

She could see the words echoing as she spoke them rhythmically in Cam's mind, and Cam was repeating after her [...] and her eyes were opening and shutting, and Mrs. Ramsay went on still more monotonously, and more rhythmically, and more nonsensically [...] speaking more and more mechanically, until she sat upright and saw that Cam was asleep. (132)

The incantatory visibility of language here is coupled with the projected images of the skull. Mrs. Ramsay's words reinforce the fantastic reality with which she lulls her daughter to sleep, enacting "the triumph auditorily of what is unverifiable visually" (Breton, WIS 108). In creating a new reality of the object, language and image combine in a surreal enunciation.

Like the Surrealists, Woolf conceives of poetic language as coming from a place "elsewhere," writing to Stephen Spender in 1935: "I don't think you can get your words to come till you're almost unconscious" (Lee 665). In Breton's later qualifying of the First Manifesto's claims about the primacy of the image (*Manifestoes* 37), he stresses that the primary source of surreal inspiration is in fact to be found in language. While Surrealism manifests a visual hallucinatory imagination, the poet is never posited as a visionary: the freeing of the imagination is dialectical with the presence of the material world. Moreover, the image and any meaning it might hold is an after-effect of an auditory hallucination, of the condensation and displacement of a non-verbal phenomenon into human language. Breton writes:

[V]erbal inspiration is infinitely richer in visual meaning [...] No, Lautréamont and Rimbaud did not *see* what they described; they were never confronted by it *a priori*. That is to say, they never *described* anything. They threw themselves into the dark recesses of being; they heard indistinctly, and with no more comprehension than any of us had the first time we read them, certain realised and realisable works. "Illumination" comes afterwards. (WIS 108)

While I have suggested an alternative "optics" in Woolf's work, those optics are nevertheless linguistic visions. Enunciating a literary work, the materiality of language (as text itself) merges the auditory and the visual and can be read in terms of the Surrealist situation of the object: it contains latent possibilities, an ephemeral multiplicity of meanings and usages in its tangible manifest surface, and our encounter with its potential surreality (as reader or writer) is a matter of alternative perspectives and visions.

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Full Moon by Exsodus
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Whole Like a Wave: Woolf's Husserlian Materiality

Ann Banfield has argued that the atomistic world of Bertrand Russell's new realism provides the best philosophical lens through which to understand Woolf's relationship with the physical world (46-47). Most aspects of this reading are extremely persuasive.¹ However, Russell's stress on atomism seems at odds with the unity and flow in Woolf's watery worlds, and his insistence that individual subjectivity can be reduced to a geometrically-defined perspective on events fails to explain the private moments when Woolf's characters, deprived of sensory stimuli, remain fully present. Husserl's phenomenology provides a different but perhaps equally useful way to understand the strange mix of fluidity and fixity on display in Woolf's novels.² Due to constraints of space, I will discuss just two novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, but these may suffice to show how Husserl's explanation of immanent and transcendent ways of grasping conscious content can account for Woolf's startling descriptions of the material world.

¹ For example, the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* illustrates Bertrand Russell's stress on the persistence of unobserved objects; *Orlando* confirms his suggestion that personal identity consists of sequential perceptions.

² Husserl's thought was certainly less well known to Woolf than Russell's, but as Jean Radford has pointed out, T. E. Hulme popularized Husserl's work in a series of essays published in *New Age* in 1915-1916 under the collective title of "A Notebook," and Husserl himself delivered lectures at University College in London in 1922 (89).

Derived from the Latin root “*manere*,” immanence means to stay within a given sphere. Whilst in theology, a transcendent God is beyond matter, immanence refers to the presence of God in the material world. In philosophical debates, transcendent objects are simply objects unavailable to consciousness; immanence refers to the interpenetration of consciousness and matter. The notion that consciousness can pervade matter had considerable currency in Woolf’s London, popularized by texts such as Henri Bergson’s account of pure duration in *Time and Free Will*, William James’s essays on radical empiricism, which obliterated the distinction between mind and matter by attending strictly to experience,³ and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s examination of the non-dualistic experience of the “primitive” mind in *How Natives Think*. Fiery reactions against immanence, such as Pope Pius X’s 1907 encyclical letter “*Pascendi Dominici Gregis*” and Wyndham Lewis’s *Time and Western Man*, also served to keep the concept in view.

Woolf was clearly in sympathy with the idea that consciousness is embedded in materiality. Her characters’ thoughts, emotions and energies are presented so tangibly that they become indistinguishable from physical objects. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter’s grief “r[ises] like a moon” in Clarissa’s drawing room, and hangs above them as they converse (42). Attachments between people are “thin thread[s] [...] which [...] stretch and stretch” as the characters move away from one another (112-13), or “spider[s] thread[s]” of intention drawing them together (114-15). In *To the Lighthouse*, though Lily reflects that people are “sealed” like beehives (51), she also imagines that the hives put out some “sweetness or sharpness [...] intangible to touch or taste” that exceeds their domed boundaries (51). So too the characters exceed the limits of their physical bodies by means of intangible, yet clearly perceptible energies. James registers the “twang and twitter of his father’s emotion [...] vibrating round them” (36), then the fountain-like “rain of energy” his mother sends up in response (37). Later Lily is subject to Mr. Ramsay’s demand for attention, “pour[ing] and spread[ing] itself in pools at her feet” so perceptibly that she gathers up her skirts (152). Thought too has a concrete presence. Far from having trouble of thinking of a kitchen table while she strolls outdoors, Lily actually sees the table “lodged now in the fork of a pear tree [...] its four legs in the air” (23). Mr. Ramsay may ponder the question of how objects can persist in the absence of a perceiver but Lily’s experience is that a simple thought can create an instant, vivid presence.

Still, Mr. Ramsay’s dilemma did represent a central question of the day: How could one verify any objective fact, given that all that we know of the world comes to us by means of subjective, ever-changing sense-perception? Russell answered the question by drawing a sharp distinction between sensation and sense-data and asserting that sense-data could exist independently of mind (Banfield 70-71). He called sense-data in the absence of an observer *sensibilia*. “Once this minimal subjectivity is externalized from the mind,” says Banfield, Russell is able to conceive of “a subjectless subjectivity” (70). Objects can conceivably persist in the absence of a subject, and the human subject is “rendered unnecessary [...] by its theoretically possible absence” (75). Subjects become perspectives, locations from which things are seen. Any sense of enduring selfhood is merely a construct. Banfield quotes Russell: “I think first this and then that’ should not ‘mean that there is a single entity ‘I’ which ‘has’ two successive thoughts’ but ‘that there are two successive thoughts’ with ‘causal relations’ such that we ‘call them parts of one biography’” (100).

Husserl took a very different route in answering the above-referenced question. He proposed, following Descartes, to call into question anything beyond the certainty that all we are aware of occurs within the field of our own consciousness (*Cartesian Meditations* 18-19). When we abstain from a naïve belief in an external world, we are not left with nothing, says Husserl, since “this abstaining [...] exists, together with the

whole stream of my experiencing life. Moreover, this life is continually there *for me*” (19). Already it is clear that this is a very different model than Russell’s. Sense data, instead of being extra-mental and atomistic, is unified and flowing. The subject, far from being dispensable, provides the field in which all else can appear.

Phenomenology then seeks to identify “apodictically certain ways by which, within [one’s] own pure inwardness, an Objective outwardness can be deduced” (*Cartesian Meditations* 3). In *Ideas*, Husserl proposes ways to distinguish “outwardness”—transcendent perception—from our primary state of “inwardness”—immanent perception. Immanent perceptions are simply our various mental processes, which we know immediately and completely: “[I]t is essential to the givenness of something immanent precisely to present something absolute which cannot ever be presented with respect to sides or be adumbrated” (96-97). Subject/object distinctions do not exist, since any content of our thought processes is an integral part of their flowing stream: “[B]y *intentional mental processes related to something immanent*, we understand those to which it is *essential that their intentional objects, if they exist at all, belong to the same stream of mental processes to which they themselves belong*” (*Ideas* 79; italics in original text). By contrast, content that is transcendent—like Mr. Ramsay’s hard-edged table—is given “one-sidedly” (94), “through appearances” (95). To grasp these appearances requires a stepping-away from the immediate stream of immanent perception, “a further consciousness in which ‘a position is taken’ with respect to the thing” (77).⁴ For Husserl, transcendent objects are abstractions. The primary reality is the unified streaming of immanent content.

Husserl’s model is more consistent with Woolf’s depiction of materiality than is Russell’s in that Woolf’s characters perceive the world as fundamentally unified and flowing.⁵ Russell explicitly rejected the notion of unity: “I share the common-sense belief that there are many separate things; I do not regard the apparent multiplicity of the world as consisting merely in phases and unreal divisions of a single indivisible Reality” (qtd. in Banfield 80). In contrast, Woolf’s characters frequently partake of the being of objects and people around them. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay feels herself becoming “trees, streams, flowers;” she and they “in a sense [a]re one” (63). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus perceives that the leaves of a tree in the park are “connected by millions of fibres with his own body” (22). On her way to buy flowers for her party, Clarissa Dalloway senses that she and Peter “liv[e] in each other,” and that she is “part [...] of the trees at home; of the house there [...] ; part of people she had never met” (9). Peter recalls how a young Clarissa, riding a bus of Shaftesbury Avenue, claims to have “felt herself everywhere; not ‘here, here, here’; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere” (152). Instead of existing in separate disconnected locations, she imagines herself “laid out like a mist [...] spread ever so far, her life, herself” (9). Her uncanny identification with Septimus at the end of the novel, together with her empathetic experiencing of the last moments of his life, confirm her sense of her far-flung, continuous being.

Russell’s model of consciousness is the antithesis of flow. Atomistic *sensibilia* are perceived from myriad perspectives that likewise have gaps between them. Banfield’s explanation for the prevalence of watery imagery in Woolf is that waves break in a series, or can be thought of as concentric circles radiating out from various perspectives (122-126). Serial waves and rings do describe some of Woolf’s effects, but fail to account for images evoking swamps or streams. The singer outside

⁴ In *Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations*, A. D. Smith notes that Russell’s *sensibilia* are “constituted,” existing outside the mind, while Husserl’s *hylé* (immanent sensory content) is “prior to all constitution, being an ultimate constituent of conscious life” (81-82, 99). Nevertheless, Smith finds that the two arrive at an impersonal subjectivity that is very similar (82-84).

⁵ Woolf’s comparison of sense perceptions to “an incessant shower of innumerable atoms” (“Modern” 631) does betray the influence of atomists like Pater and Russell. But even these particles fall in a watery shower.

³ For an excellent examination of Richardson’s Pilgrimage in light of James’s resolution of the mind/matter dilemma, see Deborah Parsons Longworth (2009).

Regent's Park Tube not only unifies all her own diverse memories; her song "soak[s] through the knotted roots of infinite ages, skeletons and treasure" (81). Listeners are "soaked and steeped and made mould of" by the dissolving action of the primal vowels (82). Mrs. Ramsay, gazing at familiar household objects as she contemplates Paul and Minta's engagement, feels that "[...] it was all one stream, and chairs, tables, maps, were hers, were theirs, it did not matter whose" (113-14). Certainly there are transcendent objects in Woolf, the beloved particulars of everyday life, but they are often swept along in a watery medium, suggesting an encompassing immanent consciousness. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, as Peter watches Londoners embarking on an evening out, he pictures them climbing into boats. It is "as if the whole place were floating off in carnival" (164). Elizabeth, contemplating the lives of everyone within hearing of the military music she encounters near St. Paul's, imagines that the sound, "pouring endlessly [...] would wrap them all about and carry them on" (138). Even sea-related imagery stresses, not the separation between waves, but the aspect of water that encompasses and unites. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily is excited by moments in which "life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, be[comes] curled and whole like a wave" (47). In "Time Passes," Mrs. McNab is enveloped by water—as she cleans, she "roll[s] like a ship at sea" (130), or swims "like a tropical fish oaring its way through sun-lanced waters" (133). A reading of this section consistent with Russell would assert an absence of consciousness in the empty house. Though Woolf refers to the housekeeper as "something not highly conscious" (139), and stresses the lack of human awareness in the eyeless flowers outside the door (135), a case could be made that the entire environment is permeated by its own seamless, impersonal consciousness—"the fertility, the insensibility of nature" that is so intent upon flooding and eroding the separate compartments of the house (138). Woolf's verbs suggest purposeful and seemingly sentient action: the wind creeps, questions, toys, brushes, fumbles, noses, brushes, and sighs (126-7). Moonlight mellows, smooths, and brings the waves (127). Loveliness and stillness clasp hands; silence sways (129). It is not that nothing is conscious; rather, everything seems to be.

Further confirmation that Woolf's vision is consistent with Husserl's immanence is the fact that, in her novels, characters preoccupied solely with transcendent facts—the world of countable sequence and measurable proportion—are shown as stunted, arid. The comical Mr. Ramsay, so determined to put the letters of the alphabet in proper order, will probably never get to R, much less past it (*To the Lighthouse* [TTL] 33-34), and his egotism makes him a menace to everyone around him. Sir Bradshaw, who worships a well-ordered sense of proportion (*Mrs. Dalloway* [MD] 99), destroys the lives of his wife and patients.⁶ By contrast, Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Dalloway are aware of both the immanent and transcendent levels of their identities. Mrs. Ramsay's invisible, essential identity comes to the fore when she is silent and alone, refraining from all the activities that typically define her. Described as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness," this identity is nevertheless boundless, enjoying a "range of experience [that] seem[s] limitless" (TTL 62). "Losing personality" is not the same as losing self-awareness; she "exult[s]" in the freedom, peace, and stability she experiences in this state (62-63). Articulating the difference between her immanent being and her transcendent personality, she says, "Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by" (62). Mrs. Dalloway's "diamond" identity is a transcendent construct—she selects and presents a single public, socially acceptable aspect of her personality (MD 37). Yet like Mrs. Ramsay, she is aware that "our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the

unseen part of us, which spreads wide" (153). These two women, with their "vague" perceptions, seem to have a much more comprehensive grasp of reality than Woolf's men.

Just as characters obsessed with transcendent facts are unsympathetic, situations experienced in the mode of transcendence are limited and lifeless. Two key scenes illustrate how a situation that seems dry and hard-edged can give way to a fluid, living experience. Clarissa's party is at first described in terms of the guests' stiff, self-conscious body language, their cutting judgments of one another, and their tendency to pull apart, "standing in a bunch at a corner" (MD 167-68). Clarissa thinks, "Oh dear [...] it [i]s all going wrong, all falling flat" (167). But as the guests begin to interact, the environment liquefies to the point that Clarissa, wearing "a silver-green mermaid's dress," is described as "lolloping on the waves [...] a creature floating in its element" (174). Mrs. Ramsay's dinner provides an even more dramatic example of transcendent, separated consciousness giving way to the fluid, uniting force of immanence. At the beginning of the evening, feeling "outside [the] eddy" and noting the room's shabbiness and lack of beauty, Mrs. Ramsay explicitly describes a state of transcendence: "Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (TTL 83). Somewhat later, after the candles are lit, the room begins to seem like an island surrounded by a world which "ripple[s]...waver[s] and vanish[es], waterily" (97). Finally, when the separate energies and interests of the diners have fused, the guests are portrayed as being underwater. Mrs. Ramsay sees the people around the table as "silent trout [...] all lit up and hanging, trembling" in a stream (106), and notes the difference between her mind's typical activity of "netting and separating one thing from another" and this fluid state in which "the whole is held together" (107).

Husserl, then, allows us to better account for the unity and fluidity of Woolf's fictional worlds. This is not to deny Russell's influence on Woolf, and Banfield's important work on the topic—it seems quite likely, given the range of available influences, that Woolf's philosophical world view was a hybrid affair. Furthermore, I have not wanted to imply that either Husserl or Woolf in any way discounted the reality of transcendent objects. Indeed, Husserl states that the phenomenologist strives to "make understandable [...] *how*, within the immanency of conscious life and in thus and so determined modes of consciousness belonging to this incessant flux, anything like *fixed and abiding objective unities* can become intended" (*Cartesian Meditations* 48; italics in the original text). Woolf also recognized this as the primary puzzle of existence: that in the flux of immanent perception, objects can be constituted, identities preserved, separations instituted. As Clarissa says, "the supreme mystery [...] was simply this: here was one room; there another" (MD 127). Lily, despite her fear "that the unity of the whole might be broken" by a line bisecting her canvas (TTL 53), in the end paints it anyway. Like Husserl, she is compelled to engage with the transcendent facts that emerge from the underlying unity. Only with both levels in view she can say, "I have had my vision" (209).

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⁶ Even the clocks in *Mrs. Dalloway* offer a critique of transcendence. Like Bradshaw, the clocks of Harley Street advocate proportion, but they shred and subdivide in a way that seems petty (102); by contrast, the tolling of Big Ben "dissolves" and "floods" (4,48,94,117-18), sending "all sorts of little things [...] flooding and lapping and dancing in on [its] wake" (128).

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Benito Mussolini, durante la marcia su Roma, con alcuni dei quadrumviri: da sinistra Emilio De Bono, Italo Balbo e Cesare Maria De Vecchi.
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:March_on_Rome.jpg>

instead to focus on the material world of fashion, the photographs have nonetheless been extensively critiqued.² I would like to shift the focus to Woolf's melding of the material world of fashion, English tradition, and history with the barbarity of fascist ideology. To establish the lens through which to view this question, we might do well to consider, as Derek Ryan has argued, that "the material world is not purely a concern for archivists and historicists, and that the way we historicise is affected by how we theorize materiality and how theory is materialised" (4). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf is concerned profoundly with how theories about the connection between fascism and patriarchy are materialized in her historical moment. Through an analysis of Woolf's deployment of sartorial photographs as dialectical images in conversation with theoretical discussions on fashion and photography, in this short essay I will sketch out how Woolf elucidates uniform dress as an expression of the fascist aesthetic to materialize homologous ideological forces like English nationalism and European fascism upon the bodies of men. Instead of participating in the proliferation of propagandist photographs from Republican Spain (e.g., fascism in action), Woolf interrogates the international logic of fascism by examining how man's morality is inscribed onto his uniform, and as such male fashion becomes intrinsically fascist.³

On the topic of fashion, in the *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin was prolific and astute, and his concept of the "dialectical image" elucidates Woolf's use of photography as a materialist critique.⁴ Ulrich Lehmann defines the sartorial valence of Benjamin's dialectical image as "the explosive within history [that] is ignited and subsequently blasts the very foundations of historicism. As this explosive is fashion, it becomes apparent that fashion is the indispensable catalyst for both remembrance and a new political—that is, materialist—concept of history" (210). By showing us sartorial photographs alongside narrative descriptions of total war, Woolf reveals the fallacy of telic and imperialist history that has been written sartorially upon English patriarchal bodies. I suggest that we view the photographs in *Three Guineas* as dialectical images by which Woolf both juxtaposes and interconnects English nationalist progression to/with total war and international fascism.

There is an implicit psychoanalytic undercurrent to Woolf's visual analysis because as she illustrates, sartorial expression is not purposeless; rather, it performs purposefully whether the wearer is consciously aware or not. Photography allows Woolf to expand and to explore the instantaneous second of masculine rituals to delve into the male psyche and reveal its insurgent fascistic impulses while presenting to the reader a tableau of masculine sartorial expression. As Benjamin describes in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," photography "introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (1239). Because, in the snapshot, a camera can render the infinitesimal second visible to the naked eye, one becomes aware of "what really goes on between hand and metal" when he or she reaches for an object like a spoon (1239). The transfixed moment rendered by a snapshot lets us glimpse the transience of life. While noting the technological advances in photography, Benjamin also observes the loss of auratic art in the modern age because photography "emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual"

² See for example Jessica Berman and Elena Gualtieri. Scholars have been fascinated by what Woolf chooses *not* to show. Indeed, both critics mentioned above focus on the lacunae that Woolf creates by not including the Spanish photographs, yet neither examine in depth why she chooses photographs of English masculine fashion.

³ It is interesting to note that fascist fashion historically developed in tandem with ultra-nationalism in early twentieth-century Italy. Giacomo Balla, an Italian painter and proponent of Futurism, urges the revitalization of male fashion in order to glorify war and to aestheticize politics.

⁴ Jennifer Wicke has called attention to Woolf's "dialectical materialism," whereby fashion motifs become Benjaminian dialectical images; but by focusing instead on literary language, she does not consider the photographs in *Three Guineas*.

Materializing the Fascist Aesthetic in *Three Guineas*

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf famously omits a pictorial representation of the macabre effects of total war even though throughout the essay, she repeats the refrain of "dead bodies and ruined houses," which depicts the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War caused by Franco (16). The included photographs of uniformed men from several English institutions function as visual substitutes for the referenced yet excluded images from the Spanish war. As Maggie Humm explains, "[p]aradoxically, the public photographs in the text become timeless dead icons of patriarchy, while the narrator's repeated mnemonic of the absent photographs of the Spanish dead becomes a lively attack on patriarchy" (227). But, if we factor in the sartorial implication of the photographs, Woolf, at first glance, seems to express ambivalence toward engaging the material world—whether manifest internationally or nationally, as dismembered civilian casualties on a Spanish battlefield or hawkish masculine fashion in the hallowed halls of English institutions. The question then becomes: why does she choose to focus on the fashion of fascism rather than fascism in action?

While little critical attention has attended to answering why Woolf evades the perceived "real world" of international war,¹ choosing

¹ Rebecca Walkowitz examines Woolf's method of evasion in *Cosmopolitan Style*.

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