the lighthouse because it represents his deceased wife's wish, shows his continuous advocation of the human centrality since the symbol "gives primacy to the human."[250] Mr Ramsay's strong sense of being a patriarchal subject, which tends to dominate and patronize female characters of the novel, also generates the distance between him and the outer nature. Therefore, his perception of nature is not based on the equal relationship between the subject and the object, but, rather, he exercises his authority: "Let him be fifty feet away, let him not even speak to you, let him not even see you, he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. He changed everything."[251] This quotation directly implies that Mr Ramsay keeps supporting the division between the subject and the object and that he considers himself eligible to dominate objects.

In contrast to Mr Ramsay's strong ego,[252] which sustains the anthropocentric division between the subject and the object, and his indifference to ordinary experience, Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe represent "subjectivity" which engulfs the separation between "us" and the apparent nature and establish relationships of intimacy with objects of everyday experience. These two female characters illustrate Woolf's attempt to prove that the separation between

248. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 78.
249. Beer, 41.
250. Beer, 41.
251. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 163.
252. Banfield, 170-174.

subjects and objects is "fictitious."[253] From the very beginning of the novel, Mrs Ramsay is depicted as a woman interested in lives of other people and as related to her physical environment. She manipulates human relationships, she is the centre which attracts all the others, and she indulges in the business of "merging and flowing and creating"[254] symbolized by her knitting. Moreover, she has a sense of "being past everything, through everything, out of everything,"[255] which implies that she is a constitutive part of other human and non-human subjects and that she crosses the boundary between her own subjectivity and surrounding objects. As Derek Ryan points out, she adopts Deleuze and Guattari's concept of molecular identity and represents a rhizomatic organism that prioritizes entanglement over separation: "As Mrs Ramsay becomes entangled with her surroundings, there is a diffusion of subject, object, and time, and a rhizomatic movement prevails."[256] In Whiteheadian terms, she represents a vibrant organism which is internally and externally entangled with other subjects and objects via the process of prehension, or in other words "feeling" of the surrounding subjects. As a result, Mrs Ramsay's personality and subjective experience is modified with every event in which she is involved: "This personal identity is the thing which receives all occasions of man's experience. It is there as a natural matrix for all transitions of life, and is changed and variously figured by the things that enter it; so that it differs in its character at different times."[257] Mrs Ramsay's ability to change her personality in relation to the events and processes she is entangled with is demonstrated at the beginning of Chapter 11 of the section "The Window," where she enjoys a moment of peace and quiet after she put her children in bed: "For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by

253. Beer, 30.
254. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 91.
255. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 91.
256. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 86.
257. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 187.

herself."[258] In this moment, when she finds herself completely alone, her horizon and rhizomatic relations expand: "Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen. . ."[259] Moreover, she ruminates about the privilege to enjoy the intimacy of surrounding objects and expresses her regained sense of belonging to her physical environment:

> It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself.[260]

This quotation is preceded by Mrs Ramsay's complete fusion with the light from the lighthouse, which suggests that she can naturally step out of her subjective experience and become the object of her perception:

> Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at — that light for example.[261]

258. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 69.
259. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 69.
260. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 70.
261. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 70.

The quotation perfectly demonstrates Mrs Ramsay's habit to establish intimate relationships with her surroundings, in which she undergoes "the reduction of self"[262] and slips into the category of an object. Interestingly, this interchange of the subject and the object is also the basic principle of Whitehead's already-mentioned process of prehension, during which the words subject and object lose their distinctive meaning and become relative terms: "Thus subject and object are relative terms. An occasion is a subject in respect to its special activity concerning an object; and anything is an object in respect to its provocation of some special activity within a subject. Such a mode of activity is termed a 'prehension.'"[263] If this definition is applied to the above-quoted passage, the light represents a "prehended" object that serves as data of Mrs Ramsay's prehension which is integrated into her experience. As a result, the subject's identity depends heavily on the objective data, and for this reason, it may be said that Mrs Ramsay becomes the objects with which she interacts or that her subjectivity springs from the objects in her surroundings. In *Process and Reality* Whitehead points out that his philosophy of organism overthrows the Kantian idea that the objective world emerges from the subjective, which means that the subject dominates and determines the natural world. Whitehead rejects this traditional elevation of the subject and emphasizes that his philosophy of organism describes "how objective data pass into subjective satisfaction."[264] In fact, he introduces a new doctrine, which is based on the idea that "the subject emerges from the world,"[265] which also weakens the position of the subject in favour of the objective world that is no longer the result of the thinking mind. In contrast with Mr Ramsay, who is not capable of this dissolution of the self and attachment to the objective world, his wife is willing to approximate things in her surroundings and "become" these objects. This claim is supported

262. Banfield, 287.
263. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 176.
264. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.
265. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

also in the transitioning section "Time Passes," where we learn about Mrs Ramsay's death, but her physical absence is compensated by the presence of her belongings which still carry her personality and ensure her "objective immortality." Her subjectivity seems to linger in the things, especially clothes, that Mrs Ramsay left behind:

> But people should come themselves; they should have sent somebody down to see. For there were clothes in the cupboards; they had left clothes in all the bedrooms. What was she to do with them? They had the moth in them—Mrs. Ramsay's things. Poor lady! She would never want them again. . . There was the old grey cloak she wore gardening (Mrs. McNab fingered it). She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers (the garden was a pitiful sight now, all run in riot, and rabbits scuttling at you out of the beds) —she could see her with one of her children by her in that grey cloak.[266]

The attenuated sense of human ego and interrelatedness with natural environment is also characteristic of Lily Briscoe, who struggles with the domination of male gaze and a strong sense of male ego throughout the novel. In comparison with Mr Ramsay and William Bankes, she is greatly interested in her environment. Unlike Mr Ramsay's detached perception of the objective world, Lily can sense every minute change of mass in her environment and her experience of the visible world is always both physical and emotional: "But now, with all her senses quickened as they were, looking, straining, till the colour of the wall and the jackmanna beyond burnt into her eyes, she was aware of someone coming out of the house, coming towards her. . ."[267] As Woolf suggests in the first section of the novel, Lily can keep "a feeler on her surroundings,"[268] which she later applies to her creative process.

266. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 148.
267. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 22.
268. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 22.

Moreover, she ruminates about the possibility to become one "with the object one adored,"[269] in her case with Mrs Ramsay, who represents the centre of stability for her:

> What device for becoming like waters poured into the jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired. . .[270]

This quotation demonstrates that Lily's identity and experience of the visible world may also be described as "rhizomatic"[271] because the artist can suppress her own self in order to create a more equal unity with objects in her environment, particularly with those that she loves.

As it has been suggested, Lily's interest in her surroundings and her inclination to establish relationships of intimacy with human and non-human objects also apply to her artistic process, during which she struggles with the setting for Mrs Ramsay's portrait and the representation of masses. Deeply stricken by Mrs Ramsay's death, in the last section of the novel, Lily intends to complete the "impossible" painting. She resumes her effort, revives her "interest in ordinary human things"[272] and challenges once again her eternal enemy— "this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid her hands on her."[273] As she plunges into a creative trance, she loses the sense of her own identity, which is dispersed in the environment. As she began "precariously dipping among the blues,"[274] she "was losing consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality."[275] Moreover, it seems that her hand is led almost automatically and that only when she renounces her sense of being a

269. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 57.
270. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 57.
271. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 84-94.
272. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 170.
273. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 172.
274. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 173.
275. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 174.

separate subject which can control the environment as well as the creative process, she is able to "tunnel" her "way into her picture, into the past."[276] She starts to realize that it is impossible to capture Mrs Ramsay in her entirety, or even "that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself,"[277] because one would need to represent all Mrs Ramsay's relationships and shades: "One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought."[278] During the process of tunnelling into the past, Lily suppresses her own personality and remembers Mrs Ramsay's "daily miracles" and idiosyncrasies: "She had let the flowers fall from her basket, Lily thought, screwing up her eyes and standing back as if to look at her picture, which she was not touching, however, with all her faculties in a trance, frozen over superficially but moving underneath with extreme speed."[279] This quotation indicates that Lily loses her awareness of being a subject separated from the reality around her, becomes an integral part of her surroundings and abandons her anthropocentric perspective. This de-subjectification enables her to finish the painting and degrade her experience to the level of the ordinary:

> One must hold the scene—so—in a vice and let nothing come in and spoil it. One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. The problem might be solved after all.[280]

After this sudden reunification with the ordinary experience, Lily senses the presence of Mrs Ramsay in the room, which helps her retain the vision of the woman's personality:

276. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 187.
277. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 209.
278. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 214.
279. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 218.
280. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 218.

> ‘Mrs Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!’ she cried, feeling the old horror come back—to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. Mrs. Ramsay—it was part of her goodness to Lily—sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step.[281]

Although at this moment the reader would expect Lily to complete her painting of Mrs Ramsay, she turns towards the island, where, by that time, Mr Ramsay should have landed to visit the lighthouse, then back to her easel and renounces her ambition to depict Mrs Ramsay’s personality. Instead of portraying her in a sophisticated and holistic manner, she manages to complete an abstract picture devoid of any attempt to close-to-reality representation of the woman:

> Quickly, as if she recalled by something over there, she returned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lies running up and down, its attempt at something. . . With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.[282]

The quotation suggests that Lily’s finished painting in no way resembles the image of Mrs Ramsay. It seems that Lily realized that a personality, a subject, cannot be extracted from its environment. This inability to represent Mrs Ramsay and insert her into a timeless setting demonstrates the novel’s key concern—the movement from the notion of human subjects,

281. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 219.
282. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 225-226.

who bifurcate between them and their surroundings, towards "more-than-human" subjectivity, which does not control the surrounding visible world but results from it.

Instead of the emergence of a unified subject, Lily's painting suggests that it is the process and a subject's relations with his or her environment that are crucial to determine one's personality. However, it is an impossible task because these connections can never be pinned down and reproduced. Through the focus on the painstaking creative process and Lily's and Mrs Ramsay's ability to entangle with their environment and overcome the gap between their sense of self and surrounding objects, Woolf explores the Whiteheadian idea that subject and object cannot be clearly distinguished and that a subject has no control over the object but rather emerges from it. For this reason, the subject cannot be fully captured without its relations to its environment that contributes to its individuality. Therefore, *To the Lighthouse* foregrounds the importance of physical objects, like the above-discussed short stories, and rejects the idea that the subject is a distinct entity, which may be abstracted from its physical setting. Consequently, Woolf lets human subjects lose their power over the natural world and suggests that their intertwinement with the physical objects in their surroundings reverses the traditional dualism of the human and the non-human nature. As Elsa Högberg proposes, Woolf focuses on the "object-like" qualities of the human subject, by which she anticipates the ideas of currently influential object-oriented ontology.[283] The following chapter elaborates on this idea and proceeds one step further by focusing on Woolf's treatment of physical objects and the natural world as subjects that possess certain animateness and "human-like" qualities, which reveals Woolf's inclination to panpsychism.

283. Högberg, 152.

Chapter 2: Panpsychist and Post-human Traces in Virginia Woolf's Fiction

The Promise of Panpsychism in the Reconceptualization of Matter and Nature

Whereas the preceding chapter explored in detail Woolf's interest in the interaction between subjects and objects, between the human and the nonhuman, and suggested that the boundary between these categories is no longer distinct, this chapter focusses on nonhuman and inanimate, yet experiencing subjects in Woolf's fiction. The experience of these subjects is analysed in reference to panpsychism, a philosophical theory emphasizing that mental properties and sentience may be attributed to all constituents of reality, including physical objects made of traditionally solid, lifeless, and inert substance. Particular attention is paid to Alfred North Whitehead's modest version of panpsychism intimated mainly in his work *Science and the Modern World*. This chapter also deals with Woolf's concept of nature without clearly distinguishing between the two meanings of the word nature associated with the Bloomsbury Group. In his essay "Bloomsbury and Nature" Peter Adkins emphasizes that the group's members, on the one hand, perceived nature in its broad sense as the natural "nonhuman world from which the artist or writer takes his or her subject," and, on the other hand, in its narrower sense, as "the set of aesthetic ideals that have been established through cultural representations of the countryside."[284] Adkins contends that these two concepts of nature are often intermingled in the works of the Bloomsbury Group's members, which is reflected in this chapter by emphasizing that Woolf uses the word "nature" to refer to both the physical environment, in the sense of reality, and to the aesthetic enjoyment of natural setting. This chapter proposes that nature in Woolf's works may be considered alive and even sentient, which subverts the boundary between the human and the nonhuman. Woolf's preoccupation with the description of animated nature implies that she engages with the crisis

284. Peter Adkins, "Bloomsbury and Nature," in *The Handbook to the Bloomsbury Group*, eds. Derek Ryan and Stephen Ross (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 226.

of nature of the early twentieth century. The latter was caused by the scientific and industrial progress and emphasis on material aspects of life and reality. Therefore, the animated nature in Woolf's fiction serves as the writer's tool to make readers think about their relationship to nature, which has mainly been based on the discussed subject-object relationship permitting the maltreatment of nature. As a result, nature is exploited and dominated by the human subject, which is reflected in ecocritical reading of modernist fiction. Woolf's writing manifests that the author subverts anthropocentrism rooted in the Western philosophical tradition by emphasizing that a human being is just one among many natural, and similarly sentient, subjects. Therefore, Woolf revives the objective of the Romantic poets to counterbalance the society's focus on scientific progress, industrialisation, and material needs by highlighting the human entanglement with nature. Similarly, the already mentioned panpsychism represents an analogous counterpart to the scientific materialism prevailing in the Western tradition, particularly in the early 20th century science, which inherited the tradition of Cartesian "machines" and Newtonian mechanics. Woolf's contemporaries William James, Bertrand Russell, and Alfred North Whitehead defied scientific materialism by reviving the mental aspects of reality and by attributing experience and sentience even to the most elementary particles from which reality is built. The aim of this chapter is to ascribe the same intention to Woolf, who rejects the notion of purely physical objects, conceived as stable and disconnected pieces of matter, and suggests that objects may also be seen as experiencing subjects. This enables Woolf to eliminate the inertness of nature constructed by scientific materialism.

In *Science and the Modern World* Alfred North Whitehead argues that the Western science had focused on the "irreducible brute matter"[285] for at least three centuries and that this tradition should be replaced by a less materialistic approach. The philosopher condemns

285. Whitehead, *Science*, 17.

"scientific materialism" for its worship of "senseless, valueless and purposeless"[286] material and claims that this purely materialist ontology is no longer viable in the first half of the 20th century. He claims that scientific materialism degraded the status of experience to something "dim and fragmentary" and he attempts to rehabilitate experience as something that "sounds the utmost depth of reality."[287] He calls for a system of thought where nature is not based on the concept of static, and inert matter, but on the concept of organism.[288] Such a system implies the focus on the idea of interconnectedness of natural events, and more importantly on the idea that everything in nature may be seen as an animate organism comparable to more complex organisms such as plants or human beings. In a similar vein, in *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead admits that to conceive "nature as composed of permanent things, namely of bits of matter" goes in line with our common sense thinking, however, he argues that the new scientific and philosophical discourse of the beginning of the 20th century must adopt a completely different viewpoint of nature as "a theatre for the interrelations of activities."[289] In *The Concept of Nature*, he introduces his cosmology based on the concept of nature conceived as "a complex of related entities,"[290] which contradicts the mechanical conception of nature based on separate blocks of matter. It is important to return to Whitehead's definition of actual entities described as "drops of experience," as subjects of their own experience, determined by their feeling or "prehension" of other entities: "A feeling cannot be abstracted from the actual entity entertaining it. This actual entity is termed 'subject' of the feeling."[291] Therefore, an actual entity is constituted by its feeling and by its unique sense of being itself: "An actual entity feels as it does feel in order to be the actual entity which it is."[292] As a

286. Whitehead, *Science*, 17.
287. Whitehead, *Science*, 18.
288. Whitehead, *Science*, 75.
289. Whitehead, *Modes*, 140.
290. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 9.
291. Whitehead, *Process*, 221.
292. Whitehead, *Process*, 221.

result, his ontological system may be defined, on the one hand, as non-materialist, due to his attribution of experience to the smallest constituents of reality, and, on the other hand, atomic, owing to his belief that these constituents of reality create assemblages ranging from pieces of inanimate matter, lower organisms, plants, and higher animals to human beings: "The ultimate metaphysical truth is atomism. The creatures are atomic."[293] Whitehead elaborates his panpsychist theory in *Religion in the Making*, where he suggests that every natural event, also meaning every actual occasion, has a physical and a mental pole. Having a physical pole for an actual entity means that it can actively receive data from entities in its proximity and evaluate them. This is succeeded by the entity's choice of data, which are integrated in its process of becoming, thus, the entity has the capacity to influence its process of "concrescence." In accordance with this theory, even human beings may be defined as a bundle of physical and mental processes. By introducing actual entities that are both of physical and mental nature, Whitehead overcomes the long-established dualism of mind and matter, experience and lifeless substance, and initiates a new monist tradition that interweaves the mental and the physical aspects of being: ". . .we should conceive mental operations as among the factors which make up the constitution of nature."[294] Whitehead's concept of reality, grounded on experiencing actual entities, may be compared to a more recent theory of "vibrant matter" introduced by Jane Bennett in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. The concept of vibrant matter is inspired by Spinoza's idea of striving—an effort or power to maintain existence which is attributed to all things.[295] Bennett emphasizes that there is "a vitality intrinsic to materiality,"[296] because the inorganic matter is capable of agency, which enables to overcome the dichotomy between organic and inorganic matter. However,

293. Whitehead, *Process* 35.
294. Whitehead, *Science* 156.
295. David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2007), 90.
296. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

panpsychism and vital materialism cannot be conflated, as the former places emphasis on the mental aspect and the sense of subjectivity of each constituent of reality, and the latter insists on vitality in a non-mental and non-spiritual sense, manifested as an impact or thing-power on the vital unity's environment. Moreover, Bennett argues that vital materialism is entirely atheistic and that its ethical aim is to "distribute value to bodies as such,"[297] which somehow implies that vital materialism attributes value to brute matter. On the contrary, panpsychism seems to embrace the turn away from this imminent value in physical matter deprived of its mental aspect. However, as Austin J. Roberts argues in his article "Pneumatterings: The New Materialism, Whitehead, and Theology," new materialists are heavily inspired by Whitehead's thought, although they do not openly recognize his influence in their texts. It is important to admit that Whitehead introduced the idea that "agency goes all the way down"[298] much earlier than new materialists, who elaborated on his concept of panexperiential, and internally related entities. While currently influential new materialism and other object-oriented ontologies relying on panpsychism, panexperialism, animism, or other doctrines attributing agency to the rudimentary constituents of reality, face harsh criticism for advocating flat ontology that levels all differences between the human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, living and lifeless matter,[299] this criticism cannot be applied to Whitehead's panpsychism. Whereas the philosopher reconciles the above-mentioned binaries, he clearly distinguishes between various levels of experience and, by no means, does he suggest that every subject is the same or that the agency of a human subject equals the agency of a particle. Moreover, his ontology does not exclude difference, because each actual occasion emerges from a different process of concrescence which guarantees that it is novel and

297. Bennett, 13.
298. Austin J. Roberts, "Pneumatterings," 5.
299. Benjamin Boysen, "The Embarrasement of Being Human: A Critique of New Materialism and Object-Oriented Ontology," *Orbis Litterarum* 73 (2018): 228. https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12174

unique. For this reason, Whitehead's ontology, which at the same time attributes proto-psychic qualities to matter and acknowledges the ontological difference, is used to analyse Woolf's panpsychism which also seems to celebrate difference and distinguish between different kinds of agency.

Panpsychism is most famously defined by Thomas Nagel in his book *Mortal Questions* where it is described as a doctrine admitting that "the basic physical constituents of the universe have mental properties, whether or not they are parts of living organisms."[300] However, by no means does this view claim that everything in the universe is endowed with mind or consciousness. Both mind and consciousness are anthropocentric terms and imply that lower animals and inanimate matter possess the same mental faculties as human beings. Instead, panpsychists sometimes prefer using the term "panexperientialism" because it does not entail the attribution of psyche, or consciousness, to material objects. In his book *Panpsychism in the West* David Skrbina argues that the best and functional definition of panpsychism might be that "all objects, or systems of objects, possess a singular inner experience of the world around them."[301] Moreover, he contends that in order to overcome our anthropocentric viewpoint, we must admit that mentality in objects around us cannot be described in terms of human consciousness, but more like "a universal quality of physical things, in which both inanimate mentality and human consciousness are taken as particular manifestations."[302] Thomas Nagel defined this quality as "what-it-is-likeness" in his famous essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat," where he argues against the reductionist approach to consciousness and emphasizes that conscious experience is "a widespread phenomenon,"[303] because every organism must have a sense of what it is like to be that organism. In a similar

300. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 181.
301. Skrbina, 16.
302. Skrbina, 17.
303. Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," 436.

vein, panpsychists claim that inanimate objects may have some kind of proto-psychic experience, because they can react to the changes in their environment. For example, Whitehead discusses the issue of universal experience at the beginning of *Modes of Thought*, where he states that we have already advanced our thinking about experience by considering animals as "centres of feeling and of experience,"[304] and therefore, also vegetables may be perceived as having some degree of experience. He then adds that also inanimate objects, the lowest kind of aggregation of actual occasions, may influence each other, at least on the physical level. The potentiality of feeling and expression thus lies also in non-living objects; however, it is fully developed in higher organisms. Skrbina provides a long list of philosophers who inclined to panpsychism across the history of Western philosophy and among them, he mentions Bertrand Russell, a friend of the members of the Bloomsbury Group and Whitehead's student. In *Outline of Philosophy*, Russell suggests that a riverbed, too, may be capable of experiencing, or thinking, as it is able to remember its course and react to its physical environment:

> A watercourse which at most times is dry gradually wears a channel down a gully at the times when it flows, and subsequent rains follow [a similar] course. . . . You may say, if you like, that the river bed remembers previous occasions when it experienced cooling streams. . . .You would say [this] was a flight of fancy because you are of the opinion that rivers and river beds do not 'think.'[305]

Russell does not mean to say that a riverbed is a thinking or sentient organism. More likely, he implies that even lifeless nature around us is endowed with a life of its own, maybe even experience according to which it "acts." Similarly, Whitehead points out in *Process and*

304. Whitehead, *Modes*, 23.
305. Skrbina, 155.

Reality that also a stone might be able to provide its own autobiography, because it remembers its reactions to the environment. Steven Shaviro elaborates on this particular image in his *The Universe of Things*, a book on speculative realism, and suggests that Whitehead does not urge us to reveal what the inner life of a stone is but mainly to acknowledge that other than human entities in reality may have its own experience of reality: "I attribute feelings to stones precisely in order to get away from the pernicious dualism that would insist that human beings alone (or at most, human beings together with some animals) have feelings, while everything else does not."[306] A similar point is also made by Skrbina, who highlights that panpsychism is the reaction to the tendency in contemporary science to regard mind as "limited to humans and perhaps to higher animals" and "dependent or reducible to the physical substrate of the human brain."[307] A representative of this "materialist" and physicalist approach is Daniel Dennett, a philosopher of mind who claims that human consciousness, or in other words mind, is reducible to the neuro-biological processes of our brain. As a result, panpsychism represents a great opponent of various forms of physicalism and warns against negative ethical and environmental consequences related to the worship of brute matter. By adopting the panpsychist perspective, we admit that the human subject is no longer unique and the only "enminded" being in the universe, which leads to the recognition of the "shared quality" with fellow beings, and therefore even to the acceptance of compassionate and ecological values. For this reason, panpsychism seems to be a very relevant worldview, especially nowadays, when we find ourselves on the verge of ecological crisis and face all forms of hatred towards "the other." The adoption of panpsychism enables us to reconsider our relationship to nature and other human and nonhuman beings.

306. Shaviro, 61.
307. Shaviro, 1.

Throughout the literary history, writers have often been influenced by the philosophical context in which they were creating their texts, or they have intentionally demonstrated a philosophical theory in their works. This section analyses Stephen Shaviro's attempt to trace panpsychism in the science-fiction story "The Universe of Things" by Gwyneth Jones and Whitehead's discussion of the animated nature in Romantic poetry. These two instances of panpsychism unveiled in literary works are briefly discussed below as sources of inspiration for the analysis of panpsychist traces in Virginia Woolf's works.

The short story "Universe of Things" deals mainly with the human encounter with aliens, who are endowed with a special capacity that helps them maintain a close relationship with other beings and things in their proximity. Consequently, their own tools are regarded as biological extension of themselves. One day an alien asks a human mechanic to repair his car and the mechanic decides to repair it by hand to show the alien how powerful and skilful humans are without the use of artificial technology. However, the mechanic experiences a moment of epiphany when his tools come alive and interact with him. Shaviro does not pay attention to the fantastical aspect of the story but suggests that it makes us "think about liveliness of objects" and about "the ways that they are related to us."[308] Moreover, he points out that we are afraid of admitting that there could be some vitality and agency in the inanimate nature:

> We are threatened by the vibrancy of matter. We need to escape the excessive proximity of things. We cannot bear the thought of their having an autonomous life, even if this life is ultimately attributable to us. We are desperate to reassure ourselves that, in spite of everything, objects are, after all, passive and inert.[309]

308. Shaviro, 47.
309. Shaviro, 48.

A similar objective to perceive inorganic nature as intrinsically alive is introduced in Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* where the philosopher discusses the English Romantic poets and their relationship to nature. The philosopher praises the poets for their criticism of scientific materialism, which was on the rise in the 18th and early 19th century, and for their emphasis on the organicity and animateness of nature. He contends that Wordsworth's natural poems illustrate his idea of nature conceived as an organic whole of "entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presence of others,"[310] which implies that natural events in Wordsworth's poetry are interdependent and influence each other. This is illustrated in a passage from *The Prelude* where Wordsworth points out that nature is capable of haunting its observers, which might be interpreted as Whitehead's natural objects that enchant us with "lure for feeling." Although Whitehead admits that the Romantics perceived lifeless natural objects as distinct from the animated things, he emphasizes that they regarded the inorganic stuff as potentiality for an interaction during which the human mind and the object perceived are interwoven, so that the clear-cut distinction between subjective experience and the objective nature is put at stake. Whitehead, of course, admits that Wordsworth, or any other Romantic poet, distinguished between living and lifeless things, however, he appreciates their intention to describe nature and human beings as intrinsically inseparable. Whitehead concludes the chapter by highlighting that the Romantics attribute value to all objects, even to those that are normally conceived as inert substance: "Both Shelley and Wordsworth emphatically bear witness that nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic value . . ."[311] This aesthetic value, or a lure fore feeling, may be regarded as the proto-psychic quality intrinsic to all constituents of reality. Accordingly, it may be concluded

310. Whitehead, *Science* 84.
311. Whitehead, *Science* 87.

that Whitehead suggests in the discussed chapter that the Romantics perceived both animate and inanimate objects as centres of agency or feeling.

Considering Shaviro's analysis of panpsychism in Gwyneth Jones's short story "The Universe of Things" and Whitehead's analysis of "active" nature in the poems of the Romantics, the following part of this chapter attempts to explore panpsychist traces in Virginia Woolf's works. Its aim is to emphasize that Woolf also represents an author who criticized the senseless, valueless, purposeless material, and that she undermines the binary of the animate and inanimate nature in her works. In a similar way to Whitehead, she aimed to create a universe that would be interwoven into a single organic whole, a universe where every entity would be related to another entity and where the human subject no longer dominates, because even inanimate matter may become a sentient subject: ". . . all entities inhere in the world 'in the same sense', then we must conceive a hailstone in the same way as a human subject."[312] The following discussion of the inanimate nature that comes alive in Woolf's fiction may be contested by claiming that all the analysed passages are written from human-centred perspective and that Woolf relies on anthropomorphism while she endows nature with experience. However, as Shaviro admits, this transference of human qualities to inanimate entities is the only means we can use to undermine anthropocentrism and to attribute the same value to nonhuman subjects: "The point is that a certain cautious anthropomorphism is necessary, in order to avoid anthropocentrism."[313] The best a writer can do is to use figurative language, metaphors, and similes to at least approximate and imagine the experience of other organisms. Woolf uses precisely this means to attribute experience to other-than-human subjects in her fiction, and for this reason, her writing is particularly resonating nowadays when we try to turn our gaze from humans to nature that needs to be

312. Shaviro 14.
313. Shaviro 61.

protected and restored. Moreover, Woolf's depiction of nature is not only anthropomorphic, but proceeds one step further and describes a what-it-is-likeness of being other-than-human subject.

Animated and Sentient Nature in Woolf's Fiction

The germs of Woolf's panpsychism may be traced back to her father's thoughts on materialism expressed in his essay "What is Materialism?" where Leslie Stephen emphasizes that it is problematic when scientists deal solely with blocks of matter and their physical qualities, because then they do not know how to handle immaterial notions such as experience or feeling: "But a difficulty arises when the man of science begins to deal with organised and living matter; when he tries to unify knowledge by reasoning from the principles of physical science in the departments claimed by the philosopher and the psychologist."[314] Stephen reflects on how we can describe the relation between the brain, the piece of matter, and mind, our spiritual realm, and emphasizes that the two are related and intertwined. He further points out that materialism is very appealing to a common-sense mind that believes in the reality of solid "sticks and stones."[315] However, he argues that we know nothing about matter directly except through the workings of our consciousness, thoughts and sensations.[316] He feels the urge to bridge the gap between the world of lifeless extended matter, studied by scientific materialism, and the world of experience examined by psychologist and philosophers. Stephen asserts that "emotions are just as real as the stone"[317] and condemns materialism that holds matter as "an ultimate reality" and defines emotions and sensations as "mere nothings or phantasms."[318] He admits later in the essay that matter must have some other properties than those which are usually studied by scientific materialism: "If living beings arose from inanimate matter, that does not prove that life is a figment, but only that matter had other properties than those which we please to attribute to it."[319] Moreover, he emphasized that

314. Leslie Stephen, "What is Materialism?," 132.
315. Stephen, 134.
316. Stephen, 135.
317. Stephen, 139.
318. Stephen, 143.
319. Stephen, 145.

through our senses we learn about conscious experience of other beings. "We weave our universe out of the senses," and therefore we are indirectly connected to other centres of consciousness.[320] These centres of consciousness are not specified, but Stephen might refer also to nonhuman centres of sentience because near the end of the essay, he points out that "we cannot give ourselves souls without giving them to our dogs, and if to ours dogs, perhaps to plants."[321] Stephen concludes his essay by rejection of pure spiritualism and considers himself to be an adherent of materialism which is non-reductionist, rejects the primacy of matter and attributes the same value to solid substance and "ephemeral" experience, emotions, and sensations.

Stephen influenced Woolf in many respects, although their relationship is described by most scholars as complicated. As we know from Woolf's essay "Leslie Stephen," Stephen did not provide the female members of the family with formal education, but he gave them freedom to pursue whatever hobby and profession they chose. Moreover, he encouraged Woolf in her passion for reading and writing and let her read anything she found in his library, which contained all sorts of books, ranging from philosophical treatises to historical records. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf describes how happily Stephen discussed the borrowed books with his daughter. Katherine C. Hill argues in her article "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution" that Stephen undoubtedly passed on her daughter some of his ideas related to the nature of literary art.[322] The following part of this chapter aims to suggest that Woolf also adopted some of his philosophical views on the nature of reality expressed in "What is Materialism?" and that she similarly rejects both pure

320. Stephen. 148.
321. Stephen, 153.
322. Katherine C. Hill, "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution," *PMLA* 96, no. 3 (1981): 354, https://doi.org/10.2307/461911.

materialism and pure spiritualism, which is inevitably influenced by her father's atheism, and tends to hold more organic, holistic, and monist view of reality.

In her well-known essay "Modern Fiction" Woolf criticizes Edwardians such as H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett for representing mainly the material aspects of life, "the solidity" of reality, in their fiction. Instead, she argues that modern writers should represent life as it really is, which means to transcribe "the incessant shower of innumerable atoms" that fall on "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day."[323] This focus on experience implies that Woolf rejected scientific materialism for reasons similar to her father's. Moreover, her comparison of impressions and feelings to physical atoms indicates that the author attributes the same value to both physical and mental aspects of life. In addition, it refers to Stephen's claim that feelings and emotions are as real as stones. However, Woolf's lengthy discussion about modern writers' focus on the mind and on the description of the internal may be misleading, and many scholars attempted to interpret Woolf's writing solely from the idealist, spiritual, or transcendental perspective. In fact, the writer's fiction ascribes the same portion of attention to the descriptions of physical and mental experience, and therefore, the aforementioned approaches are highly reductive. As Woolf points out in her essay "On Being Ill," literature seems to give preference to the manifestations of mind: "… literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and, save for one or two passions such as desire and greed, is null, and negligible, and non-existent."[324] On the contrary, she follows in her father's footsteps and emphasizes that the body is present in every excitement of the mind and that it experiences a daily drama. The body and mind are inseparable for her, which can be demonstrated in the following simile: ". . . it [mind] cannot separate off from the

323. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 9.
324. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 101.

body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant."[325] Woolf rejects the traditional dualism of matter and spirit, therefore, her fiction may be best interpreted only from the perspective of non-dualist philosophical theories, such as panpsychism, neutral monism, or Whitehead's philosophy or organism.

While the previous chapter dealt with the interaction between human beings and objects in their surroundings and suggested that Woolf blurs the distinction between the subject and the object, this chapter explores the idea that even other-than-human organisms and inanimate objects may be considered sentient subjects. In relation to the novel *To the Lighthouse*, it has been analysed how mainly female characters of the novel can overcome the distinction between the subject and the object and how they place themselves on the same level as the objects in their proximity. Whereas Mrs Ramsay's interaction with the light from the lighthouse resulted in her becoming the light and adopting the position of the object, in the middle passage "Time Passes" the light replaces Mrs Ramsay's loving and caring gaze and becomes a subject. The light is described as having similar qualities to human beings and as affecting its environment. It is necessary to admit that the light's experience is depicted in anthropomorphic terms, however, as Shaviro pointed out in his book *The Universe of Things*, cautiously used anthropomorphism may be used to disrupt anthropocentrism. In the following quotation the light is at the same time endowed with authority and sympathy:

> When darkness fell, the stroke of the Lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in the soften light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again."[326]

325. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 101.
326. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 145.

In “The Lighthouse,” the final part of the novel, Lily’s canvas is described as having “an uncompromising white stare” that “rebukes”[327] the artist. Also other objects in *To the Lighthouse* are described as “sentient,” for example the trees and the flowers that “looked before them, yet beholding nothing,” or the cliffs and ships that seem to prehend one another and communicate by their own means: “And as it happens when the weather is very fine, the cliffs looked as if they were conscious of the ships, and the ships looked as if they were conscious of the cliffs, as if they signalled to each other some secret message of their own.”[328] This passage also reveals Woolf’s fascination with things whose essence is incomprehensible to human beings. Moreover, it exemplifies Whitehead’s idea that each entity is aware of the feelings of other entities and maintains relations with them. Consequently, the “interconnections and individual characters”[329] of these entities merge into larger assemblages, real physical objects, which create our universe.

Throughout the novel, it is intimated that nature and weather are capable of their own agency and that they have their own life indifferent to the struggling of humans. This issue is foregrounded in “Time Passes,” where nature gets hold of the house and demonstrates its agency, for example in the following passage, where the spring is personified and described as having its peculiar form of agency: “The spring without a leaf to toss, bare and bright like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in her purity, was laid out on fields wide-eyed and watchful and entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders.”[330] In this section of the novel Woolf presents a universe from the nature’s point of view and enables natural elements to reign, which undermines the agency of human beings whose actions and death are squeezed into square brackets. The human is thus pushed aside, decentred[331] and its

327. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 171.
328. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 198.
329. Whitehead, *Modes*, 150.
330. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 143.
331. Adkins, 232.

absence gives way to the triumph of nature. Although human absence and nature's seizure of the house should intensify the sense of emptiness and deadness after the residents' departure, in fact, it magnifies the sense of nature's liveliness: "Flies wove a web in the sunny rooms; weeds that had grown close to the glass in the night tapped methodically at the window pane."[332] All natural and non-natural entities in the house seem to coexist and express their unique sense of being. A paragraph later, Woolf describes the sounds that resonated in the house where nobody spoke human language: "Now and again some glass tinkled in the cupboard as if a giant voice had shrieked so loud in its agony that tumblers stood inside a cupboard vibrated too."[333] When Whitehead talks about feeling, which is the subjective expression of each actual occasion, including the smallest bits of organic matter, he defines the most elementary experience as "emotional feeling felt in its [an entity's] relevance to a world beyond"[334] and compares it to the transmission of vibration among physical particles. Therefore, the sound and vibration of the glass and tumblers from the quotation may be interpreted as the clash or co-presence of expressed experience of inanimate objects.

These descriptions of animateness in "Times Passes" are in stark contrast to Woolf's intention to depict a house deprived of life: "The house was left; the house was deserted. It was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it."[335] Mrs McNab, who enters the house captured by nature, represents human effort to dominate nature and thwart its flourishing. However, she surrenders when she comes to a conclusion that to prevent the house from falling into the hands of nature was "beyond the strength of one woman."[336] Woolf's rhetorical question "What power could prevent the fertility, the

332. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 144.
333. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 145.
334. Whitehead, *Process*, 163.
335. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 149.
336. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.

insensibility of nature?"[337] hints at her deliberate intention to undermine the value of human actions in comparison to "nature that has played so many tricks upon us."[338] The word "insensibility" does not imply nature's lack of conscious experience but, rather, its indifference to the actions of human beings. Nature's unstoppable activity depicted by Woolf in "Time Passes" also refers to its creativity, the process of incessant becoming, which is described by Whitehead as the ultimate principle of his philosophy of organism: "Creativity is the principle of novelty. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies."[339] Nature thus may be conceived as environment permitting the perpetual recreation and actualisation of its elements. This creativity is reflected also in the following quotation, where Woolf celebrates nature's expression and creative power: "Tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and pattered their life out of the window-pane. Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; the lawn waved with long-grass; giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages…"[340]

In *Orlando* Woolf brings to life the family mansion, where the main character is born, by endowing it with a heart that beats: "Ah, but she knew where the heart of the house still beat. Gently opening a door, she stood on the threshold so that (she fancied) the room could not see her and watched the tapestry rising and falling on the eternal faint breeze which never failed to move it."[341] Woolf describes the house in terms of a living human being, as the centre of feeling and sense experience. Orlando fancies that the rooms of her family mansion absorbed the mood of people who occupied them as well as her feelings and experience. Moreover, the rooms react to Orlando re-entering the house and express their own feelings, which is described in the second part of the following quotation:

337. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.
338. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2003), 37.
339. Whitehead, *Process*, 21.
340. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.
341. Woolf, *Orlando*, 157.

> She fancied that the rooms brightened as she came in; stirred, opened their eyes as if they had been dozing in her absence. She fancied, too, that, hundreds and thousands of times as she had seen them, they never looked the same twice, as if long a life as theirs had stored in them a myriad moods which changed with winter and summer, bright weather and dark, and her own fortunes and the people's characters who visited them. Polite they were to strangers, but a little wary; with her, they were entirely open and at their ease. Why not indeed? They had known each other for close on four centuries now. They had nothing to conceal. She knew their sorrows and joys she knew what age each part of them was and its little secrets—a hidden drawer, a concealed cupboard, or some deficiency perhaps, such as a part made up, or added later. They, too, knew her in all her moods and changes.[342]

This dense passage, in which Woolf personifies the rooms of Orlando's mansion, reveals Woolf's interest in the interaction between human beings and their surroundings, however, she puts emphasis on their equality regarding the influence on one another. In *The Concept of Nature* Whitehead defines nature as a complex of related events, which are in his later works referred to as actual occasions. One of the examples of an event is the lecture hall in which he gives his lecture, and this event is interwoven with the event of his own "bodily life."[343] The two events are thus disclosed one to each other and some of their traits may be integrated by the prehension of the co-present event. He also does not exclude that other events might intervene into the event of the hall and the body. When the data integrated in the process of prehension enter the structure of the occasion in the process of concrescence, they may be transmitted into larger assemblages, or societies, which are seemingly permanent in contrast

342. Woolf, *Orlando*, 156.
343. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 10.

to events: "The 'effects' of an actual occasion are in its intervention in concrescent processes other than its own. Any entity, thus intervening it the processes transcending itself, is said to be functioning as an 'object.'"[344] Consequently, Orlando's feelings may be interpreted as data integrated and stored in an event and then reproduced in the constant process of creation of societies (larger, macroscopic assemblages of actual occasion), in this case the walls of the rooms. This claim is supported by Woolf's idea that the rooms change in relation to Orlando's fortunes and with "the people's characters who visited them."[345] Both the rooms and Orlando represent simultaneously experiencing subjects and objects prepared to be integrated into the nature of the other. Also, the fact that the rooms "never looked the same" brings back Whitehead's definition of actual occasions or events that are never the same due to the various input in the process of their concrescence, or becoming, represented in Woolf's quotation by emotions of the room's occupants.

The absorption of human feeling by inanimate objects or nature features also in *Jacob's Room*, where the moor, which is associated with Clara's love for Cornwall, "accepts all" and stores lovingly people's emotions or literally "hoards these little treasures, like a nurse."[346] The sun, similarly to the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse*, has eyes and directs them at whatever it choses: "Back came the sun dazzlingly. It fell like an eye upon the stirrups, and then suddenly and yet very gently rested upon the bed, upon the alarum clock, and upon the butterfly box stood open."[347] The following quotation illustrates Woolf's belief in the principle of interconnection and liveliness of nature which is emphasized by the anthropomorphic term "breathing" comparable to Whitehead's idea that all entities are interconnected and influence each other: "People still murmur over the last word said on the

344. Whitehead, *Process*, 220.
345. Woolf, *Orlando*, 157.
346. Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (London: The Harper Press, 2013), 133.
347. Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 18.

staircase, or strain, all through their dreams, for the voice of alarum clock. So when the wind roams through a forest innumerable twigs stir; hives are brushed; insects sway on grass blades; the spider runs rapidly up a crease in the bark; and the whole air is tremulous with breathing; elastic with filaments"[348] The wind launched a chain of events in nature and the relations between these events are demonstrated by the word "filaments." A few lines below Woolf emphasizes that "webs of the forest are schemes evolved for the smooth conduct of business" and that "the stir in the air is the indescribable agitation of life,"[349] whereby she acknowledges the interconnectedness and life-force attributed to all natural entities. She admits that all constituents of reality are endowed with a degree of vitality, "all-encompassing, permeating force,"[350] which spreads through the whole nature. Interestingly, the "webs of forest" that enable "the smooth conduct of business" hints at the idea that relations between organisms in a forest are important to ensure each organism's survival. A similar reflection appears in Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* where the philosopher describes how existence of a single tree depends on its relations with the environment:

> A single tree by itself is dependent upon all the adverse chances of shifting circumstances. The wind stunts it: variations in temperature check its foliage: the rains denude its soil… But in nature the normal way in which trees flourish is by their association with a forest. Each tree may lose something of its individual perfection of growth, but they mutually assist each other in preserving conditions for survival. . . . A forest is a triumph of the organisation of mutually dependent species.[351]

348. Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 163.
349. Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 163.
350. Foster, 54.
351. Whitehead, *Science*, 206.

In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead argues that "no entity can separate itself from the others, and from the whole" and therefore, it may be suggested that Woolf's filaments or webs in the air represent metaphorically this inseparability and the concern of one organism for another. Each entity of the universe is indirectly connected to other entities and as Whitehead suggests, each entity has some sense of its own existence, and consequently, also some value:

> At the base of our existence is the sense of 'worth.' Now worth essentially presupposes that which is worthy. Here the notion of worth in not to be construed in a purely eulogistic sense. It is the sense of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character.[352]

In her fiction Woolf appreciates the worthiness of every organism by attributing it a degree of experience and by suggesting that things are alive. In her short story "Ancestors," she introduces a girl who was brought up to behave in a sensitive way to nature so that she never harms a single natural entity: ". . . to hurt a flower was to hurt the most exquisite thing in nature."[353] In her short story "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" the main character decides to cut off an overgrown branch and feels regret about depriving the plant of its life: "As it [the rose] fell, surely some light came in too, surely one could penetrate a little farther into her being. Her mind then was filled with tenderness and regret. . . . To cut an overgrown branch saddened her because it once lived, and life was dear to her."[354] Hence, Woolf seems to admit that other organisms may have their own life or subjective experience, which is uncommunicable. However, it may be captured, at least, by anthropomorphic literary language. Woolf ascribes a special status to flowers in her fiction, which is explained in her essay "On Being Ill" where she admires flowers for their dignity and strength to stand upright

352 Whitehead, *Modes*, 109.
353. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 181-182.
354. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 224.

regardless the conditions: “Let us examine the rose. We have seen it so often flowering in bowls, connected it so often with beauty in its prime, that we have forgotten how it stands, still and steady, throughout an entire afternoon in the earth. It preserves a demeanour of perfect dignity and self-possession.”[355] Woolf adds that flowers are “the most self-sufficient” of all things that human beings have made companions,” by which she recognizes their own autonomy and life independent of human beings. Moreover, people “live in the country to learn virtue from plants,”[356] which means that nature is also intrinsically virtuous. Woolf also contrasts life in nature with human life and concludes that nature is innately alive and as an entity does not need to worry about its death or decay: “The dogs bark. The rooks, rising in a net, fall in a net upon the elm trees. The wave of life flings itself out indefatigably. It is only the recumbent who know what, after all, nature is at no points to conceal – that she in the end will conquer.”[357] On the contrary, human beings constantly have to “wriggle with the hook of life.”[358]

In *The Voyage Out* Woolf personifies the ship Euphrosyne on which the characters sail to Santa Marina: “On and on she went, by day and by night, followed her path, until one morning broke and showed the land. . . . She rang with cries; men jumped on her; her deck was thumped by feet.”[359] This passage is narrated from the perspective of the ship that experiences her advance to the port and the actions of her passengers. The fact that Woolf decides to eliminate the human experience from the approach towards an unknown land implies that the human perspective is no longer in the centre. While Rachel Vinrace is walking in the exotic wilderness of her new destination, she is fascinated by the liveliness around her and admits that nature around her has its own life: “She laid them side by side,

355. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 105.
356. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 106.
357. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 106.
358. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 106.
359. Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Harper Press, 2013), 92-93.

flower to flower and stalk to stalk, caressing them for walking alone. Flowers even pebbles in the earth had their own life and disposition and brought back the feeling of a child to whom they were companions."[360] The quotation contrasts different perspectives on nature. First, the non-anthropocentric viewpoint emphasizing that even pebbles may have their own sense of existence and life, which brings back Whitehead's idea that even a stone might write its autobiography. Second, the traditional anthropocentric viewpoint that human beings constantly project their feelings on the surrounding nature and that objects evoke memories from the past, for Rachel, for example, from her childhood when she used to interact with natural objects during her childish plays. As Rachel discovers the beauty of nature alongside her first love adventure, she seems to be more and more sensitive to the impulses she gets from her environment: "Rachel seemed to see and hear a little of everything, much as a river feels the twigs that fall into it and sees the sky above, but her eyes were too vague for Evelyn's liking."[361] The quotation also reveals that that Woolf conceives nature as something capable of "feeling." Moreover, the idea that the river feels twigs falling into its stream is reminiscent of the quotation from Bertrand Russell's *Outline of Philosophy* where the philosopher suggests that a riverbed reacts to its outer conditions and "remembers its previous occasions."

360. Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 191.
361. Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 294.

Celebration of Life, Value and Beauty in Nature

So far, the animated nature and objects were discussed in Woolf's early novels and in her masterpiece *To the Lighthouse*, however, this theme is also foregrounded in her other novels. In *Mrs Dalloway* she directly addresses the issue of life penetrating the whole nature. Both Clarissa and Septimus are hyper-sensitive characters, who seem to have a very strong bond with nature around them and who feel the life hidden within it. Woolf argues in the essay "On Being Ill" that this deeper understanding of nature and hypersensitivity may be the asset of mental illness and that "it is to the poets that we turn to" as our senses "domineer" over our intelligence in the period of poor mental health.[362] During one of his fits, raving Septimus expressed the idea that "leaves were alive; trees were alive."[363] Interestingly, Woolf avoids using the conditional "as if alive" which she uses in *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, Septimus believes in certain patterns of harmony in nature that are independent of human agency:

> The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked, at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and

362. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 107-108.
363. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 17.

> reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.[364]

The quotation not only demonstrates Septimus's awareness of the liveliness in nature, but it also shows that this experience or feeling is predominantly of aesthetic nature. The liveliness of nature is emphasized in the quotation by highlighting the interconnectedness of the elements entering mutual "prehension," for example by the words "stretching" or "elastics," which is reminiscent of "filaments" mentioned in *Jacob's Room*. Then, the aesthetic quality of experience or feeling is described as springing from fairly "ordinary things," which, again, strikingly recalls Whitehead's characteristic of prehension. Whitehead discusses aesthetics in relation to his cosmology in *Adventures of Ideas* where he claims that "beauty is a quality which finds its exemplification in actual occasions."[365] and that actual occasions can create beauty. An occasion in the process of concrescence merges from different parts and these "parts contribute to the massive feeling of the whole, and the whole contributes to the feeling of the parts."[366] Moreover, the beauty of an occasion is perfected when harmony is established among its entities. This harmony is demonstrated also in the above-mentioned quotation where the separate occasions in nature create one unified work of art. Whitehead claims that "beauty concerns the inter-relations of the various components of Reality," which implies that "any system of things which in any wide sense is beautiful is to that extent justified in its existence."[367] As a result, it can be concluded that all things in nature, even inanimate things mentioned in the quoted passage, have their autonomous and irreplaceable role and importance as long as their enter relations with each other and create beauty. Regarding the interrelations of occasions that create an instance of beauty, Whitehead points out in *Modes of*

364. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 52.
365. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 252.
366. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 252.
367. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 265.

Thought that if an occasion possesses a sense of being one actuality in a world of actualities, then the occasion is endowed with aesthetic significance. As Shaviro highlights in *The Universe of Things*, Whitehead does not clearly distinguish between ethics and aesthetics, therefore, he "gives an aestheticized account of ethics."[368] This ethico-aesthetics is heavily grounded in the concern of one entity for another and the belief in the intrinsic value of every part that makes up reality: ". . . we have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of universe."[369] According to Shaviro, this is one of the key features of panpsychism: "When panpsychism insists on the mentality of lobsters, neutrinos, and lumps of granite, what it is saying in the first instance is that these entities exist *pour soi* and *en soi*. They are autonomous centres of value."[370] Similarly, the above-mentioned quotation from *Mrs Dalloway* shows that Woolf can also be classified as a panpsychist because the objects in her fiction, on the one hand, have an autonomous existence pour soi, and, on the other hand, relate to other objects to create an aesthetic unity.

Woolf acknowledges the autonomous existence and life of inanimate objects also in *The Years* where books in the library seem to be self-sufficient and enjoy their own experience: "As she passed she glanced in at the long windows of the library. Everything was shrouded and shut up. But the long room looked more than usually stately, its proportions seemly; and the brown books in their long rows seemed to exist silently, with dignity, by themselves, for themselves."[371] However, it is in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* where nature and objects really come to live and manifest their interconnection with human beings. In relation to *The Waves*, Woolf writes in her diary that she wants to get rid of "all waste,

368. Shaviro, 24.
369. Whitehead, *Modes*, 111.
370. Shaviro, 89.
371. Woolf, "The Years," in *The Years & Between the Acts* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2012), 191.

deadness, superfluity,"[372] which she accomplishes by interviewing the characters' lives with the natural cycle captured in the interludes that precede each chapter. With its focus on nonhuman realm, the interludes are very similar to the passage "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*. Dominant characters of these passages are the sea, the sun, birds, and other animals. Although people are mentioned here and there in these passages, they are always shifted into the background. Whereas animals and other natural elements are persistently personified in these interludes, Woolf also captures their proper experience, for example in the following passage, where she describes the interaction between various animal species:

> In the garden the birds that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn on that tree, on that bush, now sang together in chorus, shrill and sharp; now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky. They swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and started them. Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this instant. Also they sung emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree, singing together as they chased each other, escaping, pursuing, pecking each other as they turned high in the air.[373]

On the one hand, the quotation attributes human qualities such as fear or joy to the birds, but, on the other hand, it illustrates Woolf's interest in the subjective experience of birds and motives for their flight and singing, for example when they feel threatened by human presence or play with other representatives of their species.

In his article "Ecology and Ethology in *The Waves*" Derek Ryan points out that in the interludes, Woolf attempts to capture nature's interaction with human beings and interaction

372. Woolf, *The Diary*, Vol. 3, 209.
373. Woolf, *The Waves*, 40.

between nonhuman agents before "we try to translate that affect into language."[374] He also points out that this explains Woolf's recurrent use of the conjunction "as if," which reveals Woolf's refusal to apply human culture to nonhuman world depicted in the interludes. The conjunction implies that Woolf's portrayal of nonhuman experience is only approximate and cannot translate the animal world accurately without using "the animal language." However, Ryan argues that although Woolf uses anthropomorphism, it is justified by her intention to "consider multiple nonhuman agencies."[375] Unfortunately, human beings have no other possibility than to express this agency by our tools, which means by human language. This "nonanthropocentric anthropomorphism"[376] thus represents Woolf's tool to decentre humans and explore the expression of other-than-human subjects. Whitehead discusses the notion of expression in *Modes of Thought* and extends the definition of the term beyond human beings by highlighting that this ability is not limited only to human beings: "Expression is the diffusion, in the environment, of something initially entertained in the experience of the expresser. No conscious determination is necessarily involved; only the impulse to diffuse."[377] This quotation indicates that expression is a universal capacity that is not limited only to human beings but concerns all four kinds of social aggregations (natural entities) – inorganic matter, vegetable, the animal grade and the human grade. As a result, it is possible to consider language to be just a refined sort of expression and not as a unique means used by human beings. For Whitehead, and probably even for Woolf, language is not the separation line between nature and culture but a means how we can cross the barrier between these two realms.

374. Derek Ryan, "Posthumanist Interludes: Ecology and Ethology in The Waves," *Virginia Woolf: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, eds. Jeanne Dubino, Gill Lowe, Vara Neverow and Kathryn Simpson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 153.
375. Ryan, "Posthumanist Interludes," 154.
376. Ryan, "Posthumanist Interludes," 154.
377. Whitehead, *Modes*, 21.

Besides the natural interludes, the theme of nature that comes alive is foregrounded in the whole novel. At its very beginning, Woolf introduces the characters as well as nature that is almost described as a character living its own life: "Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. The petals are harlequins. Stalks rise from the black hollows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters."[378] Moreover, human characters appear to be hyper-sensitive to their surroundings and they perceive the all-permeating nature's life-force in their proximity. Although the world of nature and the world of human civilisation are contrasted in the following quotation, both seem to be buzzing with life:

> 'A bird flies homeward,' said Louis. 'Evening opens before her eyes and gives one quick glance among the bushes before she sleeps… Listen to the trams squealing and to the flashes from the electric rails. We hear the beech trees and beech trees raise their branches as if the bride had let her silken nightdress fall and come to the doorway saying, 'Open, open.'
>
> 'All seems alive,' said Louis. 'I cannot hear death anywhere tonight.'[379]

Throughout the novel Woolf draws an analogy between the transient human life and the natural order, which is everlasting and indestructible. This is highlighted at the very end of the novel where Bernard challenges the personified Death and Woolf decides to conclude with a short scathing sentence: "The waves broke on the shore."[380] The sentence implies the continuation of the natural and indicates that human beings are just drops in the sea of natural cycle, which also corresponds to the basic principle of process metaphysics claiming that physical objects, including people, are "no more than stability-waves in a sea of process."[381]

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378. Woolf, *The Waves*, 5.
379. Woolf, *The Waves*, 130.
380. Woolf, *The Waves*, 167.
381. Rescher, 53.

Consequently, death of human beings may be seen only as a part of larger ongoing process. The sea metaphor is extended by Woolf herself when she compares the characters to "a string of six little fish,"[382] by which she again contrasts their smallness with grand-scale nature.

A world buzzing with life may also be found in *Between the Acts* where Woolf chooses a natural setting for the pageant staged in this work. The village setting and the animals present during the performance seem to be active participants in the play as they disturb the action by different noises and movements. Since the audience is so close to nature while watching the play, Woolf seems to blur the distinction between culture and nature by interweaving the animal and the human worlds:

> Look and listen. See the flowers, how they ray their redness, whiteness, silverness and blue. And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabling, their green and leaves hustle us and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starling, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the black cow stands still.[383]

On the one hand, Woolf emphasizes the interconnection between human beings and natural elements in this text, for example when Mr Swithin considers the idea that "sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one,"[384] but on the other hand, she describes the animal life without the intervention of human agency. The following quotation captures animal agency inside the barn without human presence. Life leaps from every corner and crevice of the barn and the reader is dragged into the world of animal senses:

> The barn was empty. Mice slid in and out of holes or stood upright, nibbling. Swallows were busy with straw in pockets of earth in the rafters. Countless beetles and insects of various sorts burrowed in the dry wood. A stray bitch had

382. Woolf, *The Waves*, 145.
383. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 363.
384. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 389.

> made the dark corner where the sacks stood lying-in ground for her puppies. All these eyes, expanding and narrowing, some adapted to light, others to darkness, looked from different angles and edges. Minute nibbling and rustling broke silence. Whiffs of sweetness and richness veined the air. A bluebottle had settled on the cake and stabbed its yellow rock with its short drill. A butterfly sunned itself sensuously on a sunlit yellow plate.[385]

Similarly to natural interludes in *The Waves* or the passage "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*, this passage demonstrates that life is present also when humans are absent, which corresponds to the author's intention to renounce deadness in her fiction: "The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity. . ."[386]

In "The Death of the Moth" Woolf also demonstrates her fascination with life that permeates everything in nature. While watching the moth flying from one side of the window-pane to the other, the female observer is astonished by the life energy that makes the moth continue in its desperate flight: ". . . it seemed as if a fibre, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body."[387] By compressing the world's animateness and desire to live into this tiny creature, Woolf recognizes that life energy permeates all nature from the very primitive organisms to the largest and most evolved ones. She compares the moth to "a tiny bead of life" around which "a thread of vital light" almost became visible. She brings our attention to the fact that we often forget that also organisms that seem to be ugly and without a sense of dignity have their own life independent of human beings. When the moth surrenders to death at the end of the story, the observer

385. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 354.
386. Woolf*, The Diary, Vol. 3*, 209.
387. Virginia Woolf, "The Death of the Moth," in *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life, ed. Rachel Bowlby* (London: Penguin, 1993), 180.

arrives at a conclusion that although nothing can withstand death, the vital power in nature, which is impersonal, indifferent, and not attached to "anything in particular,"[388] endures. This is reminiscent of the essay "On Being Ill" where Woolf emphasizes that "the wave of life flings itself indefatigably" and that nature always conquers.[389] Another important aspect of this story is Woolf's attempt to relate the moth's experience of being itself. She points out that the meagre creature appears to be content with its limited possibilities and that it does its best to keep itself alive. She is interested in what the moth's motive for this struggle might be. Similarly, Woolf imagines the rooks' "tremendous exciting experience," when they suddenly take off from the trees and land again after a while, and she seems to be astonished by the impulses that make animals and other organisms do what they do. This fascination with the motion and reactions of organisms and curiosity about animal experience, or what-is-it-likeness to be those animals, is the main subject of Woolf's short story "Kew Gardens" and novella *Flush* where the author takes up the perspective of an animal and tries to approximate its experience. In these two texts Woolf limits the use of anthropomorphism and acknowledges the animals' proper mode of existence and experience, which is vastly different from that of human beings.

388. Woolf, "The Death of the Moth," 181.
389. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 106.

Beyond Anthropomorphism: Woolf's Exploration of Other-Than-Human Experience

In the short story "Kew Gardens" Woolf describes a day in Kew Gardens from a perspective of a low-grade animal, a snail, and explores the notion of "what-it-is-like" to be a snail. Woolf hints at the idea that animals experience the world differently than human beings already in *Jacob's Room* where she points out that also insect has its own sense of being: ". . . each carries a globe of the world in his head."[390] As Derek Ryan argues in "Ecology and Ethology in *The Waves,*" this world of an animal, its experience of the environment, may be interpreted via Jacob von Uexküll's concept of "umwelt" defined as "environment-world" where an animal develops, expresses itself and interacts with other animals.[391] Moreover, to mediate animal experience of umwelt, and not just behaviourist observations, Uexküll uses anthropomorphism while examining animals and their reactions to the environment. Ryan suggests that Woolf uses the same technique in the interludes in *The Waves* while describing the birds' subjectivity: "We see the movement from simply documenting an observation to trying to probe deeper into the Umwelt of the birds, a probing that leads to an increased element of anthropomorphism, but which is always negotiated tentatively."[392] In "Kew Gardens" Woolf does not use the first-person narration to capture the snail's experience, as one might expect, but she uses the third-person voice in order to give us an objective account of the snail's down-to-earth experience. The following quotation describes the snail's position in the flowerbed and its experience of its surroundings from the perspective of the earthbound animal without the use of unnecessary anthropomorphism:

> From the oval-shaped flower-bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the

390. Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 163.
391. Ryan, "Posthumanist Interludes," 157.
392. Ryan, "Posthumanist Interludes," 159.

surface; and from the red blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end.[393]

Shaviro claims in *The Universe of Things* in relation to the acknowledgment of lower animals' and inanimate objects' experience that "all entities have insides as well as outsides, or first-person experiences as well as observable, third-person properties."[394] It means that the only way how we can grasp the first-person experience of an entity is to evaluate its reactions to the environment and only then, we can assume what the first-person experience might be like. It is particularly pertinent for the interpretation of the above-mentioned quotation where Woolf pays attention to a detailed description of flowers growing in the flowerbeds, and to various shapes that the parts of the flowers have. Woolf thus presupposes that the animal, which is mentioned only later in the story, orientates itself in space by the recognition of colours, shapes, and light. She continues in comparing the human and animal experience when she points out that human movement is unlike the "zig zag" flight of white and blue butterflies. Then, she narrates the conversation between a man and a woman and when they start to disappear from the snail's visual field, they are described as "diminished in size among the trees." As Joyce E. Kelley points out in her article "Stretching Our 'Antannae': Converging Worlds of the Seen and the Unseen in 'Kew Gardens,'" Woolf oscillates between "the microcosm of action happening within the oval-shaped flower bed and the macrocosm of people passing around it,"[395] therefore, she compares the perspectives of two different animal species. However, the comparison and acknowledgement of the value of both perspectives is not the only objective of the text. Woolf also hints at the idea that the two perspectives intersect, and she interweaves the umwelts of humans and the snail, for example, at the end of

393. Woolf, "Kew Gardens," in *Monday or Tuesday* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997), 39.
394. Shaviro, 104.
395. Joyce E Kelley, "Stretching Our 'Antannae': Converging Worlds of the Seen and the Unseen in 'Kew Gardens,'" in *Virginia Woolf: Writing the World*, eds. Pamela L. Caughie and Diana L. Swanson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 161.

the story where a man pushes the point of his parasol into the earth, or in other words into the habitat of the snail: "The couple stood still on the edge of the flower bed, and together pressed the end of her parasol deep down into the soft earth."[396] It seems that it is the snail, whose private space is violated, who tells us about these passers-by. Then, the parasol is mentioned again when the couple are pressing it into the earth and then they pull it out to have a cup of tea: ". . . and he pulled the parasol out of the earth with a jerk and was impatient to find the place where one had tea with other people, like other people."[397] It is quite striking that Woolf emphasizes the word "people" as if she wanted to hint at people's stereotypic behaviour such as walking or having tea, which is quite different from the snail's routine. The emphasis on the word "people" also represents an abrupt change in focus directed again to the human realm. However, the adoption of the snail's perspective returns, and it is intensified at the end of the story where Woolf mentions "all gross and heavy bodies" which "sunk down in the heath motionless and lay huddled upon the grass."[398] It might be suggested that if Woolf had meant the story to be narrated from human perspective, she would probably not have opted for macroscopic "gross" and "heavy" bodies. Apart from the description of the snail's perception of its environment, Woolf also interprets the snail's behaviour and shows interest in his reasoning: "It appeared to have a definite goal in front of it, differing in this respect from the singular high-stepping angular green insect who attempted to cross in front of it, and waited for a second with its antennae trembling as if in deliberation, and then stepped off as rapidly and strangely in the opposite direction."[399] Here Woolf reveals her fascination with the animal's proto-conscious thinking and demonstrates that "purposes transcend mere aim at survival."[400] Diana L. Swanson points out in her article "Woolf's Copernican Shift:

396. Woolf, "Kew Gardens," 44.
397. Woolf, "Kew Gardens," 44.
398. Woolf, "Kew Gardens," 45.
399. Woolf, "Kew Gardens," 41.
400. Whitehead, *Modes*, 28.

Nonhuman Nature in Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction" that Woolf manifests in this short story how "other-than-human beings present in the same place as the human characters have goals and problems and make decisions."[401] The snail's slow advance is interrupted by the appearance of other human beings. It is important to point out that Woolf does not use a direct and specific reference to another couple, instead, she opts for the biological term "human beings" which refers generically to the specific animal species and not to particular individuals. This reference to human beings alongside the already mentioned reference to people at the end of the story implies that in "Kew Gardens" humans are not the central focus of the story[402] and that Woolf is not interested in specific subjectivity, but mainly in a general difference between human and nonhuman perspectives. To conclude, the short story exemplifies Thomas Nagel's argument from his essay "What Is It Like to be a Bat" about consciousness being "a widespread phenomenon,"[403] which, on the one hand, cannot be fully accommodated by human language, but on the other hand, we must at least try to approximate. Although Woolf cannot demonstrate nonhuman agency without using anthropomorphic language, she enables this agency to be at least "felt."[404]

In *Flush* Woolf moves from a low-grade to a high-grade animal realm when she decides to focus on the umwelt of a dog whose perspective is again contrasted with the perspective of humans. As Derek Ryan argues in his book *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, scholars have not paid much attention to this experimental novella or dismissed it for being too committed to anthropomorphism.[405] Although the use of anthropomorphism in *Flush* is extensive, Woolf uses it in "more complex ways"[406] than just to project human

401. Diana L. Swanson, "Woolf's Copernican Shift: Nonhuman Nature in Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction," *Woolf Studies Annual* 18 (2012): 67, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24906897.
402. Swanson, 66.
403. Nagel, "What Is It Like," 436.
404. Swanson, 71.
405. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 133.
406. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 135.

qualities on the animal and explores the experience of the dog beyond the anthropomorphic perspective. She attempts to capture the dog's experience of its environment via non-anthropocentric means, in a similar way as she did in "Kew Gardens," where she approximated the perspective of the snail by means of the play with the microscale viewpoint of the animal and the macroscale human perspective. Woolf seems to be intrigued by the animal's subjective experience of the world and projects this interest on Elisabeth, who often wonders about Flush's motives for his actions:

> Sometimes they would lie and stare at each other in blank bewilderment. Why, Miss Barrett wondered, did Flush tremble suddenly, and whimper and start and listen? She could hear nothing; she could see nothing; there was nobody in the room with them.[407]

Elisabeth seems to be amazed by the animal's inner life and wishes to penetrate Flush's mind. In the following quotation, she is watching the dog, thinking about his self and imagines what it might be like to be a dog:

> She could not guess that Folly, her sister's little King Charles, had passed the door; or that Catiline the Cuba bloodhound had been given a mutton-bone by a footman in the basement. But Flush knew; he heard; he ravaged by the alternate rages of lust and greed. Then with all her poet's imagination Miss Barrett could not divine what Wilson's wet umbrella meant to Flush. . .[408]

This observation makes Elisabeth reflect on the idea of the self and she arrives at a conclusion that it is very hard to describe someone's self only through the apparent facts that we can see: "Was not the little brown dog opposite himself? But what is oneself? Is it the thing people see? Or is it the thing one is? So Flush pondered that question too, and, unable to solve the

407. Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 26.
408. Woolf, *Flush*, 26.

problem of reality, pressed closer to Miss Barrett and kissed her 'expressively.'"[409] It can be inferred that it was Woolf herself who was interested in revelation of one's sense of self and in mediating the first-person experience which, however, remains unattainable through the means of the observation of apparent facts. Therefore, it is impossible to capture not only an animal's subjective experience but also any other human being's subjectivity. We know that we have our own subjective experience of the world and we assume that other human beings' experience is similar, therefore, we use our own language and images to describe other people's experience. This is also pointed out by Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas*: "The only strictly personal society of which we have direct discriminative intuition is the society of our own personal experience."[410] Whitehead thus suggests that other than our own subjective experience is unknowable, from which implies that if we use human language to describe both another human being's or an animal's experience, it does not mean that we want to impose our anthropocentric viewpoint on them but that we simply want to approximate their experience.

Similarly, Thomas Nagel points out in his essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" that "a specific subjective character" of a human or nonhuman being's behaviour is "beyond our ability to conceive."[411] Moreover, he argues that if we tried to describe an animal's subjective experience in objective terms, we would, in fact, move farther away from the animal's inner experience. Instead, he suggests developing a new method that would enable us to describe the subjective character of experiences "in a form comprehensible to beings incapable of having those experiences," which entails that we have no other means than human language to express any other animal's perspective. It may be suggested that in *Flush* Woolf attempts to capture the dog's perspective via anthropomorphism, however, she chooses a more objective

409. Woolf, *Flush*, 32.
410. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 206.
411. Nagel, "What Is It Like," 439.

third-person narration implying that she only imaginatively depicts what Flush's subjectivity might be like.

Throughout the novella, Woolf tries not only to depict Flush's specific experience but attempts to distinguish it from the human experience. In the following quotation, she describes Flush walking in the street, and she pays attention to various external stimuli that the dog encounters and also to the effect of these stimuli: "Petticoats swished at his head; trousers brushed his flanks; sometimes a wheel whizzed an inch from his nose; the wind of destruction roared in his ears and fanned the feathers of his paws as a van passed."[412] Similarly, she recurrently highlights the dog's refined sense of smell which makes him distinct from his mistress. The following quotation captures Flush's unique sense of smell and percepts that he integrates from his environment:

> The cool globes of dew or rain broke in showers of iridescent spray about his nose; the earth, here hard, here soft, here hot, here cold, stung, teased and tickled the soft pads of his feed. Then what a variety of smells interwoven in subtlest combination thrilled his nostrils; strong smells of earth, sweet smells of flowers; nameless smells of leaf and bramble; sour smells as they crossed the road; pungent smells as they entered bean-fields.[413]

These quotations imply that Woolf demonstrates Whitehead's idea about humans who are "amateurs in sense experience"[414] in comparison to the dog who is a specialist in sense experience. Woolf states that Flush's sense of smell is "far beyond the range of human nose,"[415] which she keeps mentioning at different places of the text: "The human nose is practically non-existent. The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the

412. Woolf, *Flush*, 21.
413. Woolf, *Flush*, 11.
414. Whitehead, *Modes*, 113.
415. Woolf, *Flush*, 21.

one hand, and dung on the other. The infinite gradations that lie in between unrecorded. Yet it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived."[416] Woolf also suggests that the dog experiences purely human cultural concepts such as religion, architecture, or science by means of smell, which implies that culture, usually thought to originate from human actions, may be a shared space including nonhuman agents who only experience it differently: "Love was chiefly smell; form and colour were smell. To him religion itself was smell. To describe his simplest experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power."[417]

Moreover, Flush seems to be very sensitive to changes in his environment, and Woolf depicts his experience of these changes. The following quotation describes his reaction to the change in temperature in the room of his captivity in Wimpole Street: "Then the candle toppled over and fell. The room was dark. It grew steadily hotter and hotter; the smell; the heat, were unbearable, Flush's nose burnt; his coat twitched."[418] Another example of Woolf's exploration of authentic animal experience is her attribution of animal qualities to human beings, by which she admits that also animals impose their own perspective on human agents in their environment. For example, Miss Barrett's and Mr Browning's voices are compared to cooing, clucking, humming, or barking, by which Woolf acknowledges that, for the dog, human language is not distinct form other species' modes of expression.

Quite interestingly, Flush does not respond only to sensory stimuli in his environment, but he is also able to recognize the change in his mistress's mood, for example when she falls in love with Mr Browning and Flush becomes aware of their changed relationship that is projected to their shared space: "He looked round him. Everything had changed. The bookcase, the five busts – they were no longer friendly deities presiding approvingly – they

416. Woolf, *Flush*, 87.
417. Woolf, *Flush*, 86.
418. Woolf, *Flush*, 57.

were hostile, severe."[419] Flush is also able to recognize his mistress's changed mood in the tone of her speech, although he cannot understand what she is talking about with Mr Browning: "Though he could make no sense of the little words that hurled over his head from two-thirty to four-thirty sometimes three times a week, he could detect with terrible accuracy that the tone of the words was changing."[420]

The already-quoted passage demonstrating Flush's extraordinary sense of smell is followed by his runaway in search of a hare or a fox regardless the presence of a person who is supposed to watch out for the dog: "Off he flashed like a fish drawn in a rush through water further and further. He forgot his mistress; he forgot all human kind."[421] This demonstrates that dogs have their own free will independent of what people require them to do and that they decide according to their own reasoning and needs. This coincides with Whitehead's classification of dogs as societies with one centre of experience, centre of agency, which dominates other bodily centres of activity. The same applies to man, but not to vegetables, or lower forms of animals, which lack this centre of "personal dominance"[422] and may be considered as "democracies" where all centres of activity or experience are at the same level.

Moreover, Woolf also suggests that dogs are capable of reflection on their deeds, therefore, they are endowed with a certain degree of morality. Analogously, Whitehead argues in *Modes of Thought* that animal behaviour is not driven merely by the pursuit of survival, but that certain morality is also intrinsic to higher animals: "The animal grade includes at least one centrality, supported by the intricacy of bodily functioning. Purposes transcending (however faintly) the mere aim at survival are exhibited. . . Morals can be discerned in higher animals; but not religion."[423] To apply this idea on Flush, it may be suggested that although

419. Woolf, *Flush*, 38.
420. Woolf, *Flush*, 40.
421. Woolf, *Flush*, 11.
422. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 206.
423. Whitehead, *Modes*, 28.

the dog is capable of certain degree of morality, in contrast to his mistress, he is not able to reflect on abstract notions such as reality, humanity or religion. This is emphasized by Woolf claiming that Flush is "fresh from such problems,"[424] which is a reaction to Elisabeth's already-quoted reflection on reality and the concept of "oneself." Flush's action beyond the aim of survival is also demonstrated by his jealousy of Mr Browning, who usurps Miss Barrett's attention. This jealously results in the dog's attack of his enemy: "Flush sprang upon his enemy with unparalleled violence. His teeth once more met in Mr Browning's trousers."[425] After the attack Flush feels that his action was justified as he was "conscious of the rightness of his cause," however, when he realizes that his mistress is immensely disappointed with him, he changes his mind and reconciles with the idea of Mr Browning being his mistress's lover by eating the cakes that he refused to eat when they had been offered to him by Mr Browning:

> He would eat them now that they were stale, because they were offered by an enemy turned to friend, because they were symbols of hatred turned to love… As he swallowed down the faded flakes of that distasteful pastry—it was mouldy, it was fly-blown, it was sour—Flush solemnly repeated, in his own language, the words she had used—he swore to love Mr Browning and not bite him for the future.[426]

This quotation not only reveals that Flush can recognize whether he commits something reprehensible or praiseworthy, but that Woolf is interested in the dog's own mode of expression, his own language. Although Woolf, on the one hand, suggests that the animal's language incompetence represents the gulf between the human and the brute, she attempts to deconstruct this division and emphasize the similarities between human and canine animal

424. Woolf, *Flush*, 32.
425. Woolf, *Flush*, 45-46.
426. Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (London: Vintage, 2018), 47.

species: “Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other.”[427]

Throughout the novella Woolf explores the communication between Flush and Mrs. Browning and emphasizes that although they are representatives of two distinct animal species who cannot fully understand each other, they are still able to communicate certain emotions and ideas: “The fact that they could not communicate with words, and it was a fact that led undoubtedly to much misunderstanding. Yet did it not lead also to a peculiar intimacy?”[428] The mentioned intimacy consists in empathy between the dog and his mistress which is manifested by their ability to read each other’s feelings: “Flush could not read what she was writing an inch or two above his head. But he knew just as well as if he could read every word, how strangely his mistress was agitated as she wrote. . .”[429] The quotation indicates that Flush develops an ability to sense his mistress’s mood, which is probably a result of his affection for her, a typical dog trait. Jean Dubino suggests in her article “The Bispecies Environment, Coevolution, and *Flush*” that what Woolf tries to depict in *Flush* is the entanglement of the human and the nonhuman animal, the interaction between different animal species and how “our identity is dependent on our identity with others.”[430] Whereas focusing on the umwelt of the dog, on its unique perception of its environment, Woolf also describes how the human and the nonhuman species penetrate each other’s umwelts, which shapes their identities and deconstruct the binary between them in favour of coevolutionary existence.[431] Woolf demonstrates that Flush and Miss Barrett share their feelings and that the

427. Woolf, *Flush*, 19.
428. Woolf, *Flush*, 27.
429. Woolf, *Flush*, 37.
430. Jeanne Dubino, “The Bispecies Environment, Coevolution and Flush,” in *Virginia Woolf: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, eds Jeanne Dubino, Gill Lowe, Vera Neverow and Kathryn Simpson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 131.
431. Dubino, 132.

agitation of the one affects the other: "Between them Flush felt more and more strongly, as the weeks wore on, was a bond, an uncomfortable yet thrilling tightness; so that if his pleasure was her pain, then his pleasure was pleasure no longer but three parts pain."[432] At a different place in the book, Woolf states that every movement that Miss Barrett made also "passed through"[433] Flush and that Flush's "flesh was veined with human passions."[434] As Dubino points out the entanglement between Miss Barrett and Flush results in Flush's nature becoming similar to that of human species, therefore, he ends up somewhere in between human culture and animal nature.[435] Woolf states that Flush's character "was cultivated rather to the detriment of his sterner qualities"[436] and that he prefers being with humans to being with other animal species. Moreover, the desires to possess qualities and physical dispositions of human species, for example to have "ten separate fingers," "make little simple sound" or "blacken paper" and write poetry.[437] Consequently, Flush seems to lose his unique dog traits and acquires human qualities due to the incessant contact with his mistress. Dubino suggests that Woolf anticipates contemporary theories of convergence claiming that the interaction between different animal species can shape and transform their individual identities.[438]

However, this convergence of mutually interacting species may also be explained with the aid of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism where actual occasions' identities emerge from the data that they integrate, which means that their individuality is based on the relations with their environment. In *Process and Reality* Whitehead argues that this doctrine, when extended to macroscale organisms, implies that "the character of an

432. Woolf, *Flush*, 25.
433. Woolf, *Flush*, 68.
434. Woolf, *Flush*, 88.
435. Dubino, 142.
436. Woolf, *Flush*, 32.
437. Woolf, *Flush*, 29.
438. Dubino, 142.

organism depends on that of its environment."[439] Moreover, the "character of an environment is the sum of the characters of the various societies of actual entities which jointly constitute that environment."[440] As Didier Debaise points out in his book *Speculative Realism: Revisiting Whitehead*, the contact between Whiteheadian societies—a society and its environment—which are aggregates of actual occasions described in terms of relative stability and a particular identity, may result either in the affected societies' indifference, transformation or disappearance.[441] Therefore, the contact between human beings, animals and things, which are described in Whitehead's metaphysics as societies, may have either no impact, may lead to a society's perishing, or to its transformation. The latter corresponds to the argument of the above-mentioned theories of convergence emphasizing "transformative encounters between active subjects."[442] These transformative encounters echo Whiteheadian "inflow into ourselves of feeling from nature"[443] that ensures the continuity of human and nonhuman animals. This comparison is possible only due to the process-oriented definition of personal identity (the adjective "personal" in Whitehead's metaphysics does not refer only to human beings, but also to all animals with central nervous system), which is, on the one hand, distinctive and "sustains a character,"[444] but on the other hand, constantly changeable since it consists of various emerging and perishing actual occasions. Consequently, human beings with whom Flush lives and interacts may be conceived as societies of actual entities that constitute the dog's environment from which the dog acquires new impulses that shape his identity. Woolf thus explores Whiteheadian transformative effect of one society, a human

439. Whitehead, *Process*, 110.
440. Whitehead, *Process*, 110.
441. Didier Debaise, *Speculative Empiricism: Revisiting Whitehead* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 156.
442. Dubino, 142.
443. Daniel A. Dombrowski, "From Nonhuman Animals to the Environment," *Beyond the Bifurcation of Nature: A Common World for Animals and the Environment*, ed. Brianne Donaldson (Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 13.
444. Whitehead, *Process*, 34-35.

being, on another society, the dog, by endowing the animal with certain human qualities, which modifies its animal identity. However, it may be suggested that Miss Barrett's identity is similarly transformed by her coexistence with Flush. At the beginning of the novella, when she is given Flush, she experiences a moment of intimacy with the animal during which Flush's "large bright eyes shone in hers," and she is transformed from an invalid into a nymph.[445] The image of a nymph is significant become this mythological creature is very closely associated with nature rather than human culture that Miss Barrett, otherwise, seems to represent. Later Woolf points out that Mrs Browning "was changed, as much as Flush was changed" after her marriage and moving to Italy where she lived in closer relationship to nature. At the end of the novella, Woolf again emphasizes features of resemblance between Mrs Browning and Flush and hints at their intermingled identity:

> She was growing old and so was Flush. She bent down over him for a moment. Her face with its wide mouth and its great eyes and its heavy curls was still oddly like his. Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, each perhaps, completed what was dormant in the other. But she was woman; he was dog.[446]

The quotation demonstrates the mutual connection between Flush and Mrs Browning and hints at their shared traits. Moreover, it indicates that Woolf probably believed in an ontological bond between human beings and animals when she mentions that the dog and the woman are created out of the same mould. The boundaries between species are not "airtight boundaries" because the nature of one species "shade off into the other."[447] However, it may be inferred from the ending of the above-mentioned quotation that Woolf was reluctant to get rid of the binary between the human and the nonhuman completely, and that she also believed that there is a difference between the human and the nonhuman, which is the reason why she

445. Woolf, *Flush*, 27.
446. Woolf, *Flush*, 105.
447. Dombrowski, 10.

cannot be criticized for exploring so-called flat ontology. Rather, in words of Whitehead, she argues in *Flush* and other works discussed in this chapter that the Rubicon between the human and the nonhuman, the living and the non-living matter had been crossed and that "we find ourselves in a buzzing world, in a democracy of fellow creatures."[448] Whereas this chapter focused on Woolf's attribution of life to all existence in the universe, on her inclination to panpsychism, and discussed the interrelatedness between the organic and the inorganic, the following chapter directly deals with Woolf's own idea of democracy of fellow creatures and focuses on her conception of human identity and exploration of "buzzing" interconnectedness of human identities.

448. Whitehead, *Process*, 50.

Chapter 3: Woolf's Process-Oriented Identity, Intersubjective Selves and Exploration of Community of Difference

Whereas the previous chapters analysed the way Woolf conceives of the relation between the subject and the object, or the human and the nonhuman, and emphasized that the author deconstructs these two categories in order to explore other-than-human existence, this chapter focuses primarily on the concept of human identity and subjectivity in Woolf's works. Although it may seem rather retrograde with regards to the previous chapter highlighting that Woolf attempted to weaken the strong position of the human subject, this chapter elaborates on the author's idea that human subject is merely one of many other subjects which do not exist prior to their surroundings but originate from the natural and social environment. In this light, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Woolf's characters do not represent strong, self-sustained subjects, which exist independently of their surroundings, but they develop continuously with other subjects in their proximity. Consequently, these subjects may often be described only in reference to other subjects, as their identities intermingle with their predecessors and contemporaries. It will be suggested that this conception of identity is strikingly similar to the process-oriented idea of the human subject, or identity, which conceives of one's identity, both mental and physical, as a complex and permanently evolving processes—an event. The following part of the chapter focuses on the intermingling of various subjects' identities and Woolf's exploration of intersubjectivity, which does not represent a mere narrative technique but reveals the author's general view of society imagined as a community of interacting subjects. It will be shown that especially in her late works *The Waves*, *Three Guineas*, "A Sketch of the Past" and *Between the Acts*, Woolf focuses on the interconnection of human beings whose mutual bonds are also the basis of the acknowledgement of difference and value of each individual that contributes to the mosaics of "the work of art" of reality. Furthermore, it will be suggested that although Woolf is often

accused of being too elitist and bourgeois, because she frequently depicts struggles of upper-middle-class characters, her late works evince certain equalizing tendencies and reveal Woolf's "ontoethics," a kind of ontological and at the same time ethical system grounded on interconnection, "becoming with," and recognition of value of each part of this system. This ontoethics resonates especially in Woolf's last work *Between the Acts* where she assembles vastly different characters, who are forced to acknowledge their sense of belonging to the community and practise solidarity, which may prevent their potential extermination. While this attempt to bridge gulfs between heterogeneous characters may seem very utopian and the interpretation of Woolf's late works from this perspective may appear overly optimistic, it draws on the intimations of interconnectivity and interdependence that may be traced in Woolf's earlier works. As a result, these unifying tendencies in Woolf's fiction cannot be discarded only as the result of the modernist search for all kinds of "organic forms" and emphasis on unity but must be acknowledged as one of the aspects of Woolf's "personal philosophy" defines in "A Sketch of the Past."

Human Life and Identity as an Unfolding Process

In her short story "The Mark on the Wall" Woolf captures her idea of human life by describing it as a flight through the underground, whose pace and nature cannot be substantially influenced by its experiencer:

> Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour – landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse. Yes, that seems to express the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard. . .[449]

The quotation indicates that Woolf was aware of the transience of human life and the ongoing effort that one must make again and again in order to survive daily struggles and also more serious problems. Moreover, life is something with no pre-set order, something random, and partly self-directing. The author offers a similar description of life in her essay "Modern Fiction," where she urges modern writers to focus on capturing their characters' mental life, or stream of consciousness: "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."[450] This quotation indicates that life is something overwhelming, it cannot be ordered into separate events but must conceived as a medley of impressions and experience. The same idea is conveyed in *To the Lighthouse* where Lily Briscoe queries about the meaning of life and arrives at a conclusion that it is based on "miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" and the eternal process of "passing and flowing."[451]

449. Woolf, *Monday*, 48.
450. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 9.
451. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 176.

Woolf reflects on the contradictory nature of life and identity also in her diary where she points out that it is at the same time "very solid," as it is grounded on concrete bodily and mental experience, and "very shifting," as it resembles a very fast passage of perpetual change:

> I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change; one flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous—we human beings; & show the light through. But what is the light? I am impressed by the transitoriness of human life to such an extent that I am often saying a farewell—after dining with Roger for instance; or reckoning how many times I shall see Nessa.[452]

On the one hand, the quotation reveals Woolf's recurrent struggle with the passage of time, but on the other hand, it suggests that one's life is nothing stable and that one's identity does not remain the same because it is modified in every instant by new experience and stimuli coming from the surrounding world. Describing human beings as "successive and continuous," she does not refer merely to the fact that after we die, we are immediately replaced by someone else's birth, but that our selves are reborn in every moment anew. Moreover, this continuity and succession also implies that one's identity is never entirely separated from the others' selves and that it is impossible to delineate one's personality because it overlaps with other identities. This "collective" nature of identity is especially important for the analysis of Woolf's late works discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

In her essays "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and "Character in Fiction," Woolf discusses the way characters should be handled in modern fiction and she criticizes "the materialist" Arnold Bennett for creating "solid" characters who are described mainly by their

452. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 218.

social and material background, and their actions. Consequently, the reader can never get the idea of the character's personality. Woolf deconstructs Bennett's notion of a character by means of inventing Mrs Brown, who impersonates the "shapelessness" and fluidity of modern characters:

> In the first place, her solidity disappears; her features crumble; the house in which she has lived so long (and a very substantial house it was) topples to the ground. She becomes a will-o'-the-wisp, a dancing light, an illumination gliding up the wall and out of the window, lighting now in freakish malice upon the nose of an archbishop. . . . She changes the shape, shifts the accent, of every scene in which she plays part. And it is from the ruins and splinters of this tumbled mansion that the Georgian writer must somehow reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place; it is from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit that he must create solid, living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown.[453]

This description of the "Georgian" Mrs Brown indicates that for Woolf a character, or in general a human being, is ephemeral, elusive, and momentary, and that his or her personality changes in respect to the position in space as well as the interaction with the surroundings. The changing nature of a character and the idea that his or her personality may be captured only through significant moments of experience and external relations was also the main reason why Woolf struggled with biographical writing. In her essay "The New Biography" she suggests that a modern biographer must be able to combine truth conceived as "granite-like solidity" and personality described as "something of a rainbow-like intangibility."[454] In *Orlando*, a fictional biography of Vita Sackville-West, the solid facts are represented by important events of the protagonist's life and descriptions of the changing spirit of historical

453. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 35.
454. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 95.

periods and the intangible is manifested in Orlando's multiplicity of selves and impossibility to unite these under the control of "The Captain Self," a unitary and describable identity. The same tension between the tangible and the ephemeral nature of being applies to Woolf's second attempt to write a biography—Roger Fry's biography. Woolf was working on *Roger Fry: A Biography* between the years 1934 and 1940 and in her diary, she describes her impressionistic method of capturing not only her friend's professional achievements, the solid facts, but also minute daily experience and impressions that reveal his personality:

> A question how to do Roger. Why not begin at the end with Le Mas: a whole day; & then work backwards: give elements in combination in action, first; & then trace them—give specimen days, all through his life. Le Mas: the mosquitoes &c. his cooking: the colour, the martins: the French novel: freedom— cast back to childhood.[455]

Woolf describes a similar struggle to capture a person and his or her life also in reference to her own personality which she tries to portray in "A Sketch of the Past." At the beginning she suggests that so many biographies, which she had read, failed, because they "leave out the person to whom things happened."[456] For this reason, she does not proceed from one event to another, as they happened in her life, but she starts with significant impressions that established the basis of her personality—the moments she spent as a child in St Ives. She describes the latter as moments of ecstasy experienced while lying in her nursery and listening to the sound of waves. She emphasizes that these moments are the key factors that left an imprint on her personality: "I see it—the past—as avenue lying behind; a lone ribbon of scenes, emotions. . . . I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace. . ."[457] This

455. Woolf, *The Diary, Volume 4: 1931–1935*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982), 258.
456. Woolf, "A Sketch," 65.
457. Woolf, "A Sketch," 67.

quotation suggests that Woolf perceived one's past as accumulated experience and not necessarily collected in a linear order. This claim is supported in passages where she mentions that she felt as "the container of the feeling of ecstasy"[458] and compares life to a "bowl that one fills and fills and fills"[459] with experience. Later on, she elaborates on this idea of accumulation of the past experience and suggests that the present moment or one's momentary identity is always based on, and enriched with, the past: "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. . ."[460] Similarly, in *The Waves* Louis says that he is not "a single and passing being"[461] and that "a vast inheritance of experience is packed"[462] in him. This may be related to Whitehead's notion of the enduring self-identity of the soul which is based on the idea of succession of the occasions of experience: "The soul is nothing else than the succession of experience, extending from birth to the present moment. Now, at this instant, I am the complete person embodying all these occasions."[463]

Consequently, it is possible to draw a tentative conclusion that Woolf's idea of identity and self may be likened to the process-oriented view of identity that rejects the notion of the static and unitary subject because "fixity simply does not square with the character of our experience."[464] Process metaphysics defines a person as a megaprocess consisting of its mental and physical processes, where the self is "a coalescence of all of one's diverse microexperience" and "a cohesive and (relatively) stable center of activity agency."[465] Whitehead describes a person as a macro-object, in his terms a society, composed of

458. Woolf, "A Sketch," 67.
459. Woolf, "A Sketch," 64.
460. Woolf, "A Sketch," 98.
461. Woolf, *The Waves*, 114.
462. Woolf, *The Waves*, 92.
463. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 163.
464. Rescher, 107.
465. Rescher, 108.

constantly emerging and perishing actual occasions. These societies are "sets of actual entities in the unity of relatedness constituted by their prehensions of each other"[466] and they "enjoy adventures of change throughout time and space."[467] This indicates that for process philosophers one's identity is subject to perpetual change and modification, and it depends on the set of actual occasions that comprise it at a given moment in time. In Deleuzian terms, human identity, or self, is always in the process of becoming where a subject is defined as "flux of successive becomings."[468] As a result, it is impossible to capture one's identity in its entirety and describe it as a steady and unitary entity.[469] This idea is demonstrated in Woolf's novel *The Waves*, where Bernard mentions that he is "made and remade continually,"[470] and Louis suggests that people "assemble different forms, make different patterns."[471] However, this changing and multiple nature of identity is foregrounded in *Orlando* not only by the many identities that the main character assumes throughout the novel, but also by the narrator's witty reflections on the many versions of a single person:

> Then she called hesitatingly, as if the person she wanted might not be there, 'Orlando?' For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not—Heaven help us—all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? . . . these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions, and rights of their own, call them as you will (and for many of these things there is

466. Whitehead, *Process*, 24.
467. Whitehead, *Process*, 35.
468. Rosi Braidotti, "Becoming-Woman: Rethinking the Positivity of Difference," in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, eds. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 391.
469. Braidotti, 399.
470. Woolf, *The Waves*, 74.
471. Woolf, *The Waves*, 95.

> no name) so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs Jones is not here, another if you can promise it a glass of wine and so on; for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with him and are too wildly ridiculous to be mentioned in print at all.[472]

The quotation indicates that Woolf resisted the notion of unitary self, or a singular and imposing "I," which makes only intentional decisions and presides over the entirety of its experience. Instead, she envisaged a more complex notion of identity based on multiplicity of experience, multiple centres of agency, and transforming sets of its relations, which is discussed in the following two sections of this chapter.

472. Woolf, *Orlando*, 152.

Multiplicity of Selves

In *A Room of One's Own*, sometimes considered Woolf's feminist manifesto, the author expresses her irritation with the restrictive imposition of the unitary and mainly masculine "I." This is demonstrated on the fiction of "Mr A" whose "I" imposes itself on everything and pushes it into the background: "I respect and admire that 'I' from the bottom of my heart. But—here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other - the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter 'I' all is shapeless as mist."[473] Moreover, the unitary self expels heterogeneity and hinders the flow of creativity: "There seemed to be some obstacle, some impediment in Mr A's mind which blocked the fountain of creative energy and shored it within narrow limits."[474] Woolf replaces this sense of unitary "I" with invocations of split-consciousness, focusing on multiplicity of identity, or the concept of an androgynous mind.

Earlier in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf points out that "the mind is certainly a very mysterious organ," she wonders what one means by "the unity of the mind" and concludes that it seems to have "no single state of being."[475] Then she continues with reflection on the possibility of a split consciousness, her famous definition of the androgynous mind and the idea that the two sexes are always present in a single identity. These attempts to overthrow unitary subject and its domination may be read alongside Julia Kristeva's essay "Subject-in-Process" and a chapter entitled "From One Identity to an Other" from her book *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.* Here the philosopher suggests that every linguistic theory is based on the conception of the unitary "speaking subject," which is conceived as "judging, thetic consciousness."[476] Kristeva attempts to negate this notion of unitary self by defining "a subject-in process," whose identity oscillates between the maternal

473. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2004), 115.
474. Woolf, *A Room*, 116.
475. Woolf, *A Room*, 112.
476. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980), 120.

identity and semiotic drives of language and the symbolic order and unitary subject of the father. Kristeva provides examples of such subjects in reference to the poems of Comte de Lautréamont and Antonin Artaud, where the subject emerges via "representation of a [subject's] different relation to natural objects, to social apparatuses, and to the body itself."[477] This suggests that the determining factors of subjectivity are variables and that the subject emerges only in the instant of speaking and in relation to its relations to its own internal processes of experience as well as changing external setting. Moreover, Kristeva points out that it is primarily the artistic avant-garde who make use of the concept of the subject-in-process in order to "attack all the stases of the unitary subject."[478] In relation to the quotation from *Orlando*, where Woolf attempts to capture the many becomings of a single being or identity, the author's fiction may be read as a gradually developing attack on the unitary speaking subject described by Kristeva. Moreover, the quotation is complemented with a reflection on the key self which manages and supervises all the other selves: "This is what people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all."[479] This definition of the "Key self" is followed by Orlando's streams of consciousness and speaking for herself, during which she attempts to find her true self. As soon as she re-enters the gate of her family mansion, this stream of thoughts and words ceases, and Orlando acquires her real identity:

> So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called; rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. For it is probable that when people talk aloud, the selves (of which

477. Julia Kristeva, "The Subject in Process," in *The Tel Quel Reader*, eds. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (New York: Routledge, 1998), 140.
478. Kristeva, "The Subject," 137.
479. Woolf, *Orlando*, 153.

> there may be more than two thousand) are conscious of disseverment, and are trying to communicate, but when communication is established they fall silent.[480]

It is important to point out that owing to the narrator's comment that the identity is rightly or wrongly called a single self, it may be suggested that the narrator is ironic and sceptical about the concept of the static and single self, which may be deduced from the generic reference "they say" in the penultimate quotation, where the narrator seems to mistrust the concept of a single self. Furthermore, it indicates that a nonunitary and heterogeneous subject, defined as a multiplicity of identities and experience, comes into being only as a side effect of speech, because it emerges out of the ongoing process of signification where multiple selves are involved. In other words, Woolf, similarly to Kristeva, might have dismissed the existence of the "speaking subject," or a sense of unitary self, that exists prior to its relations to language, or a given communication act.

Woolf explores the multiplication of selves also in two of her essays dedicated to the characters reflecting on their perception of the external world. In "Street Haunting: The London Adventure" Woolf reveals her thoughts on identity, which she imagines as something multiple and subject to constant change, in contrast to the conventional idea of personality as a whole:

> Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its

480. Woolf, *Orlando*, 155.

way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience' sake a man must be a whole.[481]

The quotation illustrates that Woolf was intrigued by the concept of identity and that she may be classified as process-oriented thinker, who conceives of identity as of something that cannot be pinned down and who doubts the existence of a true self or enduring identity. Moreover, Woolf suggests that this idea is a mere convention that helps us pigeonhole one's identity into a certain fixed category.

The tendency to simplify and unify one's self is also the focus of the essay "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car" where a lady drives a motor car and contemplates the beauty of Sussex landscape at the sunset. The woman is "mastered" and "overcome" by the indescribable beauty and undergoes a sudden split of the self. The multiplied selves focus on different aspects of the experience and communicate with each other: "There they sat as the car sped along, noticing everything: a hay stack; a rust red roof; a pond; an old man coming home. . . But I, being somewhat different, sat aloof and melancholy."[482] The last words show the woman's sadness related to her regret of the fast passage of her life. However, another self appears and directs her thoughts from the past towards the brighter future, and the woman suddenly cheers up. She starts recollecting her single self, as she knows that the convention is to have only one identity. However, she fails and cannot avoid using the pronoun "we" in place of "I": Now we have got to collect ourselves; we have got to be one self. Nothing is to be seen any more, except one wedge of road and banks which our lights repeat incessantly. We are perfectly provided for. . . . Now I, who preside over the company, am going to arrange in order the trophies which we have all brought in."[483] The description of various selves as centres of certain affects or processes corresponds to

481. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 82.
482. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 205.
483. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 206.

Whitehead's already mentioned definition of a human being as a personal society. This means that a man is not only a series of occasions of experience, but it is a society consisting of other societies, or "the unity of a wider society, in which a social coordination is a dominant factor in the behaviour of the various parts."[484] As Whitehead specifies this in relation to human body, the parts of one's body are considered to be equally important centres of experience, which express "themselves vividly to each other" and obtain "their feelings mainly by reason of such mutual expressions."[485] Therefore, a sentient being, or a self, is a complex of variety of experience collected by its centres of activity, which may be likened to Woolf's notion of multiple selves unified by "the Key self." Woolf concludes her above-mentioned essay by a sudden twist when the narrator announces the death of the individual facilitated by the splitting of selves:

> 'What we have made then today,' I said, 'is this: that beauty; death of the individual; and the future. Look, I will make a little figure for your satisfaction; here he comes. Does this little figure advancing through beauty, through death, to the economical, powerful and efficient future when houses will be cleansed by a puff of hot wind satisfy you?[486]

It is very difficult to interpret what Woolf had in mind while she imagined the figure of the man described in the passage. Probably the modern man living in the era of economic progress, which forces us to restrict individual needs in order to sustain the capitalist system?

As it has been suggested by Lorraine Sim, the essay initially draws on the tradition of the sublime experienced in the presence of beautiful nature, however, Woolf modifies this tradition by invocating and celebrating the technological progress of the first decades of the twentieth century, here impersonated by the speed of the motor car. Lorraine suggests that

484. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 205.
485. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 23.
486. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 206.

Woolf explores the theories of mind and aesthetic judgement, as introduced by Kant or Hume, and argues that at the very end, Woolf returns to the synthesis of "presiding 'I' who synthesizes separate points of view" in favour of the unity of experience. Therefore, the writer aims to demonstrate that the mind always tends to "create coherent and unified representations of its objects."[487] Contrary to this interpretation, I would like to suggest that the final synthesis resulting in the image of "the modern man" is not so much concerned with the unity of mind but with dispersal of this unity. This claim may be justified by Woolf's persistent use of the plural noun "we" and by the disappearance and death of the individual indicated in the above-mentioned quotation. Thus, this rejection of the individual and the appearance of the modern man may symbolize Woolf's shift from unitary subject, or mind, towards the modern concept of multiple, heterogeneous and interconnected subjects that populate the author's fiction, where "unity called 'I' no longer exists,"[488] as well as the modern world where even the general scientific progress, represented by the motor bike in this essay, entails the urge to redefine the outdated concept of a single and separate identity.[489]

487. Sim, 133.
488. Hussey, 43.
489. Sam Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism* (Clemson, Clemson University Press, 2015), 144.

Intersubjective and Relational Selves

In relation to the conception of her novel *The Waves*, Woolf claims in her diary that she intends to create one stream of intertwined human subjects, nonhuman objects, and other natural elements:

> Now the moths will I think fill out the skeleton which I dashed here: the play-poem idea: the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night, all flowing together: intersected by the arrival of the bright moths.[490]

The quotation also suggests that the novel's characters were not to represent subjects existing independently of their environment, but that they were meant to be its integral parts, almost in the sense that they emerge from their surroundings. Moreover, the "flowing together" phrase foreshadows the intersubjective mode and focus on interconnectedness, which prevail in the novel. Woolf specifies her idea of the characters in another diary entry, where she points out that she wants her characters to be vague and indeterminate: "What I now think (about the Waves) is that I can give in a very few strokes the essentials of a person's character. It should be done boldly, almost as caricature."[491] Woolf carries out this indeterminacy mainly by avoiding the description of flesh-and-blood characters and providing only the characters' voices or soliloquies that are "shared" and complement one another. This narrative mode is established at the very beginning of the novel where the characters are watching a sunrise and the complete image is patchworked from the characters' perspectives:

> 'I see a ring,' said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.'

490. Woolf, *The Diary*, *Vol. 3*, 139.
491. Woolf, *The Diary*, *Vol. 3*, 300.

> ‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.’
>
> ‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.’
>
> ‘I see a globe,’ said Neville, ‘hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.’
>
> ‘I see a crimson tassel, ’ said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads.’
>
> ‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.’[492]

A similar instance of collective consciousness emerges in the scene where the characters gather in a restaurant to have dinner, and the flower in a vase on the table is described as a product of the collective vision of the characters:

> We have come together (from the north, from the south, from Susan’s farm, from Louis’s house of business) to make one thing, not enduring—for what endures? —but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution.[493]

However, the interconnectedness of the characters is not restricted only to their potential to co-create the reality around them, but it is manifested primarily on the ontological level of their own identities. It is mainly Bernard who provides insights into their shared selves and who points out that he cannot clearly define his self in opposition to the others’ identities. From the beginning of the novel, he manifests his ability and desire to mix with other people and create a community. The first instance of his fusion with the unknown crowd is when he

492. Woolf, *The Waves*, 4.
493. Woolf, *The Waves*, 70.

returns by train to London, establishes strong bonds with his co-passengers and regrets the necessity to take up the "burden of individual life" while leaving the train:

> I do not want the train to stop with a thud. I do not want the connection which has bound us together sitting opposite each other all night long to be broken. . . . But I do not wish to be first through the gate, to assume the burden of individual life. I, who have been since Monday, when she accepted me, charged in every nerve with a sense of identity, who could not see a toothbrush in a glass without saying, "My toothbrush", now wish to unclasp my hands and let fall my possessions, and merely stand here in the street, taking no part, watching the omnibuses, without desire; without envy; with what would be boundless curiosity about human destiny if there were any longer an edge to my mind. But it has none.[494]

The quotation demonstrates Bernard's dislike of defining his identity in opposition to other people's identities after he has got engaged. The character hints at the blurred boundary between himself and other people, and at the boundless connections he establishes with his surroundings. Moreover, he describes his "vibratory" identity only a paragraph later where he mentions that he is "trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy"[495] directed towards random passers-by and he is "traversing the sunless territory of non-identity."[496] Later he states that "we are forever mixing with ourselves with unknown quantities."[497] In relation to the transitoriness of human beings and their identities, Bernard

494. Woolf, *The Waves*, 63.
495. Woolf, *The Waves*, 63.
496. Woolf, *The Waves*, 65.
497. Woolf, *The Waves,* 66.

also points out that he is "aware of our ephemeral passage,"[498] and therefore, he acknowledges "the illusory character of personhood."[499]

A similar merging with the outside also concerns Clarissa Dalloway, who fuses with the crowd and the street until her own identity cannot be abstracted from it:

> . . . 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.[500]

The quotation suggests that Clarissa's identity and subjectivity arises from the subjects and objects in her surroundings and does not exist independently of and prior to it. In fact, the identity that Woolf describes in the previous quotations has been likened to Deleuze's concept of haecceity,[501] which represent the Deleuzian counterpart of the terms such as "a person, subject, thing, or substance."[502] Haecceity is based on the relations of an element, or a human being, and its relations with the elements in its environment, according to which it changes at every instant. Deleuze exemplifies this on Clarissa Dalloway's walks through London and highlights that if the character knew that she is "an event," she would never ruminate again about herself being a proper subject that is either "this" or "that."[503] While walking the streets of London, Clarissa tends to extend her subjectivity on the human and nonhuman beings, and she feels "odd affinities" with "people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street,

498. Woolf, *The Waves*, 64.
499. Wiseman, 123.
500. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 7.
501. For detailed analysis of Woolf's use of haecceity, see Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 189–192.
502. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattati, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 304.
503. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattati, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 307.

some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns."[504] Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse* Mrs Ramsay is endowed with "community feeling with other people which emotion gives as if the walls of partition had become so thin that practically (the feeling was one of relief and happiness) it was all one stream, and chairs, tables. . . "[505] In *The Waves* Bernard confesses that his identity cannot be defined without his relations to other people: "To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self."[506] Later, he expresses the same idea while pointing out that his character is assembled from other people's identities: "Thus my character is in part made of the stimulus that other people provide, and in not mine, as yours are."[507]

In "A Simple Melody," one of Woolf's earlier short stories written around the year 1925, the main character George Carslake attends a lively party, but he does not feel comfortable there and flees, at least in his mind, the place by plunging into his favourite activity—walking. He observes a beautiful and a little bit faded picture of the heath and imagines himself and the other attendees of the party wandering there. He repeatedly evokes the feeling of belonging and similarity with his company that springs from the unifying effect of the natural scene and contrasts it with the social scene of the party, where "everyone wants to shine, and to enforce his own point of view."[508] The man continues to ruminate about one's uncomfortable and disagreeable connection to other people and suggests that while being among many people, one's identity is "in conflict with other beings and selves."[509] However, the man cannot decide whether this entanglement of diverse selves brings about pleasure or pain, because, on the one hand, a close contact between people brushes away one's individual

504. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 111.
505. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 123.
506. Woolf, *The Waves*, 64.
507. Woolf, *The Waves*, 74.
508. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 206.
509. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 206.

discreetness but, on the other hand, it also complements one personality: "People pressed upon each other; rubbed each other's bloom off; or, for it told both ways, simulated and called out an astonishing animation, made each other glow."[510] In this respect, the story prefigures Bernard's exploration of intermingling identities, which in his case also produces ambivalent feelings. Whereas he mostly welcomes the perpetual mixing of his personality with the identities of his friends and other people's "illuminations," at some points he seems to give in to despair over his inability to recover "from that endless throwing away" and "dissipation."[511]

Hélène Cixous mentions *The Waves* in her book *Volleys of Humanity*, where she rejects "authoritative" unitary subject and points out that the subject arises from various unconscious processes resulting in the moment of speaking and therefore, "it is always more than one, diverse, capable of being all those it will at one time be, a group acting together, a collectivity of singular beings that produce enunciation."[512] She compares this conception of the subject with a fictional character that is always premeditated and represents "the guarantor of the transmission of meaning and of the true."[513] Cixous argues that some texts could not be subjected to an analysis because they were not "codifiable by means of character."[514] Their analysis was thwarted due to the characters, who did not represent unitary subjects and guarantors of meaning and coherence. As a result, these texts prevent the "summarisation of meaning" and their characters shatter "the homogeneity of the ego of unawareness" and represent "off-centric" or "eccentric subjectivity."[515] Cixous defines this kind of characters as "subject-plus-one" and suggests that Woolf's novel *The Waves* might be read via this concept

510. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 206.
511. Woolf, *The Waves*, 157.
512. Hélène Cixous, *Volleys of Humanity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 45.
513. Cixous, 43.
514. Cixous, 46.
515. Cixous, 46.

of multiple and amalgamated subject, because the novel's characters constantly oscillate between the identity of "nobody" and "all the possible individualities."[516] In relation to Bernard, who represents a "subjectless" nonunitary identity and emphasizes the interconnection between his and the other characters' identities, and also to Woolf's polyphonic narration, which does not prioritize any of the characters, it may be suggested that Woolf was immensely interested in one's identity conceived as a part of a larger whole, as Cixous's subject-plus-one identity, and emphasized that the individual is always a "part of a larger organic entanglement."[517]

As it has already been suggested, this non-fixed, collective, and intersubjective notion of identity described by Bernard may also be analysed via Gilles Deleuze's concept of the fold or an event, which represents a process that integrates multiplicity of stimuli and changes according to the newly acquired parts: "The event is a vibration with an infinity of harmonies or submultiples such as an audible wave, a luminous wave, or even an increasingly smaller part of space over the course of an increasingly shorter duration."[518] These events or folds arise from the virtual, from singularities enriched by potentialities, which are realized in the actual. Therefore, these "subjects" are created from the outside and do not "exist prior to its orientation and instantiation in relation to its wider environment."[519] In this respect, subjectivity is not enduring but may be conceived as a moment and "a place within the ongoing movement of a wider field."[520] Every individual combines diverse elements from the outside, parts of other subjects, which indicates its social and intersubjective nature. This is the basis of rhizomatic/molecular multiplicities or identities defined by Deleuze and Guattari

516. Cixous, 46.
517. Wiseman, 122.
518. Gilles, Deleuze, *The Fold*, 77.
519. Michael Halewood, " On Whitehead and Deleuze: The Process of Materiality." *Configurations* 13, no. 1 (2005): 74.
520. Halewood, 74.

as entities "composed of particles that do not divide without changing in nature, and distances that do not vary without entering another multiplicity and that constantly construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communications."[521] This intermingling of various identities, which are described as Deleuze's communicating multiplicities, corresponds to Bernard's revelation about his own identity which is "made and remade" continually and "which is made of the stimulus that other people provide."[522] Deleuze and Guattari themselves quote *The Waves* as an example of a work of literature where the characters represent multiplicities and expand beyond its borders into the multiplicities of their friends: "Each is simultaneously in this multiplicity and at its edge, and crosses over into the others."[523] While Derek Ryan analysed Woolf's fiction with the aid of Deleuze's molecular or rhizomatic identities,[524] and Rosi Braidotti pointed out that Woolf's fiction provides a model of Deleuze's "'plane of immanence,' where different elements can encounter one another, producing those assemblages of forces,"[525] there has not been an extensive analysis of Woolf's focus on interconnection via Whitehead's philosophy of organism. In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze recognizes Whitehead as "the last Anglo-American philosopher before Wittgenstein's disciples spread their misty confusion."[526] This confusion refers to the linguistic turn in philosophy and science, which moved the attention from metaphysics and ontology towards epistemology and linguistic analysis. For Deleuze, Whitehead represents a philosopher of the event, who built his philosophy of organism on the principle of "the many becomes one, and are increased by one,"[527] which may be applied to Woolf's concept of intersubjective identity explored in her late fiction.

521. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattati, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 37.
522. Woolf, *The Waves*, 74.
523. Deleuze and Guattari, 294.
524. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 184-192.
525. Braidotti, 401.
526. Deleuze, *The Fold*, 76.
527. Whitehead, *Process*, 21.

As it has already been discussed in the previous chapter, Whitehead's philosophy of organism is based on the interrelation of natural elements or processes, whereof the smallest are called actual entities defined as "drops of experience, complex and independent."[528] These smallest particles arise from the process of concrescence, or becoming, during which a subject collects objective data from its environment, integrates them and reaches "objective immortality" when it perishes as a subject but continues to exist in other subjects that choose it as a part of their becoming: "The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the many which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive 'many' which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthetizes. The many become one, and are increased by one."[529] This quotation suggests that the creative ontology, which Whitehead conceives in *Process and Reality*, is based on general relationality of the microparticles of the universe, which also guarantees the reality's continuity. Interestingly, this description of concrescence is very similar to Woolf's depiction of her characters' interconnection in *The Waves*, where the identities of these characters are integrated into one entity symbolized by the already mentioned carnation: "There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves – a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution."[530] The conflating parts of the characters' identities are mostly hinted at by Bernard, who cannot separates himself from his friends: ". . . what I call 'my life,' it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am—Jinny, Susan, Rhoda or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs."[531] This quotation almost

528. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.
529. Whitehead, *Process*, 21.
530. Woolf, *The Waves*, 70.
531. Woolf, *The Waves*, 156.

paraphrases Whitehead's synthesis of the many into one and reveals the importance Woolf attributed to the ontological bond that connects the characters.

Moreover, elsewhere in the novel, Bernard speaks about the overcoming of the individual self: "There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt, 'I am you.' This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome."[532] This quotation indicates that the characters have no separate identity of their own, but that they function only as a multiplicity where the various identities overlap and merge. Each character's specific individuality is essential for the formation of the final amalgamated whole. In this respect, the individual identity and its facets are not lost entirely, they still exist and express themselves in the potential amalgam. The same applies to Whitehead's actual entities which are always important *per se*, but also for the process of concrescence of other entities: "Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe."[533]

It has been suggested by several scholars that this model of one's identity, which is at the same time unique, but shared and intersected with identities of other elements in the environment, may be interpreted via the theory of wave-particle duality of light. While the light is a self-sufficient particle, it is also a wave that affects its environment, and it is only the matter of perspective whether we consider light a particle or a wave. Rachel Crossland demonstrates this on Woolf's use of pronouns in *The Waves*, where Bernard constantly oscillates between personal and fixed "I" and collective "we."[534] However, like for Whitehead's actual occasion, Crossland suggests that the two pronouns, or the two perspective of human identity, do not exclude each other but force the characters, as well as the reader, accept this dualistic model of identity: "Woolf is able to keep us aware of the other

532. Woolf, *The Waves*, 163.
533 Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 111.
534. Crossland, 57.

side of the duality even while she is focusing on one aspect of it, as in Bernard's 'we are not single, we are one.'"[535] Therefore, it can be argued that while the characters preserve their individual differences, they still enter a collectivity where their interconnection with each other is foregrounded and emphasized the mutual process of becoming of otherwise disconnected individuals. Furthermore, Woolf's multiplicity of the characters in the novel has no centre, it is "off-centric" in Cixous's terms, since the unifying element, represented by the character of Percival, is lost and cannot be retrieved when the character dies in India: "Now is our festival; now we are together. But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily without a background."[536]

To particularize the process of becoming mentioned above, Whitehead's process of concrescence is highly creative and ensures novelty in the universe due to the objective data that continue to exist as potentialities for other concrescending entities, which bear the trace of the original entity or the subject. Analogously, Woolf attributes this creativity to her characters, who demonstrate that they are aware of their historicity. Louis, for example, mentions that he is "woven in and out of the long summers and winters" and that his identity is plaited from diverse historical data: "My destiny has been that I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day."[537] Similarly, the characters, whose connection is invigorated by their meeting in the restaurant, re-enter the street and manifest their virtual mark on the upcoming becomings: "We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregation of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can

535. Crossland, 58.
536. Woolf, *The Waves*, 68.
537. Woolf, *The Waves*, 114.

subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road."[538] The "congregation of the past time" and "the everlasting road" refer directly to the past, which formed a base of the characters' identity and which is now modified by the data that the characters added to it. Consequently, each subject's identity, emerging from the process of concrescence, is at the same time social, because it is connected to other entities, and historical, because each actual entity springs from preceding subjects or entities. The description of the process of concrescence of actual entities is strikingly similar to Deleuze's concept of the subject as a fold, which implies that Deleuze is indebted to Whitehead in many respects:

> . . . each subject or fold is a social, physical, and historical rendering: social, in that it incorporates elements of the public into a singular entity; physical, in that it is an actual rendering of elements of the universe; historical, in that its formation arises from the prior and particular arrangement of previous folds, and problems within which it is situated.[539]

Therefore, it is possible to draw a tentative conclusion that Woolf's characters in *The Waves* may be likened to either Whitehead's actual entities or Deleuze's folds, since they are both social, in respect to their mutual connections and the fact that they are individualities created out of objective data, and historical, in terms of their emergence from the subjects existing prior to them. In this respect, it is important to point out that the novel may be seen as a transition in Woolf's developing conception of her characters as she moves from the modernist focus on individuality and subjective consciousness towards the postmodern idea of fluid, multiple, and constantly changing identity defined merely by the subject's relations and interaction with other subjects.

538. Woolf, *The Waves*, 81.
539. Halewood, 74.

Referring to the overcoming of individual identity intimated by Bernard, it is important to emphasize that Woolf by no means suggests a kind of "flat ontology" that would level all the differences between the parts, which comprise subjects, and between distinct subjects themselves. The same does not apply to Whitehead's philosophy of organism, where each entity is original as it unifies diverse data and combines them in unpredictable ways: "An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies."[540] In addition, Whitehead adds later that "no two identical actual entities originate from the identical universe,"[541] which means that difference is always a part of the process of becoming, regardless the identical data that it synthesizes. In a similar way, Woolf's characters in *The Waves* are interconnected by certain traits that they share, however, they "assemble different forms, make different patterns."[542] While each character keeps his or her own idiosyncrasies, their identities "converge in spite of difference."[543] The individual differences are exemplified by Susan's close bond with nature, Louis's accent, or Rhoda's need to touch solid objects, and also by each character's sense of individual identity. Whereas Bernard claims that his sense of individuality is so low that he "cannot be entirely sure what is "his self," he asserts that Louis and Rhoda are "authentics," who "exist more completely in solitude."[544] Bernard suggests that Louis's way of expressing himself is confident and that his words are "pressed, condensed, enduring,"[545] which is in stark contrast with Louis's own perception of himself. These different extents to which the characters demonstrate their own sense of identity and dependence on their environment correspond to Whitehead's societies

540. Whitehead, *Process*, 21.
541. Whitehead, *Process*, 23.
542. Woolf, *The Waves*, 95.
543. Emily M. Hinnov. "'Each is part of the whole: We act different part; but are the same': From Fragments to Choran Community in the Late Work of Virginia Woolf." *Woolf Studies Annual* 13 (2007): 1.
544. Woolf, *The Waves*, 64.
545. Woolf, *The Waves,* 65.

which also show various responses to the societies in their proximity. Whitehead points out that societies "may be more or less stabilized"[546] in relation to their environment. Consequently, each society reacts to the changes in its environment first by indifference, when the society is stable enough, second by transformation, when it adopts to the new environment, and finally by disappearance, when it cannot persist the influence of the environment.[547] If this interaction of a society with its environment is applied to Woolf's characters in *The Waves*, it would suggest that Bernard is an unstable society, which is incapable of maintaining its sense of individuality and surrenders very easily to external stimuli. In contrast, Susan would be a stable society because she does not intermingle with the identities of her friends and preserves a close connection to her domestic environment. As a result, it may be concluded that the characters are at the same time interconnected, however, they all maintain various degrees of individuality within their assemblage of societies. Woolf describes the characters' interrelated, and yet diverse nature most aptly in the following quotation, where each character represents a different instrument whose role is irreplaceable in the final symphony:

> How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole—again like music. What a symphony with its concord and its discord, and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be.[548]

The importance of each character's uniqueness and relevance for all the other characters, which corresponds to Whitehead's idea that each individual self has "its signification in the

546. Whitehead, *Process*, 100.
547. Debaise, 156.
548. Woolf, *The Waves*, 145.

universe,"[549] is one of Woolf's recurrent motifs in her later works "A Sketch of the Past," *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts* where intersubjectivity, as analysed in this chapter, acquires an ethical dimension.

549. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 111.

Beyond the Ontological Interconnection: Woolf's Ontoethics

While the previous section of this chapter analyses intersubjectivity via internal relations between Whitehead's actual entities, this analysis might be refuted as inaccurate and misleading, because in *Process and Reality* the philosopher argues that internal relations, which ensure interconnectedness of various subjects, exist only between successive and not simultaneously existing subjects such as human beings in the case of Woolf's discussed novel. Moreover, as it has been suggested at the very beginning of this chapter, in Whitehead's metaphysics human beings are not classified as "actual entities," which are microscopic elements of experience, but as societies or nexuses[550] defined as larger groupings of constantly emerging and perishing actual entities, which bear a characteristic trait that shapes the identity of the individual. In this respect, interconnection applies to various parts of a single society and not to contemporary societies or human beings. However, there are scholars who attempt to extend Whitehead's theory of internal relations by attributing general interconnectedness also to simultaneously living human beings and shift Whitehead's philosophy of organism from the realm of ontology and metaphysics to the realm of ethics.

Nancy B. Howell suggests that what feminism and process philosophy have in common is their emphasis on interconnectedness and that Whitehead' s internal relations provide "a conceptuality for relational selfhood which arises from a multitude of relationships."[551] Being aware of mishandling the philosopher's ideas, Howell insists that Whitehead's philosophy of organism is not a closed system but something that might be modified in order to serve feminists and other activists, who aim to dismantle the dualisms rooted in the Western philosophical thought. Similarly, Joseph A. Bracken, or Jorge L. Nobo

550. Whitehead himself wants the plural form of the word "nexus" to be "nexes," but it seems misleading for non-Whiteheadians, so I decided to use the regular plural form.
551. Nancy B. Howell, "The Promise of a Process Feminist Theory of Relations," *Process Studies* 17, no. 2 (1988).

tried to fill the gap in Whitehead's metaphysics by considering contemporary actual entities, or societies, as parts of Whitehead's extensive continuum, a space of potentiality where succeeding or concurrently existing actual entities may interact and influence each other.[552] It is important to point out that these attempts are not entirely incompatible with Whitehead's ontological system outlined in *Process and Reality* and therefore, intersubjectivity and interrelatedness of human beings in Woolf's fiction may be analysed from the perspective of Whitehead's internal relationality between actual entities. Although scholars argue that there is a vast difference between what Whitehead defines as actual entities and societies, the aspect of interconnection may be related to both categories. Moreover, it may be suggested that the relationality, typical of the microlevel of reality, may be attributed also to macroscopic societies such as human beings. While in *The Concept of Nature* Whitehead emphasizes that nature is a "complex of related entities,"[553] the philosopher specifies this relatedness in *Process and Reality* where he introduces actual entities as interdependent building blocks of the universe. He argues that the process of concrescence or becoming, during which any actual entity is involved in the process of becoming of other actual entities, ensures "the obvious solidarity of the world."[554] Consequently, it may be suggested that, for Whitehead, the internal relations between concrescending actual entities indeed facilitate the interconnection between macro-objects in reality. Moreover, it also hints at Whitehead's interest in both ontology and ethics.

In the same vein, the philosopher's societies, for example physical objects and human beings, are never separate from their surroundings, but they always require a wider permissive

552. See Jorge L. Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986) or Joseph A. Bracken, *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).
553. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 9.
554. Whitehead, *Process*, 7.

environment: “But there is no society in isolation. Every society must be considered with its background of a wider environment of actual entities, which also contribute their objectifications to which the members of the society must conform.”[555] In this sense, Whitehead insists that every society “requires a social background, of which it is itself a part,”[556] which means that a society of a single human being is always connected to other human beings, either directly through inheritance of certain characteristic features, or indirectly via connections of solidarity that permit each society’s harmless existence. As Valerie C. Saiving points out, if we apply Whitehead’s relationality to interpersonal relationship, it necessarily means that human and nonhuman beings in each society’s environment “contribute significantly to its individual uniqueness.”[557] As a result, it may be proposed that Whitehead prevents the “bifurcation of nature,”[558] the division of reality into unrelated and inert subjects and objects, by devising a kind of ontoethics, described by Elisabeth Grosz in her book *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism* as “an ethics that addresses not just human life in its interhuman relations, but relations between the human and the entire world, both organic and inorganic.”[559]

Interestingly, after experimenting with intersubjective identities and polyvocal narration in *The Waves*, Woolf seems to envisage a similar ontoethics of interconnection of human beings, or “ethics of interrelatedness,”[560] in her late works, especially in “A Sketch of the Past,” *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts*. However, the first intimations of such theory may be found also in her previous works, and most explicitly in *Mrs Dalloway*, where Clarissa’s “odd affinities” with known and unknown people make her believe in “a

555. Whitehead, *Process*, 90.
556. Whitehead, *Process*, 90.
557. Valerie C. Saiving, “Androgynous Life: A Feminist Appropriation of Process Thought,” in *Feminism and Process Thought* (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), 25.
558. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 21.
559. Grosz, 1.
560. Ashley J. Foster, 53.

transcendental theory" according to which our inner self may attach to "this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death."[561] Therefore, Woolf suggests that there may be a deeper bond between people apart from their spatial relations and common everyday interaction. The very same idea is developed further in her autobiographical essay "A Sketch of the Past" where Woolf also emphasizes the crucial role of social environment in the formation of one's identity: "One's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods and conceptions."[562] These background relations are later referred to as "pattern behind the cotton wool" which consists in establishing intimate ontological bonds between human beings. While ruminating about the organic unity of the flower, which represents a perfect whole since it is "part earth; part flower,"[563] Woolf transposes the idea of organic unity to the aesthetic appreciation of reality described as a work of art comprising of many interrelated parts:

> It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art.[564]

This well-known passage, which has been analysed and discussed by Woolf scholars from countless perspectives, clearly indicates that Woolf reflected on philosophical issues such as the nature of reality or one's relation to this reality and other human beings. While some scholars argue that "the cotton wool" of everyday reality and "the pattern" behind it might

561. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 111.
562. Woolf, "A Sketch," 73.
563. Woolf, "A Sketch," 71.
564. Woolf, "A Sketch," 72.

refer to the Platonic transcendental or ideal,[565] I would personally tend to agree with those who believe that Woolf's fiction is entirely rooted in materiality, yet there seems to be some ordering principle that organizes matter on the conceptual level. Elisabeth Grosz, for example, calls this non-transcendental conceptual category "the incorporeal" which represents ideality conceived as a spatial and temporal frame of matter. Therefore, the incorporeal enables matter to "represent and expand itself, its load of virtuality."[566] In a similar vein, it may be suggested that Woolf's "pattern behind the cotton wool" is not dissociated from the material but represents its integral part, which ensures relations and combinations of multiple elements of physical reality. Grosz draws parallels between her incorporeal and Deleuze's plane of immanence and argues that it is not "Platonic order" behind the everyday but a space where virtual interactions between multiplicity of concepts and ideas can take place: "Rather it is the order where one concept can encounter another, enhance it or diminish it, and which other concepts must attain in order to engage in the domain of concepts."[567] Moreover, these encounters involve concepts "produced and developed in different times and places,"[568] which suggests that two elements can influence each other without being simultaneously present and physically connected.

Deleuze's plane of immanence may be likened to Whitehead's concept of extensive continuum, which is defined in *Process and Reality* as "one relational complex in which all potential objectifications find their niche,"[569] which means that all perished actual occasions transformed into objective data may be integrated in the process of actualisation of other entities. Whitehead emphasized, like Deleuze in relation to the plane of immanence, that the

565. Lorraine Sim, " Virginia Woolf Tracing Patterns through Plato's Forms," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28, no. 2 (2005): 38-48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3831714.
566. Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 251.
567. Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 137.
568. Grosz, *The Incorporea*l, 136.
569. Whitehead, *Process*, 66.

extensive continuum "underlies the whole world, past, present and the future."[570] Moreover, Whitehead adds that the continuum is a space of contact of entities which are "united by the various allied relationships of whole to part,"[571] which corresponds to Woolf's belief in the part-whole relations between members of society indicated in the quotation from "A Sketch of the Past." Whitehead's and Deleuze's open and non-linear temporality of the extensive continuum and the plane of immanence is particularly important while discussing the interconnection of human beings in Woolf's above-mentioned works, where even characters who do not know each other, or do not share the same space and temporality, affect each other. As it has been mentioned, Clarissa Dalloway is related to people she has never met, Mrs Ramsay shares a feeling of kinship with other people, Bernard's identity is composed of other people's features, and Louis's self is made of traits that the preceding generations provide. Consequently, it is possible to draw an analogy between Woolf's "pattern" and the two philosophical concepts and define it as a field of potentiality and interconnection where concepts, ideas, thoughts, and material elements encounter and shape each other.

By dispersing hints at interrelations and unity throughout her fiction and proclaiming interconnectedness to be her "personal philosophy," Woolf suggests that her focus on interconnection and unity does not result mainly from the aesthetic theories of her contemporaries, for example Roger Fry's formalism or Clive Bell's significant form. As Alexandra Harris suggests in her book *Romantic Moderns*, Woolf did not detach her art from the experienced reality and used every opportunity to disrupt "the Post-Impressionist ideal of immune and self-contained whole."[572] Accordingly, it may be inferred that Woolf's inclination to assembling, unifying, and merging springs from her belief in general interrelatedness underlying elements of reality rather than aesthetic practice of a pure organic

570. Whitehead, *Process*, 66.
571. Whitehead, *Process*, 66.
572. Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 103.

form. Instead of considering Woolf's emphasis on connection and unity a result of the influence of the formalist aesthetics, the last section of this chapter explores the idea that the unifying pattern represents the basis of Woolf's "ontoethics." Her ontoethical theory treats all constituents of reality as interconnected and therefore, there must be relations of solidarity and compassion between not only human beings but also human beings and natural elements around them.

"We Are Member of One Another": Woolf's Search for Solidarity and Unity Created Out of Multiplicity

While defining his extensive continuum, Whitehead turns his attention from the realm of pure ontology to the field of ethics when he claims that "the extensive continuum expresses the solidarity of all possible standpoints throughout the whole process of the world."[573] Furthermore, he emphasizes that each actual entity is a part of the continuum as it "pervades the continuum,"[574] which suggests that every single actual entity is valuable because it may change the character of the continuum. Whitehead expresses the same idea in *Modes of Thoughts*, where he moves from microscopic actual entities to the macroscopic visible world and emphasizes the interconnection and worth of every human being as a part of the whole: "We are, each of us, one among others; and all of us are embraced in the unity of the whole."[575] Interestingly, this quotation is strikingly similar to Woolf's passage from "A Sketch of the Past" which introduces the author's belief in the interconnection of all human beings into a single work of art. Whitehead elaborates on his idea of unity and its ethical aspect by pointing out that each existence upholds value for itself but also for other individuals: "Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe."[576] As Brian G. Henning points out, this aspect of Whitehead's philosophy promotes "philosophy of organism" to the rank of "moral philosophy."[577] Moreover, as all existing smallest particles or macro-objects like human beings somehow contribute to the becoming of the whole, they should act as "agents of beauty,"[578] so that the created whole is as beautiful and harmonious as possible.

573. Whitehead, *Process*, 66.
574. Whitehead, *Process*, 68.
575. Whitehead, *Modes*, 110.
576. Whitehead, *Modes*, 111.
577. Brian G. Henning. "Trusting in the 'Efficacy of Beauty': A Kalocentric Approach to Moral Philosophy," *Ethics & Environment*, 14, no. 1(2009): 102, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40339170.
578. Henning, 116.

The same ethical value may be attributed also to Deleuze's plane of immanence that represents the dwelling of life and the virtual storage of concepts from which the actual and singular subjectivity arises and intermingles with all the other "events": "For a moment a life erupts, it expresses its singular subjectivity, its status as event, and it shares in common with everything around it, living or not, the capacity to actualize its potentials, to expand as well as contract itself."[579] Moreover, Grosz suggests that it is this capacity of the plane of immanence to connect, shape and actualize singular subjectivities that helps Deleuze to elaborate "an ontoethology, an ontoethics" based on the interaction of conceptually related subjects and their milieus.

Analogously, Woolf underlines the common and shared ground in her pacifist manifesto *Three Guineas*, where she urges the nation to fight against the threat of fascism not by the means of a violent response, but by realizing the fact that people are born equal and that it is the social order which imposes impassable divisions on them. Woolf anticipates this issue already in *To the Lighthouse* where Mrs Ramsay complains about how easily people, and especially children, adopt social norms and prejudices: "Strife, divisions, difference of opinions, prejudices twisted into the very fibre of being. . ."[580] In *Three Guineas*, which is intended to be a response to a letter from an educated gentleman who asks about the possible ways to prevent the war, Woolf harshly criticizes the patriarchal system and its educational institutions which support competition between people and all kinds of aggression. Refusing to donate money to help rebuild a women's college modelled on male educational institutions, she argues that all attempts to show one's privileges and superiority may result in the exercise of aggression and hatred, and consequently lead to an outbreak of war:

579. Grosz, 150.
580. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 12.

> We can say that for educated men to emphasize their superiority over other people, either in birth or intellect, by dressing differently, or by adding titles before, or letters after their names are acts that rouse competition and jealousy—emotions which, as we need scarcely draw upon biography to prove, nor ask psychology to show, have their share in encouraging a disposition towards war.[581]

Instead of colleges that educate young patriarchal authorities, who exercise their power upon other people, Woolf envisages "a new, poor college" where students would be taught primarily "the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people's lives and minds."[582] Moreover, Woolf emphasizes that this new kind of college would aim to level all social distinctions and encourage the building of society "not parcelled out into the miserable distinctions of rich and poor, of clever and stupid."[583] As a result, this non-hierarchical organisation would enhance the interaction between all sorts of concepts and ideas originating in this space and support the cooperation between "all the different degrees and kinds of mind, body and soul merit."[584] Holly Henry points out that Woolf's anti-violence and anti-aggression rhetoric might have been inspired by Whitehead,[585] who in *Science and the Modern World* condemns "methods of violence" and "defensive armour" and argues that humans should instead cultivate "adventures of thought, adventures of passionate feeling, adventures of aesthetic experience."[586] This is conspicuously similar to Woolf's educational reform suggested above and to her idea from "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" that people can fight violence "with the mind."[587]

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581. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 26.
582. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 40.
583. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 40.
584. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 40.
585. Henry, 68.
586. Whitehead, *Science*, 206.
587. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 216.

After urging women to enter the professional life and disrupt the "pugnacious" patriarchal order without adopting its mechanism, Woolf concludes her essay by returning to the gentleman's letter and the photograph of Hitler, who stands in front of ruined houses and dead bodies. She looks at the photograph and exhorts the reader to realize that the figure of a tyrant is not entirely dissociated of ourselves but that we are "ourselves that figure,"[588] which forces us to reconsider the ways we treat other human beings. Consequently, she invokes the common bond that unites all human beings and "connections that lie far deeper than the fact on the surface": "A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life."[589] Therefore, Woolf returns to the idea of unity prefigured in "A Sketch of the Past" with much greater vigour and insistence while maintaining the original idea about the interconnection at the ontological level. Although it may be suggested that throughout the essay Woolf imagines an equalitarian society, she ultimately argues for a society based on the recognition of difference, where people would enable "human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity."[590]

Whereas this multiplicity is only intimated in *Three Guineas*, it comes to the foreground in *Between the Acts*. In her diary Woolf reveals her intention to depict heterogeneous society, focus on community, suppress the individual "I" and replace it with collective and intersubjective "we" which is "composed of many different things. . . we all life, all art, all waifs & strays – a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole. . ."[591] The collective "we" is achieved by Woolf's turn to the village community which prepares its fair terminated by Miss La Trobe's pageant depicting the history of England from prehistory until the present moment—the outbreak of WWII. The pageant is hosted by the upper-middle class

588. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 163.
589. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 163.
590. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 163.
591. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, *Volume 5* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 135.

Oliver family in the garden of their country house Pointz Hall. Whereas Woolf's previous works focussed primarily on upper-class characters, the array of characters in *Between the Acts* ranges from sellers and farmers to vagabond artists. These characters assemble to prepare the fair, while some of the villagers comprise the cast of the play, and the rest constitute the audience. As Alexandra Harris suggests, the characters are brought together to celebrate "their shared place,"[592] their space of interconnection. At the same time this place represents the condensed essence of the very Englishness which is threatened by the Nazi planes flying above the villagers' heads.

It is important to point out that in *Between the Acts*, Woolf applies her unifying tendency to multiple planes. First, it operates on the textual level when she chooses to insert the text of the pageant into the main body of the novel without clear signalling where the pageant begins and ends. Although most of the versions of the novel italicize the text of the pageant, as introduced by Woolf's husband when he published the work after Virginia Woolf's death, Woolf's original version fully integrated the lines of the pageant into the text of the novel without a clear distinction between the text of the novel and the pageant. Second, the novel introduces a medley of vastly different characters, whose voices often overlap or speak at the same time. Third, Woolf's decision to stage the pageant outside results in an interesting inclusion of surrounding nature and its expressions such as animal sounds, rain or changing light in the scene of the play. Both the actors and the audience seem to be equally integrated in this natural setting. At the beginning of the performance, the audience start assembling, their voices merge into one humming, and the surrounding nature encircles them once they reach their seats: "And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabling, their green and leaves hustle us and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starling, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the

592. Harris, 190.

black cow stands still."[593] Nature also intervenes in the play itself when the rain starts falling or when the animals' natural noises accompany the actors' parts.

However, these unifying attempts are in stark contrast to Woolf's continual emphasis on fragments and fragmentariness. Throughout the novel Woolf constantly oscillates between the sense of unity and fragmentariness which again operates on multiple planes and is anticipated by the gramophone's recurrent gurgling "Unity – Dispersity" during the pageant. First, Miss La Trobe's play is fragmented as it offers the story of the nation via disconnected scenes from various historical periods rather than a coherent story of the country's progress until the present moment. Second, the novel includes characters who are not well accepted by the society and may be considered marginal, for example Dodge, who was bullied at school for his womanly behaviour and who says about himself "I'm a half-man,"[594] or Miss La Trobe, who is not "pure English" and shares her cottage with an actress. Accordingly, the play serves as Miss La Trobe's tool to assemble the fragments of society corrupted by prejudice, hypocrisy, and aggression, and urge the audience to unite in the fight against a greater enemy that endangers their existence. The urgency of Miss La Trobe's message is intensified by ceaseless ticking of the gramophone and it culminates in the scene depicting the present moment of "ourselves sitting here on a June day in 1939."[595] During this scene, the actors suddenly run from behind the bushes holding pieces of cracked mirrors and glass in their hand and suddenly coming to a halt: "Out they leapt, jerked, skipped. Flashing, dazzling, dancing, jumping. Now old Bart…he was caught. Now Manresa. Here a nose…There a skirt…Then trousers only…Now perhaps a face…Ourselves? But that's cruel. To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume… And only, too, in parts…That's what's so distorting and

593. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 363.
594. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 341.
595. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 391.

upsetting and utterly unfair."[596] In this way, the audience is startled by being shown their distorted and fragmented images in order to realize the distance and imaginary gulfs and crevasses that people create between them and that are now completely erased: "So that was her little game! To show us up, as we are, here and now. All shifted, preened, minced; hands were raised, legs shifted."[597] As the audience try to shy away from their unfavourable reflections, the images merge one into another, create an amalgam of the audience's identities and shatter social divisions, and even the privileged position of the humans is dethroned: "What an awful shop-up! Even for the old, who, one might suppose, hadn't any longer any care about their faces. . . .And Lord! The jangle and the din! The very cows joined in. Walloping, tail lashing, the reticence of nature was undone, and the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved."[598] Before the audience start dispersing, an anonymous loud voice comes from behind the bushes and exclaims prophetic truths about the state of humanity, and about the kinship that connects all people regardless their social status or background:

> *Oh we're all the same. Take myself now. Do I escape my own reprobation, simulating indignation, in the bust, among the leaves? There's a rhyme, to suggest, in spite of protestation and the desire for immolation, I too have had some, what's called, education…Look at ourselves, ladies and gentleman! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilisation, to be built by* (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) *orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves.*[599]

596. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 393.
597. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 393.
598. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 393.
599. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 394.

Most probably it is Miss La Trobe herself pronouncing these words, which is foreshadowed earlier before the start of the play when she talks about the audience as "devil" and expresses her intention to "douche them with present-time reality."[600] Here Miss La Trobe addresses not only the village community but the whole nation and humanity, who should reconsider the base on which our society stands. Like in *Three Guineas*, Woolf emphasizes "the one life" that permeates all of us and urges humanity to glue together its "orts, scraps and fragments." Although most of the audience are disgusted by their distorted images, old Bartholomew and reverend Stratfield seem to be the only ones who understand Miss La Trobe's message. After the play has finished, Mr Stratfield offers his humble interpretation of the play:

> Am I treading, like angels, where as a fool I should absent myself? To me at least it was indicated that we are members of one another. Each is part of the whole. Yes, it occurred to me, sitting among you in the audience. Did I not perceive Mr Hardcastle here' (he pointed) 'at one time a Viking? And in Lady Harridan—excuse me, if I get the names wrong—a Canterbury pilgrim? We act different parts; but are the same.[601]

Interestingly, the reverend's suggestions that people's identities are at least partly conflated echoes Bernard's claim that people "assemble different forms, make different patterns,"[602] George Carslake's revelation from the short story "A Simple Melody," where the man suggests that "we are all of us, very different superficially, but now united,"[603] and Woolf's own statement from "A Sketch of the Past" outlining her personal philosophy based on the interconnection of all human beings. Furthermore, the reverend's emphasis on the sameness and importance of each individual's contribution to the whole is very similar to Whitehead's

600. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 390.
601. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 396.
602. Woolf, *The Waves*, 95.
603. Woolf, *The Complete Shorte*r Fiction, 205.

organic conception of actual entities and societies and ultimately even human beings that are always interrelated: “We are, each of us, one among others; and all of us are embraced in the unity of the whole.”[604]

Reverend’s revelation concerning the interconnectedness of individuals is anticipated earlier in the novel by Mrs Swithin, who contemplates human identity in relation to changing historical background and concludes that people are the same and they only change their garments: “‘I don’t believe’ she said with her odd little smile, ‘that there ever were such people [the Victorians]. Only you and me and William dressed differently.’”[605] Therefore, the woman acknowledges the process-like conception of identity where past actual entities do not vanish but continue living in future occasions, whose nature in predetermined by the past data that they integrate. People’s identity does not change fundamentally, but it is modified by the external data that vary and change with the historical context. Moreover, Mrs Swithin also arrives at a revelation about the ontological bond between people and imagines “discordant harmony,” a heterogeneous, yet unified, work of art composed of the individuals that are all equally important, which is reminiscent of the passage from *The Waves*, where the interconnection of the characters is symbolized by various instruments’ parts in a single symphony:

> She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour of imagination—one-making. Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. If discordant, producing harmony—if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus—she was smiling benignly—the agony of the particular sheep, cow or human

604. Whitehead, *Modes*, 110.
605. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 388.

being is necessary; and so—she was beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance—we reach the conclusion that all is harmony, could we hear it.[606]

It may be concluded that Woolf's recurrent evocation of unity, interconnection, and one-making effort are not only the result of the modernist formalist aesthetics focusing on balance, unity, and oneness, but that they are characteristic of Woolf's thinking about society, interpersonal relationships, and social justice in her late works. Had Woolf's one-making been just the result of the modernist worship of structure, unity, and coherence, she would not have paid so much attention to these unifying tendencies, especially in her late works, which in many respects undermine the modernist aesthetics. This alienation from the pure formalist aesthetics is manifested in *The Waves*, where Woolf prefigures postmodern aesthetics by attacking the idea of stable personhood, or more importantly in *Between the Acts*, where Woolf turns away from the formalist aesthetics and celebrates aspects of a work of art that Roger Fry dismissed.[607] This separation from Fry's doctrines may be seen in Woolf's constant interweaving of her art and reality, and it is embodied by Miss La Trobe, who represents a formalist artist who wants to stick to her unity of premeditated design, however, it is constantly disrupted by external influences such as the weather, animals, or the audience.

Whereas *Between the Acts* is not postmodern only in terms of its formal aspects, for example its use of metanarrative, beginning in medias res, and open-endedness, it anticipates the philosophical debates of the second half of the twentieth century in its focus on diversity and difference, which has often been neglected by simply classifying Woolf as a modernist and formalist artist, who responded to the upcoming war by turning to the depiction of Englishness represented by the rural community. Although Woolf insists so much on unity, ontological bond between people, and their common ground in *Between the Acts*, it does not

606. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 388.
607. Harris, 103.

mean that she envisages a homogeneous society. On the contrary, her constant oscillation between unity and fragmentariness enables her to "make unity out of multiplicity,"[608] or "discordant harmony."[609] In accordance with her intention to create "we" composed of heterogeneous and vastly different elements, Woolf no longer focuses only on privileged upper-class individuals like in her earlier novels, but she employs a variety of characters and includes also the marginal ones. In this respect, the novel is highly inclusive, which is also indicated by reverend Stratfield, who finishes his interpretation of the play by his internal thoughts on Albert, mentally ill boy who collects money at the end of the play: "The good man contemplated the idiot benignly. His faith had room, he indicated, for him too. He too, Mr Streatfield appeared to be saying, is a part of ourselves. But not a part we like to recognise, Mrs Springett added silently, dropping her sixpence."[610] The quotation demonstrates that Woolf attempted to give voice also to characters who are often ostracized by society for their difference, or otherness, and that even these characters may be essential parts of the whole piece of art called humanity. The same degree of otherness and difference applies also to Miss La Trobe, who is despised by most of the characters and wants to demonstrate the society's ill-doings by her play, or Dodge, who is mocked for his womanly nature. Moreover, Woolf also lets the characters speak their proper words without trying to polish them and she also makes use of working-class villagers.

As a result, the novel cannot be primarily associated with the tradition of high modernism focusing on white upper-class individuals and homogeneity but should rather be analysed as a novel celebrating Bakhtin's hybridity and heteroglossia, the two concepts by which the critic opened new "hybrid" perspectives on modernist literature. Bakhtin linked heteroglossia, or the mixture of voices, with novels that employ a diversity of social speech

608. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 163.
609. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 388.
610. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 397.

types, and suggested that it is facilitated also by heterogeneous design and structure of the work of art in question:

> Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized).[611]

Woolf meets these preconditions of heteroglossia by intermingling the third-person narrator, the voices of the characters, Miss La Trobe's stage directions, internal thoughts of the characters, and background natural noises. Moreover, she inserts a play within the novel and attempts to provide a concise history of England and her literature alongside the main village fair plot. This heteroglossia ensures the inclusive nature of the novel's community and is closely related to Woolf's use of the carnivalesque, which enables the author to draw connections, establish a dialogue between the novel's characters and overthrow the hierarchy of the centre and the margin, or the superior and the inferior. Bakhtin did extensive research into the medieval festivals while writing his book *Rabelais and His World*, where he analyses the carnivalesque in Rabelais's fiction. He pointed out that during the medieval carnival time social ranks were levelled and ordinary people could treat the privileged social ranks as equals:

> This temporary suspension, both real and ideal, of hierarchical rank, created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special kinds of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came into contact

611. Michail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981), 263.

> with each other and liberating them from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times.[612]

Christopher Ames argues very persuasively that Woolf experiments with the concept of carnivalesque in *Between the Acts*, and emphasizes that Woolf's attempt to write "festive comedy" enables the author to "exploit the comic potential of a similar mingling of high and low,"[613] and ultimately take advantage of the inclusive aspect of the carnivalesque. This is achieved by interchanging social statuses of the characters, for example when she lets an ordinary seller play the part of Queen Elisabeth, the use of colloquial language and linguistic play, for example in the form of "alliteration, assonance, rhyme and onomatopoeia,"[614] which evoked the above-mentioned free language of the marketplace, and finally by blurring the distinction between the audience and the actors. For example, Woolf's experiment with intermingling and one-making deprives Albert of his label of the "village idiot" rooted in the local community and enables him, at least temporarily, to become an integral and important part of the community while he performs several parts in the play and collects donations at its end. Eliza Clark, an ordinary tobacco seller, is transformed into queen Elizabeth and she has the opportunity of her lifetime to appear "eminent and dominant."[615]

After the play finishes, the audience start to disperse, and Woolf lets the people's voices speak one over another as they pronounce fragmented judgments on the play that they have just seen. Whereas some of the audience find the play brilliant, most of them seem to be taken aback by the reverend's interpretation of the play implying that "we all act all parts,"[616]

612. Michail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.
613. Christopher Ames. "Carnivalesque Comedy in Between the Acts." *Twentieth Century Literature* 44, no. 1 (1998): 396.
614. Ames, 402.
615. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 346.
616. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 399.

"one spirit animates the whole"[617] and that "we are members one of another."[618] This indicates that the play was at least partly successful as far as Miss La Trobe's intention to show the fragmented state of the contemporary society, and urge the audience to unite, are concerned.

To conclude, it is important to point out that in *Between the Acts* Woolf "embraces plurality and difference,"[619] both at the formal and thematic level, much more than in any other of her novels. While portraying very diverse characters who are, nevertheless, interconnected at the ontological level, Woolf seems to be hinting at the possible loss of difference and uniformization associated with the Nazi ideology that threatens the English nation embodied by the community assembled for the performance of Miss La Trobe's play. In this respect, this interpretation of Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts* counters the analysis of Jed Esty, who in his book *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* argues that the novel's focus on local country community springs from the failure of interwar urban cosmopolitanism[620] and that Woolf turns to the national and local to depict English particularism.[621] According to Esty, in *Between the Acts* Woolf expresses her patriotism and revives the sense of Englishness due to the slow process of "shrinking" of the British Empire. However, this reading is highly reductive and neglects Woolf's frequent irony and criticism of the British Empire and her dislike of ardent nationalism and patriotism foregrounded in *Three Guineas* or in her diary, where she admits that she does not like "any of the feelings war breeds: patriotism, communal &c, all sentimental & emotional parodies of our real feelings."[622] In fact, Esty's interpretation ignores Woolf's humanist project that originated in

617. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 401.
618. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 396.
619. Wiseman, 129.
620. Wiseman, 126.
621. Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5.
622. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, *Vol. 5.,* 302.

Three Guineas, where Woolf argues for the exaltation of transnational values such as peace and social justice, acknowledgement of difference, and universal collaboration between people. In *Between the Acts* this humanist, and probably also post-humanist and utopian, project reaches its apogee while Woolf does not limit the interconnection of human being merely to the local English community but includes, or at least mentions, people of different national backgrounds, and animals alike. Nor Miss La Trobe, neither Mr and Mrs Manresa are of "pure English"[623] origin and they represent the diversity and inclusiveness of the British democratic tradition. Moreover, Woolf briefly mentions Jewish refugees who were fleeing the continental Europe at the time, and she recognizes their right to integrate in the British nation and start a new life: "'And what about the Jews? The refugees…the Jews…People like ourselves, beginning life again…'"[624] Similarly, Miss La Trobe's pageant promotes diversity not only by its mixture of various genres and periods of British literature and history, but by emphasizing the difference within the British Empire. It does not forget to mention its "black men"[625] or "a pot pourri"[626] associated with the Indian culture. Therefore, the artist may be seen as a demiurge, who is "not merely a twitcher of individual strings" but a person who "seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world."[627] Interestingly, Woolf uses the word "cauldron" in *The Waves*, when she points out that the characters create a cauldron "of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver."[628] This quotation indicates Woolf's inclusiveness that does not prioritize the characters of *The Waves* but also other people that constantly interact with the characters.

623. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 333.
624. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 364.
625. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 382.
626. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 380.
627. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 378.
628. Woolf, *The Waves*, 145.

Furthermore, as Sam Wiseman points out, Woolf intentionally fails to describe what "Englishness" means, and she offers a very wide and vague conception of the term, which is even intensified by her decision not to determine the location of Pointz Hall and depict "land merely, no land in particular."[629] This implies that Woolf's project of her late works, which all deal with the war and socio-political conditions of the period, was conceived much broadly than as a mere retreat from the war to local community in the very heart of England. Following her exploration of intersubjectivity in *The Waves*, criticism of the Empire in *The Years*, her exhortation to undermine all forms of oppression and aggression, and search for new ways of connection in *Three Guineas* culminate in *Between the Acts* where Woolf imagines "a mellay; a medley" both on the structural and thematic planes. Elaborating on her idea of "personal philosophy" outlined in "A Sketch of the Past," she presents miscellaneous characters as ontologically interconnected and shifts those on the margin to the centre and vice versa, which leads to the final exclusion of the centre and focus on value of each individual. Similarly to Whitehead, who envisages an "ontoethics" based on the interconnection and appreciation of each element of reality which represents "an attempt to forge new expressions, new hi/stories that matter,"[630] Woolf's late works also introduce the author's personal speculative philosophy, which urges "her readers to see and think differently"[631] and question the established modes of power, oppression and exclusion.

629. Wiseman, 126.
630. Melanie Seghal, "A Situated Metaphysics: Things, History, and Pragmatic Speculation in A. N. Whitehead," in *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Roland Faber and Andrew Goffey (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 179.
631. Anna Snaith, "Late Virginia Woolf." *Oxford Handbooks Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed 23 Jul. 2020. www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-28.

Chapter 4: Woolf's Criticism of Anthropocentrism and Exploitation of Nature

The last chapter elaborates on the previous three chapters which focused on Woolf's destabilization of the subject/object dualism, undermining of the culture/nature division and the criticism of strong sense of one's individuality. To draw a logical conclusion, it may be inferred from this brief summary of the previous chapters that Woolf, in many respects, anticipated the philosophical and activist discourses of the late 20th century which criticize the strong position of human subjects, hint as the perpetual destruction of nature resulting from the human appropriation of the natural world and focus on the interrelatedness of all natural entities. As it has been pointed out in the previous chapters, Woolf's fiction foreshadows the postmodern criticism of anthropocentrism and anticipates contemporary flourishing of ecological and environmentally oriented thought. To elaborate on Woolf's idea that human life consists not only in "personal relations" but in "our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales," this chapter explores Woolf's characters' interrelation with nature and the author's criticism of human domination and exploitation of nature. Interestingly, this tendency to "belittle" the position of the human is manifested also in the works of the other Bloomsbury Group's members, which may be ascribed to the influence of Roger Fry's interest in the parallels between nature and aesthetics. As Peter Adkins points out, Fry was a close friend of Edward Carpenter, a radical socialist and activist, whose books focus on "the environmental cost of industrialized capitalism."[632] This possible influence on Fry's reconsideration of the relationship between the human and the natural, along with the scientific discoveries, which undermined the human ability to fully describe all the complexities of natural phenomena, resulted in Fry's aesthetic theory of Post-Impressionism, which claims that artists should not provide an illusion of nature, its copy or truthful

632. Adkins, 226.

representation, but capture the relation established between the natural object and the artist.[633] Woolf, more than any other writer associated with the Bloomsbury Group, was concerned with the changing relation between human agents and their natural environment, and as it will be illustrated, her fiction also handles environmental issues connected with the human treatment and abuse of nature. Without resorting to envisagement of an abstract aesthetic theory of nature,[634] Woolf expresses her concern with the crisis of nature, regarded as a consequence of modernization, and deals with the relationship between the human and the natural directly in her writing. As a result, she reimagines the traditional subject/object perspective of this issue and draws the readers' attention back to, on the one hand, primitive but, on the other hand, sustainable and non-exploitative human companionship with nature.

The natural turn in Woolf's fiction is explored in this chapter via the characters' sense of belonging to their physical environment, Woolf's suppression of the human, and the idea of the world "seen without a self" imagined in natural interludes of *The Waves* and the transition passage "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, the chapter discusses Woolf's criticism of capitalist, imperialist, and consumerist society presented in her essays "The Docks of London," "Thunder at Wembley," or "Oxford Street Tide." These issues are analysed with the aid of Whitehead's "proto-ecological" philosophy and environmental ethics based on process-oriented thought, which also questions the superior position of human subjects and insists on their interrelation with natural elements in their environment. Whitehead's metaphysics of intersubjectivity discussed in the previous chapter is particularly pertinent to the current discussions about the Anthropocene described as "the time when nonhumans are rapidly emerging from the background and intertwining with humans in the foreground."[635] Moreover, the human and the natural are considered interdependent in the

633. Adkins, 229.
634. Adkins, 231.
635. Roberts, "Intersubjectivity," 72.

Anthropocene. Regarding the idea that every actual occasion, meaning every element in nature/reality, has significance for itself and for the others, Whitehead's metaphysics may serve as a very useful basis for environmentalists, who search for "solidarity with nonhumans."[636] Interestingly, Woolf seems to creatively anticipate these debates of the Anthropocene's interrelation between the human and the inhuman and she hints at the danger that springs from anthropocentrism. The organic unity of the community analysed in the previous chapter is, therefore, extended in the present one also to nonhuman parts of the whole.

636. Roberts, 72.

Characters as Integral Parts of Their Natural Environment

Following the discussion from the first chapter, where it has been suggested that Woolf overthrows the dualism of the subject and the object in order to place all the constituents of reality at the same ontological plane and undermine the traditional idea of a subject as an active "doer" and an object conceived as a passive, brute, inert piece of matter, the following section elaborates on the idea that Woolf's subjects may easily become objects and vice versa. This interchange leads to the reconsideration of the validity of the nature/culture dichotomy. It has been pointed out that every subject of experience, either the microscopic "actual occasion," or macroscopic "society" requires a permissive environment of other entities, which are at the same time subjects of experience and objects for the "prehension" or feeling of other entities. It has been illustrated in relation to Mrs Ramsay, Clarissa Dalloway, or Bernard, that subjectivity, or individuality, springs from the objective reality around them and does not exist prior to them. In this way, the subjects are very closely connected to their environments, from which they can be separated only with a great difficulty. The above-listed characters from Woolf's fiction demonstrate continuity with their natural environment, whose elements are described as overlapping with those of the characters' bodies. Clarissa Dalloway seems to indulge in connections to her surroundings which are integrated in her own identity, for example when she is described as "being part of the trees at home; of the house there."[637] Clarissa experiences a similar connection to the natural world and the loss of sense of being herself while buying the flowers in Miss Pym's shop, where she "breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell"[638] and plunged into a moment of being, a moment of ecstasy. When going home on a bus on Shaftesbury Avenue, Clarissa reflects on her ability to be continuous with her environment and to disperse her selfhood

637. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 7.
638. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 10.

throughout her surroundings: ". . . she felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that." Clarissa's subjectivity unfolds in the physical world around her and she is an indispensable part of it. Similarly, Septimus also reveals his subjectless personality throughout the novel and emphasizes his interconnection with his surroundings. In his sudden surges of phantasmagorical visions affecting his shell-shocked mind, he seems to be hypersensitive to his natural environment and extremely conscious of his body being a part of the natural world: "And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body. . ."[639] At the moments of greatest ecstasy, he seems to go through out-of-body experience when his body is "macerated until the nerves fibres were left" and the only thing that he perceives is his connection with nature. He loses control over his body and plunges in unembodied experience because his body becomes "one more object in that world, bobbing up and down in the breeze along with the trees, feathers and birds"[640]: "He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head."[641] In these instances, Septimus's wife Rezia also turns into "a flowering tree."[642] The quotations indicate that Septimus regards his body as "transcorporeal,"[643] because it creates an assemblage and intermeshes with the nonhuman. The concept of transcorporeality introduced by Stacy Alaimo is strikingly similar to Whitehead's idea of one's body as indistinguishable from the surrounding nature, which is discussed later. Analogously, Clarissa also sometimes seems to be oblivious of her body, which becomes transparent and perceives only a pure experience of the external:

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639. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 17.
640. Hussey, 14.
641. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 51.
642. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 107.
643. Leanna Lostoski, "'Imaginations of the Strangest Kind': The Vital Materialism of Virginia Woolf," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 49, no.1 (2016): 61, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44134676.

> . . . a single figure against the appalling night, or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain. . .[644]

Both Clarissa and Septimus represent Woolf's characters who are very closely intertwined with the natural world, which is also seen as basically animate and experiential, as it has been suggested in the second chapter. Therefore, they may be interpreted as the writer's means to criticize the separation between the human and the nonhuman world maintained by the science of the then period, which was marked by great advancements in industrialization, modernization, and globalization.[645]

A similar interconnection of one's intimate bond with nature is also the subject of Woolf's short story "In the Orchard," where the main female character is lying on a long chair under a tree in an orchard, and Woolf repeatedly evokes her appearance as translated into the language of nature:

> The opals on her finger flushed green, flushed rosy, and again flushed orange as the sun, oozing through the apple-trees, filled them. Then, when the breeze blew, her purple dress rippled like a flower attached to a stalk; the grasses nodded; and the white butterfly came blowing this way and that just above her face.[646]

The harmony between the natural and the human entities, and the human similarity to natural phenomena described in the quotation, recurs in the story also in relation to the action and

644. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 23.
645. Lostoski, 61.
646. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 149.

noises produced by the humans and nature. The leaves of apple-trees start to tremble and "chime" due to the loud sound of the local church's organ. Conversely, the sound of the organ is "cut into atoms by a flock of fieldfares."[647] Moreover, the woman's body is described as embedded in its natural environment, analogously to the transcorporeality of Septimus's or Clarissa's bodies: ". . . then she smiled and let her body sink all its weight on to enormous earth which rises, she thought, to carry me on its back as if I were a leaf, or a queen. . ."[648] At the end of the story, Woolf erases the character completely and mentions only that the female character's "purple dress stretched between the two apple-trees," and then she provides a lengthy description of the natural harmony and self-sufficiency that reigns in the orchard: "There were twenty-four apple-trees in the orchard, some slanting slightly, others growing straight with a rush up the trunk which spread wide into branches and formed into round red or yellow drops. . ."[649] This detailed depiction continues until the last line of the story, where Woolf brackets Miranda's sudden realisation of losing so much time in the orchard: "The wind changing, one bunch of apples was tossed so high that it blotted out two cows in the meadow ('Oh, I shall be late for tea!' cried Miranda), and the apples hung straight across the wall again."[650] Interestingly, the bracket put around the human verbal expression and experience might foreshadow Woolf's deliberate placement of human events in bracket in *To the Lighthouse*, where the human is intentionally pushed aside in the central passage "Time Passes."

In *The Waves* Woolf also foregrounds the relation of the characters to their environment and it is particularly Louis and Susan who are described as directly connected to it. Louis identifies with his natural surroundings in the following quotation, which is repeated

647. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 149.
648. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 150.
649. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 151.
650. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 151.

in multiple alterations throughout the novel: “I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with bricks, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver.”[651] Only a passage later he elaborates on this identification, when he completely merges with the greenery around him: “I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk.”[652] Susan is also interconnected with her natural environment around her, but unlike Louis, this environment is her domestic scene at her father’s farm. She indulges in the experience of her sense of possession and belonging, which results in the feeling that “her body is like the ‘body’ of the earth”[653] :

> At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn. I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him. Mine is the heron that stretches its vast wings lazily; and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another munching; and the wild, swooping swallow; and the red faint in the sky, and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields—all are mine.[654]

These quotations suggest that Woolf was extremely concerned with her characters’ relation to nature and that this close connection is realized mainly via the experience of their bodies which represent places of contact with the physical world. Therefore, the body is not just a mere physical case for the soul, but rather the wheel of lived experience[655] that mediates the characters’ entanglement with objects in nature. Moreover, this identification with the

651. Woolf, *The Waves*, 5.
652. Woolf, *The Waves*, 6.
653. Hussey, 10.
654. Woolf, *The Waves*, 55.
655. Hussey, 19.

natural elements anticipates Woolf's proto-environmental thinking revealed in the essay "The Docks of London" and "Thunder at Wembley" discussed later in this chapter.

As a philosopher, who rejected the scientific materialism that sustains the inertness of physical objects and the division between the human and the natural/psychical world, Whitehead emphasizes throughout his work that the human subject, or any other experiential subject, is inseparably linked to his or her environment, and that there is no distinct line between the two. As it has already been suggested in the first chapter regarding the erasure of the subject/object dichotomy in Whitehead's metaphysical system, all subjects in reality are endowed with the capacity to "experience" the world around them, and this surroundings substantially contributes to their emergence as individual subjects. In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead elaborates on the idea and refers directly to the human body, which he considers to be an integral part of its environment:

> We think of ourselves as so intimately entwined in our bodily life that a man is a complex unity—body and mind. But the body is part of the external world, continuous with it. In fact, it is just as much part of nature as anything else—a river, or a mountain, or a cloud. Also, if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends.[656]

This quotation indicates that Whitehead believed in inseparability of one's body from their environment in a very similar way to Woolf in the above-mentioned quotations. The quotation unveils that the body is of equal importance like all the other natural entities, and that the human tendency to put our body on airs is no longer justified. To give an example of this entwinement, Whitehead mentions a molecule that is a part of nature, enters our body, gets absorbed, and we cannot say at which points the molecule leaves our body, or whether it stays in it permanently. For this reason, Whitehead argues that "the body is very vaguely

656. Whitehead, *Modes*, 21.

distinguishable from external world" and consequently, it must be regarded only as "one among other natural objects.[657] In this respect, Clare Palmer suggests that Whitehead's idea of human subjects continuous with the environment is analogous to the notion of "extended self" of deep or "transpersonal" ecology. This concept is introduced in Warwick Fox's book *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology* and it is based on the "dissolution of boundaries" between the individual and his or her environment,[658] which results in one's awareness of nature's fragility and respectful behaviour towards it.

In line with the description of the notion of extended subject, Woolf's characters, whose identities intermix with other human and nonhuman subjects, may be likened to deep ecology's subjects, who erase the distinction between "us," our body, and nature. This indistinct line between the body and its environment is encapsulated in Bernard's quotation from *The Waves*, where he insists on the fact that our body is constantly enriched by molecules or data coming from the outside: "We are forever mixing ourselves with unknown entities."[659] This intermingling of the human and the natural molecules in also hinted at in *To the Lighthouse*, where in the last section Cam is sailing on a boat with her father to the Lighthouse and she experiences an extremely close connection to her natural environment while she plunges her hand into the water:

> Her hand cut a trail in the sea, as her mind made the green swirls and streaks into patterns, and numbed and shrouded, wandered in imagination in that underworld of waters. . . . Then the eddy slackened round her hand. The rush of the water ceased; the world became full of little creaking and squeaking

657. Whitehead, *Modes*, 144.
658. Clare Palmer, "Identity, Community and the Natural Environmnet: Some Perspectives from Process Thinking," *Worldviews* 2, no. 3 (1998): 263–264, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43809665.
659. Woolf, *The Waves*, 66.

sounds. One heard the waves breaking and flapping against the side of the boat as if they were anchored in harbour. Everything became very close to one.[660]

The quotation suggests how an intimate contact with the natural phenomena, here Cam's connection with water, intensifies one's mental and experiential faculties, and makes one strengthen his or her sense of belonging and interconnection with the environment. In fact, Cam experiences the moment when a person becomes "part of the nature of things,"[661] which is foreshadowed by Lily earlier in the novel while she artist is watching Mr Ramsay's boat that vanishes is the distance.

While the previous chapter analysed this interconnection only in terms of social relationships, it is important to point out here that this entanglement equally includes the animate and inanimate nature, which is illustrated in the above-quoted passages. Consequently, it may be suggested that Woolf's characters' entanglement with natural elements anticipates contemporary ecological and ecocritical debates, which circle around the interrelation of the human and the natural. In these debates, the human is no longer the centre, but it is only one element among the many. Furthermore, Woolf's attempt to unite and interconnect the human and the natural may be seen as analogous to Whitehead's effort to bring the natural and the human back together via undermining the post-Newtonian scientific materialism, which separated and drew the human and the natural world further apart. In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead argues that a viable perspective is not that of a subjectivist, who "makes this world depend on us,"[662] but of an objectivist, for whom "we seem to be ourselves elements of this world in the same sense as are the other things which we perceive."[663] Whitehead sharply criticizes the "assumption of the bare valuelessness of

660. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 198.
661. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 204.
662. Whitehead, *Science*, 89.
663. Whitehead, *Science*, 89.

mere matter," which resulted in "the limited moral outlook" of the modern western world. Whitehead attributes this change in morality to industrialisation, which gave rise to two main problems of the modern world—"the ignoration of the true relation of each organism to its environment" and "the habit of ignoring the intrinsic worth of the environment."[664] Whitehead's metaphysics, based on equally important and interrelated actual occasions, "steers Western philosophy away from its inveterate anthropocentrism,"[665] and precisely for this reason, it is often used by ecologically oriented theorists and thinkers, who attempt to decentre the human. In addition to the "ontoethics" discussed in the previous chapter, Whitehead's conflation of ontology and ethics seems to acquire one more dimension and develop into something which we nowadays know as environmental ethics. This ethico-environmental aspect of Whitehead's cosmology is based on the idea that value is attributed to every constituent of reality, because it serves as a potentiality for the process of becoming of other entities. In this respect, Whitehead's process thought foregrounds the intrinsic value in nature[666] and debases humanity to "merely one of the world's processes.[667] Since contemporary environmental thinkers focus on the interrelation of the human and the natural, which results in the nexus, a complex of interrelated entities, Whitehead's cosmology provides "an instrument of considerable power which can help us understand how this nexus which is nature is related to human subjectivity and how value emerges in both."[668]

664. Whitehead, *Science*, 89.
665. Shaviro, 8.
666. John B. Bennett, "Ecology and Philosophy: Whitehead´s Contribution," *Journal of Thought* 10, no. 1 (1975): 28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42588463.
667. Arran Gare, "Environmental Ethics and Process Philosophy," *Trumpeter* 8, no. 1 (1991): 36, https://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/file/34926641-c9bf-4dc4-a8d4-66d69c4acfee/1/PDF%20%28Published%20version%29.pdf.
668. John B. Bennett, 29.

Woolf's Implicit and Explicit Criticism of Anthropocentrism

Regarding the overemphasizing of human value and focusing mainly on the human perspective, Woolf criticizes the "inveterate anthropocentrism" in her essay "Flying Over London," where, on the one hand, she exalts the plane as a ground-breaking human invention but, on the other hand, compares the "smallness" of the human realm with the vastness of the non-anthropocentric sky: "Habit has fixed the earth immovably in the centre of their imagination like a hard ball; everything is made to the scale of houses and streets."[669] Contrary to this down to earth perspective, when taking off the ground, man "becomes conscious of being a little mammal, hot-blooded, hard boned" and experiences the "vanishing and melting" and impermanence of the vast world above the Earth. However, Woolf ironically adds that we cannot get rid of our anthropocentric perspective and we involuntarily imagine the skies as terrestrial space:

> Yet, though we flew through territories with never a hedge of stick to divide them, nameless, unowned, so inveterately anthropocentric is the mind that instinctively the aeroplane becomes a boat and we are sailing towards a harbour and there we shall be received by hands that lift themselves from swaying garments; welcoming, accepting.[670]

Being aware of our natural tendency to apply the human perspective also to nonhuman entities, Woolf attempts to imagine what it is like to get rid of the human superiority when she describes the point in the sky from which human beings cannot be seen and only the marks, which they left behind, may be visible: "Here was a garden; here a football field. But no human being was yet visible; England looked like a ship that sails unmanned. Perhaps the race was dead. . ."[671] Gillian Beers analyses the parallel between Woolf's recurrent

669. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 207.
670. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 207.
671. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 208.

description of flying in her late fiction and the image of England as an insular separate nation, and she points out that the invention of planes led to the nation's reconsideration of its impenetrable and autonomous position, which resulted in significant "social and national changes."[672] As it may be inferred from the quoted passage, Woolf was conscious of this shifting perspective of the nation/island and she depicts the autonomous "impermeable island" as a "temporary form within the view of geological time"[673] not only in this essay but also in *Between the Acts*, where the "Englishness" is sustained and, at the same time, questioned as an untenable concept. After the potential erasure of the English nation, Woolf continues by suggesting the possible extinction of the whole human race when the crew of the plane is approaching death. Whereas human traces disappear, gulls become the privileged race: "Across them there passed in single file a flight of gulls, livid white against the leaden background, holding on their way with the authority of owners, having rights, and means of communication unknown to us, an alien, a privileged race."[674] Interestingly, Woolf plays with this changed position of the human, this human "re-scaling,"[675] also in *Between the Acts*, where she constantly undermines the opposition of the human and the animal, which reaches its peak during the "mirror scene" where "the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved."[676]

Having faced possible extinction, the crew approaches a wet cloud that consumes them and attacks them with a shower of hails, which is described as the moment of inevitable death, but it is interrupted by surpassing the level of clouds and flying in the space of stillness, quietness, and whiteness. From there the plane starts descending towards the Earth and the

672. Gillian Beer, "The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf," *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1996), 167.
673. Beer, "The Island," 172.
674. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 208.
675. Henry, 70.
676. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 393.

outlines of the human world reappear. However, the significance and size of the human action, as well as the animal one, are again diminished:

> Though the dot was the size of a bluebottle and its movement minute, reason insisted that it was a horse and it was galloping, but all speed and size were so reduced that the speed of the horse seemed very, very slow, and its size minute. Now however, there were often movements in the streets, as of sliding and stooping; and then gradually the vast creases of the stuff beneath began moving, and one saw in the creases millions of insects moving. In another second they became men, men of business, in the heart of the white city buildings.[677]

This passage illustrates how Woolf aptly captures the changing perspective of the human, seen from the sky as a minute and insignificant creature comparable to a kind of insect, which we often treat as something ugly and valueless. Furthermore, Woolf masterly shifts perspective between macroscale objects like the Earth, clouds, and the sky, and the microscale organisms such as human beings and other animals. This suggests that Woolf knew how small the position of the human is in comparison to the natural phenomena and the geological powers, by which she may be recognized as one of the first authors who reflected on contemporary ecological and environmental issues. As it will be discussed later in relation to "Time Passes" and natural interludes from *The Waves*, this human scale, opposed to geological physical and time scale, represents one of the recurrent features in Woolf's fiction.

However, Woolf perhaps ironically returns to the anthropocentric perspective while the members of the crew begin to discern separate human beings, and she claims that "one had to change perpetually air values into land values" with all its divisions of "social

677. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 210.

grades."[678] The end of the story turns toward a social critique of upper-class society that occupies the quarters around Oxford Street, where "nobody noticed us at all, but went on jostling each other with some furious desire absorbing them,"[679] and the superficiality of the signs of human civilisation such as shop names, flags, or a unified architectural style of the city: "And then it was odd how one became resentful of all the flags and surfaces and of the innumerable windows symmetrical as avenues, symmetrical as forest groves, and wished for some opening, and to push indoors and be rid of surfaces."[680] Woolf's comparison of symmetrical streets to forest groves again shows the writer's interest in juxtaposing the human and the natural and searching for the parallels between these two realms perceived as separate due to the science and philosophy, which practiced what Whitehead calls "the bifurcation of nature." Moreover, the passage refers back to Woolf's essays "Modern Fiction" and "Character in Fiction," where the author urges the novelist to neglect the superficial descriptions of matter and delve deeper into the matter's structure and connections between the parts of the structure as suggested in "A Sketch of the Past" discussed in the previous chapter. Woolf emphasizes this interconnection beneath the surface also in the discussed essay, when she, as one of the crew members, tries to plunge beneath the symmetry of the street and describes an inner space of a woman's room, which pretends to be distinct and different, yet it is only one part of the seeming uniformity: ". . . there appeared a room, incredibly small, of course, and ridiculous in its attempt to be separate and itself."[681] Woolf then proceeds with a description of the room, which reveals the person's presence and personality, and concludes the essays by stating that the experience of flying, which forces us

678. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 210.
679. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 211.
680. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 211.
681. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 211.

to reconsider our position and relation to the rest of the universe, significantly modifies our perspective of the world, and therefore, provides a certain epiphany:

> Everything changes its values seen from the air. Personality was outside the body, abstract. And one wished to be able to animate the heart, the legs, the arms with it, to do which it would be necessary to be there, so as to collect; so as to give up this arduous game, as one flies through the air, of assembling things that lie in the surface.[682]

This ending of the story reveals that while one experiences a complete alienation from the human and the material earthbound superficiality and experiences what it is like to perceive the Earth from non-anthropocentric abstract perspective, one is consequently able to reappreciate the physical experience of what it means to be human in a more profound way. This newly acquired perspective would not be characterised by the celebration of the superficial signs of the human success, but by the realisation of our position of only one among many animate agencies of this universe. Moreover, this universe would be woven out of the relations of its inhabitants that lie beneath the surface.

A change from anthropocentric to relational and non-anthropocentric perspective is also the key theme of Woolf's essay "The Sun and the Fish," where Woolf describes the experience of an eclipse that suddenly makes us reconsider our importance in comparison to the natural and geological powers. Moreover, the observation of the eclipse also represents an experience of death and possible extinction of human life in a very similar way to the experience of flying "above the human level" in "Flying Over London." By recurrent imagining of the possible extinction of the humans and the destructive power of human

682. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 211.

agency, Woolf anticipates the "scenarios of extinction" and the states of being taken aback by natural process as introduced in the discourse of the Anthropocene theories.[683]

At the very beginning of the "The Sun and the Fish" Woolf describes people's willingness to travel long distances and assemble with "a purpose in common" —observation of the eclipse, which unifies the people who face this more-than-human, natural, and geological, phenomenon. Woolf emphasizes that the people are not connected only for "human" reasons, but precisely because they are aware of the significance of the natural phenomenon: "We were no longer in the same relation to people, houses and trees; we were related to the whole world. We had come, not to lodge in the bedroom of an Inn; we were to come for a few hours of disembodied intercourse with the sky."[684] This disembodied intercourse with the natural phenomenon recalls Septimus's and Clarissa's "transcorporeal" experience of their interrelation with nature, where the body becomes almost transparent and dissolves in its surroundings. Moreover, Woolf emphasizes that what lies behind this relation to the natural entities is the bond with other people as it has already been outlined in "A Sketch of the Past." In this way, Woolf suggests that one's connection to other people and the feeling of community with them is always mediated by the intimate relation to natural environment from which subjectivity arises. As Woolf proceeds in this argument, she argues that the encounter with the nonhuman natural force results in giving up individual identity and realization of the individual's insignificance vis-à-vis the natural phenomenon: "Rather, perhaps, we had put off the little badges and signs of individuality. We were strung out against the sky in outline and had the look of statues standing prominent on the ridge of the world."[685] The end of the quotation refers to the possible extinction of the human race and

683. Stefanie Heine, "Forces of Unworking in Virginia Woolf's 'Time Passes,'" *Textual Cultures* 12, no. 1 (2019): 120. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26662807.
684. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 189.
685. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 189.

hints at the significance of the natural world, which is even intensified by Woolf's comparison of the observers to "men and women of the primeval world" who "come to salute the dawn."[686]

When the view of the sun is completely blocked, Woolf starts describing the world without colour and life and captures also the people's shock by this sudden exposure to the loss of light and splendour: "This was the end. The flesh and blood of the world was dead and only the skeleton was left. It hung beneath us, frail; brown; dead; withered."[687] After this experience of the Earth's death the sun starts to reappear, the world becomes more alive again and the observers feel a sense of relief while watching the Earth's recovery: "But steadily and surely our relief broadened and our confidence established itself as the great paint brush washed the woods, dark on the valley, and massed the hills blue above them."[688] However, Woolf emphasizes that even though the Earth came to life again, one will always remember that it can be extinguished very easily and that we cannot take the existence of life for granted: "But still the memory endured that the earth we stand on is made of colour; colour can be blown out; and then we stand on a dead leaf; and we who tread the earth securely now have seen it dead."[689] The quotation indicates that Woolf takes the eclipse as a starting point for her reflection on the possible crisis, perhaps an ecological crisis, of our planet, whose potential destruction was first reflected in the modernist literature which implicitly dealt with "the destructive consequences of modernity."[690]

After the experience of the eclipse, hinting at a possible death of not only human life, Woolf abruptly changes the theme of the story and shifts her attention to the description of observation in a zoological garden, which is, in contract to the experience of eclipse, full of

686. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 189–190.
687. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 191.
688. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 191.
689. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 191.
690. Högberg, 149.

pure life, movements, and colours. The narrator first observes two lizards and then fish tanks, where colourful fish swim in various direction without a purpose or a goal that tends to be associated with every human action:

> There the inhabitants perform for ever evolutions whose intricacy, because it has no reason, seems the more sublime. . . . The most majestic of human evolutions seems feeble and fluctuating compared with the fishes'. Each of these worlds too, which measures perhaps four feet by five is as perfect in its order as in its method.[691]

This quotation ushers in Woolf's return to the non-anthropocentric perspective while she compares the complexity of the fish life and its order with that of the humans and undermines the significance of human evolution. Furthermore, Woolf proceeds to celebrate the variety in nature and highlights the role of each natural event, which directly or indirectly influences the course of nature:

> The rise of a bubble, negligible elsewhere, is here an event of the highest importance. The silver drop bores its way of a spiral staircase through the water to burst against the sheet of glass which seems laid flat across the top. Nothing exists needlessly. The fish themselves seem to have been shaped deliberately and slipped into the world only to be themselves.[692]

Woolf's focus on the workings of nature without the influence of human action reveals the author's belief in nature's self-sufficiency, analysed in the following section of this chapter, and her belief in the innate worth of each living and non-living entity. This attribution of value is strikingly similar to Whitehead's association of worth with all existence: "We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in

691. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 192.
692. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 192.

its own nature, is the upholding of the value intensity."[693] The value of the nonhuman organism is encapsulated in Woolf's comparison of the fish's "perfect existence"[694] with the mediocre appearance of human race: "More care has been spent upon half a dozen fish than upon all the races of humankind. Under out tweed and silk is nothing but a monotony of pink nakedness."[695]

To conclude, it may be suggested that although the short story is divided into two parts dealing with two completely different kinds of experience, the first of observing the eclipse and the second of fish, these two incongruous themes converge in Woolf's attempt to warn against the potential destruction of life on our planet and against the tendency to elevate human existence's value above the existence of other animal species. The story foregrounds the "smallness" of the human, which is contrasted with the vastness and seeming permanence of natural phenomena. The following section of this chapter explores Woolf's experiment with the complete erasure of anthropocentric perspective and her anticipation of posthumanism in "Times Passes" and natural interludes in *The Waves*.

693. Whitehead, *Modes*, 111.
694. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 192.
695. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 192.

The Non-Anthropocentric "World Seen Without a Self" and Posthuman Turn

While in the above-discussed essays Woolf juxtaposes the human and the natural world, in the passage "Time Passes" and in the natural interludes of *The Waves* she decides to erase the human trace almost completely and anticipates contemporary turn to "posthuman" fiction which undoes anthropocentrism. Instead of the human experience and agency, Woolf places nature into the centre of these passages and explores its, on the one hand, destructive, and, on the other hand, preserving power. Regarding the intimations of extinction of humans discussed above, these passages may also be read as apocalyptic narratives "of the end of time"[696] currently associated with the theories of the Anthropocene. However, while these narratives focus primarily on the destructive effect of human action on natural elements, Woolf's passages are surprisingly full of animated life and rather than displaying the decay and final destruction of nature and human race, they foreground nature's regenerative powers and indestructibility.

In "Time Passes" Woolf intentionally leaves out the human experience and elements and undermines the central human position in the novel's narrative. This is achieved by decentring and elimination of the human by several means, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, she suppresses all the hints at human existence and uses the images of absence and silence to emphasize the void created after the human inhabitants had left the place. Woolf refers to "Time Passes" in her diary as to an "impersonal passage" that "interests me [Woolf] very much"[697] and breaks the unity of the novel's design. While the first part of the novel focuses primarily on Mrs Ramsay and the relationships that she "knits" around her, and the third part of the novel focuses on Mr Ramsay, his ambition to complete the trip to the

696. Heine, 134.
697. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 36.

lighthouse, and Lily's determination to finish her painting of Mrs Ramsay, the middle passage provides a relief form these human ambitions and interpersonal relationships and describes Bernard's "world seen without a self."[698] After finishing the first part of the novel, Woolf talks about "Times Passes" as "the most difficult abstract piece of writing," and she provides its outline as follows: "I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & features with nothing to cling to. . ."[699] This description of Woolf's experimental project reveals that the passage's effect is meant to be harsh, impersonal, and inconsolable, and that the only subjectivity appearing in the passage is the empty house and the character of time, which fully demonstrates its agency. The "no people's characters" intention is clearly stated at the beginning of the passage, where Woolf highlights that "there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say 'This is he' or 'This is she.'"[700] This passage directly recalls the first part of the novel, where references to the mind and the body, or the subject and the object, abound. Moreover, the last part of the quotation suggests that in "Time Passes" Woolf obliterates the gender roles, which are crucial in the first and the third part of the novel, in favour of genderless subjectivity of the traditionally inanimate matter which comes alive in the passage. The absence of human subjectivity is repeatedly evoked by Woolf's focus on silence, stillness, and the images of the void:

> Nothing it seemed could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence which, week after week, in the empty room, wove into itself the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout, and folded them round the house in silence.[701]

698. Woolf, *The Waves*, 162.
699. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 76.
700. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 137.
701. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 142.

On the one hand, this passage demonstrates the emptiness of the house devoid of human experience, but, on the other hand, foreshadows the theme of the passage—nature's capacity to survive, create and act independently of human agency. The human trace in the passage is preserved only in the residues of things used by the house's inhabitants: "What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated."[702] Another reminder of human existence is Mrs McNab, the Ramsay family's cleaner, who is sent to restore the house from the workings of nature:

> Then again peace descended; and the shadow wavered; light bent to its own image in adoration on the bedroom wall; when Mrs. McNab, tearing the veil of silence with hands that stood in the wash-tub, grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle, came as directed to open all windows, and dust the bedrooms.[703]

Woolf's second means to undermine the importance of human subjectivity and existence in "Times Passes" is the already discussed panpsychism, aliveness of inanimate matter, and agency distributed throughout nature. While panpsychism itself is a reaction to scientific theories that bifurcate between the animate human existence and inert lifeless matter of the visible world, Woolf uses its main premises not only to distribute mentality in the whole universe, but mainly to demonstrate that nature can act independently of human intention and hint at the indifference of nature to human actions. Woolf's use of nonhuman agency has been described in detail in the second chapter, so here, it is mentioned mainly because its close association with the writer's third means to weaken the central position of the human—the depiction of nature where the human is just one temporary element, contrary

702. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 140.
703. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 142.

to the everlasting natural processes and geological forces. Although some scholars tend to read the destructive processes and gradual decay in "Time Passes" and natural interludes in *The Waves* as a metaphor of human violence exercised on nature,[704] I would like to suggest that Woolf's depiction of destructive processes manifest the power of nature and its long-term capacity to create, change, and regenerate.

As Leanna Lostoski suggests, the passage introduces nonhuman temporality or what Jane Bennett calls a "long view of time."[705] This longer timespan is concerned primarily with the time of natural and geological processes, where the human temporality is merely a minute part of the whole. This extended posthuman temporality is intimated at the very beginning of the passage where Woolf speaks about the contrast of a single night's time and the succession of nights: "But what after all is one night? A short space, especially when the darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird signs, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave. Night, however, succeeds to night."[706] This ongoing succession of time is evoked repeatedly: "Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference."[707] In a parenthetical comment, Woolf mentions that "night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together,"[708] and she compares the single act of a board's springing to the geological force of a crumbling rock: "Once only a board sprang on the landing; once in the middle of the night with a roar, with a rapture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley. . ."[709] The geological and more-than-human time is introduced not only in the central passage, but also at the very beginning of the novel, where

704. Högberg, 152.
705. Lostoski, 67.
706. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 139.
707. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 146.
708. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 147.
709. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 142.

Lily and William Bankes are watching dunes, which are described as something that will survive much longer than its observers:

> ". . . both of them looked at the dunes far away, and instead of merriment felt come over some sadness – because the thing was completed partly, and partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communicating already with the sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest.[710]

This quotation from the beginning of the novel anticipates the comparison in size and value between the human and the natural in "Time Passes" and also hints at Woolf's recurrent idea that nature is indifferent or "insensible" towards organisms that inhabit it.

While the house is subjected to a constant apocalyptic destruction and decay, metaphorized by waves likened to "amorphous bulks of leviathans,"[711] the house "left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains"[712] or being invaded by "rats in all the attics,"[713] Woolf emphasizes that this natural activity does not take into account its impact on the humans, as it is something "alien to the processes of domestic life."[714] Turning away from the initial destructive and apocalyptic vision of the house, a product of human action which had "gone to rack and ruin,"[715] Woolf suddenly describes the natural forces imposed on the house as fertile and life-creating: "Tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and pattered their life out on the window pane. Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; the lawn waved with long grass . . . which made the whole room green in summer."[716] In this way, the house changes from lifeless substance into a space of immense creation and fertility, however,

710. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 25.
711. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 147.
712. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 149.
713. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 149.
714. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 144.
715. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.
716. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.

nature's creativity pays no attention to the consequences of its action on human creations as indicated by the rhetorical question "What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?"[717]

As a result, it cannot be argued that the passage represents the narratives of extinction and effacement characteristic for the theories of the Anthropocene, because the outlook of the destruction converts into metaphors of production, fertility, and constant renewal.[718] Whereas at the beginning of the passage nature seems to mourn the absence of the human existence and this absence is reflected in the state of the house, there comes a sudden shift and the narrative starts to celebrate life enabled by the absence of human action. Therefore, nature's "insensibility" mentioned in the rhetorical question does not refer to nature's capacity to mercilessly destroy the products of human actions, but ironically hints at the fact that nature is endowed with intrinsic creativity, which is most of the time suppressed by humans and which can fully develop only in the absence of the human agency. Furthermore, the insensibility of nature again refers to the irrelevance of value of human existence[719] in contrast with the processes and power of nature. This is implied in the passage where Woolf describes the upcoming spring as "entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders."[720] In addition to the previous quotation about nature's insensibility, the following quotation suggests that natural processes cannot be disrupted by human action: ". . .nothing now

717. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.
718. Stefanie Heine in her already quoted article argues that to approach "Time Passes" via the notion of Anthropocene does not necessarily require interpreting the passage by means of its "apocalyptic logic" but rather by forces of unworking – constant movement from decay to restoration or "eternal starting over." According to Heine, the passage does not imply the finality of the end of time and undermines this sense of finality by constructive processes of the natural phenomena and the cleaner who wants to restore the house from its gradual decay (p. 128).
719. Gioiella Bruni Roccia, "Between Parentheses: The Poetics of Irrelevance in Virginia Woolf's Experimental Fiction," *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 3, no.1 (2017): 103, http://journals.euser.org/files/articles/ejls_jan_apr_17/Gioiella.pdf.
720. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 143.

withstood them; nothing said no to them. Let the wind blow; let the poppy seed itself and the carnation mate with the cabbage."[721]

Although Woolf depicts nature as primarily creative, alive, and independent of human action, she suggests that human behaviour may significantly restrict the productivity and fertility of nature. This anthropocentric attempt to control nature and its processes is embodied by Mrs McNab, the family's cleaner, who is supposed to fight the natural forces and disturbs the nonhuman world[722]: "Slowly and painfully, with broom and pail, mopping, scouring, Mrs. McNab, Mrs. Bast stayed the corruption and the rot; rescued from the pool of Time that was fast closing over them now a basin, now a cupboard. . ."[723] Her action is depicted as a triumph over nature and its conquest during which "some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place."[724] However, this temporary domination over nature is depicted as something beyond the human power as indicated by Mrs McNab's thoughts: "It was beyond one person's strength to get it straight now."[725] Later the woman repeats her lament: "It was too much for one woman, too much, too much."[726] While the woman's complaints may be ascribed to her advanced age, they are more likely to be interpreted as Woolf's emphasis on human hopelessness vis-à-vis the power of nature to destroy and create. This impression is intensified near the end of "Time Passes," where Woolf triumphantly announces the end of the cleaners' restorative action: ". . . keys were turned all over the house; the front door was banged; it was finished."[727] This celebration of human work and subjugation of nature is undermined right in the upcoming sentence, which introduced "the half-heard melody, that intermittent music which ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent,

721. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 150.
722. Lostoski, 71.
723. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 152.
724. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 152.
725. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 149.
726. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 149.
727. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 153.

yet somehow related; the hum of insect, the tremor of cut grass"[728] which regains its intensity after being drowned out by human action. This natural hum indicates that human action with a temporary effect cannot compete with nature's capacity to endure and regenerate, which implies that Woolf intentionally wants nature to have the last word.

This survival of nature threatened by Mrs McNab's attempt to restore the house's ordered and inhabited-like appearance is followed by a sentence in square brackets, which are here and there dispersed throughout the whole passage: "[Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in September. Mr. Carmichael came by the same train.]."[729] This last note in the brackets heralds the return of human occupants of the house, but the fact that this event is squeezed into very concise and objective note in brackets refers back to the original idea that human existence is suppressed in the whole passage. Consequently, it may be inferred that the use of square brackets represents the last means to undermine anthropocentrism in the section "Time Passes."

The first two bracketed references appear directly after the introduction of the empty house and the description of the destructive forces of nature. The passage starts by the characters arguing whether the light should be extinguished or left on before the family go to bed and the first bracketed sentence states that Mr. Carmichael is the last one who stays up and blows out his candle after midnight. In this way, the sentence ushers in the atmosphere of darkness and emptiness, which pervades the first part of the passage and indicates that the human element will be pushed aside. This impression is confirmed in the second bracketed sentence that gives the reader a very objective information about Mrs Ramsay's death without any emotional pathos. This harsh objectivity and brevity of the comments is in stark contrast to the first part of the novel, where the central focus is the character of Mrs Ramsay, her

728. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 153-154.
729. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 154.

thoughts, emotions, and actions. The following two notes in brackets inform the reader about Prue's marriage and her unfortunate death due to illness connected with childbirth. However, this death is overshadowed by the aliveness of the preceding and succeeding passages which introduce "bees humming," "gnats dancing"[730] and a loving caress of the light from the lighthouse that falls on the "empty" rooms. As Gillian Beer suggests, the novel is not only the author's means to cope with the death of her parents but also with the loss of "confidence in human centrality."[731] Therefore, the square brackets in "Time Passes" may be considered as one of the crucial features which reflect this uncertainty and shifted perspective in the novel. The following two bracketed remarks are concerned with the war and inform us about Andrew's death on a battlefield in France and the revived interest in poetry. Like other "human events," the war is depicted as a secondary event of minor importance, and the mention of Andrew's death is squeezed into the description of "this silence this indifference"[732] of the empty house and depiction of the beauty of a sunset experienced at the beach. Moreover, the harshness of the comment again reminds the reader of nature's indifference towards human misfortunes. However, it at the same time "accentuates the brutality of the event,"[733] which is also intensified by the sharpness of the nuclear sentence "A shell exploded."[734] To conclude, it may be suggested that the square brackets used in "Time Passes" serve as one of Woolf's techniques to decentre the human experience, shift the readers' attention to the material and the natural, and undermine the importance of human achievement and loss in contrast to the larger-scale processes of nature.

Natural elements and the animal world are foregrounded also in the interludes that precede each chapter in *The Waves*. These interludes describe the movement of the sun in the

730. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 144.
731. Beer, 41.
732. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 145.
733. Bruni Roccia, 103.
734. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 145.

sky from the early morning to the sunset as well as the changing colours of the sea, the beach, and the life of animals appearing on the scene. Nature and animals are the main characters of these passages and human traces are almost entirely cut out. These passages are indefinite in terms of their temporal and spatial frame, except for one hint at "English fields," which indicates that Woolf describes the English coast. However, the landscape reminds the reader of any wild coastal area. The absence of both human subjective perception of time and the remainder of monumental time, time which is associated with the figures of authority and power,[735] and the focus on natural time and possibly "geological timespan" pushes Woolf's exploration of the nonhuman, or posthuman, one step further. In relation to *The Waves*, Woolf writes in her diary that she intends to "saturate every atom" and "eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity,"[736] which suggests that the reality that she wants to depict should be "alive" in all respects. Moreover, while sketching the first scenes and significant images of the novel, she talks about "the continuous stream" of human thought and the physical environment, which is "intersected by the arrival of the bright moth."[737] Interestingly, the animal overshadows the human subjectivity and foreshadows the "nonhuman turn" of the novel. This turn towards the natural is emphasized in the following sketched scene, where Woolf reveals her interest in the history of the earth by describing a man and a woman who are having dinner and talking about various things: "The contrast might be something of this sort: she might talk, or think, about the age of the earth: the death of humanity: then moths keep on coming."[738] Later in her diary she mentions that the narrative of the novel must be embedded in "the unreal world" of "the phantom waves" and she uncovers her wish to let nature be heard throughout the novel: "Could one get the waves to be heard all through? Or

735. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 106.
736. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 209.
737. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 139.
738. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 139.

the farmyard noises? Some odd irrelevant noises."[739] Woolf concludes this diary entry by realization that the reflection on the novel's design and conception makes her think of the greenness and aliveness of nature: "Everything becomes green & vivified in me when I begin to think of the Moths."[740]

In line with this intention to place the natural environment into the foreground, moths and other natural elements in the interludes are often depicted in much clearer and solid terms than the products of human work. The first interlude not only describes the beginning of a day, when the sun is still hidden behind the horizon, but also introduces a fairy-like house of Elvedon, about which the characters make up fantasies. Woolf describes vividly and in detail birds chirping and the sun, which starts touching the house's walls, however, everything inside the house remains "dim and unsubstantial."[741] The same contrast between the natural and the human is developed in the second interlude, where the main characters are "the dew dancing on the tips of flowers," whereas the sun with its beams of sharp light "laid broader blades upon the house."[742] However, the things illuminated by the beams of light remain indefinite and fluid rather than solid in comparison to distinct sound of the waves: "Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid. Meanwhile the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore."[743] In the interlude describing a late evening, red curtains of the house's windows are repeatedly blows in and out by the wind, the light in the house is obscured and the solidity of the human-made objects is questioned once more: "All for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity, as if a great moth sailing through the

739. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 263.
740. Woolf, *The Diary, Vol. 3*, 236.
741. Woolf, *The Waves*, 3.
742. Woolf, *The Waves*, 15.
743. Woolf, *The Waves*, 15.

room had shadowed the immense solidity of chairs and tables with floating wings."[744] In reference to Woolf's diary entry, where the human thought is interrupted or "intersected" by the arrival of moths, the passage metaphorically describes the power of nature to obscure and sideline human existence. While the natural elements are always described as alive and active, the human-made objects are passive recipients of nature's effects:

> The evening sun, whose beat had gone out of it and whose burning spot of intensity had been diffused, made chairs and tables mellower and inlaid them with lozenges of brown and yellow. Lined with shadows their weight seemed more ponderous, as if colour, tilted, had run to one side. Here lay knife, fork, and glass, but lengthened, swollen, and made portentous. Rimmed in a gold circle the looking-glass held the scene immobile as if everlasting in its eye.[745]

This passivity on the part of human objects in the interludes represents another of Woolf's techniques to overthrow the traditional idea of humans as active agents who use and shape the natural environment according to their needs. Furthermore, the absence of the human from the interludes is the main tool employed by Woolf to evoke "death of humanity," the novel's theme suggested in her diary.

The posthuman atmosphere of the interludes also springs from their indefinite temporal frame and references to nonhuman time and natural cycle. In the first interlude, which describes the sea "indistinguishable from the sky" and the blurred division between the horizon of the earth and the sky, Woolf alludes to the first book of Genesis, where God

744. Woolf, *The Waves*, 103.
745. Woolf, *The Waves*, 118.

creates the distinction between heaven and earth[746] and the sea and the sky.[747] This suggests that Woolf might refer not only to the beginning of a single day but the birth of life on Earth. Similarly, the last interlude focuses on the slow extinguishment of light and the arrival of eternal night, which may signalize the end of civilization. Interestingly, the darkness equally swallows up both human and natural elements:

> Darkness washed down streets, eddying round single figures, engulfing them; blotting out couples clasped under the showery darkness of elm trees in full summer foliage. Darkness rolled its waves along grassy rides and over the wrinkled skin of the turf, enveloping the solitary thorn tree and the empty snail shell at its foot.[748]

It may be inferred from the quotation that the last interlude introduces an apocalyptic view of both human civilisation and the Earth. Elsa Högberg suggests that the interludes might "depict one day, from sunrise to sunset, or a geological time span stretching from the beginning of life on Earth to, say, an imagined future when the sun sets on the British Empire."[749] Therefore, the individual lives of the novel's characters may be regarded as mere grains of life in the vast geological time of the planet and its nature described in the interludes. Furthermore, especially the last parallel between the setting sun and the intimation of the British Empire's decline, which has been analysed in Jane Marcus's essay "Britannia Rules The Waves,"[750] is important, because it proposes that Woolf was often critical of the Empire and aware of its

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746. *The Christian Standard Bible*, Gn 1:1-2: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."
747. Gn 1: 6: "And God said, 'Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.' So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so."
748. Woolf, *The Waves*, 134.
749. Högberg, 150.
750. Jane Marcus, "Britannia Rules The Waves," in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century 'British' Literary Canons*. Ed. Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 155.

mercantile policy which not only exploits colonies and their natural recourses, but also tends to view natural objects as mere commodities with commercial value. In this light, the apocalyptic nature of the last interludes may represent Woolf's warning against ecological crisis and potential decline of our civilization resulting from the overconsumption of natural sources and consumerism. Woolf connects the latter with the imperialist establishment in her essays "Thunder at Wembley" and "The Docks of London" discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Woolf's Criticism of the Exploitation of Nature and her Proto-Environmental Thinking

In her essay "Thunder in Wembley" Woolf describes the human effort to turn the quarter of Wembley in London into a showcase of the British Empire at the occasion of the British Empire Exhibition organised between the years 1924-25. At the very beginning Woolf states that "it is nature that is the ruin of Wembley" despite all the attempts of the exhibition's organizers to tame nature's activity: "They might have eradicated the grass and felled the chestnut trees; even so the thrushes would got in, and there would always have been the sky."[751] Then Woolf ironically proceeds to describe the poorer area of the quarter and points out ironically that "nature asserts herself where one would least look to find her—in clergymen, school children, girls, young men, invalids in bath-chairs,"[752] therefore, in people who come to admire the luxuries and inventions produced by the nation's craftsmen. However, Woolf mocks these people whose sense of pride and dignity springs from the achievements of the Empire: "How, will all this dignity of their own, can they bring themselves to believe in that?"[753] Interestingly, Woolf adds that this last comment is pronounced by the thrush that appears earlier in the essay and that represents nature's voice. Whereas the organizers of the exhibition substantially changed the character of the place, they allowed some trees to remain at their place and Woolf describes the life that dwells between their branches: "You look up, and discover a whole chestnut tree with its blossoms standing; you look down, and see ordinary grass, scattered with petals, harbouring insects, sprinkled with stray wild flowers."[754] This natural beauty is then juxtaposed by the scene of the exhibition, the products of human effort and focus on lower-class people, who, like nature, spoil the overall splendid impression of the Empire: "All this the Duke of Devonshire should

751. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 169.
752. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 169-170.
753. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 170.
754. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 170.

have prevented."[755] The last part of the essay is concerned with the "problem of the sky" which is the only element that the organizers could not influence before the beginning of the exhibition. The sky "suffers all these domes and palaces to melt into its breast; receives them with such sombre and tender discretion,"[756] and it is personified by Woolf as it decides to show its potency and capability of thwarting the boasting of the Empire:

> But even as we watch and admire what we would fain credit to the forethought of Lieutenant-General Sir Travers Clarke, a rushing sound is heard. Is it the wind or is it the British Empire Exhibition? . . . The sky is livid, lurid, sulphurine. It is in violent commotion. . . Colonies are perishing and dispersing in spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates.[757]

Woolf uses the storm, the tool of the sky, to demonstrate that nature can affect and damage everything that is created by human action, which again demonstrates her effort to highlight the "smallness" of the human as opposed to the vastness and significance of the natural phenomena. Moreover, the fact that she connects human action with the Empire shows her criticism of the political layout based on the increasing exploitation of natural resources and destruction of natural environment. Although her reference to colonies must be read as the description of the individual pavilions dedicated to individual British colonies, it may also hint at Woolf's personal concern about the perishing Empire and the colonies that regain independence.[758]

Woolf advocates nature and counters destructive human action in the last section of the essay by evoking images of crumbling human products: "Pagodas are dissolving in dust.

755. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 170.
756. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 171.
757. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 171.
758. Woolf raises a similar concern in *The Waves* where she asks: "What is to be done about India, Ireland, or Morocco?"

Ferro-concrete is fallible."[759] This idea of nature's vengeance on humanity is confirmed by Woolf's apocalyptic vision that is foreshadowed in her essay "The Sun and the Fish," but fully acknowledged in this essay: "Humanity is rushing to destruction, but humanity is accepting its doom."[760] The essay "Thunder at Wembley" ends with the image of lightning spread across the sky and its comparison to the roots of trees. These might refer to the trees that were cut to provide room for the pavilions, and therefore, the whole essay might describe nature's reprisal for destruction of the fallen trees: "Cracks like the white roots of trees spread themselves across the firmament. The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky."[761] Like the overall tone of the essay, even this last passage is highly ironical and the phrase "for letting in the sky" refers to the organizers' failure to control everything including the weather and other natural phenomena. As a result, the storm that interrupts the display of the Empire may be considered a punishment for the constant human effort to subjugate nature. Furthermore, Woolf associates this failure with the failure of the Empire itself and hints at this political construct's fragile nature.

Interestingly, Woolf's focus on trees as living organisms that often must give way to human action is a recurrent theme in several of her works. In "The Mark on the Wall" Woolf outlines an image of afterlife and argues that when we lie buried in the ground, there is no difference between our body and the surrounding nature of which we become an integral part: "As for saying which are trees, and which are men and women, or whether there are such things, that one won't be in condition to do for fifty years or so. There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalls, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped

759. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 171.
760. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 171.
761. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 171.

blots of an indistinct colour. . .”[762] This indicates that man is only one part of the natural cycle and may become the part of soil from which other organisms are nourished. Later on in the essay Woolf returns to the image of a tree and argues that “Wood is a pleasant thing to think about.”[763] Then she provides a lengthy description of a tree’s life and the life of the surrounding organisms that depend on it: “The song of birds must sound very loud and strange in June; and how cold the feet of insects must feel upon it, as they make laborious progresses up the creases of the bark. . .”[764] The description ends with the tree’s merging with the ground from which the tree originally arose: “One by one the fibres snap beneath the immense cold pressure of the earth, then the last storm comes and, falling the highest branches drive deep into the ground again.”[765] However, Woolf insists that the life of a tree continues even after its decay because it is either transformed into something else, or it continues in the happy human thought that it produces: “Even so, life isn’t done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes. It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree.[766] Interestingly, Whitehead provides a similar image of a tree that stands in a forest and his survival “depends upon the association of various species”[767] which help the tree preserve the ideal conditions for his growth. Like Woolf, Whitehead also ends this passage with the image of the soil where “microbes necessary for its fertility” ensure the existence of subsequent life.

While here Woolf emphasizes the immortality of a single tree and its importance for other organisms, in *Mrs Dalloway* Septimus is capable of perceiving nature very intensely and

762. Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*, 49.
763. Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*, 53.
764. Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*, 54.
765. Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*, 54.
766. Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*, 54.
767. Whitehead, *Science*, 206.

directly warns humanity against cutting trees, which is only one of the ways how humans destroy life: "Men must not cut trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down)."[768] The character continues in his ecological rumination later in the novel, where in one of his hallucinations he turns directly to policy makers and urges them to realize that trees are alive, therefore, they deserve to be included in the concept of "universal love":

> The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first, that trees are alive; next, there is no crime; next, love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever.[769]

The passage indicates that the aliveness of trees and protection of nature represents an important issue for Woolf, which is even intensified by her reference to "profound truths." A similar aversion to the destruction of greenery appears in already mentioned short story "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection," where the woman protagonist regrets having to cut an overgrown branch and depriving it of life: "To cut an overgrown branch saddened her because it had once lived, and life was dear to her."[770] Furthermore, in her short story "The Shooting Party" Woolf describes a hunt in which a lot of animals are slaughtered, and she punishes her characters for enjoying this barbaric hobby, which suggests that she was also criticizing human behaviour towards animals. While men are shooting the animals, women are waiting for them inside, conversing and celebrating, waiting for the hunted meat, and looking forward to the feast. When the prey in brought into the house, Woolf captures very naturalistically the dead carcasses being flung into the larder:

768. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 18.
769. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 51.
770. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 224.

> The birds were dead now, their claws gripped tight, though they gripped nothing. The leathery eyelids were creased greyly over their eyes. Mrs Masters, the housekeeper, Wing the gamekeeper, took bunches of dead birds by the neck and flung them down on the slate door of the game larder. The slate floor became smeared and spotted with blood. The pheasants looked smaller now, as if their bodies had shrunk together.[771]

Later Woolf describes the women's luncheon consisting of roast meat in a similar way and emphasizes the act of carving a knife and slicing the bodies of the dead animals: "Miss Antonia drew the carving knife across the pheasant's breast firmly. She cut two slices and laid them on a plate. Deftly the footman whipped it from her, and old Miss Rashleigh raised her knife."[772] After that, the two women remember a hunt, during which a person was shot, and their feast is suddenly interrupted by a slate falling down a chimney and the arrival of men and dogs. which start fighting a spaniel. The squire starts to wave his tawse and hits Miss Rashleigh by accident. The woman stumbles and falls against a mantelpiece where the shield above the fireplace is loosened and "buries" her. The scene ends with the apocalyptic image of the wind attacking the house, the constant noise of the shooting, and the fall of a tree followed by the damage of the king's framed picture: "The wind lashed the panes of glass; shots volleyed the Park and a tree fell. And then King Edward in the silver frame slid, toppled and fell too."[773] Like in the essay "Thunder at Wembley," people are shown the power of nature that takes revenge for the human action which destroys its flora and fauna.

In reference to Septimus's suggestion that our protective behaviour towards nature might change the world entirely, it is possible to draw a tentative conclusion that in all the above-mentioned short stories and essays, Woolf shows her proto-ecological thinking based

771. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 256-257.
772. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 257.
773. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 260.

on the notion of "universal love" introduced by Septimus and on the criticism of all forms of killing and destroying. By showing human mishandling of nature and by underlying the characters' interconnection with nature illustrated in the previous sections of this chapter, Woolf suggests that the harmful behaviour towards nature stems from the denial that the humans' "very being is constituted by relations that ultimately connect them to everything in the universe."[774]

As it has already been demonstrated, women in Woolf's fiction are more likely to acknowledge the intrinsic connection with other human beings and surrounding nature, which is further developed in Woolf's pacifist manifesto *Three Guineas,* where she mentions that men are the ones responsible for death and destruction: "Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you [men], not by us [women]. . ."[775] In the rest of the essay, Woolf argues that this need to kill springs from the educational system which produces aggressive, competitive, authoritative men who then serve as the representatives of the Empire. Instead of this education based on the exercise of power, Woolf outlines her idea of education that would not teach "the arts of dominating other people; not the arts of ruling, of killing, or acquiring land and capital,"[776] but, rather, preach Septimus's "universal love," encourage connections between all living organisms and "discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life."[777] Therefore, the aim of new educational institutions is to "combine" and teach "the art of understanding other people's lives and minds," which echoes Whitehead's idea that the existence of a single tree depends on the organisms in its environment: "Every organism requires an environment of friends, partly to shield it from violent changes, and partly to

774. John B. Cobb, "Deep Ecology and Process Thought," *Process Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001): 121–130, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44798386.
775. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 9.
776. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 39.
777. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 40.

supply it with its wants."[778] Moreover, Whitehead suggests that those organisms that are endowed with some kind of "defensive armour," force, and larger size do not live more successful life than smaller and seemingly insignificant organisms. He argues that the use of force and physical and mental superiority "bars coöperations,"[779] which may be related to Woolf's criticism of male exercise of power that thwarts understanding and cooperation between individuals mentioned in *Three Guineas*. As a result, Septimus's "universal love" is a concept that would prevent the killing of men, cutting down trees, and destruction of other organisms.

The need to change the world by the profound truths of love, cooperation, and solidarity suggested by Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, or directly by Woolf in *Three Guineas*, is also the main subject of the essay "The Docks of London." The essay begins with a detailed description of the Port of London and the constant movement of arriving and outgoing ships. Then, the focus shifts from the ships towards the warehouses and crumbling buildings of the docks of London, which offer "the most dismal prospect of the world" with their "air of decrepitude" and "desolation."[780] However, the lifelessness of the place is immediately contrasted with the description of nature that once dominated the surroundings of the docks:

> When, suddenly, after acres and acres of this desolation one floats past an old stone house standing in a real field, with real trees growing in clumps, the sight is disconcerting. Can it be possible that there is earth, that there once were fields and crops beneath this desolation and disorder? Trees and fields seem to survive incongruously like a sample of another civilization among the wall-

778. Whitehead, *Science*, 206.
779. Whitehead, *Science*, 206.
780. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 194.

> paper factories and soap factories that have stamped out old lawns and terraces.[781]

The passage demonstrates Woolf's concern about the human destructive power that can erase the beauty of nature existing for several centuries. She contrasts the simple enjoyment of nature's beauty with a modern urge to exploit and transform nature:

> Now pleasure has gone and labour has come; and it stands derelict like some beauty in her midnight finery looking out over mud flats and candle works, while malodorous mounds of earth, upon which trucks are perpetually tipping fresh heaps, have entirely consumed the fields where, a hundred years ago, lovers wandered and picked violets.[782]

This passage also illustrates that Woolf was concerned about the way humanity processes rubbish and disposes it on large waste dumps, which destroy otherwise fertile parts of land. Woolf continues in this description of man-made waste and emphasizes that the dumps are getting larger and larger every year:

> Barges heaped with old buckets, razor blades, fish tails, newspapers and ashes—whatever we have on our plates and throw into our dustbins—are discharging their cargoes upon the most desolate land in the world. The long mounds have been fuming and smoking and harbouring innumerable rats and growing a rank coarse grass and giving off a gritty, acrid air for fifty years. The dumps get higher and higher, and thicker and thicker, their sides more precipitous with tin cans, their pinnacles more angular with ashes year by year.[783]

781. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 194.
782. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 194.
783. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 194-195.

After that Woolf turns her attention towards the ships that arrive from other parts of England, and overseas, and explores the goods that are brought "from the plains, from the forest, from the pastures of the whole world."[784] This indicates that the merchandise that is sorted out, "sampled and recorded," is the product of the exploitation of not only English nature but nature of its colonies and other countries of the world. This impression is even intensified when a dock worker lists the things that he sometimes finds in a single sack of cinnamon – "a snake, a scorpion, a beetle, a lump of amber, the diseased tooth of an elephant, a basin of quicksilver."[785] Therefore, Woolf shows that the inorganic matter or living creatures are often accidentally brought from its country of origin only because of human need for cinnamon. Moreover, Woolf continues in emphasizing that even these curiosities, accidentally brought to England, receive their mercantile value which is the reigning principle of the docks:

> But with this one concession to curiosity, the temper of the docks is severely utilitarian. Oddities, beauties, rarities may occur, but if so, they are instantly tested for their mercantile value. Laid on the floor among the circles of elephant tusks in a heap or larger and browner tusks than the rest.[786]

Woolf then explains the diverse uses of ivory and points out ironically that while we turn it into temporary utile products, the material and the animal it comes from may be much older than a civilized country: "Thus if you buy an umbrella or a looking-glass not of the finest quality, it is likely that you are buying the tusk of a brute that roamed through Asian forests before England was an island."[787] The quotation reveals Woolf's criticism of human subjects, who think that they have right to kill, use and transform the forms of life that are much older than humanity. Woolf continues in the same tone and celebrates ironically the human skill to

784. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 195.
785. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 196.
786. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 196.
787. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 196.

turn all the materials into products of use and value: "One tusk makes a billiard ball, another serves for a shoe-horn—every commodity in the world has been examined and graded according to its use and value. Trade is ingenious and indefatigable beyond the bounds of imagination."[788] At this point it seems that Woolf criticizes the consumerist society, which attributes value to things and living creatures merely on the basis of their versatile use, however, apart from the utility, Woolf suggests that "beauty begins to steal in" the warehouses, in the design of the machinery, in the cool vaults, where wine is meant to mature, and that "use produces beauty as a by-product."[789] Moreover, she points out that this beauty exists independently of human action and its observer, and that it originates from the combination of diverse elements such as smell, colours, and shapes:

> A yellow cat precedes us; otherwise the vaults are empty of human life. Here side by side the objects of your worship lie swollen with sweet liquor, spouting red wine if tapped. A winy sweetness fills the vaults like incense. Here and there a gas jet flares, not indeed to give light, or because of the beauty of the green and grey arches which it calls up in endless procession, down avenue after avenue, but simply because so much heat is required to mellow the wine.[790]

The passage illustrates Woolf's ambiguous feeling towards modern production and consumerism which at the same time destroy nature, as indicated in the previous quotations, and produce a certain kind of beauty, like in the last quotation. For this reason, her description of the docks may be regarded at once as critical and celebratory, and due to the use of irony and dualistic perspective employed persistently throughout her works, it is hard to give

788. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 196.
789. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 197.
790. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 197.

preference to one over the other. John Flanagan points out that Jane Marcus, for example, interprets Woolf's use of irony in *The Waves* as the "means by which Woolf distances herself from the imperialist project."[791] In a similar vein, I would suggest that Woolf's ambiguous—partly celebratory and partly ironical—tone in "The Docks of London" embellishes the author's criticism of the imperial capitalism.[792] This claim is supported even by the fact that both *The Waves*, published in 1931, and the discussed essay, published in *Good Housekeeping* in 1931, were written in the late stage of Woolf's writing career, in which the author focussed on covert criticism of the Empire.

Woolf's focus on the use and value of goods reveals the writer's concern about modern capitalist society, which, as Whitehead points out, due to advancements in science and political economy "directed attention to *things* as opposed to *values.*" Whitehead elaborates on this idea and suggests that "ultimate values were excluded" and he provides examples such as religious faith or the value of human life and labour: "A creed of competitive business morality was evolved, in some respects curiously high; but entirely devoid of consideration of human life. The workmen were conceived as mere hands, drawn from the pool of labour."[793] In the same way, Woolf's warning against replacement of beauty with use and commodity value and her discussion of exploitation of natural resources associates the writer with the contemporary debates of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene,

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791. John Flanagan, "What's History without the Empire?: The Colonial Death Drive in *The Waves*," *The Electronic Journal of the English Philology Unit at the University of Helsinki*, vol. 3 (2004): 4, https://blogs.helsinki.fi/hes-eng/volumes/volume-3-special-issue-on-literary-studies/whats-history-without-the-empire-the-colonial-death-drive-in-the-waves-joseph-flanagan/.
792. Allisa G. Karl suggests in her book *Modernism and the Marketplace: Literary Culture and Consumer Capitalism in Rhys, Woolf, Stein, and Nella Larsen* (London: Routledge, 2009), page 61, that this dual perspective, which at the same time celebrates and criticises imperialism, demonstrates "the insidiousness of imperialist and capitalist ideologies and their conditioning of mundane and habitual practices."
793. Whitehead, *Science*, 203.

especially with its attempt to regard "humans as a species, who are often alienated from the effects of their labors."[794]

As we know from Susan Squier's essay "'The London Scene': Gender and Class in Virginia Woolf's London," Woolf's original intention in "The Docks of London" was precisely to criticize the "consuming middle class" society, which exploited the labour of working class and the natural resources. The first drafts of Woolf's essay contained several passages where Woolf mentions "unremitting labour full of sweat & agony & squalor & horror" contrasted with the "million different luxuries & necessities" enjoyed by the middle class. Therefore, the original version of the text was supposed to illustrate "the price in human suffering paid by the working classes to produce the necessities and luxuries which middle- and upper-class England consumes."[795] Moreover, the original version of the passage describing production and handling of waste contained a reference to silt being transported and dropped into the sea, the image of men throwing away their rubbish contrasted with the image of women cleaning the mess after them, intersected by the sailing out of the liner towards India. According to Squire, had not the passages of social criticism been removed; the essay's conclusion would be much more ironical and critical than the celebratory tone of the human progress and ability of the published text:

> The only thing, one comes to feel, that can change the routine of the docks is a change in ourselves. Suppose, for instance, that we gave up drinking claret, or took to using rubber instead of wool for our blankets, the whole machinery of production and distribution would rock and reel and seek about to adapt itself

794. Melina Pereira Savi, "The Anthropocene (and) (in) the Humanities: Possibilities for Literary Studies", *Revista Estudos Feministas* 25, no. 2 (2017), https://www.jstor.org/stable/90007996.
795. Susan Squier,"'The London Scene': Gender and Class in Virginia Woolf's London," *Twentieth Century Literature* 29, no. 4 (1983): 490, https://www.jstor.org/stable/441430.

afresh. It is we—our tastes, our fashions, our needs—that make the cranes dip and swing, that call the ships from the sea. Our body is their master.[796]

Squier suggests that Woolf identifies with the consumer middle class, which rules the docks and the country's economy by their needs, and also that this identification and suppression of her original passages of social criticism was a reasonable decision to "avoid friction with the magazine's audience."[797] I would like to argue that although Woolf changes the pronoun to "we," she mockingly pretends to identify not only with the consumer middle class, but with the whole concept of man regarded as the master of nature. Consequently, Woolf's later suggestion that "one feels an important, a complex, a necessary animal"[798] while watching their achievements may be read as an ironical comment on the human self-proclaimed supremacy. This reading is justified not only by Woolf's original intention to criticize the consumerist society, but also by the very ending of the published version of the essay, where Woolf does not elaborate on the success of capitalist consumer society but returns her attention towards the natural elements exploited by human action: "Flocks upon flocks of Australian sheep have submitted to the shears because we demand woollen overcoats in winter. As for the umbrella that we swing idly to and fro, a mammoth who roared through the swamps fifty thousand years ago has yielded up its tusk to make the handle."[799] This passage directly refers to the involuntary sacrifice that animals make in order to satisfy human needs. Moreover, the image of a person merrily swinging his or her umbrella contrasted with the slaughtering of mammoths, or the image of a person wrapped comfortably in a woollen coat juxtaposed with the scene of sheep shearing seem to be highly ironical and critical. The very last lines of the essay describe the incessant movement of goods import, sorting out, and

796. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 198.
797. Squier, 489, Woolf wrote the essay for the magazine *Good Housekeeping* which was destined to middle class housewives.
798. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 198.
799. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 198.

transportation of products all over England while other ships depart for colonies to seek for more merchandise. This ending highlights the indifference of consumers towards the suffering of animals and the price that nature pays for satisfying their needs, and indicates that this misuse of nature and its resources is likely to continue until we have realised that the only way to change this system, "the routine of the docks," represents "the change in ourselves" mentioned earlier in the essay. Therefore, this "change in ourselves" refers to the necessity of admitting the detrimental impact of human action and to the urgency of adoption of Septimus's universal love principle, which treats people, animals, and other natural elements as equals because they are all equally "alive."

Interestingly, ecofeminists Dona Haraway,[800] Isabelle Stengers, and Viviane Despret[801] take inspiration in Woolf's ability to "venture off the beaten track to meet unexpected, non-natal kin,"[802] her urge to pose questions and envisage "the idea of a world that could be habitable."[803] While discussing the Anthropocene in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucen*e, Haraway refers to Woolf while talking about the realization that humans are responsible for the conditions of life of other species, bodies, and things.[804] All three ecofeminists allude to Woolf's passage from *Three Guineas* where the author responds to the question about women's tools to prevent the war as follows: "Think we must. . . Let us never cease from thinking what is this 'civilisation' in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them?"[805] In this response, Woolf emphasizes that it is important for women to question the beaten tracks of

800. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 130.
801. Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret, *Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaightful Daughters of Virginia Woolf* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014).
802. Haraway, 130.
803. Stengers and Despret, 159.
804. Savi, 3.
805. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 73.

our society and not to accept them without considering their consequences. In her article "The Anthropocene (and) (in) the Humanities: Possibilities for Literary Studies" Melina Pereira Savi suggests that the man's question about women's possibilities to prevent the war may be transposed to the context of ecology and reformulates it as follows: "How can we improve this situation we have put ourselves in, where climate change threatens to end with innumerous lives on Earth, including our own?"[806] Therefore, Woolf's injection "Think we must" and its continuation do not necessarily refer mainly to women, who must question patriarchy, but these words, in general, make us reflect on our habits and detrimental behaviour, which would result in gradual "change in ourselves," and consequently "the change in society" longed for by Septimus. In this light, the pronoun "we" from the final passage of Woolf´s essay "Docks of London" does not imply the author's identification with middle class and her celebration of consumerism, but reveals that Woolf was aware of her complicity in human mistreatment of nature. To read this essay as the celebration of the economic growth of the Empire and consumerism of the country's middle class, which is based on the exploitation of natural resources and ill-treatment of animals, would contradict Woolf's celebration of the connection between human beings and nature. As a result, Septimus's argument that "trees are alive," Louis's exclamation in *The Waves* that "All seems alive,"[807] Clarissa Dalloway being a part "of the trees at home; of the house,"[808] or the suggestion from *Between the Acts* that "Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one"[809] would come to nothing. Nevertheless, Woolf's decision to suppress the critical passages in the short story complicates, and partly undermines, the argument made in this section.

806. Savi, 3.
807. Woolf, *The Waves*, 130.
808. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 7.
809. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 388.

Conclusion

Woolf's "Philosophy"

At the beginning of her essayistic memoir "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia Woolf talks about the major influences on her personality and work. She mentions that the family's summer stays in St Ives, Cornwall, were "perennial, invaluable"[810] and that "if life has a base that it stands upon,"[811] for her, it is undoubtedly the moments when she was lying in her St. Ives' nursery and listening to the rhythmic sound of waves, which led to moments of ecstasy and intensive experience Woolf calls "moments of being." Woolf argues that these moments are important for her aesthetic perception of reality as a writer and that she thinks the moments are accompanied with "a revelation of some order" and "a token of some real thing behind appearances."[812] In her writing, Woolf attempts to penetrate beneath the surface of appearances and fragments, and she retrieves the solidity and reality of things by putting them into words and giving them a sense of wholeness: "It is a rupture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together."[813] The wholeness and unity that are repeatedly evoked in the essay, and also in many of Woolf's works, as it has been pointed out in this dissertation, is the basis of Woolf's "personal philosophy" which is primarily defined as an ontological interconnection of all human beings:

> From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the

810. Woolf, "A Sketch," 128.
811. Woolf, "A Sketch," 64.
812. Woolf, "A Sketch," 72.
813. Woolf, "A Sketch," 72.

> truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; and certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.[814]

First, it is important to focus on Woolf's notion of the word "philosophy" which does not refer to a system of philosophical enquiry and concepts but encapsulates her perspective of reality and the basis of her artistic vision. In other words, it may be summarized as her own system of beliefs and ideas which helps her give some frame to miscellaneous and often contradictory impressions and experience. As Benjamin Hagen points out, Woolf rejected abstract philosophy dissociated from real life, of which we can find evidence in her letter concerning Herbert Read's review of Roger Fry's lectures, where Woolf asks the question "what is the value of a philosophy which has no power over life?"[815] A similar definition of philosophy is provided also by Bernard in *The Waves*, where the character defines his philosophy as something constantly evolving, incoherent, and connected to the everyday experience: "My philosophy, always accumulating, welling up moment by moment, runs like quicksilver a dozen ways at once."[816]

Returning to the description of Woolf's philosophy in "A Sketch of the Past," it also reveals Woolf's rejection of the transcendental, or divine, disconnected from the world we perceive, and the author's atheism probably inspired by Leslie Stephen. In this respect, Woolf's philosophy might be described as a very down-to-earth, atheistic, and "materialistic," however, "the pattern behind the cotton wool" and the connection at the ontological level indicate that Woolf acknowledges that there is some organizing principle behind the physical world, although it is not the result of the work of a divine being. For example, Mark Hussey argues that there is certain "yearning for transcendence of the world of time and death" and a

814. Woolf, "A Sketch" 72.
815. Hagen, "Bloomsbury and Philosophy" 146.
816. Woolf, *The Waves*, 123.

quasi-religious sense of "something more to life,"[817] and J. Ashley Foster suggests that Woolf's "luminous halo," which often refers to the spiritual aspect of reality, "is not transcendent but immanent in the material."[818] In this respect, Woolf's philosophy is not dualistic but more likely a monist one, as it interweaves the spiritual and material aspects of existence, for example in the essay "On Being Ill," where she likens the inseparable cooperation between the body and mental experience to "the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea."[819] This reveals that Woolf was interested in the fundamental questions of philosophy, and particularly in the question of the substance of reality and the relation of our experience with this reality. Woolf pays special attention to these issues in her early essay "Modern Fiction," where she urges writers to find new techniques to capture "reality, this essential thing,"[820] outlines new possibilities to construct characters and reconsiders the traditional notion of a plot. Woolf demonstrates this attempt to reconceptualize reality in fiction in her early short stories "The Mark on the Wall," where she asks a question about the knowledge of the external world and provides several definitions of the mark, which enables her to come to a conclusion that there is no "standard thing, the real thing."[821] The question of the nature of reality is foregrounded especially in the novel *To the Lighthouse*, where it is primarily Mr Ramsay who conducts a research into "subject and object and the nature of reality."[822] However, all the other characters attempt to conceptualize their own notion of reality and position in which they stand in relation to other elements of reality, whether it be Lily, who tries to capture the personality of Mrs Ramsay, or Mrs Ramsay, who places herself in the centre of the interpersonal relations.

817. Hussey, 96.
818. Foster, 54.
819. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 101.
820. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 8.
821. Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, 86.
822. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 28.

Furthermore, Woolf's above-mentioned rejection of the existence of creators such as Shakespeare or Beethoven intimates another aspect of Woolf's philosophy, namely her idea that our universe and culture might be self-creative or even collectively produced, which is a direct consequence of her aversion to a dominating subject or "strong ego"[823] that stands in opposition to the subjects/objects in its environment. The quotation from "A Sketch of the Past" suggests that the author, a subject, manifests themselves only in the produced work of art, an object, and cannot be extracted from it. As a result, Woolf's idea that "we are the thing itself" is repeatedly manifested in her fiction by a gradual deconstruction of the subject/object binary, for example in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mrs Ramsay "became the thing she looked at,"[824] or in *The Waves*, where Susan becomes naturals objects in her environment, for example a stalk or a tree.

These hints at Woolf's interest in questions such as the nature of our being, the fundamental substance of reality, the relation between the subject and the object, and the interpersonal connection of human beings illustrate that Woolf's fiction may be read as philosophical, or "philosophically literary."[825] Woolf reveals her interest in philosophy also in her essays and reviews, for example in "The Cosmos," a review of Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson's journals, where Woolf describes the artist's interest in the meaning of the word cosmos and the harmony between objects of the naturals word. Woolf highlights the man's focus on the everyday objects, behind which some profound truths and symbols are hidden: "Nothing exists in itself but only as a means to something else. The solid objects of daily life become rimmed with high purposes, significant, symbolic."[826] It is interesting that this relation of objects and something "transcendental" behind them is also explored in Woolf's

823. Banfield, 170-174.
824. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 70.
825. Hagen, 139.
826. Virginia Woolf, "The Cosmos," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume 4 (1925-1928*), ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt 1994), 372.

own prose, for example in "Solid Objects" or *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, Woolf mentions Cobden-Sanderson's intimate connections with naturals elements – the fact that he was "more related to the hills and streams"[827] than people around him. This idea is also foregrounded in Woolf's fiction, where human characters are often interwoven with the surrounding environment.

Woolf herself disliked prose whose main topic was interpersonal relationships because this kind of writing neglected the fact that "a large and important part of life consists in our emotion toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset. . ."[828] In her review of L. P. Jacks's works, which appears under the title "Philosophy in Fiction" in Woolf's collected essays, Woolf reveals her interest in philosophical fiction and argues that it is, at the same time, intellectually demanding and brings new perspectives. She claims that Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, English educator, philosopher, and Unitarian minister, was "something besides a novelist"[829] because his writing is enriched with the knowledge of philosophy and religious speculation, which is for her the quality "which we wish that more novelists shared with him."[830] Moreover, Woolf states that this philosophical mode of Jacks's fiction enables the author to articulate "a different method of approach and a different direction,"[831] by which she means that the author offers new perspectives on writing and reading and shows his readers a little different version of reality, however intellectually challenging it might be. It may be deduced from these various reflections of Woolf on philosophy and literature that the author was intrigued by philosophical enquiry, which is

827. Woolf, "The Cosmos" 372. Here Woolf quotes Cobden-Sanderson's diary entry from 21 May 1913.
828. Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," in *Selected Essays* 80.
829. Woolf, "Philosophy in Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginis Woolf: Volume 2, 1912-1918*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1987), 209.
830. Woolf, "Philosophy in Fiction," 209.
831. Woolf, "Philosophy in Fiction," 209.

mirrored in the fact that her writing poses more questions than provides answers. Whereas it may be said that her writing is philosophical, it does not provide a clear, unified, and unambiguous system of beliefs and ideas, but, rather, explores in literary language the general changes in society, philosophy, and science of her time. Therefore, Woolf attempted to convey the same ideas aesthetically in her writing as her contemporary philosophers, biologists, and physicists.

While Woolf's philosophy has been analysed and put in dialogue with numerous philosophers, this thesis suggests that if it is to be approximated to anything, it is very close to the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead, whose large scope includes and analyses the same ideas as Woolf's personal philosophy outlined above. Whitehead himself claims in his dialogues that art is the means to handle our experience and gives it some kind of structure: "'Art,' said Whitehead, coming to our rescue, 'is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern."[832] Interestingly, this task of art is often the subject of Woolf's fiction, which is foreshadowed in the essay "Modern Fiction," where Woolf argues that writers should "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in order in which they fall" and "trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness."[833] Moreover, Woolf's recurrent mention of the pattern is also important because it appears in her fiction not only in reference to the structure of our experience but also to the interconnection of human beings in "A Sketch of the Past." In this light, the four chapters of this thesis, devoted to various aspects of Woolf's aesthetic treatment of reality, may be regarded as an attempt to trace this pattern that organizes Woolf's experience of the visible world. Furthermore, Whitehead claims in *Science and The Modern World* that "it is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives

832. Alfred North Whitehead and Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher 2001), 225.
833. Woolf, *Selected Essays*, 9.

its expression" and that literature reveals "the inward thoughts of a generation."[834] The philosopher illustrates this on the example of Romantic poetry that rebelled against the scientific materialism and mechanistic perspective of nature in favour of the organic view of nature. In a similar way, the analysis of Woolf's fiction in this thesis uncovers the writer's generation's ideas about the universe. Moreover, Woolf's constant return to the philosophical questions about the nature of experience, reality, nature, and the relation between the humans and these entities, may be regarded as a contribution to the tradition of male-dominated philosophy. In her short story "A Society" Woolf ironically discusses the roles of men and women in society and their contribution to its general welfare. The female characters of the story are sent to institutions and trades dominated by men to find out what the greatest achievement of masculinity are and the women return with reports that eulogize men's success:

> Here one after another of our messengers rose and delivered their reports. The marvels of civilisation far exceeded our expectations, and as we learn for the first time how man flies in the air, talks across space, penetrates to the heart of an atom, and embraces the universe in his speculations a murmur of admiration burst from our lips.[835]

Knowing that Woolf was highly critical of the fact that women were not allowed to participate in the ground-breaking discoveries and advancements of civilisation, this thesis aimed to demonstrate that Woolf envisages her writing as her own means to penetrate to the depths of reality, to discover the "atoms" of experience and "embrace the universe" in her artistic way, which may be regarded as an equal contribution to the men's philosophical enquires of her time. Particularly, the thesis analysed that her "literary philosophy" is strikingly similar to

834. Whitehead, *Science*, 75-76.
835. Woolf, *Complete Shorter Fiction*, 131.

Whitehead's philosophy or organism, which proved to be a fruitful and enlightening tool while analysing Woolf's writing. Although the thesis was intended to discuss primarily Virginia Woolf's writing and the way it is may be captured via Whitehead's concepts, it finally turned out to be equally informative of Whitehead's philosophy of organism and its potential for literary analysis. Moreover, while focusing on the issues such as panpsychism and the deconstruction of the human/nonhuman binary, the thesis demonstrated that Whitehead's organic metaphysical system is in many ways timeless, since it is still relevant in the context of contemporary critical theory. This relevance, of course, springs from the fact that many contemporary ecocritics or new materialists, who are also mentioned in this thesis, were more or less directly influenced by Whitehead or Deleuze, whose thought is heavily indebted to the prominent process philosopher. The following conclusion summarizes the main reasons why Woolf may be, with no reservations, labelled as a process speculative philosopher and why Whitehead still seems to resonate in contemporary critical debates.

Woolf as a Speculative Process Philosopher

Process philosophy is a school of philosophical thought that dates back to antiquity, to philosophers such as Heraclitus and his famous phrase "panta rhei," which emphasizes the fact that the universe is in a constant flux and process of change. His philosophy of flow was a direct reaction to philosophers such as Parmenides, who believed in the static nature of the universe. Similarly, the twentieth century process philosophers, with Whitehead in the lead, refused the notion of static and solid substance, which dominated natural science of that time, and attempted to approach the universe as an organism comprised of microparticles of experience that combine in creative configurations and larger societies of the visible world. Due to the constant process of becoming and perishing of these particles, which Whitehead calls "actual entities," this ontology undermines the traditional notion of stable and changeless matter and permits the accommodation of experience as integral part of the visible world, whereby it subverts the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Whitehead personally rejected this dualism represented, on the one hand, by the late 19th century British idealism of F.H. Bradley, which was "too much divorced from the scientific outlook,"[836] and, on the other hand, scientific materialism of mechanical philosophy and physics based on "irreducible brute matter."[837] Whitehead oversteps this dualism by envisaging a theory of speculative non-reductionist monism, which acknowledges the existence of material reality but imagines this reality as composed of atoms described as "drops of experience."[838]

Virginia Woolf solves the same dilemma in the first two decades of the 20th century, when she objects to the materialist turn in the fiction of her contemporaries, who focus too much on external details and leave out a character's experience completely. Contrary to writers such as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, or H.G. Wells, she urges modern writers to

836. Whitehead, *Science,* 63.
837. Whitehead, *Science*, 17.
838. Whitehead, *Process*, 18.

focus on the internal life of a character and transcription of their experience. It has been pointed out that her idea of atoms of experience outlined in "Modern Fiction" is strikingly similar to Whitehead's definition of actual entities. Moreover, it has been demonstrated in her essay "On Being Ill" that Woolf may also be called a monist who attributes the same significance to the material and mental aspects of reality and insists on the interrelation of these kinds of experience. Consequently, the first two chapters analysed Woolf's and Whitehead's engagement with the idea that the notions of subject and object are only relative and interchangeable terms. While Whitehead solves this problem on the microlevel of actual entities, which are at the same time subjects of their own experience of the environment and objects to be experienced by their environment, Woolf applies this idea to macroscale objects, including human beings and material objects such as houses or trees. It has been illustrated that the characters in her short stories "The Mark on the Wall" and "Solid Objects" often enter intimate relationships with objects in their environment, these objects lose their solidity and become part of the perceiving subject during the process of "prehension." Conversely, the subject, for example Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, prehends an object and "becomes" that object, which erases the distance between the two entities by merging into one entity. This approaching of the human subject towards a nonhuman object anticipated the discussion of the following chapters, where Woolf is represented as a thinker who undermines anthropocentrism rooted both in Western science and literature.

This natural interchange between the roles of a subject and an object and simultaneous adoption of both roles are also enabled by Woolf's and Whitehead's reconfiguration of the term "things" which are no longer static blocks of matter but multiple organic entities that "enjoy adventures of change throughout time and space"[839] like John's lump of glass in "Solid Objects," which "loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal

839. Whitehead, *Process*, 35.

shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it."[840] This quotation also illustrates that Woolf's fiction is not filled with fixed unchangeable things but processes that emerge and develop in relation to their environment. This nature of Woolf's view of reality is foreshadowed already in her essay on Montaigne, where she acknowledges that "movement and change are the essence of our being" and that "rigidity is death."[841] Therefore, it may be concluded that both Woolf and Whitehead rejected materialism rooted either in science, art, or literature of their time and attempted to reconsider the everyday reality, which is no longer divided into active subjects and passive objects but entities that possess properties of both of these categories.

Their refocus on experience as an integral part of materiality and intention to link the subject and the object may be also seen as a parallel to the aesthetics of Post-Impressionism. In his essay "The Post-Impressionists" Fry talks about the difference between Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, and he argues that what the Post-Impressionists oppose is the Impressionists' urge to depict the exact impression or appearance of an object. On the one hand, this approach to painting produces pictures which capture the exact appearance of matter, but, on the other hand, fail to express "emotional significance which lies in things."[842] Therefore, whereas for Fry the Impressionist paintings capture dead material nature of one's impression, to which we as subject-observers cannot relate, the Post-Impressionist paintings emit an emotion, which Whitehead called "lure for feeling,"[843] and cease to be objects separate from perceiving subjects because they intermingle with the experience of the perceiving subject. Woolf, for example, finds this ability of a painting to blur the distinction between the subject and the object in Vanessa Bell's paintings which "give us an emotion"

840. Woolf, "Solid Objects," 104.
841. Woolf, "Montaigne," 134.
842. Roger Fry, "The Post-Impressionists," 82.
843. Whitehead, *Process*, 25.

and illustrate that her sister was an artist "to whom the visible world has given a shock of emotion."[844]

It has been demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis that Woolf's characters, for example John in "Solid Objects," or Lily and Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, also experience a shock caused by their encounter with everyday objects, which usually results in a strong surge of emotion and giving up of the strong subject position. While Fry discusses the Impressionist painting, he rejects their depiction of an impression of a thing as it appears to a perceiving mind, because it completely leaves out the basic characteristics of a thing, for example "the 'treeness' of a tree."[845] This objection demonstrates that Fry, in fact, accuses the Impressionists of bifurcating nature and the visible world in the same way as Whitehead's contemporary scientists. For Fry, the Impressionists distinguished between the things themselves and the impression of them, which is mediated by our mind and changing external conditions. Analogously, Whitehead claimed that "the theory of psychic additions" bifurcated the visible world into "the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness."[846] Instead, Whitehead suggested that what one sees is the final and real fact in nature, an object to be studied by natural science that includes all the properties perceived by an observer. In "Solid Objects" Woolf studies the piece of material collected by John in the same way as natural scientists of her time, and she highlights all the diverse qualities the objects possess and does not indicate that these qualities are only added by a perceiving mind or result from John's solipsism. Throughout the story, Woolf emphasizes the solidity and "realness" of the objects that have emotional impact on the minds in their surroundings.

844. Virginia Woolf, "Foreword to Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5: 1929 to 1932, ed, Stuart N. Clarke (London: The Hogarth Press 2009), 139-140.
845. Fry, "The Post-Impressionists," 82.
846. Whitehead, *The Concept*, 21.

The second chapter of this thesis elaborated on the first chapter and used Whitehead's idea of an actual entity described as a subject of its experience. Since it can influence its process of becoming and affect the objects in its environment, it has a certain degree of "sentience." Therefore, no piece of material can be regarded as purely inert and lifeless. The attribution of psychic properties and experience to physical material is often labelled as panpsychism, of which Whitehead is often considered to be a representative. In this respect, Whitehead anticipates the theories of currently popular new materialism and Jane Bennett's idea of vibrant matter, which liberates material objects from their passivity and endows them with agency. It has also been pointed out that several new materialists, for example Karen Barad, were influenced either directly by Whitehead, or indirectly via Deleuze. Consequently, Whitehead's idea of active nature, which he himself demonstrates on the example of British Romantics in a chapter of his book *Science and the Modern World*, was used to analyse Woolf's anthropomorphic descriptions of "enminded" and active objects in her fiction. After the general introduction to panpsychism, the chapter focused on objects in the novel *To the Lighthouse*, mainly the central passage "Time Passes," where inanimate entities such as ships, cliffs, and the lighthouse seem to be conscious of their environment and interact with human and nonhuman objects/subjects in their environment. For example, the lighthouse "laid its caress"[847] and Lily's canvas "rebukes" the artist with its "uncompromising white stare,"[848] which shows that the human experience is often decentred in the novel and the inanimate world acquires proto-psychic properties and agency. The same sentient materiality was tracked in Woolf's other novels, for example in *Orlando*, where the protagonist's mansion is personified, or in *Jacob's Room* where Woolf endows the moor with sentience and

847. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 145.
848. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 171.

emphasizes "breathing"[849] and action of natural phenomena independent of the behaviour of humans.

The following part of the chapter then explored the emphasis that Woolf lays on life and agency as a universal quality distributed in nature, which is illustrated in some of her short stories, and most significantly in her posthumously published "The Death of the Moth." Therefore, the first half of the chapter elaborates on Derek Ryan's discussion of animal consciousness in relation to Jacob von Uexküll's concept of "umwelt,"[850] in other words a perceptual world in which an organism exists and acts as a subject, and extends the idea of sentient organisms beyond the animate organisms to the realm of the inanimate material world. This notion of universally distributed experience in nature indicates that Woolf was aware of anthropocentrism and materialism of the modern period, which entails that her recurrent anthropomorphic descriptions of matter represent her own response to the central position of the human subject not only in literature but also in modern science, which supported the human action in general, regardless its impact on the environment. In this respect, both Whitehead and Woolf opposed anthropocentrism and the celebration of the scientific and material progress of their time, and continued in the footsteps of the Romantics,[851] who could still see the Wordsworthian "splendour in the grass" and were conscious of the intimate relation between the humans and the surrounding world. Moreover, they both anticipated the theories of new materialism that acknowledge the "vibrancy" of matter, alongside which Woolf's fiction has already been read. However, these accounts did not emphasize enough the fact that material objects are not only centres of agency but also of

849. Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 163.
850. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 134.
851. In her book *Romantic Moderns* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010) Alexandra Harris analyses the way English modernist painters and writers, such as Woolf, Roger Fry, John Piper or E.M. Forster, did not simply accept the continental focus on the new, modern and the scientific progress, which lead to the rejection of the Romantic aesthetics, but elaborated on the Romantic tradition.

experience. Therefore, Whitehead's and Woolf's inclination towards panpsychism, their attribution of experience to inanimate nature, acquires an ethical aspect by recognising that even material things and nonhuman animals are "autonomous centres of value."[852]

As in the case of the blurred boundary between the subject and the object discussed in the first chapter, which was related to the techniques of the Post-Impressionist painting, even Woolf's and Whitehead's emphasis on experience dispersed throughout nature may be put in dialogue with the Post-Impressionist conception of nature. It has been pointed out in the second chapter of this thesis that the Bloomsbury Group members understood "nature" in two ways—first, as a source of aesthetic emotion, and second, as the material world—which often cannot be clearly distinguished from each other.[853] In this respect, the chapter focused primarily on the larger definition of nature as the material world, however, it also dealt with emotion and experience that are either directly present in nature or produced by perceiving it. As demonstrated on Whitehead's reconfiguration of the concept of matter as a megaprocess consisting of constantly changing clusters of experiential particles, the concept of nature, in the sense of the material world, was being redefined at the beginning of the 20th century by diverse advancements in philosophy and science. Therefore, it is not surprising that this reconceptualization was also reflected in the visual art of that time.

When Fry accuses the Impressionists of producing a mere imitation of nature, he emphasizes that what is captured in their images is a passive, or inert, nature dependent on the human observer, or in his own words "a passive attitude towards the appearances of things."[854] Fry suggests that a painting should also capture the emotion that an object evokes by its "significant form." Although a Post-Impressionist painting often represents "still lives," it does not depict passive objects, but active sources of emotion or experience, and therefore,

852. Shaviro, 89.
853. Adkins, 226.
854. Fry, "The Post-Impressionists," 82.

sources of nonhuman agency.[855] As a result, Post-Impressionist paintings are often deprived of human presence or indicate that human subjects are made from the same texture as material objects. For example, Vanessa Bell's paintings never contain fully framed and perfectioned human figures, but often silent people without a face or partially blurred face, who are "aesthetically on an equality with the China por or the chrysanthemum."[856] Hence, this Post-Impressionist attraction to the nonhuman world and nonhuman agency may be likened to both Whitehead's philosophical focus on nature as a source of feeling and experience, based on experiencing actual entities, and Woolf's descriptions of animate nature that push human agency aside. Moreover, the Post-Impressionists were interested in an object's relations with other objects and the relations of the colours, forms, and shapes, or in Woolf's words "the pattern" behind the cotton wool of everydayness, which cannot be experienced by human perception. Woolf herself encapsulated this interest in the pattern beyond the objects of visible world in the following quotation from her diary where she talks about her perception of Cézanne's painting of apples: "There are six apples in the Cézanne picture. What can 6 apples not be? I began to wonder. There's their relationship to each other, & their colour, & their solidity."[857] It has been demonstrated that the objects in Woolf's fiction are often depicted by the interaction with other objects, for example in *To the Lighthouse* where the cliffs are aware of the ships and even seem to communicate with each other, or in *Jacob's Room* where "the whole air is tremulous with breathing; elastic with filaments."[858] It has been pointed out in the second chapter of this thesis that Woolf's descriptions of the animate and intrinsically interrelated nature may be interpreted via Whitehead's innovative concept of nature based on universal relationality of subjective actual entities, or societies. Therefore, it

855. Adkins, 233.
856. Woolf, "Foreword to Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell," 139.
857. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1915-1919*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 140.
858. Woolf, *Jacob's Room* 163.

is possible to draw a tentative conclusion that there was a general tendency in the first decades of the 20th century to forge new conceptions of nature, which would oppose the 19th century ideas of passive and materialist nature. These new conceptions differed only in respect to the means that were used to negate the aforementioned idea of materialistic nature. For Post-Impressionists painters, it was their paintings of "emotional" objects and attenuated human element, for Whitehead, it was a philosophical enquiry into nature described as a relational organism, and finally for Woolf, it was the exploration of panpsychism, the idea of "enminded" nature, which enabled her to get rid of material "waste, deadness, superfluity."[859]

The third chapter focused mainly on Woolf's and Whitehead's reconceptualization of personal identity and illustrated that Woolf's characters do not represent stable identities, but changing unities made of both physical and mental processes. Furthermore, these entities are very closely related to other "personal societies" in their surroundings. The first part of the chapter illustrated that Woolf was searching for a definition of human life and personal identity throughout her fiction, diaries, and essays, for example in "The Mark of the Wall," where she compares life to a ride in the Tube, therefore, to something fast and changing, and emphasizes that life or identity is formed in every single instant. In her diary, she argues that "we change," which means that she acknowledges she processual view of personal identity that opposes the idea of the static and unitary subject dominating the Western philosophical tradition. Instead, process philosophers argue that "fixity simply does not square with the character of our experience,"[860] hence, it is more apt to define a person as a society of actual entities which emerge and perish. Unique traits of these entities are passed on the newly emerged actual entities, which ensures the relative stability of one's identity. However, like material objects, even these societies "enjoy adventures of change throughout time and

859. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary, Vol 3*, 209.
860. Rescher, 107.

space"[861] as their configurations reorder, comprise new actual entities with different traits, or interact with entities belonging to the surrounding societies. In this way, a processual identity is always in the making, in the process of "becoming." It has been demonstrated that Woolf often evokes the images of unstable, nonunitary, and changing identity in her fiction, for example in her essay "Street Haunting: The London Adventure," where she acknowledges that the unity of identity is only a convention, or in "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car," where Woolf captures the many selves one can possess. The changing nature of one's identity is best illustrated in *The Waves*, where Bernard admits that he is "made and remade continually"[862] and Louis suggests that people "assemble different forms, make different patterns."[863] This description of identity provided by these two characters is strikingly similar to Whitehead's societies comprised of concrescending and perishing actual entities, therefore, Woolf's idea of identity may be labelled as processual. Moreover, it has been pointed out that since Whitehead introduced both his microscopic actual entity and macroscopic society as primarily relational units, they may serve as means to analyse Woolf's exploration of intersubjective identity in *The Waves* and subsequent works. The characters of *The Waves* are interrelated and cannot separate their identity from the others' identities to such an extent that an individual identity is "overcome."[864] Furthermore, Woolf emphasizes that a character's traits contribute to the formation of another character's identity, which is incapsulated in Bernard's claim that he needs "the illumination of other people's eyes"[865] to form his own identity. As a result, it may be concluded that Woolf rejected the "dim" bifurcation of reality into "The Whole," "That Other," and "This-My-Self"[866] that Whitehead

861. Whitehead, *Process*, 35.
862. Woolf, *The Waves*, 74.
863. Woolf, *The Waves*, 95.
864. Woolf, *The Waves*, 163.
865. Woolf, *The Waves*, 64.
866. Whitehead, *Modes*, 110.

criticizes in his *Modes of Thought*. Whether the philosopher elaborates on his concept of actual entities or societies, he always emphasizes that "everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe."[867] This statement is based on Whitehead's idea that each actual entity is a subject but also an object, which offers itself as a component of a process of becoming of other entities. This entails that each actual entity, or a society, is a holder of value. Since Whitehead argues that "everything has some value for itself, for others and for the whole," his ontology acquires an ethical aspect, therefore, his philosophy of organism based on interconnection and value of all parts of the organism may be labelled as "ontoethics."

This aspect of Whitehead's metaphysics inspired feminist process philosophers and other feminist thinkers such as Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway, whose works devise a more habitable universe, where various animal species and organic and inorganic elements interact in a profitable and harmless way. John B. Cobb, on the one hand, points out that process philosophy "has been almost exclusively masculine in style and tone," but, on the other hand, refers to Mary Daly, who talks about Whitehead as about "an androgynous mind" in her book *Beyond God the Father*. Cobb argues that although Whitehead does not reject polarities in his metaphysical system as strictly as Woolf in her feminist essay *A Room of One's Own*,[868] his thinking attacked "one-sidedness" and demonstrated the need to transcend certain historically rooted dualisms, or bifurcations. Similarly, in her book *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer refers to Whitehead as to someone who envisaged a holistic universe and did not emphasize the polarity between sexes.[869] Cobb argues that there should be more elaboration on the link between feminism and process thought because feminists can

867. Whitehead, *Modes*, 111.
868. John B. Cobb, "Feminism and Process Thought: A Two-Way Relationship, in *Feminism and Process Thought*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (Lewiston: The Edward Mellen Press, 1981), 32-33.
869. Germaine Greer, *Eunuška* (Praha: One Woman Press, 2019), 136.

find "some of process features of conceptuality uniquely helpful."[870] Taken this into consideration, the second part of the third chapter described how Woolf's feminism and Whitehead's holistic ontoethics complement each other and concluded that Woolf might be recognized as a philosopher who sees holistic unity and value behind all existence. Conversely, Whitehead's process thinking advances some ideas of Woolf's feminism, or any feminism, which advocates relationality and inclusivity.

It has been demonstrated that Woolf outlines a similar ontoethics in her late works "A Sketch of the Past," *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts* where she acknowledges the interconnection of human beings in "a work of art,"[871] or "one life."[872] It is interesting that in her late works Woolf starts to resort to the "the ethics of interrelatedness,"[873] particularly in "A Sketch of the Past," where she formulates her idea of relational "personal philosophy." On the one hand, it is undoubtedly a reaction to the rising aggression in the pre-war Europe and Woolf's own fear of the German invasion of the British Isles, which would probably lead to her and Leonard's death, but, on the other hand, Woolf's turn towards intersubjectivity, community, and inclusivity may be considered a part of her social feminism. While imagining her novel *The Waves*, Woolf intended to include characters of very diverse social and class backgrounds, however, she could not replicate the speech of working class and gave up her original decision. In *Three Guineas* Woolf commits to the criticism of patriarchal society perpetuated by its elitist educational system and devises an egalitarian type of women college that would strengthen the bonds between people and support cooperation. In *Between the Acts* Woolf elaborates on her appeal to socially divided and hypocritical English society, and, by the means of Miss La Trobe's play, makes the characters face the state of pre-war society

870. Cobb, 36.
871. Woolf, "A Sketch," 72.
872. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 163.
873. Foster, 53.

symbolized by fragments of bodies reflected in mirrors and glass held by the actors. It has been demonstrated that throughout the text Woolf evokes the images of unity and lets her characters reflect on their affinity with human and nonhuman beings in their environment, which is best captured in Mrs Swithin's claim that "Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one"[874] and the reverend's attempt to interpret the pageant: "To me at least it was indicated that we are members of one another. Each is part of the whole."[875] It has been pointed out that this summary is strikingly similar to Whitehead's idea from *Modes of Thought* about the value attributed to each existing entity, particularly to the following statement about interrelation of human beings: "We are, each of us, one among others; and all of us are embraced in the unity of the whole."[876] Consequently, this aspect of Whitehead's fusion of ontology and ethics was further discussed as a means to analyse Woolf's social feminist project of *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*, which is based on the idea of inclusive community and recognition of value of its individuals. While this aspect of Woolf's late fiction has already been discussed from various points of view, it has never been associated with Whitehead. This demonstrates that although Whitehead represents a "masculine" analytical philosopher, he may have anticipated the propagators of the second and third-wave feminism, who worked hard to recognize not only the experience and value of every woman, but also marginal individuals such as homosexuals or people of colour. In this way, the chapter proves that Whitehead's thought, which anticipates postmodern ethics, may well be discussed in relation to the current fight against all forms of discrimination and leaders, who divide, rather than unite, their respective communities. For the same reason, Woolf's late fiction also seems to speak to us in a very direct and timeless way.

874. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 388.
875. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 396.
876. Whitehead, *Modes*, 110.

The last chapter of this thesis elaborates on the preceding ones in the way it again elaborates on Whitehead's concept of relationality. It no longer uses it to discuss interpersonal relationships but to analyse Woolf's relation of human beings to their natural environment. The main idea of the chapter was to highlight that while modernism is traditionally conceived as human-centred movement that foregrounds human beings as unique individuals, this hegemony of the human has been reconsidered in recent years and modernism started to be associated with the criticism of anthropocentrism. Scholars such as Gillian Beer, Derek Ryan, or Diana L. Swanson explored Virginia Woolf's interest in the natural world and focussed on the less anthropocentric perspective that some of Woolf's fiction provide. While the aforementioned scholars explored this tendency in Woolf's fiction via Deleuze's idea of rhizomatic being and creation of non-hierarchical relationships,[877] Darwin's evolution theory, which destabilized the centrality of the humans, and Freud's exploration of primeval instincts,[878] or argue about Woolf's Copernican shift that decentred the human and attributed agency and intentionality[879] to nonhuman beings, the last chapter of this thesis elaborated on these accounts of Woolf's handling of the human/nonhuman relations by the lens of Whitehead's solution to this binary division. The chapter draws heavily on the second chapter, which analysed the nonhuman agency and proto-conscious natural word in Woolf's fiction in detail, and focuses primarily on Woolf's dethronement of the human and her proto-environmentalism.

In *Process and Reality* Whitehead outlined a cosmological system where the human stuff is made of the same molecules and atoms, or more precisely actual entities, as the nonhuman material world. In this way, Whitehead salvages the western philosophy from its

877. Ryan, *Virginia Woolf*, 84-7.
878. Gillan Beer, "Virginia Woolf and Prehistory," in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 6-28.
879. Swanson, 53-74.

anthropocentrism, perpetuated by the theories of solipsism, which he himself criticizes in his book *Modes of Thought*, emphasizing that humans "are merely one species in the throng of existences."[880] Whitehead bases this claim on his ontological system of actual entities, which are subjects of their own process of becoming, and at the same time, objects for the becoming of other entities. In this way, Whitehead's complex "societies" are created from the external data and these complex processes cannot be strictly separated from other entities in their environment because they, in fact, arise from objective data in their surroundings. Consequently, the philosopher claims in the above-mentioned books that one's body is always continuous with processes in its environment: "But the body is part of the external world, continuous with it. In fact, it is just as much part of nature as anything else – a river, or a mountain, or a cloud. Also, if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends."[881]

This indistinct line between one's body and the external world results precisely from Whitehead's idea that the subject does not stand in opposition to the objective world but emerges from the objective data, which also seems to be relevant for Woolf's conception of subjectivity and its relation to the external world. Her criticism of "inveterately anthropocentric"[882] mind in her essay "Flying over London" is practically transposed into her fiction via the characters' intimate connection with their natural environment, which is foregrounded especially in *The Waves*, where Louis claims that he is "rooted to the middle of the earth" and that his "body is a stalk"[883] or where Susan acknowledges her rootedness in the environment in her statement "I think I am the field, I am the barn."[884] Moreover, these quotations also hint at the integration of a subject within their environment, which is intimated

880. Whitehead, *Modes*, 112.
881. Whitehead, *Modes*, 21.
882. Woolf, *Selected Essays* 207.
883. Woolf, *The Waves*, 6.
884. Woolf, *The Waves*, 55.

already in *Mrs Dalloway*, where Clarissa is "being part of the trees at home; of the house there," or in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mrs Ramsay has "a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything"[885] and Lily renounces her subjectivity in order to "be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table."[886] This subjectivity emerged from and dispersed throughout the natural world is strikingly similar to the notion of deep ecology's "transpersonal"[887] subject, to which process-oriented view of identity is sometimes connected. This subject erases the boundary between an individual and their environment, which echoes Whitehead's idea that "the body is very vaguely distinguishable from external world."[888] Similarly, Woolf's characters' close connection with nature hints at Woolf's criticism of the artificial human/nonhuman binary. This idea penetrates most of Woolf's fiction and may be traced also in Post-Impressionist paintings of Woolf's time, which reflected on the position of the human destabilized by the then science, captured the return to primitive nature and used the pastoral imagery.[889] This indicates that modernism was a movement which was deeply engaged with the crisis of nature, which resulted from the advancements in urbanisation, industrialisation, machinery, and other technical fields. Whitehead claims that this progress led to the complete dissociation of mind, value, and beauty from the material world, and that this materialism resulted in "the lack of reverence in the treatment of natural or artistic beauty."[890] Consequently, Whitehead warns the modern man against "the ignoration of the true relation of each organism to its environment" and "ignoring the worth of the environment," which seems to be analogous to

885. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 91.
886. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 218.
887. Palmer, 263–264.
888. Whitehead, *Modes*, 144.
889. Adkins, 229-230.
890. Whitehead, *Science*, 196.

Woolf's own attempt to undermine materialism and to place the humans back to their natural environment.

As a result, Woolf's focus on the intimate interrelation of the humans with their natural environment enables the author to advance her "proto-ecological" project in some of her essays, where she directly addresses the question of human exploitation of nature and criticizes the human self-proclaimed right to dominate the natural environment, which might be traced already in *Mrs Dalloway*, where Septimus prophetically exclaims "Men must not cut trees."[891] The penultimate section of the final chapter explores Woolf's departure from anthropocentrism, analyses her attempts to describe "a world seen without a self," and highlights Woolf's experimentation with the posthuman aesthetics. This has been demonstrated mainly on Woolf's posthuman natural interludes in *The Waves* and the non-anthropocentric passage "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*, which indicates that the discussion elaborates on panpsychism traced in these passages in the second chapter. Contrary to the latter, it has been highlighted that Woolf was concerned with human action that often prevents nature's productivity and self-sustainability. The criticism of the exploitation of nature and human agency imposed on natural elements has been explored in detail in the last section of the fourth chapter concerned with Woolf's "London Scene" essays.

It has been suggested that the essay "The Docks of London" depicts very minutely the consumerist model of society, and also what is at stake when the capitalist society chooses to prioritize their needs over the well-being of less developed countries or animal species. Furthermore, the section highlighted that Woolf anticipated the ecological crisis, in the form of waste handling or harmful treatment of animals, discussed nowadays in relation to the Anthropocene. For this reason, Woolf might be considered an environmentally aware writer, however, it has also been pointed out that it is often hard to distinguish whether she was

891. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 18.

anticipating our time's environmentalism or praising the human species for their progress in all spheres of life. This discrepancy may be ascribed to the irony Woolf uses quite masterfully to either disguise her own opinions, distance herself from the views that run counter the mainstream ideology, or just to leave the final interpretation up to her readers, who are never offered absolute truths but must create their own ones. To return to the Whiteheadian analysis of Woolf's fiction and the philosopher's own turn from anthropocentrism, it has been indicated that Whitehead's philosophy of organism is often considered to be a more appropriate ontology for the Anthropocene because it foregrounds the interrelatedness and subjectivity of every element of the universe.[892] Therefore, to link Woolf and Whitehead means to demonstrate that both the writer and the philosopher were ahead of their time in their attempts to subvert the bifurcation of nature, which distinguishes between the human subjects, who can exercise their power on other elements in nature, and the nonhuman objects, which were at that time considered passive, worthless, and created mainly to be used or consumed by the humans.

To draw a conclusion from the points raised throughout this thesis and its contribution to the academic communities that study either Woolf's and Whitehead's oeuvres, it is important to emphasize that both Woolf and Whitehead reacted to the scientific, literary, and socio-cultural discourse of their time by the means they were the most familiar with—fiction writing and philosophical enquiry. The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and the first half of the 20th century brought significant changes in all spheres of human lives, and these changes were necessarily reflected in the works of the period's thinkers. It has been pointed out that Woolf rebelled against the Victorian literature and the Edwardians, who were "materialists" denying their characters' souls and experience. In "Modern Fiction" Woolf suggested that a modern writer should "transcribe" one's experience and she likened impressions to "atoms,"

892. Roberts, "Intersubjectivity," 79-80.

by which she revealed her knowledge of New Physics, including astrophysics, represented by Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, James Jeans, Arthur Eddington, and last but not least Alfred North Whitehead, whose works Woolf might have known via Bertrand Russell or Ottoline Morell.[893] Whitehead was dissatisfied with materialism and focus on empirical knowledge of the then science, which could not account for psychological aspects of reality. For this reason, he turned towards metaphysics, which was unpopular at that time, and attempted to correct the faults of philosophical thought of the period. Consequently, from his early book *The Concept of Nature* to the latter treatises, Whitehead was developing not only metaphysical, but cosmological system, which would describe the very structure of our universe and relations between its various elements.

Virginia Woolf, whose father Leslie Stephen in his essays also demanded the inclusion of experience in the theory of materiality, tried to react to the "materialist mode" of her period by her writing, and, like Whitehead, devised a "literary philosophy," which anticipates the postmodern abandonment of binary thinking. Especially in the latter works, she approached "her philosophy" more imaginatively in order to draft a creative ontology of a more viable, just, and inclusive world. In fact, she ventured to take the Whiteheadian "imaginative leap" and outlined a new universe in her fiction, where matter is also experience, the subject is at the same time an object, and the individual is always somehow connected to other individuals like molecules and atoms studied by physics. Furthermore, these molecules/individuals are at once self-sufficient and interrelated with other molecules. Finally, it is very important to point out that this thesis, in no way, suggests that Woolf directly borrowed ideas from Whitehead and applied his concepts to her works, but it shows that both the writer and the philosopher felt the urge to react to analogous scientific and

893. Holly Henry suggests in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), on page 68, that the Woolfs met Whitehead in Morrell's Garsington House.

literary conventions of their period. As a result, the thesis focuses on Whitehead and Woolf to the same extent and it cannot does not exclude the idea that it might well have been the budding modernist prose that inspired the philosopher in envisaging a new philosophical system. In *Science and The Modern World* Whitehead suggests that the Romantic poets were the first thinkers who realized that a new philosophy of nature, which would reject scientific materialism and mechanism of science, needs to explain notions such as change, value, organism, or interfusion. Consequently, these notions created a crucial part of not only Whitehead's concept of nature, but also quantum theory.

As Catriona Livingstone points out, the relationship between science and literature does not always need to represent an "unidirectional model of influence,"[894] which makes of literature a field where scientific concepts are applied or exemplified. Instead, since both literature and science are the products of the same discourse, they represent open fields, as suggested by Gillian Beer, which complement each other and borrow from one another. Livingstone suggests that a new model of influence might be likened to a "feedback loop," which means that a scientific concept is borrowed by literature, used in a slightly different way, and consequently, it returns to the scientific field as enriched because it may be applied to different notions than the original concept. Interestingly, Whitehead himself mentions at the beginning of *Process and Reality* that every invention, or defined concept, needs to be tested in other field than where it is introduced: "The success of the imaginative experiment is always to be tested by the applicability of its results beyond the restricted locus from which it originated."[895] Consequently, when this experiment is proven applicable to other disciplines, it is endowed with further features and potentialities. Livingstone exemplifies this on the

894. Catriona Livingstone, "Experimental Identities: Quantum Physics in Popular Science Writing and Virginia Woolf's The Waves," *Journal of Literature and Science* 11, no. 1 (2018): 75, http://www.literatureandscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/LIVINGSTONE-final.pdf.
895. Whitehead, *Process*, 5.

modernist exploration of multiple and fluid identity, which might have been inspired by quantum physics' subatomic particles that are, on the one hand, self-sufficient particles, and, on the other hand, emit waves of influence.[896] Therefore, the modernists, and particularly Woolf, transposed the wave-particle duality to the discussions about human identity, by which they widened the field of the concept's possible applications.

In the same way, this thesis analysed the parallels between scientific and philosophical work of Alfred North Whitehead and Woolf's own "imaginative leap"[897] into philosophy that she takes in her writing without stating that there has been a direct influence of Whitehead on Woolf. This would undoubtedly lead to reductive reading of Woolf, and considering the dates of publication of Whitehead's most influential books discussed in this thesis, it must be concluded that Woolf's most known novels and short fiction were created at the same time, or even prior to Whitehead's works. For example, the third chapter of this thesis drew parallels between Woolf's concept of interrelated identity and ethics based on value of each member of society in *The Waves*, published in 1931, *Three Guineas*, published in 1938, and *Between the Acts*, published in 1941, and Whitehead's thoughts on interconnection of events and value of each actual occasion discussed in *Modes of Thought*, published in 1938. Similarly, Woolf's short fiction discussed in the first two chapters had been created earlier than Whitehead's works that discuss the concepts which may be applied to the short stories. What if it was the modernist fiction, and particularly Woolf's version of it, which inspired Whitehead to describe and analyse the issues raised in this thesis in his

896. Livingstone, 73.
897. Whitehead, *Process*, 4. While introducing his metaphysical enquiry and its method at the beginning of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead states that his book falls under the category of speculative philosophy and he condemns all philosophy and science that is based primarily on Baconian method of induction and abandons all attempts at imaginative thinking. The philosopher claims that "deficiency in imaginative penetration forbids progress" and that instead of induction and precise measurements, scientists and philosophers should make use of language, a tool "appealing for imaginative leap." (page 4)

philosophical treatises? Nevertheless, this thesis enriches the list of possible uses of Whitehead's theories, applies them to literature and demonstrates that the modernist thinkers were involved in the same project, only via different means of their respective disciplines. Moreover, both Whitehead and Woolf, as it has been illustrated, anticipate postmodern ideas, and orient their thought towards a better future and a more just societal organisation.

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis focuses on the analogies between Virginia Woolf's "personal philosophy" and Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, or in his own words "philosophy of organism." The thesis does not claim that Whitehead's thought directly influenced Woolf's fiction, rather, it makes use of a zeitgeist model. The two contemporaries shared the rejection of long-established dualisms, particularly the Cartesian mind-body dualism, the binaries of subject and object, animate and inanimate matter, the human and the nonhuman, and last but not least the individual and the community. Interested in the philosophical enquiry into the problem of reality and the visible world, Woolf redefines the notion of "things" in her fiction and adopts the processist view that objects may be defined as clusters of events, which are not separate from the perceiving subject but interrelated with it. Moreover, Woolf illustrates her interest in the natural world in most of her works and often suggests that what we normally think to be inert and lifeless matter, may, in fact, also have some proto-conscious, or proto-experiential, qualities like Whitehead's "actual occasions." The second part of the thesis focuses on Woolf's attempt to overcome one's individual identity in favour of adopting a more inclusive and collective "we" in her late fiction, which is strikingly similar to Whitehead's philosophy of organism suggesting that all existence in the universe is potentially interconnected in the process of concrescence, therefore, each entity has some value for itself and for the others. In a similar vein, Woolf embraces a moral philosophy in her late oeuvre, where she highlights the value of each individual because the value of the whole derives from the collective creativity of its parts. Moreover, Woolf and Whitehead both criticized anthropocentrism and destructive human action vis-à-vis the nonhuman environment, which is analysed in the last chapter of this thesis.

Key words: Virginia Woolf, Alfred North Whitehead, process philosophy, human and nonhuman entanglement, panpsychism, identity, anthropocentrism, community, ethics

Abstrakt

Tato disertační práce zkoumá analogie mezi „osobní filozofií“ Virginie Woolfové a procesuální filosofií Alfreda North Whiteheada, který sám o svém metafyzickém systému mluvil jako o „organické filosofii.“ Práce nemá za cíl dokázat přímý vliv Whiteheadova myšlení na dílo V. Woolfové, ale spíše poukázat na to, že tito současníci byli součástí stejného vědecko-společenského diskurzu a vymezovali se proti dlouho zakořeněným dualismům. Mezi tyto patří hlavně karteziánský dualismus těla a mysli, subjektu a objektu, živého a neživého, lidského a nelidského, a v neposlední řadě individuální a kolektivní identity. Woolfová se zajímala o filosofické poznání reality a hmotného světa a podobně jako procesuální filosofie odmítá pojem „věc“, který nově definuje spíše jako shluk neustále se proměňujících procesů. Tyto procesy jsou navíc velmi úzce spojeny se subjekty, tedy vědomými pozorovateli, ve svém okolí. Woolfová dále odmítá představu neživé hmoty a ve svém díle naznačuje, že i zdánlivé inertní molekuly hmotného světa mohou mít nějakou elementární schopnost cítit či vnímat své okolí, což platí i o Whiteheadových „aktuálních událostech/entitách.“ Druhá část této disertace se věnuje odklonu od individuální identity ve prospěch kolektivní identity a komunity v pozdní tvorbě Woolfové. Toto pojetí kolektivní identity je opět analyzováno pomocí Whiteheadovy organické filosofie, která zdůrazňuje vzájemné spojení všech entit tohoto světa a též hodnotu každé části, ať už miniaturní molekuly či makroobjektu, která ovlivňuje proces „stávání se“ výsledného celku. Jak pozdní tvorba V. Wooolfové, tak Whiteheadova filosofie tedy vykazují jistý etický přesah založený na ontologickém propojení všech entit. Woolfová i Whitehead navíc ve svých dílech poukazují na potřebu vzdát se antropocentrického vidění světa, které umožňuje neetické chování k jiným než lidským individuím a životnímu prostředí.

Klíčová slova: Virginia Woolfová, Alfred North Whitehead, procesuální filosofie, spojení lidského a nelidského, panpsychismus, identita, antropocentrismus, komunita, etika